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**indraprasth**

# indraprasth

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## Note from the Editors

We are happy to present another edition of *Indraprasth*, a literary endeavour that reflects the prevalent sociological, cultural, and political concerns. The journal encompasses a wide selection of literary and scholarly papers assimilating intense imaginative efforts, profound characters and meaningful silences into grand narratives. *Indraprasth* brings to us the interplay of literary configurations, contours of life, contemporary human and cultural scapes and nuanced interpretations. The current issue presents nine research papers of diverse range and contexts to contemplate the importance of art and literature in different times as a precipice of human life and imagination.

The last five decades have proved fatal for mankind globally as human race has been devastated by genocides, mass-migration, refugee crisis, droughts, wars and pandemics. Life has become utterly unpredictable. With the advancement of artificial intelligence, the basic fundamentals of human existence are being questioned. The precariousness of human existence has widely affected the creation of art, artists and critical thinkers who are now bound by social duty to reflect on these changed scenarios. This issue, through its ten contributors, tries to build up a place of such reflection and interrogation of shifting nuances of human life.

The first paper by Suman Sharma, titled “Translation as Theory: A Translator’s Perspective,” critically examines the development of Translation Theory, theoretical concepts posited by Marisa Press and Andrew Chesterman with reference to the translation of Shanta Kumar’s *Lajjo*. The paper accentuates the major conflict in translation where the meaning is yielded as a result of ‘word-for-word’ translation and ‘sense-for-sense’ translation. It further discusses Cicero’s notion of dividing the translating practices into two polarities, one being the “Man of Interpreter” (Literal) and another “Man of Orator” (Free). With different time frames, translation as a practice underwent significant changes wherein it is used as a tool to domesticate foreign text. The paper further delved into the Jakobsian concept of translation and discusses the nuances of translation in works of Sir John Denham, Abraham Cowley and John Dryden. The paper concludes that translation is studied in relation to the context and also in relation to the variables like the author and translator.

The second paper by Shikha Dutta Gupta, “Negotiating Conflict through Intersubjectivity: Revisiting Bernard Malamud’s “Black Is My Favourite Colour”.” reviews the short story “Black Is My Favourite Colour” within the paradigm of peace and conflict studies between the Jewish Americans and the African Americans. The paper attempts to study the conflict between the Black and the Jewish characters in the story; to analyse the formation of binaries in the story due to the stereotypes associated with the Blacks and the Jews and due to the ways they perceived each other in the American land; and to understand how the concept of intersubjectivity operates in the text, that shows the possibility of a peaceful co-existence for the two racial groups in America. To analyse the friendship between the characters, the author enriches the paper by including Martin Buber’s philosophy of “I and Thou.”

The third paper, “Enlightenment and Modernity in the Absurd Plays of Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter and Edward Albee,” Abhinaba Chatterjee explores *Waiting for Godot*, *The Birthday Party*, and *The Zoo Story* within the context of the Theatre of the Absurd. It argues that these plays challenge traditional notions of a well-made play, bewildering audience with their lack of inclusivity and departure from conventional storytelling. Drawing on existential philosophy, the plays depict a heightened awareness of post-war society and emphasize the need for an enlightened modernity. Through their portrayal of uncertainty, fragmentation, and the search for meaning, these plays promote inclusivity and critique the dehumanization brought about by scientific modernization and loss of faith.

The fourth paper by Takbeer Salati, titled “Body, Space and Curfew: Sa’adat Hassan Manto’s ‘Mozelle’ in the Light of Henri Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space*,” examines how the female body reconstructs itself through different spaces and identities in the story, and how bodies function as spaces of alienation. The paper argues that the story highlights the various forms of social relations that regulate and transform the characters, particularly the sex worker Mozelle, as they navigate the traditional culture and partition. It also discusses the role of religion and the ways in which bodies and spaces are represented and constructed in the story.

The fifth paper by Priyanka Arora, titled “Examining the Problems of Material Ecofeminism in Indian Cinema,” delves into a comprehensive analysis

of material ecofeminism through studying regional cinema including *Bhediya*, *Sherni*, *Kon Kitney Paani Mein?*, *Aranyakam*, and *Taledanda*. The paper analyses the connection between Nature and women characters who are vulnerable to exploitation yet they try to exercise power through their acts of resistance. While commenting on the nature-women relationship, the paper also explores ways of Indian cinema to explore such relationships.

The sixth paper by Tripti Aggarwal, titled “*Ghar and Bahir: Spatial and Gender Relations in India and the US during the Pandemic in View of Feminist Utopias*,” investigates the possibilities of change in gender roles after the pandemic. The paper compares the new spatial dimensions and gender relation during pandemic with two utopias– *Sultana’s Dream* centred in India and *Herland*, centred in America a century ago. Through the comparison, the paper tries to magnify the problems with the association of women with domesticity or inner quarters of a living space and find possibilities of new gender relations.

The seventh paper, “From Wounds to Words: Exploring Gendered Power Dynamics and Psycho-Social Victimhood through Literary Lens” by Shreosi Biswas contributes to research on critical representation of violence against women in Literature. The paper analyses the character of Miss Leela Benare from Vijay Tendulkar’s *Silence! The Court is in Session* (1967) and Tara Patel from Mahesh Dattani’s *Tara* (1995), to reveal the hypocrisy of modern nation where women still have to bear physical violence and exploitation.

The eighth paper by Ganta Nikhil Kumar, titled “*Joseph Andrews: Eighteenth-Century Sitcom*,” explores the phenomenon of situational comedy in *Joseph Andrews*. The paper examines how the humour or comedy is generated when the main characters meet different kinds of people on their way throughout the narrative and get embroiled in different types of situations. The writer considers sitcoms as a recent phenomenon as compared to their antecedents which can be seen in literature way before sitcoms entered mainstream popular culture. The paper enlightens about the contribution of comedic discourses like witty banter, clever wordplay, and humorous exchanges to the overall humorous tone, mirroring the reliance of sitcoms on quick-witted lines and clever repartee.

The ninth paper by Tanvi Garg and Tanuja, titled “Intersecting Oppression: Gender and Violence in Selected Indian Novels,” attempts at studying the

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similarities and differences in the imposition of violence on men and women and the similarity in the treatment of women in both Indian and Western societies despite cultural and religious differences. The paper critically analyses three literary pieces— *Matrubhoomi: A Nation Without Women*, *I Have Become the Tide* and *The Passion of New Eve* from the perspective of how the nature of oppression takes multifaceted manifestations. The paper also aims to study violence in correlation with gender disparity in society and its implications on individuals as well as society at large.

We would like to thank the Assistant Editors of this issue—Tanvi Garg, Srishti Sharma, Kajal Chaitanya, Shivani Duggal, Poorva Gulati, Simran Mittal, Tripti Aggarwal and for their hard work, commitment and dedication. Without them, this issue would not have been possible. We would also like to thank the students, faculty and staff of USHSS for their support.

We hope you enjoy reading these papers—we did!

Editors, *Indraprasth*

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# Translation as Theory: A Translator's Perspective

Suman Sharma

## Abstract

This paper begins with a brief discussion of the development of Translation Theory, its pioneers and major contributors. Majorly the paper has re-explored certain theoretical concepts proposed by Marisa Press and Andrew Chesterman with reference to the translation of Shanta Kumar's *Lajjo*. The researcher in his role as a translator of this novel had tried to bring home the point that by explaining and describing the problems of translation and their solution, the translator is generating new data and hence contributing to the field of translation study. In addition, the researcher also tried to demonstrate that the documentation of the influence of academic theories on translation in this particular case had also resulted in the development of implicit theories of translation.

**Keywords:** Implicit Theory, Praxis, Dilemmas, Solutions, Strategies, Creativity.

## Theories of Translation

Romans led by Cicero are often considered the founders of the Western translation theory. In this period, the main debate was between 'word-for-word' translation and 'sense-for-sense' translation; the dispute that was going to have a long-lasting effect on translation studies in the later ages. According to Hugo Friedrich, Romans viewed translation as a "transformation in order to mould the foreign into the linguistic structures of one's own culture" (Kundu 4). Cicero divided the practice of translation into two extremes: One being "Man of Interpreter" (Literal) and another "Man of Orator" (Free). Further, he makes clear distinctions between 'word-for-word' and 'sense-for-sense' translation (Kundu 4-5).

In the 16th, century the British scholars Henry Howard, Thomas Hoby and Philemon Holland began to see translation as a tool to domesticate foreign text. In addition, other scholars like Nicolas Perrot d' Ablancourt suggested replacing the obscene and boring in the translated text (11). The three most influential translators of the seventeenth century have been Sir John Denham

(1615-69), Abraham Cowley (1618-67), and John Dryden (1631-1744). Denham is known for, “Idiomatic translation and advocated the principle of compensation by which addition was allowed”. Cowley was in favour of free translation and opposed “word for word” translation. Dryden, the most important of these three, classified translation into three categories; Paraphrase, Metaphrase and Imitation. He denounced Metaphrase, terming it as “Dancing on the ropes with tattered legs” (Hopkin 57). He viewed Paraphrasing as an ideal translation and termed it as a “golden mean” (Maimom 72). However, he, later on, asserted that the choice again stems from the individual translator.

The linguistic theories of translation deal with the language during the process of translation. Language and translation are thus, closely related as translation deals with multiple languages and hence, linguistic theories have an important role in translation studies. Roman Jakobson, (1896-1982) a Russian linguist, in his seminal essay, “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation,” states “that meaning lies with the signifier and not in the signified.” Jakobson distinguished three different types of translation phenomena: Intralingual (between the same language), Inter-lingual (between two different languages), and Inter-semiotic (from verbal to non-verbal sign system). The Jakobsonian concept that meaning lies in the signifier rather than the signified makes the language an important variable in translation. Eugene Nida developed the theory of dynamic equivalence. He gave the concept of “formal” and “dynamic Equivalence” in translations. While “formal equivalence” focuses on the constancy of the lexical and grammatical details of the source language, dynamic equivalence is more natural and does not aim at attaining literal precision. In other words, formal equivalence is based on fidelity to the source text while dynamic equivalence is for taking liberties with it and giving the licence to creation.

In practice, linguistic theories of translation focus on searching for exact equivalents and the absence of exact equivalents results in untranslatability. This stress on equivalences mostly results in impediments to translation, and unless the cultural environment in which the text is produced is taken into consideration, no justice can be done in translation studies. This necessity results in cultural theories of translations. According to cultural theory, translation is an act of cultural transformation and not just an operation on languages.

Hence, the purpose of translation is of utmost importance. Eugene Nida has elaborated upon this issue in detail. He notes, "... words only have meaning in terms of the corresponding culture. But while a language can usually be acquired within a period of ten years, it takes a lifetime to understand and become an integral part of a culture" (13).

Translation Studies in the 1940s-50s are known for two diverse opinions of translation scholars because translation can bridge cultural and linguistic differences in translation. In the sixties, translation theorists began studying the methods to undertake the exact transfer in translation. Scholars like, Levy, Reiss, Holmes, Even-Zohar and Toury, studied the translation as a decision-making process (15). Even Zohar developed the "polysystem theory" and assigned a primary role to the translation. He also believed that external factors play a vital role in the selection of a text for translation. Gideon Toury probed target-oriented theories of translation and proposed that reason for the choice of a text for a translation is largely non-literary and depends on the personal or ideological preference of the translator ( NPTEL "Lecture 11"). As Jacques Derrida's, theory of deconstruction did not acknowledge the immutability of meaning, hence the very process of carrying over the meaning was rendered empty. As this theory rejected the "Binary Oppositions", hence, "Derrida's perspective blurred the boundaries between the original and the translation" (NPTEL "Module 4").

It was James S. Holmes (1924-1986), who coined the term "Translation Studies" in his key paper in 1972. He defines translation studies as "the complex of problems clustered around the phenomenon of translating and translations" (12). He classified the field of Translation Studies into two main parts: Applied and Pure. These two parts have further been divided into different subparts. Susan Bassnett provided much valuable insight into the field. In her book *Translation Studies*, Bassnett "explores translation as a semiotic and a cultural act which adheres itself strictly to the linguistic process" (18). She also explores the links between "Translation Studies" and the, "the discipline of comparative literature, postcolonial studies and globalization" (Adhikari 5).

In the 1980s, the area of TS was influenced by the postmodern, feminist and postcolonial theories. One direction of this postmodern theory studies translation as a place of transportation of linguistic signs. One of the followers

of this direction, William Frawley, held that in translation, source code is not translated into the target code, but into an independent “new third code”. Another direction of the postmodern theories views the translation from external consideration of politics, culture, market, sales and audiences. Scholars like Vermeer too believed that a translation is not only a process of linguistic transfer, but also depends upon other factors like audiences and the agency that commissions a translational work (Gautam 17).

### **The Concept of Theories**

There are several ways in which the concept of theories can be explained. Kenneth Pike, a linguist suggested three main ways of understanding any phenomena: In isolation, in waves (where phenomena merge with another phenomenon.) and as a field in its context. In addition, a phenomenon can also be explained concerning its use (Pike 4). Theories are live works and keep on evolving and better theories keep on replacing the bad ones. They are like “conceptual structures” that are developing constantly. In a wider sense, “theory is a helpful point of view.” According to Chesterman: “The etymology of the word “theory” goes back to the Greek *theoria*, meaning ‘a way of looking at something’ to contemplate it and understand it better” (3). So, theories can be thought of as ways of reaching a goal or understanding a concept.

### **Translation as Tactic Theory with Reference to Translation of Shanta Kumar’s *Lajjo***

Every translator had a particular belief and opinion about the art of translation, based on their translational experience. In cognitive psychology, these and other such beliefs are classified as “implicit theories, or subjective theories” (Presas 519). This explication of a translation phenomenon is termed by Chesterman as a “tactic theory.” Expounding this theory in detail, he writes:

A second channel of potential influence from theory to practice centres on the notion of what we could call tacit or implicit theory (compare the concept of tacit knowledge, i.e. knowledge that is difficult to put explicitly into words). Whether we are translators or not, we are all exposed to translations, everyone has some notion of what a translation is. In this sense, everyone has a view of

translation—i.e. some kind of implicit theory. (85)

There are five main notions that Chesterman describes as constituting theory. These five notions according to him are myths, metaphors, models, hypotheses and structured research programmes. Based on these notions, Chesterman makes an interesting observation, “that a translation itself can be seen as a theory of how the source text can be translated, in all the five senses outlined above” (16). He reasons that a translation is a theory, as it is modelled on the source text. Metaphorically too, the translation is like an “isomorph” of the source text. Translation makes a hypothesis about the possible interpretation of the source text and that the very act of translation is “structured scientific research” as the translator has to solve a “clearly defined problem” (16). The praxis of translation offers a kind of tactic theory which though “difficult to put explicitly into words”, nevertheless, seeks to “fill the gaps” which exist in the translation studies continuum (85). Literary translation contributes to the field of translation studies in three ways; first by answering and expounding such questions as to why a particular text and author was chosen for translation, second by explaining the strategies and techniques adopted to negotiate the challenges of translation and third by evaluating the translated text. The theories which are added consequentially to the existing patterns in the translation process have all the criteria of scientific theories. In addition to adding to already existing knowledge about translation, these mini-theories supplement the understanding of the translation phenomena. Such new knowledge can then be converted into expert knowledge through structuring and restructuring. So, by explaining and describing the creative and strategic process by which a particular text is translated, the translator acts as a theoretician of the translation. Other than the “structured research program” the translator contributes towards the theory of the translation by “providing new data” and by showing another path through which the translation can be approached (15). Moreover, by continuous practice, a translator may reflect and build upon their own “conceptual knowledge” about translation (Presas 520). Hence, the practice of translation is a way to construct new theories of translation.

The author of this research paper translated Shanta Kumar's Hindi novel *Lajjo* into English as a part of his doctoral thesis. In the course of his journey as a translator, he encountered many problems of translation. The researcher/

translator also built certain strategies for successfully negotiating these problems. In addition, the translator was also influenced by the various theories of translation. These problems, their resolutions and also the theoretical influences were recorded by the translator in his doctoral thesis. Moreover, this translation explains the entire process that led to the final translation. Hence the extant translation acted as a “theory” of translation. One of his papers, titled “To be or not to be? Dilemmas and their Resolution in Literary Translation of Shanta Kumar’s *Lajjo*,” listed various social, linguistic and cultural reasons that led to difficulties in the translation drawing repeated references from the Mona Baker’s book, *In Other Words: A Coursework on Translation*. The various strategies of translation used by the translator like; as replacement, omissions, additions and synthesis were recorded in this paper. For instant, the translator recorded the nature of difficulty in the interpretation of a particular portion of the source text and also his strategy to solve this problem in these words:

For example, deciphering the meaning of this sentence was problematic. “कांटा दरूट टमटमाते दीये की तरफ देखती रही” (Kumar 55). In this sentence, it is not clear, whether the lamp is outside or inside the house. On the first impulse, the translator thought of seeking the help of the author in comprehending this sentence, but finally, this idea was dropped, and the ambiguity in the translation was retained. So, the sentence was translated as: “Kanta stared at the fluttering *Diya*, placed at a distance.” (5)

The translator also recorded the difficulty faced by the translator in translating the words at the level of their “hyponyms” in these words: “If the word “mutter” is to be translated into Hindi, then it will only have to be translated with its exact hyponym, “बड़बड़ाना” and the word cannot, in any case, be translated as, “फुसफुसाना” (6). Similarly, the translator explained why certain words like “चारपाई” here were translated in a particular manner. A strategy to translate certain words having, “. . . no ‘orthographic’ correspondence between the ‘elements of meaning’ and the words in the two distinct languages was also explained” (7). Similarly, the translator expounded the difficulties faced in translating reduplicated and onomatopoeic expressions due to separate; “selectional and collocations restriction”, cohesive devices and referents in the two languages (Baker 15). The translator added new data to the field of

translation studies, by giving his take on the infamous form-content dilemma, often faced by the literary translator. The translator shared his opinion about this dilemma in the initial stages of the translation and how and why this opinion changed gradually during the process of translation.

The translator contributed to the “implicit theory” of translation by recording his trans-creational experiences in the paper titled “Trans-creation in Literary Translation of Shanta Kumar’s *Lajjo*”. In the said paper, the translator tried to explain why creativity plays an important role in the solution of problems of translation. The translator also explicated, how creativity can improve upon the flaws of the original, resulting in an improved and rejuvenated version of the original in another language. Here also, the translator added “new data” by listing some instances when he completely abandoned the theory of equivalences and retorted to arbitrary creativeness to account for the social-cultural context. An instant from the said paper is reproduced here to make this point clearer.

For example, it is perfectly OK for a Hindi-speaking person in India, to drink tea, but English sensibilities will get disturbed, if they had to drink tea. Instead, the English people usually sip tea. As far as drinks are concerned, anyone associated with English culture knows what drinks, mean for the English people. So, in the translation of this sentence, “भाभीजी, आपने तो चाय पिलाने को कहा था, पर आप तो चाय से नहलाने लग पड़ी” (30) the verb “पिलाना” was replaced by English verb, “have” and the sentence was translated as; “Bhabhiji you asked me to have tea, but you have started bathing us with tea.” (Sharma “Transcreation” 77)

It was also explained why certain lexical items were retained in the translation and added to the gloss. The translator also documented some interesting moments in the extant translation, when he was able to achieve the exact degree of fidelity to the original. He writes giving one such instance:

This particular phenomenon was witnessed, while translating series of these sentences: “आप घबराओ मत। यहीं बैठो। सरकारी ईमारत में एक कमरा खाली है, रात आप वहाँ पर सो जाओ। आपका सब प्रकार का प्रबंध हो जायेगा।” (Kumar 47). To the translator’s surprise, these sentences

were easily translated as: “Do not you worry. Be seated here. A room is vacant in the government building. You sleep there at night. Everything will be arranged for you” (Sharma 66). Though the translator has to use his creative skills and replace certain source lexical items, with equivalent target lexical items, it was relatively easy to translate these sentences. (81)

The translator also tried to explain the phenomena of restructuring of sentences, which led to the breaking of the sentences, the addition of sentences and also the replacement of punctuation marks in the translation by listing some examples. He explains this process as:

The entire effort of breaking the structure of the original sentence and then realigning them according to the grammatical conventions of the target language can be compared to the operation carried out by an expert cardiac surgeon, who dexterously replaces the original heart with its, artificial substitute after ripping open the patient’s chest. (82)

Theories are hypotheses to be tested for the veracity of their claim. Such examination of theories results in “error elimination”, which generates new problems, requiring the need for new theories to solve them (Chesterman “Translation”). So, this never-ending cyclic process of testing theories and the generation of new problems keeps on occurring, resulting in the unattainability of final knowledge. The translator too explains the different processes through which the first draft leads to the final translation. After every edition/ revision, a new theory of translation is generated. For example, let us examine how this sentence from the original was translated in the first draft and then how it was translated in the second and final draft. Original: “वह बदमाश तो किसी को भी नहीं छोड़ता।” (Kumar 46). First draft: “That scoundrel does not leave anybody.” Final translation: “This scoundrel does not spare anyone.” So, it can be seen that the translation produced in the first draft may not make much sense to the target text audience and may confuse and baffle them. However, the final translation had shed its source language colour and come closer to the target language conventions.

The theories can influence the translators in two ways: one at the linguistic

level and the other at an ideological level. Linguistically, a translator may be influenced by such discussion as “word for word” translation or “sense for sense” translation. S/he can also be influenced by the “theory of equivalences”. At the ideological level, translation theories can have a huge impact on a translator. Such emotional issues as “the concept of erasures” or the discussion on “Heterographic” or “Homographic” translation can drastically alter the translation practice. The novel *Lajjo* is generally considered a Hindi novel and even the author believes that he is serving the interest of the Hindi language through his writing.

Moreover, much research on his works has been carried out in the Hindi department of various Universities. Hence initially, the translator too believed that he was translating the novel from Hindi into English. However, after reading a research paper by Manoj Chayya, the entire perspective of the researcher towards the novel changed. While evaluating author Jayant Khatri's works, Chayya observed that Khatri is a native of Kachh, but he writes in Gujarati and hence he is translating the *Kacchi* culture in Gujarati. So, to translate Khatri is like the second translation (198). Applying the same assertion to Shanta Kumar's works, the researcher could easily surmise that Kumar and Khatri are located in a similar linguistic position as far as their writings are concerned. Shanta Kumar is a native of Kangra, but he writes in Hindi and hence he is translating an absent Kangri text into Hindi. Hence, the researcher discovered that *Lajjo* is not an ordinary Hindi text, but a Kangri text that was translated into Hindi. This stance of the researcher was reiterated by the presence of a sizable number of Kangri lexical items (relating to the culture of the region) in the novel. In addition, some dialogues in the novel were written in the Kangri dialect. Hence, translating *Lajjo* into English was the second translation of *Lajjo*.

In the extant literary scene in India, English is usually regarded as a neo-imperialistic, hegemonic, linguistic demon, out there to swindle the regional literature of India. However, while translating the novel, the researcher discovered that many writers from the region wrote in Hindi and not in English. So, it was concluded that the Hindi had appropriated the regional dialects in far perilous ways, then realized, especially in so-called Hindi-dominated regions of North-Western hill states. The scrutiny of the novel made it amply clear that

by encoding certain *Kangri* lexical items in the text and also by putting *Kangri* voice in some of the character's mouths, the writer had unconsciously tried to resist the domination of Hindi in his work and it was only to expand the cultural base of *Kangra* that the writer had made a bitter compromise to write in Hindi. The translation of *Lajjo* was also deeply influenced by St-Pierre Paul's essay, "A Fine Balancing Act: Translation in (Post) Colonial Settings". In this article, the researcher focused on three main issues of translation in a postcolonial context. The linguistic violence exhibited by the act of the translation, second on the replacement of cultural artefacts of a language by "abstract identities" of the target language and third on the communication gap created between neo public school educated English speaking minorities and government school-educated majority. This paper influenced the translator in two ways. First, he analysed all three issues in his paper titled "Translation of *Lajjo* as an Antidote to the Noxious Excesses of Postcolonial Writings"; Exploring the linguistic hierarchies in *Kangra*, it was found that there is a sense of shame in conversing in *Kangri* in any formal situations in *Kangra* and that "The authorities draw a strange linguistic power by conversing in hegemonic languages. This might have been one of the possible reasons, why some of the Pahari writers chose to write in Hindi" (Sharma 181). The scholarly opinion expressed by Pierre led the translators to reduce the linguistic violence in the extant translation and also prompted him to conserve the cultural artefacts of the original. Hence like the author, the translator consciously decided to retain the *Kangra* dialect and the cultural terms in the translation. The researcher chose to translate *Lajjo* so that the cultural base of the *Kangra* gets expanded in other linguistic regions of the country and the world. In addition, the translator made a conscious decision to retain the regional flavour in the translation.

Scholars are constantly trying to decipher the other areas of knowledge that translation studies constitute. By and large, the field of translation studies has moved much ahead of the initial debate on 'word for word' or the 'sense for sense' translation. In fact, the discipline of "Translation Studies" is anything, but authoritarian and every translator has his/ her opinion about it. The discussion about the distinction between theory and praxis and also the limited role of theories of translation in actual practice makes it clear that there is a gap between theory and praxis. Hence the role of theory in practice is naturally

questioned. As the translator faces open-ended problems during translation, the academic-based theories fail to provide the predetermined solutions to these problems. The process of translation as a phenomenon can be explained in diverse manners and each of these explanations has its reasoning, logic and function. As a field, translation is studied in relation to the context and also in relation to the variables like the author and translator. As an important variable, the translator describes the process of translation as it happens during the act and hence could contribute immensely to the academic discourse in the field of translation.

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## **Negotiating Conflict through Intersubjectivity: Revisiting Bernard Malamud’s “Black Is My Favourite Colour”**

**Shikha Dutta Gupta**

### **Abstract**

That’s how it is. I give my heart and they kick me in my teeth.

– Malamud 365

The present paper seeks to situate the short story “Black Is My Favourite Colour” within the paradigm of peace and conflict studies, between the Jewish Americans and the African Americans. In doing so, the article first strives to shed light on the instances of conflict and resistance between the Black and the Jewish characters in the story; second, to analyse the formation of binaries in the story due to the stereotypes associated with the Blacks and the Jews, and due to the ways they perceived each other in the American land; and third, to understand how the concept of intersubjectivity operates in the text, that shows the possibility of a peaceful co-existence for the two racial groups in America.

**Keywords:** African American, Jewish American, Conflict, Intersubjectivity, Bernard Malamud.

### **Introduction**

The United States of America became the unrivalled superpower after the world wars and saw exponential growth in economic and technological sectors based on the economic base left after the war. This was unimaginable for most Americans, as something like this had not happened before or during the war. However, the racial discrimination in the country remained intact. The section “Overview of the Post-War United States, 1945-1968” from the presentation on the U.S. History Primary Source Timeline says that:

The image and reality of overall economic prosperity and the upward mobility it provided for many white Americans were not lost on those who had largely been excluded from the full meaning of the

American Dream, both before and after the war. As a consequence, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and American women became more aggressive in trying to win their full freedoms and civil rights as guaranteed by the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution during the post-war era. (Library of Congress)

America from its nascence was a land of indigenous tribes, but as the British colonial occupation started in North America, the land of the natives was encroached and they were displaced or died of disease, and many were killed in the First Indian War. The British brought Black people from the African subcontinent as slaves and indentured laborers to the American land. Slavery in America started in the 1600s and started developing as laborers were needed for land cultivation, particularly for the production of tobacco and rice. Many of the African Americans were the descendants of the Africans who were forced into slavery after being captured during African wars and raids. They were purchased and bought to America as part of the Atlantic slave trade.

The Jews, on the other hand, came to the United States of America for refuge, as there were various antisemitic activities happening all across the world and especially in East European countries like Russia due to the Tsarist rule, Germany due to Hitler's fascism. Since time immemorial the Jews have been persecuted from their respective homelands—starting from the holy land of Israel, which led to the formation of the Jewish diaspora. Due to the unsteady immigration policies of America, many Jews were not allowed to enter the country after a certain point. Those who had already entered the country faced a lot of issues that were common to immigrants, like assimilation and appropriation into the American culture and the American way of life, formation of other branches of Judaism from ultra-orthodox to religious, traditional, and secular, the East European Jews missing the shtetl life, et cetera. Many lives were ruined and many suffered from severe identity crises after leaving their homelands. In the book *They Left It All Behind: Trauma, Loss, and Memory Among Eastern European Jewish Immigrants and Their Children* (2019), the psychological effects of migration on European Jewry is being highlighted, “For all involuntary migrants, there are cumulative layers of trauma. Families have wrenched apart as some stayed behind and others were scattered in a Jewish diaspora across the globe” (Hahn x).

Both the Blacks and Jews being minorities had sympathy for each other, though the Jews had it more because they realized that the Blacks are being the scapegoat in the American land, while the Jews were leading a better life. Eric Sundquist in his book *Strangers in the Land: Blacks, Jews, Post-Holocaust America* (2009), observes that the moral obligation that the Jews felt for the Blacks and vice versa was mostly a case of genuine compassion. However, he also says that their fellow feeling was sometimes looked at with scrutiny, which had a chance of perpetuating internal rifts.

As "America's Jews," to cite a formulation that appears over the course of the century, blacks were far more likely to bear the brunt of racism, a fact that made Jews sympathetic to their predicament if for no other reason than that it reminded them of the European pogroms they had escaped—and might face once again in the United States but for the scapegoat provided by the African American. If blacks were America's Jews, then Jews need not be. Alongside the human bonds expressed often enough in love, sexual passion, and marriage, the moral obligation Jews felt toward blacks, and blacks toward Jews, was in each case sincerely rooted in faith and traditions of compassion. That the offer of brotherhood was also, at times, an opportunistic means for Jews to fight anti-Semitism and for blacks to fight racism should hardly be a surprise. Even its most ardent proponents recognized that it was at best an "uneasy alliance," one bound to be tempered by ambivalence and self-interest. (Sundquist 3)

Though the issue of racial capitalism which led to Blacks being scapegoated in America could be looked at as a possible hindrance in the way of a potential peaceful relationship between these two groups. Ethan Goffman observed in his book *Imagining Each Other: Blacks and Jews in Contemporary American Literature* (2000) that Jews, being the ethnic group in a favourable position, had an even bigger obligation to emancipate the Other (here, the Blacks), and notes there are chances of a dialogue and an alliance between the two racial groups.

It was Jews who first emphasized common features between the two groups, Jews who initiated the alliance. Two factors directly

influenced this undertaking. First, the surge of East European Jewish immigrants to America, beginning in the 1880s, provided a group sympathetic to spurned outsiders. Second, the rise of anti-Semitism in American society following World War I, including such measures as quotas and restricted social access, revealed assimilation as precarious and provoked a common legal agenda with African Americans. (Goffman 4)

However, the main point of difference between the Blacks and Jews in America remained the fact that the Jews climbed up the ladder in the economic sphere while the Blacks stagnated for years, as even after slavery was abolished, racial discrimination still continued in the economic sphere. Thus, they kept hating the Jews who they perceived as Whites.

### **Contextualizing Conflict**

The story “Black Is My Favourite Colour” revolves around the character Nathan Lime, who was a Jewish man living in America. The story, which was written in 1963, was the time when the Black Power Movement was gaining momentum. It shows how Nathan struggles throughout his life as he was hated and was treated badly by the Blacks for being a Jew. Instances of his getting discriminated against by African Americans started in his childhood when he and his family had moved to a Black neighbourhood in the Williamsburg Section of Brooklyn where he felt quite lonely as he was unable to fit in. There Nathan tried to befriend a Black boy named Buster Wilson. Though they somehow got along for a while, Nathan realized that Buster did not want his friendship and was in fact a Jew hater one fine day out of nowhere, Buster hit Nathan and broke his nose and also used racial slurs against him.

Then there was the case of Charity Quietness, who was the domestic help that worked at Nathan’s house. She was a Black lady who used to clean Nathan’s place once a week when he had an off. She always had her breakfast all by herself, in the bathroom, though Nathan kept pursuing her to eat at the table where he ate. This showed the racism ingrained deep in her mind which governed the way she behaved around her White (Jewish) master. Then, in his youth, he fell in love with a Black woman named Ornita Harris, despite facing antisemitic treatment by the Blacks. His love interest Mrs Ornita Harris was a

widow who was not looking for love from a random stranger, let alone a Jew. However, Nathan stayed steady in his courtship and soon the woman also fell in love with him but their love could not materialize because of all the hindrances they had to meet with for belonging to different racial communities. Thus, we see that even if there were some Blacks who would reciprocate their feelings of love and friendship, being afraid of the other Blacks and in solidarity with them, they would also distance themselves, which happens in the case of Ornita Harris.

These instances from the story, when viewed from a broader perspective, are an apt depiction of the time when the Blacks in America felt an intense rage against the Jews in the country because of racial capitalism. Nancy Leong in her article titled "Racial Capitalism" defines racial capitalism as "the process of deriving value from the racial identity of others which harms the individuals affected and society as a whole" (2). Thus the Blacks in America were highly dissatisfied with being pushed to the margins based on their skin colour. The role of conflict in achieving peace which is properly foregrounded here as though the relationship that formed between Ornita and Nathan was one of love, it started with prejudice and conflict because Ornita was not comfortable befriending white men. Thus it can be said that conflict transformation in tandem with peacebuilding is a thorough process that welcomes conflict as a potentially positive force. As a result, it aims to reduce violence while striving for social justice, wholesome interpersonal relationships, and long-lasting peace. Along these lines is the idea that is being put forth in the article "Rethinking Conflict: Its Role in Building Peace":

Simply put, conflict in and of itself is neutral. Conflict is neither intrinsically negative nor positive. In fact, how it plays out is determined entirely by how it is handled—by the attitudes and skills of those involved. Conflict is not only inevitable, it is essential. Throughout history and still today, conflict is the expression of big fault lines and the seed of big changes in our world. If we understand that conflict can be managed without violence, and can in fact be transformed into an engine of positive change, we begin to see how conflict can actually be a critical part of building peace. (Colgan, et al.)

The master storyteller Bernard Malamud conveys this message through the portrayal of the relationship between Ornita and Nathan, as their disagreement during the initial phase of their relationship led to an even stronger bond later, which was because Nathan did not give up after their initial unfriendly encounters which his lady friend found as an appealing trait of a gentleman and her discomfort in befriending white men soon goes away. Emma Ferman in the article “Shifting the Power: The Role of Women in Conflict Resolution and Peacekeeping,” says that when women participate in the process of peacebuilding and become negotiators, a peaceful solution is likely to come out and last for a longer period of time. In this story, it can be seen that the Black women like Charity Quietness, Nathan’s domestic help who had discomfort in eating at the same table as him, and Ornita Harris, his love interest, who at the beginning was hesitant in even interacting with him for his being White, were at least not physically aggressive with him like the Black men who tried to kill him at his shop and those who tried to threaten and humiliate Ornita Harris for publicly roaming around with a Jew. Thus, if looked at from the gender perspective, it could be said that the Black woman did not pose a physical threat to him as the Black men did, and this could possibly lead to a harmonious relationship between the two communities.

The new world after the Enlightenment of the 17th century was one such time when both the Jews and the Blacks experienced a “legalized form of oppression” (Philipson xvi). Talking about the dualism of the Enlightenment age in the book *The Identity Question: Blacks and Jews in Europe and America* (2000), Philipson notes that:

Rather than constituting an exception to Enlightenment discourse, the paradox of a slave owner penning the American Declaration of Independence perfectly expressed the dualism of the age. The position of Blacks and Jews in the New World was different, but the logic of proclaiming a democratic republic with legalized forms of oppression drew only perfunctory comment in either Jeffersonian America or Napoleonic France. (xvi)

He further goes on to say how the experiences of the Jews and Blacks entering the new world were quite different from each other. “Unlike Mary Antin, Africans brought to North America did not like their journey across the water to the

Exodus. They came to refer to their transatlantic voyage as the Middle Passage, the second phase of their journey from Africa to their place of servitude" (xvi).

To position and comprehend the conflicts between the Black characters and Nathan (the only Jewish character in the story), they have been categorized into binary oppositions as it can be seen that the formation of many binarisms between the Blacks and Nathan, keeps increasing the resistance and tension between them. One of the binary oppositions is "Intolerance or Tolerance." In this story, it can be seen that Nathan never discriminated against Blacks. All the times that he had to deal with African American people, he was patient and optimistic. On the other hand, all the Black characters in the story have tried to break his hope of a peaceful co-existence. His patience was taken for passivity which in a way allowed the hostile Blacks to become aggressive with him. Then there is the binary opposition of "Businessman or Goons." The story again puts forth the stereotype of Jewish businessmen and Black goons, wherein it was shown that Nathan, the liquor dealer in Harlem, was met with constant resistance by the Negroes for pursuing an African American woman to be his partner, and they displayed muscle power to dominate over his financial power by beating him at two instances in the duration of the story.

Then there is the binarism of "Sensitive or Stoic." The story shows that Nathan was an empath and a sensitive person. In his childhood when he saw his Black friend Buster Wilson's father bleeding from his nose after a fight, he felt sick at the sight of it and ran home, while Buster kept watching without any expression, which portrayed the cold attitude of African Americans and the emotionality of Jewish Americans. It also foregrounds the stereotype that Blacks usually get into fights and are impulsive creatures while the Jews are tolerant and rational.

Another binary opposition that is foregrounded in the story is "Refined or Crude." In the story, it is shown that the Black men who harm Nathan, always also used offensive language which is full of antisemitic comments. They even used offensive language targeting the Black lady Ornita Harris when they saw her with the white man Nathan, as they not only did not support but were also threatened by the idea of assimilation of the Blacks into Whites and witnessing the love affair between a Black and a White filled them with the need to intervene and prevent such cases. However, there were also other

Blacks, like those that worked at Nathan's store and Charity Quietness, his domestic help, who treated him with civility and respect. So it can be inferred that the Blacks only or mostly talked to the Jews with respect if they had Jewish masters or owners like in the case of Charity Quietness or if they belonged to a well enough economically strong background like in the case of Mrs Ornita Harris. Thus in all these cases, we see that the economic disparity plays a huge role in creating conflicts between Blacks and Nathan.

### **Intersubjectivity as a Peace-Making Tool**

Intersubjectivity is defined as the sharing of different perspectives of different people which is facilitated by empathy. Empathy happens when one puts oneself in the situation of the other and tries to feel what the other could be feeling. Though every human being is inherently capable of being empathetic, it takes choice and intent to be so. In the case of intersubjectivity, it is this feeling that we have for the other by bringing in other's perspectives into one's life. The article titled "Merleau-Ponty's Concept of Intersubjectivity: A Notion Reflected Within the Modern Democratic Society" points out that "political philosophy requires a paradigm shift from subjectivity to the intersubjective dimension of subjectivity in order to achieve decency and dignity of institutions and human relations" (Bulatovic). The concept of intersubjectivity has to do with this mental ability powered by extreme social responsibility, social cognition, and emotional intelligence. It has varied applications across various disciplines. Like in Philosophy, intersubjectivity or mainly intersubjectivism helps one to reach close to the objective truth. Here intersubjectivity happens when people can readily or with some effort, suspend their thinking and become open to the various opinions that others may have.

While in the field of Psychology (Robert Stolorow), the application of intersubjectivity is looked at from the perspective of trying to know the mind of the other with the incorporation of theories like simulation theory, theory-theory, and interaction theory. At the core of the functioning of intersubjectivity in Psychology is the idea that being affected by the other person's sufferings or thoughts does not always involve dialogue. It can also happen when one shares space and close proximity with someone and notices the other and grasps the physical and mental state that the other is in. Allowing the other's being to affect one's own being is how intersubjectivity happens in Psychology. It also

has applications in Phenomenology (Edmund Husserl), Anthropology (George Herbert Mead), Sociology (Alfred Schutz), and Communication Studies (Jurgen Habermas). However, in this story, Malamud could be said to have incorporated the psychological approaches to and applications of intersubjectivity.

Bernard Malamud in his works, depicts the life of Americans post World War 2. However, unlike most post-war American writers who talked about the disillusionment and moral crisis that was an outcome of the catastrophic wars, the ensuing ennui, a general state of distrust, cynicism, and absurdism as the apocalypse had unfolded, and everyone felt that they were living in dystopic times, Malamud talked about hope. While writers like Kurt Vonnegut, Joseph Heller, and Norman Mailer talked about the military occupation in America; those like Thomas Pynchon, and Don DeLillo came up with various conspiracy theories about events of the past that still held relevant and about the postmodern crisis, those like JD Salinger, Arthur Miller talked about coming of age issues, the turning of the American man as a phoney human chasing the American Dream, then there were the writers like Grace Paley, Philip Roth, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Saul Bellow and Bernard Malamud who wrote about the human condition with humor and forgiveness. In Malamud's works, we see those rare moments where the collective pain is felt, and the self and the other(s) share meaningful moments based on intersubjectivity. In the book *Jewish American Literature since 1945: An Introduction* (1999), Stephen Wade says:

What we find in his works are stories of ordinary lives and ordinary men and women. Mostly troubled men with an ethical crisis or a humanitarian leaning. There are characters who are scared of the impending doom as if they're certain of it to happen. His fictional characters are the ones, who like the rest of the people of the world, fade into anonymity. But, then again, Malamud is different from his contemporaries in the sense that what he offers is a man with a new and empathetic vision. (64)

The writer Bernard Malamud shows how intersubjectivity acts as a peace-making tool in this story, as it brings in the possibility of there being harmony amongst the racially different characters, at least to some extent. It can be said

that in the story Nathan Lime practices intersubjectivity, which allows the possibility of the maintenance of peace and harmony between the Blacks and him if not completely resolving all causes of conflict between them.

Cases of intersubjectivity in the story can be seen when Nathan Lime faced racial discrimination by his friend Buster Wilson, and he remained calm and reflected upon the situation, trying to figure out what might have led to such intense rage in the boy who he had been trying to befriend. Even while dealing with his Black domestic help Charity Quietness, when she did not sit with him at the same table to eat, he kept pursuing her and she continued to eat by herself in the bathroom, he offered her to eat alone at the table as it became clear to him that she felt uncomfortable eating with him. Thus here it can be seen how he empathizes with her and offers a solution that would also keep her dignity intact. Also, at the time when Nathan gets beaten up by the Black people who attack him and Ms Ornita Harris when they are at the subway while coming back from dinner, he did not resort to violent techniques and rather tried to calmly handle the situation. However, at the end of the scuffle, his Black girlfriend broke off with him as she did not want to attract any more attention to herself. Though Ornita's family was not against her relationship with Nathan, the other Blacks could not let the couple live in peace as they could not forget the systemic violence perpetuated on them by the Whites and they perceived the Jews as Whites. Even here we see how Nathan after all his efforts failed, let go of the woman he was deeply in love with because more than the companionship, he cared for her safety and mental well-being.

In all these situations in the story, Nathan practices intersubjectivity as he tries to understand the perspective of people who hate him and does not spew hate in the process. His acts of friendship and kindness without any ulterior motive go along the lines of Martin Buber's philosophy of "I and Thou" which was proposed in his book *I and Thou* (1937), was the kind of intersubjectivity that was propounded by Buber. According to Buber, I-Thou and I-It is the two-fold attitude of human subjects and the two-fold structure of the world it creates as a result of such an orientation—I oriented to Thou and I oriented to It. The difference is that the I-It relationship is objectifying and the I-Thou relationship entails a mutual relationship. The I-Thou concept by Buber fits

into this narrative wherein a Jewish American man is always at the service of the African Americans and does not hold any bias against them even after facing racial discrimination. He tries to think from the other's perspective, not to justify their actions but to reason out the method in the madness.

### **Conclusion**

The approach that the paper had while incorporating binary oppositions in this story emphasizes the difference between how the oppositions are perceived, as a binary opposition can be perceived in two ways—as either/or (like good/bad) and as a comparison between two opposite terms (like good vs bad). Veronica Yates in her article "The Damage of Binary Thinking" implies that it is not binary formation but a strict adherence to binary oppositions which leads to the kind of thinking where one side is given preference over the other and thus causes violence, and dehumanization. The paper also shows that it is the comparison that perpetuates hate and not the mere presence of differences, which is in fact inevitable and important. The Jews and Blacks faced both harmony and chaos in the American land but saw in each other a stranger, as Eric Sundquist explains in the introduction of his book *Strangers in the Land: Blacks, Jews, Post-Holocaust America* (2009):

title meant to capture this intermixture of empathy, anxiety, and hostility, comes from the familiar scripture of Leviticus 19:34, "But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt." Jews and blacks were both "strangers in the land" of America, yet they experienced very differently, if sometimes parallel, dynamics of exclusion and inclusion while "dwelling with" the dominant white, gentile culture. By virtue of being or becoming "white," Jews, even recent immigrants, might more quickly be accepted "as one born among" other Americans, but Judaism and Jewishness would still set them apart. By virtue of being usually Christian and often generations-long residents, blacks might lay a stronger claim to being "as one born among" other Americans, but their beginnings in slavery and their blackness would still set them apart. Jews contemplating blacks and blacks contemplating Jews

were called upon to see “the stranger that dwelleth with you” in a mirror image that made it at once easy and hard to “love him as thyself.” (4)

The paper made attempts to put forth the reasons that had ignited animosity in the hearts of the Blacks in America against the Jews and how strained their relationship had become by the 1960s, i.e., during the Black Power Movement. It also showed moments of alliance and genuine relationships between the two different racial groups, which was a possibility only when intersubjectivity took place.

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## Enlightenment and Modernity in the Absurd Plays of Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter and Edward Albee

Abhinaba Chatterjee

### Abstract

The absurd plays of Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter and Edward Albee, bewildered the audience who were accustomed to a well-made play as defined by Aristotle. This paper will argue that an important reason for the bewilderment of the audience is the absence of the sense of inclusivity that is required to be able to combat, to quote Esslin, the “divorce between man and his life,” which arises due to the absence of reconciliation of the scientific worldview and enhanced Americanization with the centrality of the free individual subject. This paper while analysing select plays of Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter and Edward Albee will argue that these plays depict a heightened awareness of the post-war European/ American society and are based more on the Nietzschean concept of *Amor fati* and the championing of the Dionysian impulse, which forms an indispensable part of the human nature. In its search for a voice that echoes the anti-establishment tone of the traditional social norms, this paper will argue that the plays of Absurd Theatre, in its depiction of an unfamiliar world, promotes the cause of inclusivity and highlights the need for an enlightened modernity.

**Keywords:** Theatre of the Absurd, Existentialism, *Amor fati*, Dionysian, Modernity.

The plays that Martin Esslin so famously classified under the umbrella term of “Theatre of the Absurd” were able to generate the sense of absurdity by staging a moment of crisis, by presenting characters at a critical juncture of their live. The plays also critique the Aristotelian concept of a well-made play by refusing access to any introduction to the characters or a beginning and an end to the action of the plays. Along with an apparent devaluation of language as a means of communication, these plays baffled the theatre-goers of Europe and America, who were not accustomed to such theatrical techniques. According to Esslin, these techniques were used by the playwrights to “... achieve a unity between

its basic assumptions and the form in which these are expressed” (24).

The philosophy of existentialism has been a major influence on the plays by these playwrights. The existential philosophy became especially significant as a result of the destruction caused by the two world wars that led to a turn to individual responses to moments of crisis rather than abstract philosophical subjects. Thus, the existential philosophy tends to analyse the individual responses through personal perspectives rather than the universal ones in its attempts to analyse the meaning of life. This analysis of lived experience of the individual human being to a crisis, caused by the changed socio-cultural circumstances, has taken two opposing directions: the pessimistic in the existential philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer and Soren Kierkegaard and the optimistic in the philosophy of Friedrich W. Nietzsche. What united these philosophers was their critique of the rationalism of modernity.

Arthur Schopenhauer stressed the importance of the unconscious rather than conscious mental processes and took the will to be the central concept of his philosophy. Creative will is the blind and non-rational force in both the world and the human nature. Drawing from the philosophy of Plato of the world as mimesis, Schopenhauer claimed that the world exists only in our thoughts. He contended that representational knowledge of thing-in-itself cannot be acquired. He held that the task of art was to communicate the aesthetic intuition, which, according to him, was the task of the philosopher. His legacy of “dark and slanted image of the totality of life” (Wellbery 327) is most visible in the tradition of literary writings that contain revered artists such as Kafka, Melville, Tolstoy, Hardy, Proust, Borges, Beckett and Cioran. Schopenhauer claimed that the essence or basis of all beings is “need, lack, and thus pain” (WWRI 368), which comes to the very fore in such plays as Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, Pinter’s *The Birthday Party* and Albee’s *The Zoo Story* and can even be seen as an essential topic. What this means is that a person is born near death, happiness may occur occasionally, but suffering is everywhere and lingering all the time.

Søren Kierkegaard, the first thinker in modern times to insist on making the process of philosophizing a relevant and formative force, argued for recognition of the vital significance of authentic identity and strove to make it

an operative value. The term “authenticity” has been at the centre of existential philosophy, for the term implies a kind of essentialism, an objectivity that is foreign to authenticity. Kierkegaard’s existential philosophy is heavily reliant on Christianity, whose important motif is “resignation to fate.” However, the Kierkegaardian strategy of “infinite resignation” proposed in *Fear and Trembling* differs from many other strategies of detachment (for instance Buddhist strategies) in that it is not meant to involve extinction of desire. According to Kierkegaard, resignation is not indifference:

God is the one who demands absolute love. Anyone who in demanding a person’s love believes that this love is demonstrated by his becoming indifferent to what he otherwise cherished is not merely an egotist but is also stupid.... For example, a man requires his wife to leave her father and mother, but if he considers it a demonstration of her extraordinary love to him that she for his sake became an indifferent and lax daughter etc., then he is far more stupid than the stupid. (73)

For Kierkegaard, “The absurd is a category, the negative criterion, of the divine or the relationship to the divine. When the believer has faith, the absurd is not the absurd-faith transforms it, but in every weak moment it is again more or less absurd to him” (7). The Kierkegaardian notion of existentialism manifests itself in the plays of Theatre of the Absurd, which present the failure of modernity as scientific modernization caused by rationality. Just as Kierkegaard represents the absurdity in the leap of faith in positing Christianity in relation to modernity, the plays of Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter and Edward Albee depict the lack of faith in God and the dehumanization of mankind. The plays by these playwrights have been read primarily as depicting the meaninglessness of existence in a world that fails to provide any meaning. This failure to find meaning can be attributed to the loss of faith that characterized post Second World-War.

Samuel Beckett’s revolutionary play *Waiting for Godot* dramatizes a scene of “uncertainty and the inability in the modern age to find a coherent system of meaning, order, or purpose by which to understand our existence and by which to live” (Chatterjee 189). Beckett’s portrayal of an

incomprehensible world in the play—starting right from an incomprehensible location and time—”*A country road. A tree. Evening*” (Act 1) to a complete absence of information about the central character – Godot, who never appeared in the play, to a sort of identity crisis of the two characters on stage, Vladimir and Estragon, who simultaneously call themselves Didi and Gogo, presented an absurd world, that had, to quote Esslin, “bewildered the *sophisticated* audiences of Paris, London and New York...” (Esslin 1). The play that has been considered the hallmark of the Theatre of the Absurd has a typical plot that does not move forward. The language of the play is often without meaning and does not correlate with the action on stage. Despite the obvious incoherence, Esslin remarks that the play was immediately grasped by an audience of convicts. Uncertainty is pervasive throughout the play—the uncertainty of purpose, of time, place, emotion, relationships, truth and hope. In other words, nothing is certain except the existence of the two tramps on stage. Descartes’ distinction of the body and the mind as represented by Estragon and Vladimir respectively brings forth their inevitable co-existence as well as their separate existence. The two characters cannot stay without the other and it is only in their togetherness that the action of the play takes place. The audience is led to doubt the certainty of their existence in isolation. Even the most fundamental things are not certain:

ESTRAGON: Wait! (*He moves away from Vladimir.*) I sometimes wonder if we wouldn’t have been better off alone, each one for himself. (*He crosses the stage and sits down on the mound.*) We weren’t made for the same road. VLADIMIR: (*without anger*). It’s not certain.

ESTRAGON: No, nothing is certain.

*Vladimir slowly crosses the stage and sits down beside Estragon. (Act I, 52)*

A similar sense of uncertainty prevails in the plays of Harold Pinter. His play, *The Birthday Party*, depicts the disruption of the life of Stanley Webber, intruded by two mysterious characters Goldberg and McCann. The reasons for the intrusion remain uncertain. The initial recognisability of the stage setting

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to the audience turns into a resistance to rationalisation. As Rabey points out, “... verbal gestures of ostensible accessibility become, in dramatic usage, ironic indications and reiterations of the persistent separateness of individual perspective and interests” (52). The play distorts the conventional sense of speech in theatre to illustrate how bids for linguistic communication seek not dialogue but confirmation. This becomes evident from the early scenes:

Meg: Is that you, Petey?

Pause.

Petey, is that you?

Pause.

Petey?

Petey: Yes, it's me.

Petey: What?

Meg: Is that you?

Petey: Yes, it's me.

Meg: What? (Her face appears at the hatch.) Are you back?

Petey: Yes.

Meg: I've got your cornflakes ready. (She disappears and reappears.) Here's your cornflakes. (He rises and takes the plate from her, sits at the table, props up the paper and begins to eat. Meg enters by the kitchen door.)

Are they nice?

Petey: Very nice.

Meg: I thought they'd be nice. (She sits at the table.) You got your paper?

Petey: Yes. (Act I, 19)

As with *Godot*, Pinter refuses to disclose the identities of his characters. We are just told about the probable ages of the characters and nothing more. The

mutual relationship between Petey and Meg, for instance, is never revealed. We are just led to imagine that they are a couple. Similarly, the antecedents of Stanley are not revealed, due to which the suspense grows when Goldberg and McCann intrudes and in a series of random interrogation, breaks him down psychologically and eventually, take him away to “make a man of you” (Pinter, *Plays: I* 80). This information is required by the audience to make sense of the play.

Edward Albee’s *The Zoo Story* (1959) presents the exposition and violent denouement of two strangers’ conversation in New York’s Central Park. Each turn of the dialogue brings the two men closer to each other and to an understanding of human relationships. Some elements in the play, however, such as the men’s chance meeting and their conversation, which touches on themes of fragmentation, alienation, and isolation, have prompted reviewers and critics to read it as an absurdist drama. Thus, Mary Castiglie Anderson calls *The Zoo Story* “an example of absurdist and nihilist theater” (93) and Charles Lyons places the play “within the genre classification of the absurd... because it assumes the absurdity, the chaos, of the human condition and its essential loneliness” (qtd. in Bigsby 15). Anne Paolucci compares *The Zoo Story* to Sartre’s *No Exit* (43). The play dramatizes the frustration of the protagonist, Jerry at being deprived of the basic amenities in a capitalist society:

Jerry: What were you trying to do? Make sense out of things? Bring order? The old pigeonhole bit? Well, that’s easy; I’ll tell you. I live in a four-storey brownstone rooming-house on the upper West Side between Columbus Avenue and Central Park West. I live on the top floor; rear; west. It’s a laughably small room, and one of my walls is made of beaverboard; this beaverboard separates my room from another laughably small room, so I assume that the two rooms were once one room, a small room, but not necessarily laughable. The room beyond my beaver board wall is occupied by a coloured queen who always keeps his door open; well, not always but always when he’s plucking his eyebrows, which he does with Buddhist concentration. This coloured queen has rotten teeth, which is rare, and he has a Japanese kimono, which is also pretty rare;

and he wears this kimono to and from the john in the hall, which is pretty frequent. I mean, he goes to the john a lot. He never bothers me, and never brings anyone up to his room. All he does is pluck his eyebrows, wear his kimono and go to the john. Now, the two front rooms on my floor are a little larger, I guess; but they're pretty small, too. There's a Puerto Rican family in one of them, a husband, a wife, and some kids; I don't know how many. These people entertain a lot. And in the other front room, there's somebody living there, but I don't know who it is. I've never seen who it is. Never. Never ever. PETER: [embarrassed] Why ... why do you live there?

JERRY: [From a distance again] I don't know.

PETER: It doesn't sound a very nice place ... where you live.

JERRY: Well, no; it isn't an apartment in the East Seventies. But, then again, I don't have one wife, two daughters, two cats and two parakeets. What I do have, I have toilet articles, a few clothes, a hot plate that I'm not supposed to have, a can opener, one that works with a key, you know: a Knife, two forks, and two spoons, one small, one large; three plates, a cup, a saucer, a drinking glass, two picture frames, both empty, eight or nine books, a pack of pornographic playing cards, regular deck, an old Western Union typewriter that prints nothing but capital letters, and a small strong-box without a lock which has in it ... what? Rocks! Some rocks ... sea rounded rocks I picked up on the beach when I was a kid. Under which ... weighed down ... are some letters ... please letters ... please why don't you do this, and please when will you do that letters. And when letters, too. When will you write? When will you come? When? These letters are from more recent years. (4)

The play presents Jerry's attempts at establishing meaningful communication with other human beings. His behaviour with Peter parallels his experiment with the dog. The final image of Jerry's brutal death does communicate with Peter and the audience, and this intense desire on Jerry's part to accomplish connection, according to Lisa M. Siefker Bailey, keeps this play out of the realm of the Theatre of the Absurd. With its hope for change, *The Zoo Story* presents itself as an American play in its depiction of individualism.

The underlying tone of pessimism in such studies is very much apparent. While such pessimism has been associated by Esslin as being associated with Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus*, it is significant to note that Camus' apparently pessimistic tone is contained only in the opening sentence:

There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy. All the rest—whether or not the world has three dimensions, whether the mind has nine or twelve categories—comes afterwards. (1)

The rest of the piece specifically goes on to argue why suicide is not justified. While the plays of the Absurd theatre can definitely be read in terms of the pessimistic philosophy of Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard, Camus' refutation of succumbing to suicide as the only option of life, leads us to study and analyse the plays in terms of the positive perspective of the existential philosophy. This perspective finds its most powerful advocate in the philosophy of the German philosopher Nietzsche, who introduced the concepts of the "Apollonian" and the "Dionysian" in his *The Birth of Tragedy* as constituting the true nature of the human being. The "Apollonian" aspect, according to Nietzsche, comprises the rational self of man while the "Dionysian" aspect constitutes the irrational and wild self of man. According to Nietzsche, the "Apollonian" aspect of man has been upheld ever since the advent of the Greeks, more precisely Socrates, while the "Dionysian" aspect has been suppressed, thus causing an imbalance in the human nature. The recognition of this irrational self is a step towards recognition and appreciation of the unknown. Together with his theory of *Amor fati* (love of fate), Nietzsche's notion of existence provides with a means to combat the absurdity of the world by giving us a sense of it. The major concerns of philosophy, revealing universal phenomenon, were the least of his concerns. Nietzsche was, as Ken Gemes and Chris Sykes argued, a local philosopher than a global one. His major concerns were not the search for universal phenomenon but were like "How does a particular phenomenon affect an individual in a given context?" (Gemes and Sykes 377). It is against this background that the contradictions in his writings is explained. The playwrights of the Absurd theatre do not provide an

adequate background that the audience was so familiar with, thereby provoking/forcing them to create their own interpretations of the possible backgrounds to the action of the plays that, just like Nietzsche's treatises, are more local than global.

It is interesting to note the contrast and its relation to Nietzsche's Apollonian and Dionysian drives. The sophisticated audience, who represented the Apollonian rationality, consider the play as absurd as it fails to conform to the established theatrical practices. In being affected by the absurdity of the play, the Apollonian audience of Beckett's play also displays its failure to accommodate the new, thereby negating the enlightenment modernity that strives to be inclusive of diversity.

In so far as the plays of Theatre of the Absurd dramatise the personal confrontation of its characters with the uncomfortable Dionysian subjects that have been suppressed by the Apollonian selves, the protagonists of the plays want to give voice to the people of their stratum whose bypassed histories seem lost in the fast-paced tumult of society. However, in so far as involving the audience in the play's action is concerned, all the Theatre of the Absurd plays do so. The conventional notion of Aristotelian catharsis to which the Apollonian audience was accustomed, is challenged when the catharsis does not prove to be universal, but local. As Demastes points out in his *The Theatre of Chaos: Beyond Absurdism, Into Orderly Disorder*, "the nature and degree of correspondence between the mimetic object and what we may in general refer to as its inspiration sets up a persistent and profound dialectic between non-spectacular/linear action and spectacular/non-linear action" (68-69).

Just as Nietzsche's notion of *amor fati* and Dionysus prepare his readers to re-evaluate the conventional Apollonian value, the plays of the absurd theatre in their depiction of a world where absurd but real things happen, prepare its audience to confront the irrational component of existence. These plays problematize the space of the theatre as a place where true things and events occur that aren't necessarily real and where the true and the real can readily and unpredictably trade places. Writing about Artaud, Ionesco, and the virtues of the French Avant Garde theatre in 1962, Leonard Pronko, in his *Avant-Garde: The Experimental Theater in France*, stated, "The reality of

life...cannot be expressed in so many words, for life goes far beyond the logic of language.... Facts may be known, but Truth can only be experienced” (118). In claiming that the plays of the Theatre of the Absurd attempts to “integrat[e] ... the subject-matter and the form in which it is expressed,’ (6) Esslin confirms Pronko’s statement. This unity is achieved through the use of unconventional devices of minimization which tends to make the plays more Dionysian in opening the vistas for the suppressed selves. The plays of the Theatre of the Absurd expose its audience to the fact that the Apollonian selves have made us, in Nietzsche’s memorable expression “strangers to ourselves” and hence, lack a sense of inclusivity. Following Zarathustra’s claims that the construction of a genuine, that is, unified, self is something yet to be achieved, the plays of the Absurd Theatre, in revealing the Dionysian selves, present the modern man as a mere jumble, as echoed in *Beyond Good and Evil*, where we are told:

In the present age human beings have in their bodies the heritage of multiple origins, that is opposite and not merely opposite drives and value standards that fight each other and rarely permit each other any rest. Such human beings of late cultures and refracted lights will on the average be weaker human beings. (BGE 200)

In so doing, the absurdity of the plays of Beckett, Pinter and Albee, can be looked upon as inspiring the mankind to be an Overman who is a labyrinth with centre everywhere and circumference nowhere, thus being a truly modern and enlightened being. It strives to infuse a sense of inclusivity in man that will enable him to confront the absurd.

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## **Body, Space and Curfew: Sa'adat Hassan Manto's "Mozelle" in the Light of Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space***

**Takbeer Salati**

### **Abstract**

"Each living body is space and it also produces that space" (Lefebvre 170) is what the paper intends to explore and analyze through "Mozelle" (1951), by Pakistan based short-story writer Sa'adat Hasan Manto (1912-1955) of which the event of partition forms a backdrop setting. The paper fuses Lefebvre's (French Marxist philosopher) *The Production of Spaces* (1974) and Foucault's "Body" and argues especially how female body reconstructs itself through different space evolving in a conscious self-identity within his short story. It also researches on the ways bodies function as the spaces of alienation which regulate and transform the three characters Mozelle, Trilochan and Kirpal Kaur as autonomous living bodies performing religion and constructing their bodies against the traditional culture. These are forcibly woven into a critical frame to argue and coalesce with the re-reading of "Mozelle." The paper highlights how bodies are spaces of alienation and underline the presentation of varied forms of social relations to reconstruct and contain the female body, especially Manto's sex worker in its self-identity.

**Keywords:** Manto, Lefebvre, Mozelle, Bodies, Space.

The idea of representation of body and space in Sa'adat Hasan Manto's "Mozelle" has been interpreted and re-interpreted to focus on the role of spatiality of partition. It reads the various acts and movements of bodies moving in and out of the present communal violence which surrounds itself with its characters. The paper critically examines "Mozelle" by focusing on how Foucault's body together with Lefebvre's space puts perspectives on the conscious idea of moving spaces and evolved bodies of partition. "Mozelle" is the story of three characters, Mozelle, Trilochan and Kirpal Kaur who live through the partition and its pain, horror and violence on their lives. The characters move in a space of transaction between their social roles as

segregated from the various gender roles which are forced on them. Partition which sets the timeline of the story is depicted as a happening event. The concepts of body and space first work as a leitmotif surrounding itself within alienation and later evolve against the patriarchal issues that seek to put perspectives of self-identity. The setting of the short story is the cityscape of Bombay and its buildings which are mentioned throughout the story. The timeline of the narrative starts with Trilochan on the terrace of the Advani Chambers which lets him to evolve in his free self in parallel to the suspended air of partition. The signs of the violent city clashes against the image of transparent Trilochan adapting himself in an alienation from the other subjects in his space:

The sky was completely clear but hung like an enormous ash-colored tent over all of Bombay. For as far as he could see, lights burned through the night. It seemed to Trilochan as though countless stars had fallen from the heavens and had attached themselves to the buildings, which in the dark of the night loomed like enormous trees around which the fallen stars glimmered like fireflies. (Manto, "Mozelle" 26)

Henri Lefebvre a French Marxist theorist in his work *The Production of Space* (1974) talks about social space and the different approaches to producing it. According to Lefebvre, in the production of space humans do not only produce or create social relations and use-values, but in the process the creation of social space engages in more special units, extending itself to two binaries of social space and physical space. He considers "each living body is space and has its space and it also produces that space" (Lefebvre 170). Thus, the terrace of the Advani Chambers is not only a free space away from the divided territories of partition but is a space where in his four years of absentia is now spatially alienated and is recreated in his own glorification of existing in a Sikh body.

Trilochan had grown used to the electric fan's artificial breeze, which oppressed his very existence: every morning he got up feeling as though someone had been pummeling him all night long. But now he felt rejuvenated, as the morning's fresh breeze washed over his body. He had come up to the terrace feeling anxious, but after only

half an hour the tension had eased. He could now think clearly.  
(Manto, "Mozelle" 26)

The terrace comprises Trilochan's existence as a living body which is both formed and constructed from his space and his relation with religion, as his memory traces back to his relation with Kirpal Kaur and her family who control his close relation with the Sikh community. In contrast to the city of Bombay, his experience with Kirpal Kaur exfoliates the earthy experiences of their relationship which is denoted by the essence of belonging to the same community. Manto allows love to settle in the discourses of the same religion through a sense of the collective fear from the raging Muslims and the mob shouting slogans for their demanding bodies. In the village, the bodies exist in the attire of the religion and witness a sudden revival from the cultural memory.

She had a slim figure, as if she still hadn't filled out. She had small breasts, which would have been more pleasant if plumper. In comparison to average Sikh country girls, her skin was fair, more like the color of raw cotton, and her body was glossy like the texture of Mercerized clothes. She was extremely shy.

(Manto, "Mozelle" 26)

Lefebvre in his analysis of the historical development of urban life and a continuing concern expresses the existence of our being in the world, but also as an inevitable source of alienation (Lefebvre). This explained the image of existence according to Lefebvre embodies Kirpal Kaur who is doubly alienated both from the perspectives of her body and from the codes of the Sikh religion it captures. Manto represents the character of Kirpal Kaur as that of an alienated Sikh woman also as an object for men like Trilochan to gaze in the village hauled by the other men belonging to different communities. A little later in the narration her identity is constructed from the clutches of distant memory residue, Trilochan corresponds new meanings of his love and to the image of Kirpal Kaur. Differing it from the normal image of Kirpal Kaur who had a "slim figure," he alienates himself with the thoughts and allows himself to the cultural signs of emerging bodies and spaces of each other. In view of representation Stuart Hall, the famous theorist says that "Representation itself is a biased activity. However, it is important to study representations as

they contain new knowledges, new identities and new meanings" (Hall 25).

Manto's social codes depict Trilochan's distant memory which travels through story's time-space through the living body of Kripal Kaur and seeks closure at the time he devours himself in the semantics of his love for Mozelle, a Jewish woman. As a toolkit of reviving memory, Trilochan recollects two women and their roles to produce a space for his own masculinity. The story follows accounts of Mozelle, a Jewish sex worker settled in the Advani chambers living on the second floor is the main focus. Trilochan had just moved into the chambers and had just met Mozelle. As the second part of the story opens:

He crossed paths with Mozelle the very day he got an apartment on the second floor of the Advani Chambers through the doings of one of his Christian friends. At first, she seemed frighteningly crazy. Her bobbed brown hair was in irremediable disarray, and her lipstick, cracked in spots, clung to her lips like clotted blood. She was wearing a loose white gown whose open collar revealed a generous view of her breasts, large and marked with blue veins. Her upper arms, which were bare, were covered with a dusting of extremely fine hairs as though she had just come from a beauty salon where during her haircut these hairs had fallen onto her arms to stick like crushed nuts on sweets. But more than anything, her lips held his attention: they weren't that thick, but she had smeared burgundy lipstick across them in such a way that they seemed as fat and as red as chunks of buffalo meat. (Manto, "Mozelle" 26)

There are turns of phrase selected for their arty manipulations, rather than communicative clarity, like a distinction "between true space and the truth of space" (397). The act of Trilochan's masculinity alienating the body of Mozelle, doesn't form itself in a true space rather involves itself within the truth of space that draws her reality through her attire and evokes the subject of her profession as a sex worker. However, different to the other gazes, Trilochan as a signifier of social practice desires Mozelle for her beauty and both strike to each other through the glimpse of each other's sexuality. This shows the gender of women as by-products of masculine spaces and their importance as commodified objects. Trilochan also misrecognizes Mozelle's Christian

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boyfriends as her lovers and is strewn into jealousy. However, both are reluctant to leave each other. Veena Das argues in her work “Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain”:

In the work of mourning in many societies it is the transactions between language and body, especially in the gendered division of labor, by which the antiphony of language and silence recreates the world in the face of tragic loss. (66-67)

Manto in the process of mourning of their relation exercises the “truth of space” and its relation to their religion into illustrations of scars and wounds on their bodies. The tragic loss of code of love between Mozelle and Trilochan is assured by dismissing the symbol of religious signs of Sikh beard. Das argues this mourning to be the transaction between Trilochan and Mozelle’s through Mozelle’s demand of removing his beard as the only sign of love. She expresses herself:

Mozelle pushed herself away. “When you cut your hair and shave.”

Trilochan was resigned to his fate. Without thinking, he said, “I’ll get it cut tomorrow.”

Mozelle began to do a tap dance. “You’re talking nonsense, Triloch. You’re not that courageous.”

Suddenly religion was the last thing on his mind. “You’ll see.”

“I *will* see,” Mozelle repeated. Quickly she came up to Trilochan, kissed him on his beard, and left, grimacing. (Manto, “Mozelle” 26)

The story “Mozelle” presents the character of Mozelle as a cynical subject to deter the inter-relations depicted within the story. Though being a by-product of her own profession, in reality she abandons her body and refuses to control her body and its multiple lovers. It is within her sexual territory aligned with her alienated self that she demands her missed identity and exemplifies her imagined lived space. Trilochan becomes her only way to identify herself back in the society which had exercised its power of alienation and is a reference to male sexuality. Mozelle thus becomes a representation of a sexual figure that manipulates herself as a power fantasy wherein she drives Trilochan against

his religion which he can't leave as it is his reality of and his "true space." It is who he is, a Sikh. His situation with Mozelle is clearly understood by looking at his own blurred image between his real and constructed self. In his real sense of identification, Trilochan associates himself with the cultural codes of his attires that Manto describes in his presentation of his character:

The first day after getting his hair cut, Trilochan didn't leave his apartment. The second day he sent a note to Mozelle through his servant saying he was sick and asking if she could come by for a moment. Mozelle came. Seeing Trilochan, she stopped short. "My darling Triloch!" she cried out before throwing herself onto him and kissing him so much that his face turned red from her lipstick. (Manto, "Mozelle" 26)

It is noticeable that Trilochan has lost his identity with his trimming down of the beard. The motifs of cultural sign of his beard in their relationship alienates him with the idea of reality. In the relationship of Trilochan and Mozelle, both of them fuse themselves in the space against their individuality and into the insult of their own religion. The continuous interventions of the outside world highlight their insecurities which in the narration is read through the dialogues concerning with religion and its transparency. Lefebvre calls for "a counter gaze" to "insert itself into spatial reality" (382). Manto places the scene of wedding in the outskirts of Pune and willingly shows how both had outgrown themselves out from their marked territories. It was in this desirous space of their marriage that Mozelle runs away to Deolali and deceives Trilochan from his value. This part ends where the reality of Trilochan is again abandoned. He is left into his own imaginary world of belonging to two different cultures and thus fails in producing the "truth of space" (Lefebvre) as a living body tormented in love. While Trilochan develops the sense of precise double alienation Mozelle takes advantages of her space by violating her own marriage producing for her a space of desire and a body of value grown tired from the traditional uses of religion. Furthermore, in the last part of the narration wherein the alleys surrounding by the cityscapes of Bombay are in the space of curfew is described through the lens of heterotopia that Foucault explains as:

Real places, actual places, places that are designed into the very

institution of society which are sorts of actually realized utopias in which the real emplacements, all the other real emplacements that can be found within the culture are, at the same time represented, contested, and reversed sorts of places that are outside all places, although they are actually localizable. (Foucault 5)

Curfew is represented as a heterotopia space, an abnormal space wherein Manto's trinity meets and produces spaces of social revival and reconstruction of social reality. Curfew that is imposed in the neighborhood of Kirpal Kaur becomes a meeting point for two women who share their scars as alienated bodies surviving conflict in the communal violence of the partition. Mozelle who suffers to introduce herself to Kirpal Kaur becomes an alter reality of her life and thus escapes from the intimacy which both share with Trilochan in different time paradigm. The women produce their spaces of reconciliation and reinterpreting their bodies when Mozelle instructs Kirpal Kaur to remove her pants in the visible space of the masculine power around the society and later removes her white dress and remains naked both as a living and dead body. While the two Sikh bodies are saved from the ongoing violence of the mob, Trilochan identifies himself as a Muslim 'Karim' as his new identity given to him by Mozelle in the space of conflict and for his last belief in religion, his turban. This interplay of alienated bodies through the "true space" of religion discourses of love ends with the death of Mozelle wounded in her scars. She liberates herself from her own self-identity that evolves by creating a body of sexual politics of self-desire and value. Foucault argues:

A "political anatomy," which was also a "mechanics of power," was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over others' bodies, not only so they may do one wishes, but so they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines. Thus, disciplines produce subjected and practiced bodies, "docile" bodies. (Foucault 138)

Manto's "political anatomy" here relates to Trilochan, a part of a large group of men bestiality upheaving riots in the community while as "docile body" are the female protagonists Mozelle and Kirpal Kaur of the short story including the other absent women which are present in absentia. Curfew, for a long time has constructed female docile bodies through the politics of it. Here in "Mozelle"

it acts as heterotopia of forbidden place and engages Mozelle in her own production of space as a free-spirited Jewish woman and gives her own spatial significance where from she is released through her death. While the other two living Sikh bodies allow themselves a position of flattering image of existence, Manto mourns the death of Mozelle in her textual space recreating a sense of her belonging. The gaze on the partition reoccurs in this story since the beginning and stretches to the end scene where the alleys are full with the violent mobs. As a living dead body Mozelle mourns for her alienated desires which she valued more than she valued her multi lovers who were devoted more to their religion. In "Mozelle," Manto recreates "truth of space" between body and speech, death and life, and offers his characters their own lens of social relations.

## II

Manto's other works that explore the existence of sex workers in their brothels located in the alleys of partition are different than "Mozelle." On the other hand, it explores these bodies from the spaces of religion. While the semiotics of their bodies read them as naked, Mozelle is without her attire, Trilochan removes his turban and is portrayed as castrated Sikh while as Kirpal Kaur performs her naked and exists as a living dead. The body serves as a critical figure too. The body takes its revenge, or at least calls for revenge—for example, in leisure space. It seeks to make itself known, to gain recognition, as 'generative.' It is Lefebvre's contribution to this endeavor, to the conception of the generative and creative social body—a phenomenological body (Kristen Simonsen). There is viciousness in the last intimate scene where the bodies have started to train for each other in alienation. Lefebvre asserts on the localized time or a temporalized place to further understand the process of production of space. This means the last scene of "Mozelle" has to be implored through the difference of spatial geography of the characters united together by the trope of narration. The starting of last part though starts with communal stigma for Trilochan's polarized identity:

They set off. Suddenly a man carrying a large brass basin on his head ran into Trilochan, and the basin fell. The man looked Trilochan up and down and realized Trilochan was a Sikh. Quickly, he reached for something inside his waistband, but Mozelle stumbled forward

as if in a drunken stupor and rammed into him. “Hey, what’re you doin?” she asked in a drunken voice. “You wanna hit your own brother? I’m gonna marry him.” Then she turned to Trilochan. “Karim! Pick up the basin and put it on this man’s head. . . . The man withdrew his hand from his waistband and leered lasciviously at Mozelle; then he went up to her and nudged her breasts with his elbow. “Enjoy yourself, lady. Enjoy yourself.” Then he picked up the basin and ran off down the road. (Manto, “Mozelle” 26)

Trilochan’s identity shifts to a Muslim name ‘Karim’ which is a positive assurance to his survival and existence. The living body of Mozelle, thus produces Lefebvre’s space for Trilochan in the resistance of many conflicted social relations. Identified Mozelle thus as a sex worker is finally violated and constructed from her female identity. Her need and desire of associating herself with a female body is evident through her signification of “rubbed her breasts” to feel a connection to herself: “Mozelle rubbed her breasts. ‘It wasn’t that bad. Shit happens. Come on, let’s go’ (Manto, “Mozelle” 26). Thus, it is only towards the end of the story, where Mozelle tries to introduce herself to Kirpal Kaur from her assurance of Trilochan’s presence Kirpal Kaur for the first time emerges out of her sociocultural restraints and becomes a public eye. The bodies engage into the languages of their personal scars and wound which transpose them into a collective community trauma. The moment of bodies as the sites of discourses related to the performative unconventional religion is relocated through the subversive space of hypervisibility of spatiality of partition. Trilochan offers Mozelle his turban as the most important and pure symbol for his religion revealing the scars and wounds on the body of Mozelle which illuminates her historiography rather than the invisible damage of the spatiality context of religion. As the narration traverses through the city in its end:

“Oh, damn it!” she said, and wiped her mouth with the back of her wrist. Then she turned to Trilochan. “All right, darling—bye bye. . . .”

Trilochan wanted to say something, but the words stuck in his throat.

Mozelle removed Trilochan’s turban. “Take it away—this religion of yours,” she said, and her arm fell dead across her powerful chest. (Manto, “Mozelle” 26)

Critiquing the various perspectives on living bodies during partition, Manto’s

"Mozelle" directs its attention to the formation of a conscious self-identity found in his characters. His characters as imaginations of living bodies of partition evolve within the communal violence, hatred and horror of the spaces existing. But apart from Mozelle's deep imaginations what appeals it, the tendency to represent space as microcosm of producing social relations those living inside it is also focused. While "Mozelle" questions the growing of individuals in a unique space it also portrays a mirror reflection of chaos, self-doubt and distrust as elements of partition on their face values. "Mozelle" by establishing a relation of space and body as sign and signifier subverts the role of body and religion as traditional values but offers them a growth within social relations. While "Mozelle" questions the idea of religion and self-identity, it also reflects the failed politics of imagined landmarks as the only acts of resistance to partition. The paper reads "Mozelle" through the lens of Foucault's body but attempts to go beyond the parameters of it to understand the wide array of spaces that co-exists in the readings of Manto and partition.

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## Examining the Problematics of Material Ecofeminism in Indian Cinema

Priyanka Arora

### Abstract

This paper tries to engage with the concept of Material Ecofeminism through the lens of 'Indian cinema', thereby, analysing films from regional cinema, like Hindi films (*Sherni*, *Bhediya*, *Kaun Kitney Paani Mein*); Malayalam film (*Aranyakam*); and Kannada film (*Taledanda*) to name a few.

Material Ecofeminism is the view that connects institutions of labour, power, and property as the sources of domination over both women and nature. It falls in the third wave of Ecocriticism as per Professor Scott Slovic. Multiple scholars like Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies, Stuart Curran, Ariel Salleh, and Charlotte Sussman, to name a few, have critically engaged with the category. The renewed interest in the field is exemplified by some of the recent publications such as, *Routledge Handbook of Ecofeminism and Literature*, *Routledge Handbook on Ecosocialism*, Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies's *Ecofeminism*, and *Ecocriticism: Big Ideas and Practical Strategies* by Professor Swarnalatha Rangarajan and edited by Professor Scott Slovic.

The paper is a novel attempt to read cinema through the lens of ecology and gender studies. There has been an attempt in 'Indian cinema' to project issues of gender oppression through parallel oppression of nature. The paper delineates the cinematic language being one of the key driving forces of change and effective medium for projection of material ecofeminism. The paper tries to bring forth the problematics of this engagement and how successful are these endeavours to create a more egalitarian and anthropoharmonic society, provided art has its own limitations.

**Keywords:** Material Ecofeminism, Ecocriticism, Indian Cinema, Ecofeminism, Film Studies.

Wherever women acted against ecological destruction or /and the threat of atomic annihilation, they immediately became aware of the connection between patriarchal violence against women, other people and nature...

– Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism* 14

According to the 2021 *Down to Earth* report, India lost 6,68,400 ha of forests in the last five years (Khergamker). Nearly 2% of the total forest area is encroached, the maximum in Madhya Pradesh (Nandi, *Hindustan Times* 2019). 50% of the Indian population suffers from water stress (*NITI Aayog* 2019). Only 22% of women in India participate in the labour force as opposed to 57% of men, according to *India Briefing 2022* report (Bhardwaj). India records “greater unpaid care work-related violence in marital homes,” resulting in skewed gender dynamics (*Oxfam India* 2020). These facts elucidate the need for research in Environmental Humanities and Ecofeminism.

The paper comprehends how art, especially ‘Indian Cinema,’ absorbs and reflects these catastrophic developments around us, which many theorists now claim as the ‘sixth mass extinction’ (Barnosky 51). It theorises the problematics of gender essentialism and agency for the two subjugated categories through ‘Indian Cinema’, concluding with an observation on the employment of mythopoeia, elucidating the need for the same. The use of the term ‘Indian Cinema’ comprises a plethora of linguacultural and regional positionings in the larger spectrum of the terminology. Thus, the paper engages with and, at the same time, confines itself to the cinema in Hindi, Malayalam, and Kannada. The five films that this paper will primarily focus on are *Bhediya* (set in Arunachal Pradesh), *Sherni* (set in Madhya Pradesh), *Kon Kitney Paani Mein?* (set in Odisha), *Aranyakam* (set in Kerala), and *Taledanda* (set in Karnataka) as they span the Indian territory and engage with nature. The paper manoeuvres through the complexities of and the problematics in their presentation of the discourse of Material Ecofeminism.

The term ‘Material Ecofeminism’ views the institutions such as labour, power, and property as the source of domination over women and nature. There are connections made between these subjects because of the values of production and reproduction. Capitalism seeks cheap labour for mass production. Women are the source of production and reproduction of that labour. Hence, capitalist forces ought to control women and their means of

reproduction for increased production. Most often than not, the raw material for production is extracted from natural resources. The interconnectedness between production and reproduction gets translated into the interconnectedness between women, nature, and their subjugation.

*Bhediya* is a horror comedy Hindi film by Amar Kaushik that was released in 2022. It is set in the state of Arunachal Pradesh and is the story of Bhaskar, a capitalist man provided with a project to lay a road in the middle of the forest, and Dr Anika, a veterinarian who is later revealed to be *Vishanu* or a mythical wolf who is the protector of the forest. However, her screen presence, dialogues, and agency are limited, probably to parallel the limited space that is left for nature sans encroachment. When a cobra crosses Bhaskar's path, he claims that these animals should not be allowed to roam around freely, only to be corrected by Panda, the contractor, that he is the one who has entered the cobra's home. The concept of 'home' and 'otherness' is explored through the constant remarks made by characters in the movie about the northeast not being considered a part of Indian territory. Kaushik traces the self/other divide in the film through humour. It helps unite the audience and makes them perceptive to his didactic tendencies.

*Sherni* is a 2021 Environmental thriller Hindi film by Amit Masurkar about an IFS officer, Vidya Vincent who is stationed in Madhya Pradesh and provided with an assignment to save a tigress. As an outsider, both in the context of her job and her gender, she faces difficulties in maintaining a human-non-human balance. Vidya Vincent is paralleled in the tigress who tries to manoeuvre the shrinking space around her and protect her children. The institutionalised capitalist forces, led by men in power, create problems that need to be overcome by the oppressed communities of women, tribals, and nature itself. "[The film] touches upon the lopsided nature of development, the rights of forest dwellers, the dangers of a depleting forest cover, and the lust of politicians for power and self even as the world around threatens to come unstuck" (Chatterjee).

*Taledanda* is a 2021 Kannada film by Praveen Krupakar on the Soliga tribe (children of bamboo) of Karnataka. The etymological meaning of *Taledanda* is 'death by beheading,' which resonates with the deforestation of the forests by the capitalist men, like MLA Dodranga. The protagonist,

Kunnegowda or Kunna is presented as a mentally unstable man who is later medically proven to have schizophrenic tendencies and mental retardation. The film proposes that the “forest is god’s gift” (*Taledanda*) and trees sense pain and stress. We are told that the trees listen to us, and might talk to us if we show them love. For Kunna, all life is essential, representing biophilia or love for all living beings and an inherent need to connect with nature. The women, be it his mother, or his childhood beloved Sakki, both lack agency. The didactic aspect is brought in through Venu Gupta who addresses the masses about facts and figures of the felling of one lakh trees, timber lobby, destruction of rivers, environmental damage in the name of development, climate change, and predicts future war on water. Nature is shown using wide pan shots while institutions like hospitals are shot as confined, colourless, white spaces. “The eventual message of conserving nature for a better tomorrow has been showcased powerfully through the dialogues and the greenery seen in the visuals” (Basavarajaiah).

*Kon Kitney Paani Mein?* is a Hindi film of 2015, directed by Nila Madhab Panda. The film is set in a village in Odisha where honour killing occurs. A wall is created, separating the upper castes, led by Raja Sahab and the lower castes, led by Kharu, the wrestler. However, the inability of the upper castes to indulge in manual labour leads to shortage of water and of all other parameters of life. Water is treated as a currency. The priest calls the older generation ‘sinners’ for not saving water, both land and underground, for future generations. The film throws light at the ideologically influencing forces of religion and culture used to justify actions by the people in power. Amrita Devi, an upper caste MLA, tricks the villagers for gaining votes. However, she only acts as told by Raj, son of Raja Sahab and an upper caste male. She uses the farce of goddess Bihai to ensure the union of Paro, daughter of Kharu, and Raj. Though Paro is educated and helps her father in agriculture, there are multiple attempts for her subjugation by the men around her. In opposition to Paro, Amrita Devi has more say due to her caste identity. Water brings the two communities together, eliminating caste differences, at least superficially.

Finally, *Aranyakam* is a 1988 Malayalam film by T. Hariharan that is shown from the perspective of a young girl, Ammini. It delves further into the

Adivasi community of Kerala and the exploitation both nature and women face at the hands of capitalist men. Hariharan presents multiple scenes where Ammini talks to the birds or plants, showing biophilia. The crows are considered ancestors. There are scenes where Ammini and her grandfather converse with the crows while feeding them. The film shows a young man, Devan who starts a fire at the feudal lord's home. He fights for justice and equal division of resources amongst all and is revealed to be a Naxalite. He litters in the forest, enraging Ammini. Women in the film are seen to be subjugated, controlled, and limited by the male presence. Even though Ammini has agency of mobility, she is constantly questioned about her whereabouts. The film delineates the Adivasi land amendment bill that provided for the displacement of the Adivasi communities from their ancestral lands without compensations. The women of the community were affected the most by this bill. The displacement of Adivasis due to the new land reform movements and the forest land preservation legislations get captured by Hariharan. The latest film in Malayalam, *Aavasavyuham* (comedy-drama, Krishand, 2022) incorporates the theme of climate change and pollution and can be researched further.

The interconnection of women and nature has often been labelled an essentialist discourse. Nature is often referred to as 'mother nature' to establish the characteristics of a 'nurturer' that seem to be the 'essence' of both women and nature. In *Taledanda*, Kunna identifies nature as a woman. He creates an illusion of Atilakawa, the forest goddess wearing green and pink to denote fertility and nature. She is inspired by the folk stories of the Adivasi community. The 'Nataka' presents Atilakawa being pursued by men from multinational organisations with an axe. Their greed and arrogance are an exemplar of the anthropocentric forms of living for many humans. The goddess treats Kunna like a child however seeks to be rescued by him. Kunna claims to protect Mother Earth personified but he dies in the process. The essentialist tendencies seem visible in the film alongside the lack of agency that Atilakawa is presented with. His mother, Kethamma and his love, Saaki, are also etched around him and lack agency. A man forms the centre of their lives. In *Bhediya*, Bhaskar ends up becoming the saviour of both the jungle and Anika.

However, though the realm of Material Ecofeminism might seem essentialist, it engages with the discourse of essentialism to transpose it. Some

of the women as presented in these select films are named “Anika”, meaning soldier, “Ammini”, meaning a free-spirited person in Malayalam, and “Vidya”, signifying knowledge, thereby utilising language to move beyond how women are essentially viewed or named. Their names provide them with characteristics that are beyond gendered qualities. Most of the women in these films have an identity of their own. They have a sense of self and purpose. Dr Anika in *Bhediya* is a veterinarian, Vidya in *Sherni* works in the Indian Forest Services, Ammini in *Aranyakam* wants to pursue her studies further, while Paro in *Kon Kitney Paani Mein?* is pursuing a course in agriculture. Therefore,

whilst essentialism posits that woman and nature share certain characteristics, many ecofeminists argue that these weren't inherent, rather a product of the same framework of oppression being applied to women and the environment. If women and other oppressed minorities shared values with nature, it was because our culture made it so. (Perrin)

So, Ammini, in *Aranyakam*, gains freedom of movement by walking in the jungle. Dr Anika can protect her community through her bond with nature, thereby garnering agency. In *Kon Kitney Paani Mein?*, Paro becomes the agent of change, fertility, and prosperity as her knowledge of nature helps increase her economic stature.

Though women gain some agency; be it because of their class position, their occupation, or through their own belief of being equal to men; there still exists a framework for their subjugation that ensures either their agency is limited or controlled by capitalist men, or there are men who take decisions that affect the lives of these women. Similarly, even nature seems to have limited control in these films. Vandana Shiva proposes the different forms of violence ensued on women and nature:

a) Violence against women: women, tribals, [and] peasants as the knowing subject are violated socially through the expert/non-expert divide which converts them into non-knowers even in those areas of living in which through daily participation, they are the real experts—and in which responsibility of practice and action rests with them, such as in forestry, food, and water systems. b) Violence against nature: nature as the object of knowledge is violated when

modern science destroys its integrity of nature, both in the process of perception as well as manipulation. c) Violence against the beneficiaries of knowledge.... ( 24-25)

In *Kon Kitney Paani Mein?* Raj asks Paro to clean his place, assuming a lower caste woman would know how to clean. She stands her ground and asks him to contribute too. She talks about the remineralisation of soil, drip irrigation from Israel, and dam building for water accumulation, however, the film ends in reiterating the conventional idea that a happy ending for women is to get married. In the party office, Paro gets frequently spoken over by other men and raises her voice multiple times to be heard.

Vidya in *Sherni* tries to save the tigress and her cubs from illegal poaching while at the same time ensuring the safety of the lives of the villagers. Gender inequality and discrimination at the hands of the superiors and subordinates are constantly hinted at. She cannot afford to smile as she would not be perceived competent enough in this male-dominated sphere. Vidya's sartorial identity is called into question by her family. She is perceived to be incapable of handling riots. The director creates a parallel between the tigress and Vidya. Where Vidya fights through patriarchy to ascertain her sense of self, the tigress too tries to own the space of the forest and roam around freely.

The Roti festival in the Soliga tribe community, as portrayed in *Taledanda*, provides women with some agency where they throw a stone at a man they like. If the man reciprocates, they both will be married. Saaki initially pelts a stone at Kunna. He does not reciprocate Saaki's action due to his ignorance of the cultural vocabulary. The stone gets accidentally thrown at Jadiya, so Saaki and Jadiya get married. Though the festival gives women agency to choose their partner, it is only in implicit or limiting ways. Thus, women face violence in varied forms that seems to be reinforced through capitalist patriarchal forces. Nature and the humans living in close association with it, the tribal communities too are the recipients of violence. According to Mary Mellor:

not only are economies gendered, but the relationship between humanity and nature is also gendered. Capitalism and industrialism, compounded by patriarchy, create economies that are dis-embedded from local communities, local environments, and the

whole of human daily life and the earth's life cycles. From this perspective, the so-called wealth-creating "economy" is parasitical on the regeneration and renewal capacity of the environment, unpaid work in homes and communities mainly done by women, socially provided infrastructure and laws, and the accumulated work and knowledge of previous generations. (52)

The tribal communities in India have been living in harmony with nature. Under the *Indian Forest Act of 1878*, the British divided forests into three categories of reserved, protected, and village. The privileges and freedom of tribals living in the forests were curtailed. Similarly, the *Wildlife Protection Act of 2006* also curtailed the non-timber produce collection rights of the tribal communities. *Forest Rights Act of 2006* designated certain rights to the tribal communities. However, the recent decision by the Government of India to 'develop' Great Nicobar, an ecologically vulnerable space, has caught the attention of many. "Shompens are the sole legally empowered authority to protect, preserve, regulate, and manage this tribal reserve. What we are seeing in Great Nicobar is a blatant violation of the rights of the tribals. This is also a violation of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act (Sekhsaria, *Frontline* 2023). India has seventy-five PVTGs (Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups) that are highly connected with nature for survival. Tribal women are triply oppressed, on the pretext of class, caste, and gender.

The relation that humans share with nature is often portrayed in various degrees through films. The wide shots of forests in *Taledanda*, *Aranyakam*, *Sherni*, and *Bhediya* portray the aesthetic purpose of nature. In *Aranyakam*, Olichirrikkan song signifies how Ammini finds solace and comfort in nature. She sings about nature as an abode made of creepers for her to hide where all the birds will readily listen to her stories. There is also a reference to the 'touch-me-not' plant in the song, mirrored in Ammini as she is sensitive and vulnerable. Nature provides a safe space for Ammini where she finds her voice and is heard by others or by nature itself.

Nature is also used for utilitarian purposes. "Kunna inherits his deep love for nature from his father who also gave him a wealth of traditional knowledge

about the many medicinal qualities of trees and plants in the area” (Khergamker). However, this illustrates how even knowledge of ecology, as a discourse or for utility, is passed down from generation to generation among men. Women are kept out of the domain to restrict them to domestic duties. Kethamma supports Kunna in his endeavours. She protects him from the wrath of the villagers. The night before Kunna takes his life, we see his mother bathing him. The song in the background harps on the mother-child relation that is one of sacrifice, reiterating what is expected from nature and women.

On the other hand, the animals like cobras, wolves, angry dogs, or bison portrayed in *Bhediya* contribute to the ‘sublime’ nature that can evoke fear and awe in humans. Anika and nature are paralleled and presented not just as nurturers but also capable of being violent destroyers. She says that when people disrupt the ecological balance and reduce the forest areas, it unleashes unknown threats like Ebola, Covid, SARS, and AIDS in the past. Deforestation would lead to more pressure/stress on nature to provide oxygen for the growing population. She lives in an anthropoharmonic state with nature. She has the agency and responsibility to protect the jungles from capitalist greed that embodies itself in men like Bhaskar and many others. Through the ages, there is a relationship that humans and nature share. Humans are a part of nature; culture thrives on it through societal conventions and ideological constructs. The film reiterates that “there can be no development at the cost of nature” (*Bhediya*). Lastly, nature can be a disruptive force for the societal hierarchies of caste and class created by humans as seen in *Kon Kitney Paani Mein?*, forcing them to view themselves in the larger spectrum of ‘planetarity’.

In the above discussed films, nature as a trope is portrayed for aesthetics, utility, sublimity, and anthropoharmonism. The women in the films form complex relations with their surroundings where social mobility through education (Anika, Ammini, Vidya), marriage (Paro), and caste division (Amrita Devi/Saaki and Kethamma) complicate their association with agency. Where the Hindi films present predator imagery with fierce women and fearful nature, owing to higher forest encroachment and urban living; the Malayalam film portrays them as nurturers who need to be protected; while the Kannada film provides a heightened didactic approach towards the current situation, owing to the claim that climate change will hit Karnataka the most (*Deccan Herald* 2014). Thus,

I would like to conclude this paper by asserting that it is not lucid enough to categorise women and nature in ‘Indian Cinema’ as victims of capitalism and patriarchy as we are made to encounter blurring of boundaries. However,

women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination. They must unite the demands of the women’s movement with those of the ecological movement to envision a radical reshaping of the basic socioeconomic relations and . . . underlying values of . . . society. (Ruether 204)

There is a need for women to delve into Material Ecofeminism to create a more just society because as we move:

[on] the ecofeminist path, women cease being object and Other to male desire and regain themselves as [holistic] human beings. Correspondingly, men regain connection to the earth as the Other becomes others. Thus, the bifurcation is undone. Neither of these emancipatory motions within gender will happen except as isolated and disconnected instances. . . so long as capital and the capitalist state rule. (Kovel 37)

The said films evoke didacticism by venturing into newer genres of horror-comedy, environmental thriller, romantic comedy, and drama. Their utilisation of the age-old tradition of storytelling and mythopoeia helps connect to the masses as myths have been a part of ‘Indian Cinema’ and culture, providing legitimacy to the world the films create. The myths also give more space for the filmmakers to experiment with the form, making the absurd seem real and the real, absurd. However, these movies give voice to the concerns of Material Ecofeminism and try to create a more equitable, just, and anthropoharmonic society through cinema.

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## ***Ghar* and *Bahir*: Spatial and Gender Relations in India and the US during the Pandemic in View of Feminist Utopias**

**Tripti Aggarwal**

### **Abstract**

*Ghar* and *Bahir* are two different spaces assigned to women and men culturally and sociologically which prefigure the relational dynamics between them. The *ghar* and *bahir* ideology parallels other complementary pairs of gendered characteristics like spiritual-material, selfless-individual, and submissive-possessive. Women's progress was much about stepping out of the domestic realm of *ghar* into the *bahir* of the material world. However, during the pandemic, when people of all genders were bound to the house, men had to step into the domestic realm of women and the spatial distinctions were blurred. The confrontation between men and women in the domestic realm, not for a few hours, but for days at length transformed/affected their relational dynamics. While some men increased the demand for care and attention from women, others contributed to domestic and care work which is thought to be essentially women's work. In some places, the homestay during the pandemic partially diluted the gender relations to create more harmonious households but in other places, it also made the oppressive gender relations more rigid. The paper would try to explore how men and women interacted within the domestic realm affected by the pandemic and how their relational dynamics transformed for better or worse. To understand these subtle changes in family gender dynamics, the paper would keep feminist utopias, Begum Rokeya's *Sultana's Dream* and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*, as comparative axis to judge how utopian or dystopian were changed family dynamics.

**Keywords:** Domesticity, Household, Labour, Pandemic, Spatial, Utopia, Dystopia.

*Ghar and Bahir: Spatial and Gender Relations in India and the US during the  
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We are the smiling comfortable homes With happy families  
enthroned therein, Where baby souls are brought to meet the world,  
Where women end their duties and desires, For which men labor  
as the goal of life, That people worship now instead of God.

– Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “Homes”

Few lines from Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s poem “Homes” depict the glorification of home as the first unit of human civilization, the origin and aim of humans’ gendered life goals. A home has been a veritable space to involve and evolve gender experiences of humans by the separatist formation of *ghar* and *bahir*; the gendered division between the inside and outside the home has created different social realities for men and women where they have their own respective mini worlds different from kinship bonds with the other gender at home. The struggle to achieve gender equality has been long and continuous worldwide, and the failure of persistent efforts makes it a Sisyphean task where the pandemic has caused a slip again. With bringing unprecedented adversities, the pandemic pushed all the genders inside the house, forcing these mini different worlds to collapse and co-exist in one place and creating a possibility of new exchanges and dynamics. Two years of the pandemic have initiated irrevocable changes in our lives from losing and gaining our emotional, psychological, social and economic standards. Rendering women and men together for a long time within the domestic walls have shifted the tectonic plates of gendered relations between them for better or worse. The gendered division of labour also divides the assigned places of work but for the majority of people not part of the frontline work, the pandemic has narrowed down the space to the home, where both paid and unpaid labour is to be done to survive the family. The paper would look at the changed family dynamics during the pandemic in India and America and would weigh and contrast it with century-old utopian literature by Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain and Charlotte Perkins Gilman.

Begum Rokeya in *Sultana’s Dream* sarcastically questions what if men are put into the *zenana*, “Would all their business—political and commercial—also go with them into the *zenana*?” (6). An impossibility even in the realm of utopia has been actualised as a way of survival during the pandemic. There were reports which claimed that men were more vulnerable to the virus than

women. Seeing the exonerating power of the virus to kill people, the extinction of humans with particular sexual bodies or major weaknesses as to bind them to the house is not an impossibility now. We can believe that the world of Gilman's *Herland* or Rokeya Begum's *Ladyland* might be a possibility in the distant future. When reality takes after utopian and dystopian literary creations, the comparison comes inevitably to the hands.

*Sultana's dream*, a utopian fiction by Rokeya Begum, is about a dreamy visit of a lady from Calcutta to a place called Ladyland where through reversed separatism, women have overpowered men, replaced them at their social spaces and occupations, and have sent men to the *zenanas* which are now called *mardanas* to live a secluded life and do domestic chores. Here, being in charge of public spaces, women have handled warfare, nature, and technology in a way far better than men using progressive uses of the resources and their intelligence. Rokeya Begum has retained with severity the idea of gendered domesticity by presenting home as a prison-like place of passivity reserved for the weaker gender and tasks that do not contribute to nation-building, and this time it is men who are relegated beyond the domestic threshold. Malashri Lal notes, "the threshold is real as well as a symbolic bar marking a critical transition" (25). She argues that men's position outside the home allows them "multiple existences" between the home and the world but women are only allowed one sort of domesticated life. With the exchange of spaces and roles, women have usurped advantages reserved for men in the patriarchal society. Though in the text, we do not get to know views of domesticated men because they have been silenced as women have been hitherto silenced.

Gilman's *Herland* is a women-only world where men have become extinct and, in their absence, women have created a prolific civilisation based on motherhood and love. They have done away with ill-fitting clothes and ill-suited houses to adopt comfortable versions of living. Their unique ways of handling life processes bewilder the men visitors from the distant land of America. These women are perverse to the idea of home and do not understand how women of the other land could be kept at home specifically for child care and domestic work. Gilman sees the gendered nature of the house and the separate sphere of family as dangerous to the development of both women and children. Instead, she professes community rearing where both genders have equal

opportunity to explore and utilise their skills at various tasks. Gilman brings not women of the distant land to Herland but men to introduce them to the intelligent ways women are capable of. Begum Rokeya binds men to the house to make them taste their own medicine. The thought of analysing family dynamics during the pandemic with these century-old utopias in the backdrop owes to the commonality in the emergence of men to the women's space, unfolding their lives and ways of living, showing them the other world of women created in the absence of men's oppressive presence.

Both utopias have displaced men from their advantageous spatial and power-exercising positions, exchanging the position with the subjugated 'other' or 'the second sex,' the women. While Rokeya exchanges domestic space with men, Gilman disposes of it completely but the absence of domestic space originates from the absence of men. In the presence of both the genders, one has to be inside the domestic threshold to maintain peace and social division of space and labour. In the social imagination of utopic lives, men and women rarely share a habitat with ease; however, the pandemic has coalesced both genders forcing them to share a feminine space, hence creating a third form of familial structure. Without the segregation of their places and with no defined rules except patriarchal strictures to shape their workings, men and women stumbled upon each other's activities due to the lack of emotional and physical space, creating possibilities of new permutations of roles beyond orthodox gendered segregation.

Partha Chatterjee in the essay "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question" discusses how 1950s modernity in India brought a severe drift in the world outside and inside the house — *ghar* and *bahir*. Men of the families heavily adopted English culture to adapt to the transforming public space and to compensate for this modernization, the house became the sanctum sanctorum of Indian values and its women became depositors of nationalism and values of the native culture. Women were withheld from attaining modernity at the cost of Indian spirituality and were constrained at home, they were idealized as the goddess of the hearth (*grahalakshmi*) and their labour became devotion to the house. Contrary to this men-specific modernity, modernity to women came majorly by stepping out of the private space and claiming social spaces. Women's movement from *ghar* to *bahir* was not reciprocated by men's flow

into the house because it would be anti-modernity for men to choose a weaker space and its corresponding weaker position. We have seen that women's occupancy of public space with men is far from a peaceful co-existence, rather it is ridden with gendered discrimination and violence.

American women's flow into the social space originated from the necessity to take up jobs in the absence of men who had gone as soldiers to serve in the world wars. When men returned to reclaim their space, women had to leave the social space and return home to live a dissatisfied life of limited avenues. Betty Friedan describes that the unhappiness and dissatisfaction arising from life and work at home bred a feminine mystique among women. The private space of the home has been marred by modernity's anti-home stance which degrades everything related to the house whether women, its inhabitants, or the work and products produced in it. In contrast to both the utopias which consider home as a place of seclusion and subjugation, the pandemic has made home a safe place against the havoc of the virus for everyone but the experiences inside the home for men and women were not uniform. During the initial weeks of the pandemic, men considerably enjoyed the leisure of home, getting time to spend with their families, though men's leisure heavily depended upon their economic situation. However, within a few weeks, the home started feeling like a prison due to the limiting avenues it offered to its inhabitants, men had a chance to experience women's home-produced melancholy and frustration of being bound to a place due to reasons beyond their control.

Space is a social process in itself and a platform for it plays an imperative role in shaping our social and self-identification of masculinity and femininity. The ideology of separatism that stringently works in the gendered division of space parallels other divisions that go with public and private—reason-emotion, active-passive and, materialism-spiritualism. These corresponding values shape how men and women create their different subjectivities within their engagement with each other in their respective spaces. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo says, "The greater the social distance between women in the home and men in the public sphere, the greater the devaluation of women" (qtd. in Freedman 22). Pandemic's lifestyle resonated with Rosaldo's feminist solution to the separatist inferiority of women's sphere by increasing the overlap between the domestic and public spheres which would lead to raising the status of women. Not only

women's entry into the public sphere but men's entry into the domestic sphere is necessary for the egalitarian present with existing domestic values. The problem arises in the value system that assigns greater value to the operations of the public realm than the domestic realm.

The Pandemic's lifestyle was struck with the fear of contamination and death. A great amount of work was to be done to clean and sanitise all the objects brought from the outside, to wash the clothes more than usual, to cook food on a daily basis fearing contamination of food from the outlets, to cook interesting food to engage children and family members, in the absence of all the child care facilities and schools, children had to be taken care for the whole day at home. Women were naturally expected to take up the extra burden of increased household work besides their paid work from home. Heejung Chung in an article worries whether the pandemic has returned 1950s American housewives who now have to take the "third shift" for increased domestic labour. The stay at home during lockdown demanded extra moral and emotional strength to wade through the new life patterns varying from the increased requirement of safety to extending the capacity of suffering. It was a test of patience and resilience against all odds, women needed to be the shock absorber of the families owing to the characteristics assigned to their nature. Care ethics, culturally deemed to be women's virtue, was required to survive the pandemic, battle the gloom of quarantine days and serve the infected people at home.

Women were overburdened by providing services to all the members at home, very few men shared the workload but the majority chose not to transgress the patriarchal definition of women's work. Ashwini Deshpande in her extensive data-based research concludes that in the first month of the pandemic men's hours spent on domestic chores drastically increased but subsided in the other months as the pandemic continued (95). By December 2020, there was a clear increase in the gender division of domestic chores. Women's hours spent on domestic chores have increased sharply and significantly above the pre-pandemic average, whereas men's hours have declined in both America and India. America has different family set-ups than India as most women have paid jobs and children are sent to schools and creches for a major portion of the day hence minimising women's role at home

but increasing the pressure of earning to afford those services for their children. In America too, according to Pew Center Research Analysis, the gap in the percentage of men and women satisfied with the division of household chores between them increased during the pandemic. In October 2020, 55% of men say they are very satisfied with this aspect of their relationship, compared with 38% of women (Barroso, *Pew Research Center*).

Home has been a space to domesticate and bound a particular gender, its essentiality is made stringent by the existence of the public space dominated and assigned to men. If home becomes a space to unite rather than demarcate, how the gender roles would play out. Women's return to the home was not seen as drastic as it is for men; women were expected to suddenly take up the household work culturally assigned to them in the patriarchal system. Returning to the house was more displacing for American women as the old notions of the gendered division of labour suddenly became apparent when they had to handle most of the care and domestic work besides their paid work from home. There were no official regulations or any other authority to divide the household work but mutual understanding of men and women had to tackle the bulking load by self-regulating their activities, over which cultural notions took a heavy toll. The structure of a home demands innumerable household tasks for its upkeep and its inhabitants' upkeep as well, dominantly provided by women.

The power exercised by men over the workings of the house and its inhabitants is partly shaped by their absence from home to earn money. They get the supposed right to leisure because of the assumed hard work they do outside the house to run the expenses. There were men during the pandemic who could not earn from home, their continuous presence at home should have jeopardised their authority because it is culturally men who were given the advantages of the public space and a halo of being more important in the house than the women already in it, but during the pandemic men still occupied the position of power within the home. The rise in domestic violence perpetrated by men over women, and vice-versa as well, owes much to the continuous visibility and availability of the victim in front of the oppressor. With restricted access to public spaces, men and women had no moment of relief or escape; in such a situation homes became a prison besides keeping people safe from

the virus. Setting home as a restrictive place for all genders, alike for men and women, does not prove to be fruitful. With the cultural baggage of gender notions, we understand that the real-life utopia should not succumb to spatial separatism or unification.

Women's presence in the men-dominated outer space is wrecked with gender stereotypes where women are subjugated in one way or the other. The women's shift from private to public space is unwanted in a patriarchal society because it makes homes less essential for women and threatens men's domination over both the private and public spheres. The ideal situation demands men and women share both public and private spaces without any gendered differences but before reaching that we need to analyse how other familial setups work. Through Gilman and Begum's utopias, we have seen that the segregationist world is not an ideal substitution and for all genders to live in amity, spatial distinctions on the basis of gender should be eradicated. Modernity in both the countries has mingled men and women in the public space but it still dwindles with the gender disparity. The pandemic restricted genders at home but due to the established gender ideals, the home remained a restrictive place not only because of the threat of the virus but also because it is considered to be a woman's place where men had to take resort and maintain their power.

Spatially and culturally distant apart, Rokeya Begum and Gilman have disliked home as a separate space which pigeonholes women and prevents them from utilising the home as a space of relief. Their utopias have tried to free women from the houses and the social condition produced by the pandemic too has proved home to be a fatal place for achieving gender parity. A patriarchal household failed at achieving gender blending to battle the pandemic life distraught with fear and more responsibilities. Lopa Ghosh, a Global Health Advocacy Incubator, wrote an article in 2020, considering the pandemic a purgatory to reset the gender dynamics; she imagines whether the post-pandemic world will be a feminist one. And three years down the line, I reluctantly would answer her that the pandemic was just another slip in the long Sisyphean journey to achieve gender parities. However, some men initiated to go beyond the gendered division of labour; like the threshold group of men called gentles in Sally Miller Gearhart's *The Underground* and Vandyck

Jennings from *Herland*, who initiated to learn ways of women in their gendered segregated world, few men of our pandemic laden world too gave hope for an evolutionary utopia in real, not in the entirety but at least in a limited section; raising hope for a society where men and women and other genders could live in healthy diversity and harmony without segregating spaces and tramping over each other's human rights. Separate spaces for genders, men essentially in the domestic space or in the public space or not present anywhere at all—do not qualify for a healthy society. Instead, a healthy mix of all the genders would make up for a better society, but that healthy mix should not only be inside the domestic space as shown by the pandemic, but also in the public space. Gilman believing in the constructive nature of domestic structure says, “The home is a human institution. All human institutions are open to improvement” (*Home: It's Work and Influence* 89). We still need social actions and literature which prefigures such a society where *ghar* and *bahir* are not diametrically opposite gendered places, but rather segregated for different purposes common to all the genders.

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## **From Wounds to Words: Exploring Gendered Power Dynamics and Psycho-Social Victimhood through Literary Lens**

**Shreosi Biswas**

### **Abstract**

The primary texts taken in this research article are Vijay Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session* (1967) and Mahesh Dattani's *Tara* (1995). Incidents of psychological harassment of women are common in some way or the other to most families and social circles, but seldom publicly reported. The two renowned twentieth-century playwrights have skilfully unmasked the veil of silence in two very different and delicate cases in their plays. This paper intends to critically analyse the literary representation of the characters of Miss Leela Benare (in Tendulkar) and Tara Patel (in Dattani), and also to examine the nexus of gender discrimination and male chauvinism in twentieth-century India.

**Keywords:** Chauvinism, Gender Discrimination, Hypocrisy, Society, Victim.

It has been ages since matriarchal societies prevailed in many sections of India. The days of egalitarian society when women were highly revered are also long gone. Today, Indian women folk, despite the fact that some female professionals have established themselves unequal footing with their male counterparts, are struggling under the grip of regressive patriarchy. Even in some north-eastern regions such as Meghalaya, where the matrilineal system is still functional, men are campaigning for change—a change in not merely the social system or the head of the family, but a degradation of the social status of women. And this condescending attitude and activities of most men towards any and every woman—mother, sister, girlfriend, wife, or a stranger—have reached an alarming state at present. This situation of women subordination to the male folk and the resulting humiliation has been handled with artistic dexterity by many authors in different times. In the present paper, I have taken one work each of Vijay Tendulkar (1928-2008) and Mahesh Dattani (1958-present), two leading playwrights of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, to explore one important aspect of male chauvinism as depicted in their plays. Physical tortures

on women are almost regularly reported in the print and electronic media in the country. But beyond physical tortures, Indian women are often submitted to silent psychological anguish as well. Both Tendulkar and Dattani, in their plays, have skilfully carved out the psychological harassment of women in two very different and delicate cases in their plays, cases that are common in some way or the other to almost every family and social circle, but are so subtle that they are never publicly reported.

Indian English writers have long been credited for their sincere effort to represent, in their works, various aspects of Indian society to readers across the world. Although the language in which these writers write is a foreign one, the sentiments expressed in their writings are typically Indian. And the socio-economic-cultural pictures portrayed in the pages of their works are easily and directly relatable to the readers. Many of the recurrent evils and problems of Indian society appear as leading themes in these writings. One of the most crucial of these problems is the exploitation of the 'other' or the 'lesser' sex. Women suffer in almost every sector of life, domestic as well as public, from their birth to death. And the agents of their torture are insiders as well as outsiders— their parents, relatives, friends and even strangers. Unfortunately, those who are tortured are hardly found to have any voice. The Indian English writers are often found to give voice to these unvoiced. Vijay Tendulkar and Mahesh Dattani are two such dramatists who speak against social discrimination and injustices in their plays. Their works bring up gender issues and the space usually allotted to women in a patriarchal society. Both the authors present the bizarre reality of women playing a secondary role to men. I intend to take up this socially sensitive issue as represented by Tendulkar and Dattani through the characters of Miss Leela Benare and Tara Patel, figuring respectively in *Silence! The Court is in Session* (1967) and *Tara* (1995), and I also seek to explore how the issue has been problematised by these two authors. The shameful and filthy practice of female foeticide or infanticide, still prevalent in the so-called 'modern' Indian society, serves as a common link between the two.

Tendulkar's play *Silence! The Court is in Session*, as we all know, was originally written in Marathi and was entitled *Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe*. The English title is a literal translation of the Marathi one, and is equally

significant. The immediate implication of the title may be seen in connection with the court proceedings in the mock trial where an imaginary charge of infanticide is brought against Miss Benare in the form of a game. However, the title takes up graver significance when, in the name of the mock trial, all the co-actors heap up charges on her. She is cornered and maliciously attacked by all her companions. Her personal life is publicly scandalised. Her purely personal love life is exposed with the open intention of deriving sadistic pleasure. Miss Benare is shocked and almost frozen in anguish at this unexpected turn of the situation. Her voice is choked and she is full of tears. The spirited, lively and frank Miss Benare is forcibly silenced, thus making the title of the play meaningful. Mr. Kashikar and Sukhatme, the self-styled guardians of the society, talk in a grave voice about the corruptions in the society due to the moral depravity of women like Miss Benare. Silence also deepens in the minds of the audience and the readers at the exposure of male chauvinism, hypocrisy and cruelty in the so-called progressive urban middle-class society. The famous Marathi dramatist in this play realistically reflects how gender discrimination exists in Indian society. Miss Benare's personal life harms no other individual except her own self. What on the earth, then, the society has to do with the personal incidents of an individual? She is often attacked because she is unmarried, and therefore taken as insecure. It reflects the traditional attitude that girl children are born to be married off early. It also reflects the mythical patriarchal assumption that women are incapable of conducting themselves and need to be sheltered and protected by men. But in reality, women are forcefully silenced all the more because an independent woman is a threat to the gender status-quo and patriarchal justification of supremacy. Benare is also going to be suspended from her profession as a school teacher on the lame excuse that her illegitimate relationship with Prof. Damle is harmful to her students. Quite strangely, Damle does not have to face any such adverse consequence. The hypocrisy and dual standard of the male-dominated society is prominently evident here. Quoting Nilanjan Chatterjee, Girijashankar Mane rightly explains in the article "Male Chauvinism in Translated Select Works of Vijay Tendulkar" that Benare is a "victim of a revengeful and myopic society that does not tolerate deviance from its mores" (qtd. in Mane 34). Her "efforts to be an individual" interestingly falls under the concept of 'deviance' as

understood by such a social system and hence each of her moves comes under close scrutiny and criticism (qtd. in Mane 34). The qualities of a responsible teacher—punctuality, sincerity and efficiency—are not taken into consideration. Rather, her personal life is taken to be the sole criterion for her elimination from her professional life. But no one accuses the man who is equally responsible for the adultery, and who uses the body of the woman and insults her love and worship. If Miss Benare has to lose her job for her sexual attachment with Professor Damle, he should also have confronted the same consequence. For, Prof. Damle's fault is, by no means less, but perhaps much more than that of Benare.

The mock trial that starts as a 'game' gradually evolves into a hunt. Miss Benare is trapped and is made the target of severe psychological torture by others. Her monologue to ward the end of the play expresses her pent up, long suppressed feelings, and at the same time becomes a fitting reply to all the accusations made against her in the mock trial. She starts in the form of self-meditation: "For many years, I haven't said a word. Chances came and chances went. Storms raged one after another about my throat. And there was a wail like death in my heart. But each time I shut my lips tight" (Tendulkar 72). Miss Benare here appears almost as the mouthpiece of a majority of the Indian women who experience similar situations in their lives. Most of the times, they are compelled to remain silent in the face of patriarchal hegemony. They are often not in a position to protest or justify themselves. The agonised inner self of Miss Benare is gradually explored. She admits painfully that "life was a burden to [her]" (72). The pains and deceits she faced from her childhood compelled her to conclude: "Life is a betrayal. Life is a fraud. Life is a drug" (73). She seems to appeal to the Judge: "Milord, life is a very dreadful thing. Life must be hanged" (73). Even today, daily newspapers exhibit many suicidal cases of women fed up with the exploits of men all around. Miss Benare becomes furious to think about how her employers have punished her, not because of any lapse in her profession as a teacher, but because of something that is exclusively personal to her. She demands that her "private life is my own business" and "I'll decide what to do with myself" (73). She accuses all men of being hypocrites. Commenting on the members of her drama troupe she observes: "These are the mortal remains of some cultured men of the twentieth century. See their faces-how ferocious they look!" (74). She is

frightened by those who are all around her.

In the second half of the monologue, Miss Benare makes painful confessions. She remembers how she fell in love with her mother's brother. The man was not a lover, but rather a pervert who had his eyes only on her newly blossomed beauty. So when it comes to marriage, this "brave man turned tail and ran" (Tendulkar 74). Again, as a grown-up woman she loved Professor Damle for his intellect and offered herself unhesitatingly to him. He too cared for her body alone. So she screams in utter frustration that the "body is a traitor!" (75). However, she soon asserts that she now must have her body for the baby in her womb. This, obviously, is another compulsion of women. Women, especially the married women in India, are often treated as baby producing machines. Men take this factor to be the weak point of women by which they can keep women under their control. Often the saying goes that men treat women either as a goddess or as a whore, nothing in between, and never as a normal human being. The only other female character in the play is Mrs. Kashikar, who always gets snubbed by her husband for nothing but to show his superiority and power over her. The various categories of female characters and the varied treatment they receive from their male counterparts in the literary narratives remind one of the male chauvinism and patriarchal hypocrisy portrayed by Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own*:

Imaginatively she is of the highest importance, practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction; in fact she was the slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger. Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could hardly read, could scarcely spell, and was the property of her husband. (36)

Miss Benare's monologue, in fact, is a powerful defence of her own self against the ruthless attacks of the so-called upholders of social norms, who can hardly tolerate a successful and economically independent woman like her. She contrasts sharply all the emotionally starved and unsuccessful men who vindictively prosecute her. The monologue bounds the readers as well as the audience to seriously ponder over the double standards of the male-

dominated Indian society.

'Tara' in Mahesh Dattani's eponymous play is another victim of the Indian male chauvinism. This young girl, who might have shined and twinkled all her life like a *tara* (star), is subjected to deprivation almost from her birth. She was a conjoined twin in the mother's womb, and her trouble started when their mother Bharati along with their politically and financially powerful grandfather bribed the doctor to privilege the boy child with the third leg of the conjoined twins though naturally it belonged to the girl child. The operation at the time of birth leaves Tara crippled for life. The play exhibits how she had to die a premature death because of patriarchal favouritism and domestic deprivation. Tara possessed the boldness and strength of mind to engrave a place of her own. She was more intelligent, sharp and witty and would have performed much better than the male child, if only she were given the chance and moral support by her parents. Still, she was extremely optimistic and was not deterred by the injustice done to her. She had her dreams and she asserts them in definite terms:

I will spend the rest of my life feeding and clothing those ... starving naked millions everywhere. May be I can start an institution that will do all that. Or I could join Mother Teresa and sacrifice myself to a great cause. That may give ... purpose to my ... existence.  
(Dattani 50)

But Tara was discouraged to have the course of her life in her own hand. She was bubbly and energetic who had all the qualities of a normal girl. But she was reminded time and again that her life was nothing more than a burden on this earth, and such disparaging words gradually made her lose interest in life altogether. When Tara came to know that it was her mother who made such a decision, she could not bear the truth and the shock took away her life.

Shakti Batra rightly notes in the 'Introduction' of the play that "Dattani sees Tara as a play about the gendered self, about coming to terms with the feminine side of oneself in a world that always favours what is 'male'" (xiii). In spite of being a lively and sensitive girl, Tara does not get the opportunities which his brother, being a male, enjoys, and eventually she wastes away and dies. It is of course true that Mr. Patel did not support the immoral operation

after their birth, but he too ignored Tara's prospects. He might engage Tara in some meaningful endeavour, but such a thought never occurred in his mind. As a father Mr. Patel is very much concerned over the education and career of Chandan, but he is hardly worried about Tara even if she prefers not to go to the college. As a stereotypical Indian woman, Tara is supposed to have the fulfilment of her life within the four walls of the domestic sphere. Tara smartly quips at this by saying that the "men in the house were deciding on whether they were going hunting while the women looked after the cave" (8). Dattani exhibits how the life of a positive girl like Tara is spoiled by domestic deprivation and social injustice. Mr. Patel makes his wife Bharati responsible for everything and thus merely manages an escape from his responsibilities. This may be taken as another form of male chauvinism. Although Bharati now loves Tara a lot, her subjugation to the expectations of the society and her preference for her son only proves how she succumbs to the demands of the typical Indian patriarchal society. Besides, her public display of excessive love and attention for Tara is a screen to shield her guilt and to comfort her guilty conscience. Apart from Tara's father and grandfather, Dr. Thakkar is another patriarch who, going against his medical ethics, executed the unfair operation for his greed of power and money. The doctor was bribed to make the boy the privileged child. Thus Tara was destined to die at an early age due to domestic-social injustice.

The way Dattani portrayed the character of Tara helps exposing all these bizarre truths of Indian society. Sadaf Fareed's comments in the article "Mahesh Dattani's *Tara*: a Voice of Voiceless" are relevant in this context:

Tara's potentiality was sacrificed at the altar of gender. Identity crisis becomes a chain with which a female is bound when the question of choice between male and female comes up. If we think, why is she killed? The answer is crystal clear that Tara is not wanted, because she is a girl. In our society, 'Girls' are not wanted. For a moment, if we imagine that Tara's mother had preferred her at the time of operation instead of Chandan. Would she have forgiven? No, Never! Because she also is a Woman. (5)

Irrespective of what Tara's mother must have wished, she was bound to submit to the wishes of Tara's politically and economically powerful grandfather. The

excerpts within the play in the context of the film *Sophie's Choice*, that the “Nazis will only allow her to keep one child” while the “other one would be taken away to a concentration camp”, obliquely and ironically hit at the Indian patriarchal society in which a son is usually preferred to a girl (Dattani 44). The Patels, it is mentioned in the play, are said to kill the girl children by drowning them in milk. One leading theme of the play is, in fact, the sacrifice of the girl child Tara for the sake of the boy Chandan. Tara's mother herself did this injustice to her own daughter.

In course of the play, Tara has been repeatedly referred to as a ‘freak’. M. K. Rukhaya in the article “An Analysis of Mahesh Dattani's ‘Tara’: The Other Side” significantly notes:

The term ‘freak’ has been conventionally used to refer to a person who has something unusual regarding their appearance or behaviour. The older usage of the word ‘freaks’ refers to the state of being physically deformed, or characterized by rare diseases and conditions. The word was utilized to suggest ‘sideshow performers.’ In such an instance, the word ‘freak’ represents the state of Women, who are marginalized. The female race who are not congenitally deformed but are so as society forces the handicap upon them. Just as it is presented in concrete terms in the play: Tara's leg is callously separated from her to render her twin brother normal, defying the tenets of Nature. (4)

So, if Tara is a ‘freak’, she has only been made so by those who are around her. Nature was all in her favour. But the society to which she belonged was against her. Her biological mother and grandfather were against her.

In fact, the Indian society holds some pre-conceived notions about the roles men and women ought to play in society, and people are not expected to deviate from such roles. Thus, truly speaking, the Indian society has yet to travel a long way to be a society of free-minded individuals, not stereotyped males and females. Gender discrimination can be seen in almost every sphere of the society. While it affects women in the worst manner, men are also sometimes found to be victims of it. For centuries gender stereotyping prevented men from choosing dancing or nursing as usual professions, and women from

such works as military services or a sailor's job. Even when women started working outside domestic spheres, certain jobs such as nursing, teaching etc. were earmarked as suitable for women. And it is needless to say that the working women, besides their daylong activities in the working places, have to bear the burden of domestic chores. Though theoretically taken, boys and girls (or men and women), are supposed to enjoy equal rights, the reality always tells a different tale. In most Indian families, deviations on the part of boys are often pardoned or softly handled according to the norm that 'boys will be boys'. It is expected that boys will be spirited and naughty, while girls must be obedient and submissive. Till today, the birth of a son is treated with joy and a daughter is still considered as *paraya dhan* ("the property of the in-laws"). Women at present are indeed competing with men in every field. We find women as doctors, engineers, soldiers, astronauts and whatnot. But the important point is that, not merely the socially and economically backward women, but even such educated, confident, financially self-supported and independent women as Tendulkar's Miss Benare have to suffer the qualms of gender discrimination. And such discriminations are very often practised by the educated people like Tara's family, not to talk about the prejudiced illiterate villagers. Tara is intelligent, but man "cannot accept the woman's intellect, and gets intimidated by her intelligence", and therefore, "Tara's victory at the card game is seen as thorough cheating and Chandan is ashamed to admit her victory" (Rukhaya 4). While Chandan "sees her as a good businesswoman as she cheats at cards", he attributes it not to her positive business acumen, but to her negative shrewdness (4). This is because it is conventionally believed that the "best woman was intellectually the inferior of the worst man" (Woolf 45).

The dramatisation of the challenges and helplessness of Miss Benare and Tara by their respective creators thus reveal the essentially crippled, and even perverted, mentality of the modern Indian society behind the guise of the so-called liberality and advancement. All the noble promises of equality of both the sexes and of equal opportunities to women in all the fields with men turn out to be sheer mockery on the fields of reality, as is evidenced in the case of Tendulkar's Miss Benare. Dattani's *Tara* also artfully tears the masks off the faces of the Indian politicians and educated upper-class people. On the one hand, they promise security for women, education for girls and prevention

of female foeticide, but on another level, they are hypocrites and quite conservative in their domestic spheres. When the question of a choice between a grandson and a granddaughter arises, Bharati's powerful father at once insists on Chandan (even after knowing that the granddaughter should have been a natural choice). He even leaves his entire property to Chandan and not a single penny to Tara. The social norms, economic standards and cultural factors have been responsible for manifold sufferings of and injustices against women. All these factors combine to create the social system in which the women have to take birth, suffer and die. Miss Benare and Tara may be taken to represent innumerable other Indian women who have to suffer within a nepotistic society that shapes and controls the minds and actions of people in favour of men. Thus, as Simone de Beauvoir rightly observes in *The Second Sex*, one "is not born, rather becomes, a woman" due to the treatment of the collective social system, wherein 'woman' becomes equivalent to 'victim' (14).

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## ***Joseph Andrews: Eighteenth-Century Sitcom***

**Ganta Nikhil Kumar**

### **Abstract**

Although situational comedy is a recent phenomenon, some of its characteristics and traits date back to the 18th century. Novel as a form was an emerging genre and novels like *Joseph Andrews* were highly successful because of their satirical humour on men and manners. In a situational comedy characters are put in various comical situations to create humour and it is mainly episodic. This article explores the phenomenon of situational comedy in *Joseph Andrews*. Following the great tradition of novels like *Don Quixote*, Henry Fielding writes his humorous novel *Joseph Andrews*. The full title of the novel is *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews and of his Friend Mr. Abraham Adams*. Joseph Andrews is kicked by his mistress and is now a destitute. He along with his pastor friend Abraham Adams embark on wild adventures exposing the vanity, hypocrisy and self-delusion of the world. It is through the interactions with the innkeepers, pastors, rakes and gentility that Fielding reveals and unravels the double standards of the world. Parson Adams is a character similar to Don Quixote and Joseph Andrews is Sancho Panza. Don Adam, Sancho Andrews are a mismatched pair travelling the highways and byways of the English countryside. The humour or comedy is generated when they meet different kinds of people on their way and get embroiled in different types of situations.

**Keywords:** Joseph Andrews, Henry Fielding, Situational Comedy, Popular literature, Pop Culture.

### **Introduction**

A sitcom, or situational comedy, revolves around humorous situations. Typically, it features a consistent ensemble cast of characters who undergo minimal changes or personal growth. The starting point for writing a sitcom is the situation itself, which is heavily influenced by the location and the cast of characters. The “precinct” or primary setting plays a crucial role in fueling the comedy. In the case of *Joseph Andrews*, examples of these precincts include inns, countryside settings, or barns, which serve as the primary locations where

the characters live. While a sitcom may have additional locations for characters to interact privately and publicly, it is rare for the entire story to centre around a single place. However, it is essential to establish a meeting point for the characters to facilitate their various comedic escapades.

Yet, merely having a precinct does not automatically make it a sitcom. The situation alone is just one component. Without comedic characters, it becomes more akin to a soap opera. To be successful, a sitcom must have inherently funny characters. However, their humour should not be their sole defining trait. The comedy should stem from an intrinsic connection to each character's personality. Creating a foundation of contradictory personalities and conflicts is crucial for any sitcom and comedy in general. When developing characters for the sitcom, this should be the primary consideration.

The context in which *Joseph Andrews* is written is in itself a situational parody. What would happen if a young boy is affronted by the sexual advances of his mistress. He must thus preserve his virtue from "predatory women and lustful hags" (Neale 1). This role reversal is the central tenet of the novel. The episodes or interactions of Joseph with his mistress are ambiguous to his innocent mind. He fails to understand the reason why his mistress is behaving in an uncommon manner and frustration of the mistress is apparent in her trying to persuade him to give in. But even with many attempts she fails time and again in her efforts to win him. The humour arises from the very fact that virtue in men is an unheard of concept hitherto in Literature. It was always a question of women's virtue and it never was associated with men. Henry Fielding is mocking the absurd virtues which can be seen in his contemporary novelists like Samuel Richardson's novel *Pamela*.

The episodic nature of *Joseph Andrews* is perfectly suitable for creating many situations. Many criticised Fielding for the lack of strict form and for the loose plot. There is no coherent plot and the story transgresses so much from the point that it almost seems many episodes do not fit in or were unnecessary. Mark Spilka in his "Comic Resolutions in Fielding's 'Joseph Andrews'" writes "...there is little or no dramatic connection between one episode and the next" (Spilka 12). If we look at most of the sitcoms today, their episodes may not add directly to the plot advancement but they still hold significance and relevance to the central theme of creating comedy through situational

awareness. We have the story of the History of Leonora or the History of Gentleman and many more such digressions. They simply become an intricate way to engage the characters and create humour within the narrative. This process, however suitable or formulaic for a sitcom of today, had the same effect in the 18th Century when it was written.

All the components which distinguish a situational comedy can be seen in this novel. There are three components in a situational comedy, like the main character, supportive characters and transient characters. The main characters are very few in number. It is through them that most of the action takes place like Joseph and Adams in *Joseph Andrews* or Tom in *Tom Jones*. Supportive characters play a supportive part and have a specific personality trait. These personality traits require a mental effort on part of the reader or audience in order to connect with the ongoing plot. Transient characters act as people who provide a “plot problem” or “agents of complication”.

### **Elements of a Sitcom**

When exploring the elements of a sitcom, we often find certain things which elevate the humour. Various comedic devices and techniques are employed in order to generate laughter and engage the readers. Absurdity serves as a powerful tool in sitcoms, enabling writers to push the boundaries of reality and challenge conventional norms. By exaggerating situations or characters to a comical extreme, sitcoms provide a refreshing escape from mundane reality. Shows like *Seinfeld* and *The Office* capitalise on absurdity by placing their characters in bizarre and outlandish scenarios, highlighting the inherent hilarity that arises from such situations.

Allusion is a clever technique employed by sitcom writers to refer and draw upon popular culture, historical events, or well-known individuals. By incorporating these references into the dialogue or plot, sitcoms create a sense of familiarity and connection with the audience. For instance, *The Big Bang Theory* regularly alludes to famous scientists and their discoveries, allowing viewers to appreciate the humour on both intellectual and comedic levels.

Coincidences are a staple in sitcoms, often serving as catalysts for comedic misunderstandings and entanglements. Whether it is the characters bumping into each other at precisely the wrong moment or events unfolding in a

serendipitous manner, coincidences inject unexpected humour into the narrative. Sitcoms like *Friends* and *How I Met Your Mother* expertly employ coincidences to generate comedic situations and keep audiences engaged.

Deceitful behaviour forms the basis of many sitcom plots, as characters often resort to lies and deception to achieve their objectives or navigate tricky situations. These deceptions are often revealed or unravelled in hilariously awkward ways, leading to humorous consequences. Shows such as *Frasier* and *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* skillfully utilise deceitful behaviour to generate comedic tension and create opportunities for witty dialogue and situational comedy.

Misunderstandings are a recurring theme in sitcoms, contributing to comedic chaos and confusion. The misinterpretation of information or intentions between characters fuels the humour and keeps the plot engaging. Parody is a comedic device that satirises or mimics a specific style, genre, or individual for comedic effect. Sitcoms frequently employ parody to lampoon societal norms, popular culture, or even other television shows. Puns and repartee are verbal comedic devices that rely on wordplay, wit, and quick thinking. Sitcoms frequently employ these devices to create clever and amusing dialogue exchanges between characters. Shows like *The Golden Girls* and *Parks and Recreation* showcase characters who possess razor-sharp wit and engage in rapid-fire banter, leaving audiences entertained and laughing at their clever wordplay.

Ridicule and self-deprecation are powerful comedic techniques frequently employed in sitcoms to generate laughter and establish a relatable connection with the audience. Ridicule involves mocking or satirising certain aspects of individuals, situations, or societal norms. Sitcoms often utilise ridicule to highlight absurdities or flaws, offering a humorous critique of various elements of life. Characters may engage in exaggerated behaviours or engage in humorous antics that poke fun at common stereotypes, social conventions, or cultural phenomena. By exposing the humorous aspects of these targets, sitcoms invite viewers to laugh at themselves and the idiosyncrasies of the world around them. Self-deprecation, on the other hand, involves characters making fun of their own shortcomings, mistakes, or embarrassing moments. This technique allows sitcoms to create a sense of vulnerability and humility in characters, making them more relatable and endearing to the audience. By openly

acknowledging their flaws and embracing self-mockery, characters become more human and relatable, inviting viewers to laugh along with them.

Sitcoms often feature characters who engage in self-deprecating humour as a means of coping with their insecurities or navigating awkward situations. Through their willingness to laugh at themselves, these characters disarm potential criticism or judgement, fostering a sense of camaraderie with the audience. By showcasing their own vulnerabilities and flaws, characters in sitcoms encourage viewers to embrace their imperfections and find humour in their own lives. Furthermore, self-deprecation can serve as a form of catharsis, allowing viewers to release tension or anxiety through laughter. By highlighting relatable experiences and engaging in self-mockery, sitcoms create a safe space for viewers to find solace and amusement in their own everyday foibles and missteps.

The usage of ridicule and self-deprecation in sitcoms not only generates laughter but also encourages a light-hearted perspective on life's challenges. By showcasing the humorous side of human nature, sitcoms promote a sense of empathy, acceptance, and the ability to find humour in even the most embarrassing or difficult situations. These techniques allow viewers to reflect on their own experiences with a comedic lens, offering a refreshing and uplifting escape from the complexities of everyday life. By ridiculing societal norms, stereotypes, and conventions, and engaging in self-mockery, sitcoms invite viewers to laugh at themselves and find humour in their own imperfections. These techniques not only generate laughter but also foster empathy, acceptance, and a lighthearted perspective on life's challenges. Sitcoms that skillfully employ ridicule and self-deprecation contribute to the enduring popularity of the genre, providing audiences with an entertaining and relatable comedic experience (Juckel 2).

### **Situational Comedic Episodes in *Joseph Andrews***

In one comedic moment, a battle ensues at an inn where Joseph takes a tumble from his horse, injuring his knee. Seeking solace, Joseph sits by the fireplace while the inn's landlady kindly massages his aching knee. Meanwhile, Parson Adams finds himself in a pot of pig's blood, leading to several amusing situations, such as when Tru river mistakes Adams for an actual pig, and a squire's dog

playfully tears apart Parson Adams' cassock. Another comical scene unfolds when Mrs. Tau Woz stumbles upon Betty in Tau Woz's bed. Chaos ensues as Didapper inadvertently creates a mess in the room. Later, Parson Adams mistakenly enters Mrs. Slipslop's room and confuses Didapper for a distraught woman, engaging in a hilarious scuffle until Mrs. Booby arrives, holding a lit candle.

Irony is used in a scene where, a self-proclaimed patriot who vehemently condemns cowards finds himself fleeing in a critical situation, presenting a sharp irony. Parson Adams, known for his sense of humour, indulges in plenty of ironic jests. In one instance, he takes a wrong turn and mistakenly falls asleep in Fanny's bed. Adams' adherence to moderation and philosophical acceptance of adversity, as advised by Joseph, is ironically subverted when his son is reported to have drowned. Despite his conceit in considering his sermon a masterpiece, Adams faces a poignant irony. Additionally, the portrayal of Mrs. Slipslop's character and the allure of Lady Booby contribute to the novel's satirical elements.

Fielding effectively employs satire in a scene where each passenger on a bus confronts a naked Joseph, leading to their metaphorical vulnerability. The scene exposes the sensitivity, selfishness of an old man, and the professional pretence of a lawyer, resulting in a satirical critique. Parson Adams, the most notable character in *Joseph Andrews*, is a creation of pure humour. When he travels to London to sell his sermons, he forgets a valuable manuscript at home, leading to comical consequences. Furthermore, Adams' absent-mindedness is accentuated by his peculiar gestures and amusing demeanour.

### **Resemblance to a Sitcom**

Another reason why *Joseph Andrews* resembles a modern sitcom is it does not have as Irwin says "an orderly plan of attack" (Irwin 169). Transient characters come and go playing their parts and serving their purpose for that particular episode or chapter. Fielding's novels like *Tom Jones* and *Joseph Andrews* are bildungsroman and coming-of-age novels. This provides a perfect context to weave the elements and components of a sitcom. Lawrence Mintz says, "Situational comedies are weekly half-hour plays involving a recurring cast of familiar characters who face new adventures initiated and resolved in

each episode” (Mintz 42). There exists a problem which breaks the normalcy of an everyday life creating tension and thus paving a way for characters to then solve issues using “wit” and “humour”. In *Joseph Andrews* the conflict resolves by itself at the end of the episode and does not last till the end of the plot. Mintz breaks down the structure of a typical sitcom as he writes:

The problem of the situation comedy is almost always a minor threat—either an embarrassment, a confusion or misunderstanding created by a failure to communicate or an opportunity for change which equally threatens the common, familiar pattern of existence for the characters. Faced with the threat, problem or opportunity, the characters act, and invariably make things worse, complicating and compounding the difficulty, creating new, secondary dangers. The plot thickens until there is a miraculous, unexpected, almost always unearned rescue; the situation is resolved as artificially as any *dues ex machina* ending in a classical Greek drama. All is explained, all is corrected, all is forgiven, all is restored to the condition of normality. (43)

Considering the nature of the novel, its structural elements and characters it is filled with many lively characters who represent ordinary people with single characteristic traits. The main character along with supportive and transient characters combine to create a holistic fulfilment which does not require a well-structured plot and serves the purpose of a perfect situational comedy. Abraham Adams is a curate of the parish in his fiftieth year, he supports a wife and six children on £23 a year. He is Fielding’s delightful example of the “good natured” man, he is entirely ignorant of the ways of the world— “a sort of Christian Quixote” (Neale 2). Pugnacious in defence of injured innocence, he sees life through the bookish lens of classical literature and the Bible. His forgetfulness always lands him in trouble. “The parson had exhibited a fresh instance of his absence of mind; for he was so pleased with having got Joseph into the coach, that he never once thought of the beast in the stable; and, finding his legs as nimble as he desired, he sallied out” (Fielding 133).

Adams represents a common innocence in all of us when we are deceived by the world and its people who fraud and exploit our weakness through deception and ill means. Adams is so generous and helpful that he throws

away his manuscript of Aeschylus for saving a friend in need which had cost him many years to write. “Adams jumped up, flung his Æschylus into the Fire, and fell a roaring to the People of the House for Help”. At once Joseph Andrews on his way home to see Fanny and providentially located in the next room appears and the lovers are for the time being reunited. But the manuscript, “his dear Friend, which was the Work of his own Hands, and had been his inseparable Companion for upwards of thirty Years” (Fielding 157) is lost forever. He has to survive in the world of deceptive people who claim to be well read in the classics and often dare to challenge him in his learning and having found nothing they could have related to, blame him as a rogue who is pretentious in his learning and trying to befool everybody.

Abraham Adams is not a hero of the novel but holds immense significance as Grimm’s puts it:

It is not without reason that Fielding added the name of Mr Adams to the title page. If he is not the real hero of the book, he is undoubtedly the character whose fortune the reader follows with close interest. Whether he is smoking his pipe, or losing his way while pondering a passage of Greek, or groaning over the fatuities of the man of fashion in Leonara’s story, or brandishing his famous crabstick in defence of Fanny, he is always the same delightful mixture of benevolence and simplicity, of credulity and of ignorance of the world. He lives upon Aristotle’s ‘Politics’ but he knows nothing of the politics of his own day; he is perfectly familiar with the cities of ancient Greece, but he knows nothing of the city of London. (Grimm 24)

Adams thus is not a perfect man but he is way better than those of his supposed superiors. Regardless of his faults he has a native dignity which cannot be taken away from him. Of these, only the quixotic parson is a truly comic personage, and he is so not because of affectation but of naivete. And despite his frequent ludicrousness, Adams is always dignified.

In defense he merrily revealed the scribblers in their true nature and invited all men of sense to laugh with him. He opposed affectation because he valued plain-dealing among men and saw all about him

vanity and hypocrisy. Again, his method, although more highly systematized, was simply to pull away the sham and show the reality. Fielding gave this serious business his full energy and achieved what he attempted, the entertainment and instruction of those lively, thoughtful readers who love comedy. (Irwin 188)

Betty the chambermaid and her interactions with Joseph create another situation which becomes a fertile ground for humour. Her condition in the society and her fears of remaining an invalid compels her to make advances towards Joseph and Towhouse, the owner of the inn, and finding her advances being refused she goes into an uncontrolled rage of fury.

Most of the character names are emblematic in their nature. Like Slipslop is sloppy with language. Peter Pounce does not lose any opportunity to pounce on money. The characters always resist authority and defy them in many ways. Joseph defies his mistress, refuses to give in. Slipslop refuses to obey Lady Booby even when admonishing her. Adam challenges the authority of Lady Booby by not complying with her orders. They exhibit an almost independent nature irrespective of the authority which commands them. The authorities cannot do anything because they too know that servants possess many compromising secrets which when leaked will put them in a difficult and embarrassing position.

Dismissing Slipslop was a point not so easily to be resolved upon. She [Lady Booby] had the utmost tenderness for her reputation, as she knew on that depended many of the most valuable blessings of life, particularly cards, making curtsies in public places, and, above all, the pleasure of demolishing the reputations of others, in which innocent amusements she had extraordinary delight. She therefore determined to submit to any insult from a servant, rather than run the risk of losing the title to so many great privileges. (Fielding 52)

The characters display one dimensional aspect of either being overtly mortal or immoral. Lady Booby's husband has just died and instead of mourning she devises plans to woo Joseph. He refutes the advances giving a glimpse of his familial chastity and of the greatness of his sister, the great Pamela. Thus preserving the chastity tradition of his family, the writer says, "O Pamela! My

mistress is fallen in love with me, but I hope I shall have more resolution and more grace than to part with my virtue to any lady upon earth” (Fielding 55).

Fielding “modified his modes of writing in light of audience response, moving away from traditional models of comedy to the madcap forms of burlesque and farce that released his most exuberant satire” (Rawson 20) in all human actions. We see in the cowardly gentleman a reproachful hatred towards the British army in failing to protect their own country from French invaders. But when it comes to his being patriotic he escapes his duty as a countryman. Thus, the inclusive folly can be seen in a typical hypocrite preaching moral principles which he himself does not follow. When the time comes of facing the danger, he makes haste to protect himself rather than abiding by the principles he vehemently believes that others must follow. “The man of courage made as much expedition towards his own home, whither he escaped in a very short time without once looking behind him; where we will leave him, to contemplate his own bravery, and to censure the want of it in others” (Fielding 140).

Fielding breaks away the moral tradition set by Samuel Richardson. He does not expect the reader to mend his follies how pernicious they may be. His intent is the “exposure of the offence than on amendment of the offender” (4); he probably does not anticipate that a Lady Booby would remake herself after reading Joseph Andrew.

Fielding had a deep hatred of hypocrisy and affectation and could see with keen humour the ridiculous situations that resulted when man assumed qualities that did not befit him (Grimm 8). He in his preface gives the nature of hypocrisy, he says “For as vanity puts us on affecting false characters, in order to purchase applause; so hypocrisy sets us on an endeavor to avoid censure, by concealing our vices under an appearance of their opposite virtues” (24). This can be seen in the insincere courtier, the dishonest lawyer, blockheaded physicians and religious hypocrites who are evenly distributed throughout his novels.

The episode of the travellers in a stage coach speaks of the moral dilemma which they face when a helpless human being is robbed and left on the road to die. Every traveller aims in protecting his or her skin rather than helping out.

There is Miss Grave-airs, who protests against the indecency of his entering the vehicle; there is the lawyer, who advises that the wounded man should be taken in, not from any humane motive but because he is afraid of being involved in legal proceedings if they leave him to his fate; there is the wit who seizes the situation for a fast round of double-entendres; and lastly there is the coachman, whose only concern is the shilling for his fare, and who refuses to lend any of his many great-coats lest they be made bloody.

The episode of “The History of Leonora, or the Unfortunate Jilt”, Leonara, the Unfortunate Jilt tells the story of an opportunistic girl, who as a consequence of her extreme sorrow, spurns her true love and honest fiancé Horatio in favour of the rich and Frenchified fop Bellarmine. The result of which is that she gets deceived by the fop and ends up as an invalid. The tone in which Fielding expresses is not an admonishing one but rather that of pity, as he retorts, “She hath ever since led a disconsolate life, and deserves, perhaps, pity for her misfortunes, more than our censure for a behavior to which the artifices of her aunt very probably contributed, and to which very young women are often rendered too liable by that blameable levity in the education of our sex” (Fielding 132).

In another episode of mistaken identity Adams meets Parson Trulliber, a pig-farming clergyman who, though a man of religion, refuses Parson Adam’s charity. The theme of hypocrisy is once again touched here. A religious and holy man denying service to his fellow brother.

## Conclusion

*Joseph Andrews*, written by Henry Fielding in 1742, embodies an early English novel that predates sitcoms by centuries. However, its comedic essence shares semblances with the genre, presenting a satirical and amusing narrative. The novel’s eccentric characters, akin to those found in sitcoms, possess distinct personalities and quirks. Joseph Andrews, the virtuous and naive protagonist, and the pompous Parson Adams exemplify exaggerated traits that generate comedic scenarios. Witty banter, clever wordplay, and humorous exchanges lace the dialogue of this novel. Such comedic discourse contributes to the overall humorous tone, mirroring the reliance of sitcoms on quick-witted lines and clever repartee. The situational comedies create a myth of an ability to

solve complex problems using “wit” and “humour”. The episodes of *Joseph Andrews* are short and in few cases don’t exceed more than three chapters (at the most four). This shortness of the episodes bares likelihood to television sitcoms. This technique of shorter episodes had been in literature way before they had shown their presence in popular culture. Sitcoms may be a recent phenomenon but their antecedents can be seen in literature way before they have entered mainstream popular culture. The novel is filled with a wide variety of characters who provide ample opportunities and situations to exercise situational comedy. They give us fuller insight into the actions and manners of men. Fielding himself says in his preface that he described “not men, but manners; not an Individual, but Species” (186). This becomes a fertile ground for exploring his prowess in creating situational comedy. It offers many episodes which are equivalent to the episodes of sitcoms weaving diverse threads of narrative episodes together.

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## Intersecting Oppression: Gender and Violence in Selected Indian Novels

Tanvi Garg and Tanuja

### Abstract

Violence is an imposed barbaric act of propagating injustice and brutality on someone. It is not solely limited to physical but goes beyond emotional, psychological, and active-passive domains. Be it American society or Indian society, women have always been placed at the receiving end of gendered violence. *Matrubhoomi: A Nation without Women* (2003) directed by Manish Jha and *The Passion of New Eve* (1977) written by Angela Carter, and *I have Become the Tide* (2019) by Githa Hariharan show varied violent societies for women as well as men. The violence targeted towards men involves more physical violence than mental or emotional violence as opposed to violence targeted towards women. Since the concept of honour is imposed on women's bodies, the prime target of violence for women becomes the female anatomy. Thus, through the above mentioned texts. This paper attempts to study the similarity and difference in imposition of violence on men and women and the similarity and difference in treatment of women and men despite cultural and societal differences.

**Keywords:** Gender, Violence, Dystopic Societies, Gender Fluidity, Women's Bodies, Masculinity.

Violence is a concerning aspect of human society, crossing over spatial and temporal boundaries. It affects not only individuals but also communities, even nations. Violence is a complex issue. It manifests in numerous forms—from physical aggression to verbal, psychological and sexual assaults to even socio-economic and structural harm—leaving no part of a society absolutely unaffected. The most visible form of violence in society is physical, often overshadowing the other forms of violence that are not overtly evident.

Violence, thus, extends to anything that robs one of bodily autonomy or agency, such as in the cases of forced marriages, female genital mutilation, sexual assault, the negation of identity, etc. Violence is inherently linked to

power, and sometimes power becomes intrinsically abusive. It is worth noting that violence can stem from a power imbalance, but it is often attributed to the more powerful party. The paper proposes to delve deep into the complex nature of violence and its multifaceted manifestations. The paper also aims to study violence in correlation with gender disparity in society and its implications on individuals as well as society at large.

The two terms—gender-based violence and violence against women—are often used interchangeably; most incidents of violence against women are perpetuated because of gender-based discrimination, as it affects women more than men. Perpetuation of violence towards someone because of their gender is the substructure for gender-based violence, and its disproportionality primarily towards women is concerning. However, one cannot rule out this kind of violence's effects on men either, no matter the percentage of the disparity. The basis of gender-based violence is an imbalance of power—a power that is essentially non-existent in most cases for women. Nonetheless, this power imbalance moves beyond the gender binary and includes identities such as non-binary and queer people equally in its influence. Social and cultural structures, values and norms that govern society are often the source of this kind of violence and are sheltered by a practice of denial and silence.

The paper attempts to discuss and highlight the grave issue of gender-based violence with regards to masculinity and femininity through *Matrubhomi: A Nation Without Women*, *The Passion of New Eve*, and *I Have Become the Tide*. Freedom from violence is a fundamental human rights issue, and in every society, every human deserves freedom from violence, irrespective of their gender. Any violence leads to a systematic, oppressive hegemonic power structure, especially gendered violence that cultivates a hetero-normative society and follows the principles of patriarchy. In Indian society, patriarchy operates on multiple levels, sometimes depriving men of power.

Any violence theory needs to be gender sensitive to not neglect the gendered aspect of violence, lest, in doing so, it will inevitably perpetuate a dominant patriarchal predominance. Consequently, the issue of violence targeted towards one because of gendered reasons will either be partially studied or wholly neglected. This is why a feminist lens is a prerequisite in the

study of violence, as it provides a deeper understanding of violence as a concept and practice by analysing how it is embedded in patriarchal structures of power. As Cynthia Cockburn argues, “Gender power shapes the dynamic of every interaction” (28). This makes the feminist study of violence even more pertinent since the position of human subjects in patriarchal structures is central to feminist theory.

The paper explores femicide through Manish Jha’s *Matrubhoomi: A Nation Without Women*. The film is a 2003 dystopian tragedy based in a village in Bihar that has exercised the practice of female foeticide and infanticide to the point of extinction of women in their own village as well as in all neighbouring villages. The film’s director has portrayed the brutal reality of such practices in different parts of India and has created a cautionary tale to stop this gendered violence. By doing this, he has highlighted the gory outcome it can lead to a nation without women. Jha’s purpose in writing and directing *Matrubhoomi* was to stretch the existing circumstances of disproportionate sex ratio on a global level and create an extreme scenario to unsettle the members of the society who are either silent spectators or willing participants in these sinful practices. It is absolutely terrifying to think that the movie’s plot is not too far-fetched from today’s reality but based on existing circumstances. The movie’s proximity to reality to any other dystopian kind is immensely unsettling.

The violence portrayed in the film is perpetuated in a highly patriarchal social structure that objectifies, worships and tears apart the female body all at once. Just as in most cases of gendered violence, the female body becomes the contention of ownership and power. The only female lead character in the film, Kalki, finds herself trapped in a fraternal polyandrous marriage where even the father-in-law, Ramcharan, claims his ownership over her body. Turn by turn, the five sons of Ramcharan carry out their physical relationship with Kalki each night, saving two nights for their father, the head of the family and, therefore, the most potent patriarch in the family hierarchy. The ownership falls mainly in the hands of Ramcharan because of his involvement in the exchange of goods between him and Kalki’s father, Pratap. The only camaraderie Kalki experiences is with two people—Suraj, the youngest son, who is the only person who makes her feel like she is a living person and their

house help, and Raghu, who is still a boy. Unfortunately for Kalki, the camaraderie and the support do not last long as Suraj and Raghu are brutally murdered by the people they had known their entire lives, his brothers, because of jealousy over Kalki's ownership. The four elder brothers—Rakesh, Shailesh, Brijesh, and Lokesh—want right over Kalki's body, but none ever tries to connect emotionally with her. Only when the emotional connection is established between Kalki and Suraj do they seem to lose their authority and dominance over her. Later on, the extent of ownership slips from the family's hands and reaches the entire village when, in an attempt to help Kalki, the lower caste house-help is killed by the family. Then and there, the already victimised and marginalised upper caste female body of Kalki becomes the land for control by his brothers and all the male members of the lower caste of the village by projecting ownership over Kalki's unborn child.

The punishment Kalki receives for escaping the clutches of her abusers with a lower caste boy leads her to be tied to a pole in the cowshed for months, like an animal. Kalki's position from an asset transforms into an affliction after the incident. Only when Jaggannath, the Pundit, reprimands Ramcharan for trying to find another woman in a place where there are no women left and suggests the latter accept Kalki back in the house, Ramcharan exclaims, "*Kalki shush ho gayi hai humare liye. Ghar se bhai thi. Ramcharan ke ghar se bhai thi choti just wale ke sath*" (*Matrubhoomi* 1:14:50-58). She is then raped night after night by Ramcharan and his sons and Raghu's *chacha* as a form of revenge on her. Kalki's rape by Raghu's *chacha* is not only motivated by his lust but also because women's bodies have always been treated like a site of honour to be looted for revenge as "women are seen in terms of their body only and as a medium for power fights" (Hariharan). Eventually, Kalki gets pregnant by one of her abusers. The news of the pregnancy stirs up another riot between the lower caste men of the village, who claim Raghu's other uncle, Kachra, who is deranged as the father of the child and the upper caste family of Ramcharan, all claiming ownership over the body of the child. Eventually, all these men succumb to their deaths because of violent upheaval in their village.

The idea of perpetrating violence on women to establish male supremacy, and that too when caste comes into the equation, has been a part of Indian

society for a long time. Since Indian society operates on the Brahmanical patriarchal order, men from higher castes always consider themselves above people from other castes, as evident from Githa Hariharan's novel, *I Have Become the Tide* (2019). The story is based on students studying in academic institutions who suffer discrimination because of their caste. The plot also follows the story of a cattle skinner from mediaeval times who faced caste discrimination and could barely escape it until his death. Violence against men and women becomes evident in the novel through various episodes. Ravi, a college student from a lower caste, remembers how their people are targeted for trespassing boundaries set by men from a higher caste. They are punished differently, such as being stoned to death or murdered. However, their punishments become more gruesome, particularly for women raped to maintain and establish authority (of high caste people) over others. Such violent punishments show that hierarchical order spares no one from discrimination, and people are reprimanded irrespective of gender. However,

the gendered dimension of violence against women is different from those of violence against men because while men may certainly be exposed to violence as a result of their socially determined gender roles and norms, the violence they experience – or even perpetrate against other men – rarely if ever contributes to or confirms the overall subjugation of men as an entire subgroup of people. (Hamilton qtd. in Chapman 50)

Ravi realises that the problem here is the acceptance of how high-caste people treat them. Where *Matrubhoomi* shows more physically violent ways in which men are targeted, *I Have Become the Tide* shows psychological ways in which men are tormented. Satya, a bright student, is not even treated as a student or human because he belongs to a lower caste; according to one of his professors, he should not get an education at such a decent place. To ensure that Satya suffers, his professor refuses to sign his scholarship form, depriving him of his fundamental rights; he marks him unfairly to ensure he does not pass his exams. Satya gets a room next to the washroom for a room in the University hostel because rooms are allotted based on the student category. Other students do not want that room, so students from reserved categories are given rooms in a corner where students from other categories

do not really go or try to mingle with them. His classmates and professors constantly question his intelligence and hard work every time he answers correctly in class. Sometimes, they even mock him for cheating or using unfair means to study. All this hatred and prejudices drive Satya towards his death as he commits suicide for being deprived of his bright future. As his family's eldest son, his failure to support them because of prejudices in his University drives him to take such drastic steps.

Though the novel is not set in the future but in contemporary times, this makes it more troublesome because the violence, be it physical or psychological, is still persistent. Both the texts, *Matrubhoomi* and *I Have Become the Tide*, highlight the saddening condition of violence in India, where people are punished irrespective of gender. Although the setting of both texts is different, one similar thing is the treatment of boys from lower caste by men from the upper class. Both Satya and Raghu are killed by upper-class men for trespassing the boundaries set by them. While Raghu's death is a direct murder, Satya is led towards it by psychological torture. Despite temporal and spatial differences, the concept of violence against men by men remains the same. So, even in a patriarchal structure, some men are deprived of any agency, and sometimes, to fulfil that lack, they assert their authority over women. As shown in the movie and the novel, men see harming women as a way of getting back at men from other castes or communities.

However, women still suffer the most as they are seen as easy targets and controlling them means controlling the honour and, thus, the entire community. "The 'honour' of the community becomes coeval with that of men, and while both men and women might be punished for disobeying honour codes, women bear the greatest burden—sometimes with tragic consequences—of upholding community honour" (Srivastava 35). Though the novel does not directly show such heinous crimes being perpetrated on women, it brings forth the struggles they have to face through the memories of other characters. Being from the higher class, Kalki is not given any agency on the pretext of being a woman, so here, the caste and class do not matter because it all comes down to being a man or a woman.

In *The Passion of New Eve*, Angela Carter questions the primitive notions of gender, sexuality and identity. In her novel, she shows a female utopia and

male stance on femininity and goes on to explore what happens when a man has to go through troubles faced by a woman in her lifetime. The questions of gender identity and sexuality all come into play as Carter writes, “I know nothing. I am a tabula rasa, a blank sheet of paper, an unhatched egg. I have not yet become a woman, although I possess a woman’s shape. Not a woman, no: both more or less than a real woman” (79). These words spoken by the protagonist, once a man named Evelyn, turned into a female, Eve, after a forced sex-change surgery, aptly convey how one’s gender identity is not solely based on sex assigned at birth.

The text is based on futuristic cities and begins with the prelude by John Locke’s—“In the beginning all the world was America.” This lays out the base for what is to follow in the novel. Like America, all the world was undiscovered, later invaded and conquered by the more powerful, and like the American land, the female body is also invaded and conquered by those in power, i.e. men in the novel. In *The Passion of New Eve*, the female body is seduced, objectified and abused. Even the idea of a woman is glorified by Evelyn since the beginning: “I’d dreamed of meeting Tristessa, she stark naked, tied, perhaps to a tree in a midnight forest under the wheeling stars” (Carter 3). The fetish of domination over the female body, especially of Tristessa, considered the epitome of femininity by thousands, is established at the novel’s beginning. Ironically, Tristessa turns out to be just a feminine idea and a transvestite and even that femininity is attacked, dehumanised and destroyed. However, Evelyn is imbued with self-awareness. Sexualising and objectifying women does not stop until he himself is put in a female body to experience the horrific realities that most female bodies go through in our societies.

In order to flee the city, he lands in Beulha, a futuristic city and a utopia for females and is ruled by their leading figure, Mother, with an aim to bring a revolution into the world. At this place, Evelyn is turned into Eve as he has to undergo a sex change procedure without his consent. Though Eve is psychologically still Evelyn, he tries to run away from the place and unknowingly reaches the city of zero.

This city is in sharp contrast with Beulha as it is ruled by Zero, a patriarch who considers animals higher in status than women. He is a barbarian, and Eve’s realisation of what difficulties women have to go through comes in the

form of rape by Zero, “the masculinity incarnate”. As a woman, Evelyn is snatched of any agency and falls entirely into the hands of zero. Zero has seven wives whom he treats barbarically. These wives represent the condition of all the women who have been fed the patriarchal narrative and brainwashed into being willing to become part of the hegemony. Zero has forbidden his wives to use language, metaphorically representing the idea that women are silenced through systematic oppression despite having a voice. “Although ‘subservience’ is the wrong word; they gave in to him freely, as though they knew they must be wicked and so deserved to be inflicted with such pain” (Carter 92).

Carter’s work contains fantasy elements but is also rooted in reality. Any feminist dystopia will always resemble the genuine horrors of gender disparity existing in society. Such dystopian narratives may seem far-fetched in today’s society. However, they serve as a warning to society and paint a realistic picture of what might befall humans if some issues are not kept in check. Thus, the three texts show that achieving a male or female utopian society is impossible, be it in contemporary times or in any futuristic society. The holder of power is not essential in this case because no matter who holds power, the question of what one does with it matters the most. Moreover, as the experience dictates, be it a place ruled by men or one ruled by women, it is bound to be doomed. It is generally assumed that women suffer the most physical, verbal and psychological violence from men. However, men become victims of gendered violence as well. The sad reality is that men and women both remain at the receiving end of violence. However, the giving end is majorly held by men, men in power over women and non-binary and men in power over other men in Brahmanical patriarchy in the Indian context. While *Matrubhoomi* gives a grotesque commentary on society and the nature of man in times of desperation, *The Passion of New Eve* is a satire on gender roles. At the same time, *I Have Become the Tide* shows how much violence affects men.

The violence targeted towards men involves more physical violence than mental or emotional violence as opposed to violence targeted towards women. Since the concept of honour is imposed on women’s bodies, the prime target of violence for women becomes the female anatomy. Thus, through the texts,

*Matrubhoomi: A Nation Without Women, I Have Become the Tide* and *The Passion of New Eve*, this paper has attempted to study the similarities and differences in the imposition of violence on men and women and the similarity in the treatment of women in both Indian and Western societies despite cultural and religious differences.

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## About the Contributors

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