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Research Articles on



Gender Politics in Contemporary Society



Gender Politics in Contemporary Society

International Journal of English and Studies (IJOES)

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Ever since its birth on that warm morning of July 1966, Providence College for Women, has endeavored to take giant strides of progress under the able leadership of the Management, committed Principals and their team of staff. The institution is managed and run by the sisters of St. Joseph of Tarbes, a Catholic minority institution registered under the Nilgiris St. Joseph's Sisters Society. The institution was started for the benefit of higher education of the young women and others of the locality and the Catholic community, in addition it opens wide its arms to others from far and wide without distinction of caste or creed. The College celebrated its Golden Jubilee during the year 2015-2016. Providence College nestles in a sprawling emerald green campus in the suburbs of the rustic town of Coonoor situated about six km, en route the Kotagiri-Coonoor Road way. The College also provides resident students with hostel facilities. The hostel is a place where they are cared for and loved and made to feel at home.

PG & Research Department of English

The Department of English, Providence College has a long- standing tradition of quality and excellence since its inception in 1966. With only 11 students to start with, the department has grown from strength to strength in these fifty glorious years. The lyrics of the college song: "Among the birds and flowers of Providence" was composed by Sr. Patricia Adams, a faculty of the department. The department has a strong tradition of acting. In the earlier years, under the leadership of Mrs. Padmini Adiseshiah and Sr., Margaret Mary plays of professional caliber were staged off- and on-campus. Pageants, music, debates and all liberal arts that are exclusive to the department saw an extraordinary footing from its beginning. At present with around 220 students both in U.G. and P.G., the department is one of the biggest in staff and student member. The department has set its standard on quality teaching and learning and also the overall development of training students in language, literature, communication and liberal arts. The objective is to update academic performance and to build a holistic personality.

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**Innocent Lambs, Vile Witches and Charming Princes - A Stereotypical
Gender Study on Select Grimm's Fairy Tales**

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India

Abstract

Fairy Tales have always played a vital role in a child's growth. However, since a lot of the fairy tales date back hundreds and thousands of years, the ideals and values presented in them hold an outdated air to them. Gender stereotypes like damsels-in-distress who require the help of a charming prince, and evil women who value their pride and beauty more than another life are sprinkled throughout the classic fairy tales. The selected fairy tales for the study are *Little Briar-Rose* and *Little Snow-White* by the Grimm Brothers.

Keywords: Briar Rose, Fairy Tales, Gender Stereotypes, Grimm's Tales, Sleeping Beauty, Snow White.

Fairy Tales have always been a source of dreams for some and a source of nightmares for others. Some people absorb the essence of it and treasure it along with their childhood memories. Some, on the other hand, never grow out of it until the darker realities of the world steal the sweet whispers of these dreams and twist them into nightmares. Gender issues have prevailed for time immemorial in the world and they're presented in most of the tales that have survived the test of time. This paper deals centrally with the gender stereotypes presented in one of the earliest forms of literature, fairy tales. The selected fairy tales for the study are *Little Briar-Rose* and *Little Snow-White* by the Grimm Brothers.

Fairy tales find their roots in Oral folktales passed down the ages by word of mouth. Researchers in Durham and Lisbon have traced the earliest tales to the Bronze Age dated nearly six thousand years ago. The tale, *The Smith and the Devil* (*The Deal with the Devil*) is considered to be one of the earliest tales to date. The infamous tale, *Jack in the Beanstalk* (*The Boy Who Stole the Ogre's Treasure*) is dated five thousand years ago. Classic tales like *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Rumpelstiltskin* have survived the ordeal of four thousand years, according to the research. According to an interview by the researchers for BBC News entitled, *Fairy*

Tale Origins Thousands of Years Old, Researchers say, “Some of these stories go back much further than the earliest literary record and indeed further back than Classical Mythology - some versions of these stories appear in Latin and Greek texts - but our findings suggest they are much older than that”. Though fairy tales have existed for thousands of years, the term, ‘Fairy Tale’ itself was coined only in 1697 by Madame d’Aulnoy.

Jacob Ludwig Karl Grimm (1785-1863) and Wilhelm Carl Grimm (1786 - 1859) were born in Hanan, Germany. They are renowned philologists, cultural researchers, lexicographers, and authors. They were ordinary desk workers but hearing tales from travelers who recited tales from all over the country left a deep impression on them. They decided to showcase the richness of Germany’s folklore. It inspired them immensely to compile all of the household tales under the title, *Children’s and Household Tales* published in December 1812. It was very dark for the taste of the parents, so it was heavily edited in the subsequent editions.

The tale, *Little Briar-Rose*, is more commonly known today as *Sleeping Beauty*. There was a King and Queen who longed to have a child and when they were blessed with a princess, they were so ecstatic that they organized a grand feast for everyone. Since they had only twelve sets of golden plates and spoons, they invited only twelve Wise Women, leaving out the last one. This enraged the latter. So, during the feast, she left a curse that at the age of fifteen, the princess would prick her hand on a spindle and drop dead. Another Wise Woman modified it so that the princess would sleep for a century. Little Briar falls asleep after pricking her finger at fifteen. This leads to the whole castle falling asleep and thorns covering it up. A hundred years later, a prince comes across Briar and he kisses her which wakes her up along with the rest of the castle. They get married and live happily ever after.

The story of *Little Snow-White* shows the story of a princess who was as white and beautiful as snow. Her stepmother had a magical looking-glass that answered her questions. The Queen always asked the looking-glass about the fairest lady in the kingdom and it always answered that it was her which immensely satisfied her narcissistic tendencies. However, as her step-daughter, Snow-White grew up, she became more and more beautiful and the Queen was constantly jealous of her. Her last straw was the looking-glass stating that Snow-White was the fairest of all people. In a fit of anger, she sent a huntsman to kill Snow-White but the man pitied her and so, he set her free in a forest. Snow-White meets seven dwarfs who work in a mine and they all live a happy life till the Queen learns that she’s alive.

She tries to kill her step-daughter constantly and almost succeeds but she's saved by a prince. They both get married and live happily ever after.

Fairy tales portray most of the female protagonists as innocent and charming creatures that require the help of a male to escape the clutches of an evil person, in most cases, a woman. This leads to a lot of misconceptions created in children at a young age that a woman needs the help of a Prince Charming who would come astride a horse, riding to save the day. In the tale, *Little Briar-Rose*, the beautiful princess is cursed to fall asleep after pricking her fingers on a spindle at the age of fifteen. So, on her fifteenth birthday, she comes across a spindle in the possession of an old woman and fulfills the curse. After Briar falls asleep, the whole castle along with the humans and animals falls asleep. Thorny vines covered the hedge of the castle so thickly that no one was able to enter the legendary castle. A hundred years later, a prince came across it and was able to enter the castle freely. He found the sleeping inmates of the castle and came across Briar's room. He was immediately enthralled by the sleeping beauty, "There she lay, so beautiful that he could not turn his eyes away; and he stooped down and gave her a kiss. But as soon as he kissed her, Briar-rose opened her eyes and awoke, and looked at him sweetly" (225). In the modern day, this would lead to a serious case of assault. Young children should be taught that young princesses are not helplessly asleep waiting for a magical kiss from a prince to wake them up. It's pertinent that they understand that there is nothing romantic about getting kissed awake by a stranger or, the consequences would be extremely dire.

Similarly, in the tale of *Little Snow-White*, the Queen orders a huntsman to kill Snow-White but he feels bad for her. So, he sets her free. The Queen later learns of this and tries to kill Snow-White herself. She disguises herself and forces her stepdaughter to eat a poisoned apple. A piece of it gets stuck in Snow-White's throat which restricts her breathing and leads to a fainting spell. When the seven dwarfs find her, they all think she's dead and mourn her death. They didn't want to bury her underground as they wouldn't be able to see her again, so they placed her in a transparent casket which caught the eye of a passing prince on a horse. He fell in love at first sight with Snow-White. Though he learns that she's dead, he still wants to take her casket with him so that he can admire her fair beauty. He pleads with the dwarfs for her body, "Let me have it as a gift, for I cannot live without seeing Snow-White. I will honour and prize her as my dearest possession" (242). The dwarfs take pity on him and agree. During the journey back, the apple lodged in Snow-White's

throat came out of her throat. The prince was overjoyed to see her alive, so he immediately declares his love and marries her. Though this fairytale is a classic in every sense of the word, it still follows the general stereotype of a helpless damsel-in-distress who is saved by a prince-on-horseback.

The evil characters in fairy tales typically have certain characteristics attributed to them. Most of the evil characters are typically women presented in the forms of cruel mothers, cunning stepmothers, and horrible witches. They are usually ugly and fat with cold eyes and steely hands that harm children. Some women are portrayed as conventionally beautiful with grotesque hearts. However, when they appear in front of the main characters, they appear in forms that shine a light on the nature of their soul namely, vile, bitter, and old. In *Little Briar-Rose*, the depiction of the thirteenth Wise Woman is not given during the time of the feast. However, she is depicted during the fulfillment of the curse. Little Briar comes across the Wise Woman in disguise, "There in a little room sat an old woman with a spindle, busily spinning her flax" (222). After the curse, the King destroyed all the spindles in the kingdom but the curse was still fulfilled because of the woman.

The evil character in *Little Snow-White* is her own stepmother who was so overwrought with vanity in her own beauty that she couldn't stand to see her stepdaughter outshine her. She had a magical looking-glass and she always asked it questions. Her favorite one to ask was, "Looking-glass, Looking-glass, on the wall, / Who in this land is the fairest of all?" (237). Usually, the looking-glass would answer that it was her which made her happy but one day, the glass said that it was Snow-White which astounded the Queen. She ordered a huntsman to kill Snow-White and bring her heart as proof but the man didn't kill her. Instead, he brought the heart of a boar to the Queen who ate it thinking it was Snow-White's heart. Once she learns of the deception, she sets out to kill her stepdaughter herself. She disguises herself as an old woman to soften the gullible heart of Snow-White. Beauty plays a very important role in both tales. However, oldness is one of the typical stereotypes employed by fairy tale authors to portray evil characters. Tazeen Erum, in *The History of Gender Ideology in Brother Grimm's Fairy Tales* explores that, "...Snow White and Sleeping Beauty, all have pretty faced and highlight the importance of beauty in a love relationship. Thus, beauty and romance establish a correlation in fairy tales. Perhaps fairy tales were the first recorded documents that propounded the idea that beautiful ladies had a remarkably better chance to attain happiness in life"

(4). The thought is echoed by Abigail Gurvich, in *Gender Roles as Taught by Fairy Tales* where it's highlighted:

Fairy tales were a tool, used to teach lessons to children, including the roles expected of them based on their gender. Particularly young girls. Young girls are taught how to properly behave and present themselves, as well as how not to behave... By teaching young girls that their only worth is their appearance, and that a less attractive woman is a rival who will want to hurt them, the story enforced the ideas in the girls of the time that the only things that mattered were appearance and innocence.

Fairy tales are a staple in every child's life. The tales, *Little Briar-Rose* and *Little Snow-White* are classics but they are really outdated which provides a narrow mindset on the masculinity of a man and the subservient nature of a woman. Alice Neikirk, in the essay entitled, "...*Happily Ever After*" (*or What Fairytales Teach Girls About Being Women*) notes that, "Fairytales plant an influential seed in the minds of children and as children grow, these subtle concepts morph into their perspective of reality... The themes in fairytales that reward female submissiveness and place an emphasis on beauty remain influential long after the fairytale is over" (41). Modern retellings of fairy tales have crafted a more inclusive nature in terms of gender roles but the old tales still have an iron clad hold in most households. Unless negative gender stereotypes are rooted out from a very young age, the world will still revolve around grown adults holding on to narrow mindsets and narrower hearts for gender inclusions.

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Lost India's Natives: The Invisible Third Gender based on *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story* by A Revathi

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Abstract

This paper explores the experiences of India's lost natives, specifically the invisible third-gender individuals who face more marginalization and oppression compared to the diverse mainstream population. The focus is on the autobiographical work by A Revathi, *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story*, which delves into the psychological aspects of transgender life and how trauma can disrupt and reshape gender, sex, and sexual identity, ultimately leading to the emergence of new ethical perspectives on sexual diversity. Revathi's personal narrative provides valuable insights into the connection between the body and psyche, the formation of identity, the complexities of third-gender sexuality, and the transformative effects of trauma on transgender individuals.

Keywords: Gender identity, Hijras, Third-gender, Trauma.

In India, the Hijra community faces significant backwardness and endures social exclusion, as they are forced to live on the fringes of Indian society. They encounter ostracism, mockery, and verbal abuse wherever they go, and any form of association with them is considered taboo. Hijras earn a living by performing blessings through singing badhai on ceremonial occasions and engaging in sex work on certain occasions. Despite democratic ideals of equal rights for all individuals, the Hijras had no legal recognition until 15 April 2014. On that day, the Supreme Court of India acknowledged transgender as the third gender in Indian law and called for the government to provide them with rightful inclusion in the country. Justice KS Radhakrishnan, in his ruling, stated, "Seldom does our society realize or care to realize the trauma, agony, and pain experienced by the members of the transgender community, nor do we appreciate the innate feelings of those individuals whose minds and bodies do not align with their biological sex" (1). Any attempts made by Hijras to seek alternative employment, apart from begging or performing blessings, are thwarted, reinforcing their societal relegation.

Reema Nagarajan's news article *First Count of Third Gender in India*, published in TOI, reported that there are approximately 4,90,000 transgender males in India (Nagarajan). These individuals face daily prejudice, humiliation, and harassment, which profoundly impact their self-acceptance and make them particularly vulnerable to violence, sexual assault, molestation, and rape. Unfortunately, these incidents often go unreported to the police due to the transgender community's silence, stemming from their low levels of education and employment. They also refrain from seeking healthcare and avoid public facilities such as theatres, malls, and restaurants due to the fear of being judged and ridiculed, as well as the lack of basic amenities like transgender toilets. This paper focuses on Revathi's autobiography, *The Truth About Me*, which explores the lives, culture, desires, trauma, and the hesitancy of transgender individuals to express themselves.

Since the hijras are marginalized in society, they are illiterate and are compelled to engage in begging, singing, dancing, and sex work. Despite the fact that several of them were elected as mayors and legislators in previous municipal elections, their victory was accounted for by voter resentment of the incumbent candidates rather than their own skill. As a consequence, they were unable to do anything substantial throughout their lifetime and were forced to serve as puppets in the hands of powerful individuals. The knowledge of their lives, reality, differences, cultures, and experiences in such ostracizing circumstances is very limited. We lack knowledge of what happens inside their existence as very few attempts have been made to express themselves through writing stories, songs, and autobiographies. As a consequence, neither the government nor social organizations can devise action plans or programs to improve their status or circumstances. Following the judgment, the government issued orders directing its departments to ensure acceptance of the transgender community as a distinct cultural identity and stating a need to alleviate discrimination and deprivation of this community to protect the rights of TG students. Many organizations have been directed to construct TG-friendly infrastructure such as washrooms and restrooms through aids for TG students to study without fear, stigma, or humiliation.

No ethnographic research on TG subcultures has been done to refute various misconceptions about this society that have been in public discourse since ancient times. There are several videos on Facebook and Google about their dancing, singing, and costuming, but none of them dive into their mind and daily struggles in India. These non-serious depictions of transgender individuals highlight their

complexity. According to Judge P. Sathasivam's *Rights of Transgender People - Sensitizing Officers to Provide Access to Justice* lecture in the Refresher Course for Civil Judges at Tamil Nadu State Judicial Academy, he states, “ ‘transgender’ has become an ‘umbrella word’ that is used to describe a wide range of identities and experience... whose appearance or characteristics are perceived to be gender atypical” (1).

Sara Hosey's research on *One of Us: Identity and Community in Contemporary Fiction* highlights a distinct facet of transgender identity in society as the transgender's abnormal physical traits are normal and natural to them, “the narrator faces obstacles because of other's understanding of her body, rather than because of her body's functioning or impairment” (38). Minu Ittyipe states, “the assigned gender identity is at variance with their mental and emotional state... despite the trauma, there seems to be a high degree of yearning to break free from the shackles of a body that imprisons them” (31). Transgender people are socially excluded from birth. If a boy acts feminine, Indian parents beat, reprimand, and threaten him, as the next step eviction or disownment follows. As a consequence, transsexuals never inherit their rightful property. This makes their lives unstable and vulnerable to physical and verbal abuse, forced sex, and police arrests, making ‘earning a living’ torturous. Despite welfare efforts in states like Tamil Nadu like Transgender Women Welfare Board, they cannot find work as they lack health and public amenities.

According to the British Criminal Tribes Act 1871 and the Indian Criminal Code section 377, the police maintain a database of all local eunuchs to keep an eye on them since they are considered criminals by birth, as stated by Sathasivam in his lecture *Rights of Transgender People - Sensitizing Officers to Provide Access to Justice*, “any eunuch so registered who appears dressed or ornamented like a woman in a public street... or who denies or plays music or takes part in any public exhibition... could be arrested without warrant” (3-4). Hence, they have received no relief, and their illiteracy worsens their plight. The dire circumstances faced by the transgender community in India underscore the urgent need for comprehensive understanding, empathy, and inclusive policies to address their marginalized status and provide them with the opportunities and rights they deserve.

People's attitudes regarding transgender individuals have evolved since they acquired voting rights, but much more has to be done to embrace them as human beings with the freedom to be themselves. According to Marcus E. Green's *Gramsci*

and Subaltern Struggles Today: Spontaneity, Political Organization, and Occupy Wall Street, a subaltern group, it lacks “conscious leadership” and the “restless desire or moment to revolt” (1). Whereas ancient Indian epics include Kinnars, Shikhandi, and Brihannala, no transgender character is mentioned, as no one writes about them. Elie Clare, a transgender poet, speculates on this lack of self-writing as, “Grappling with this lack of self-writing by or accurate information about these individuals... I want to hear the stories, but like the stories of other marginalized people, they were most often never told, but rather eaten up, thrown away, lost in the daily grind of survival” (78). The absence of transgender characters and narratives in ancient Indian literature highlights the historical erasure and silence surrounding their experiences. This lack of representation perpetuates the invisibility and marginalization of transgender individuals, making it crucial to amplify their voices and stories. By providing platforms for self-expression and raising awareness about their struggles, society can begin to address the deep-rooted discrimination and prejudices faced by the transgender community.

A Revathi's *The Truth About Me* is a ground-breaking hijra autobiography that sheds light on the issues faced by the transgender community. Revathi's *Preface* succinctly captures the essence of *The Truth About Me*:

In our society, we often speak the language of rights loud and clear. But do the marginalized have access to their rights? Individuals are denied their rights in the name of sex, sexuality, caste, and religion. They have to either arrive at compromise or engage in a struggle. I am one such individual who has been marginalized because I was born a male and wanted to live my life as a woman. *The Truth About Me* is about my everyday experience of discrimination, ridicule, and pain; it is also about my endurance and my joys. As a hijra, I get pushed to the fringes of society. Yet I dared to share my innermost life with you - about being a hijra... My aim is to introduce to the readers the lives of hijras, their distinct culture, and their dreams and desire (1).

This narrative serves as an enlightening exploration of hijra's existence in India, with the protagonist, Doriaswamy which is Revathi's birth name, undergoing a transformation as her family observes her feminine traits and mindset. She faces physical punishment, chastisement, and constant pressure to conform to societal expectations of masculinity. Reflecting on her experiences, she recalls being called out for ‘not being brave like a boy’ and realizing that behaving like a girl felt natural to her. Despite the external pressures, she couldn't suppress her inherent femininity,

stating, “It was like eating for me - just as I would not stop eating because someone asked me not to eat. I felt I could not stop being a girl because others told me not to be so” (7). As the narrative progresses, Revathi portrays her journey as Chandramathi in Harischandra, where she feels a deep sense of self-expression, “To the world, it appeared that I was dressing up and playing a woman, but inside, I felt I was a woman” (12). Her unique experiences and identity spark her curiosity about other individuals like her in Dindigul, Erode, and Bombay, where she seeks connections and a sense of belonging. Through Revathi's candid storytelling, *The Truth About Me* brings to light the complexities and lived realities of hijras in Indian society, challenging stereotypes and fostering understanding and empathy. It serves as a powerful tool for raising awareness and promoting acceptance of transgender individuals and their struggles.

She embarks on a journey away from her hometown to join the jamaat and undergo nirvaanam, a significant step in her transformation, becoming a chela in Dindigul. However, she soon discovers the immense challenges that come with embracing her transgender identity, guided by her guru. When she returns home to visit her parents, she is subjected to a brutal beating, a consequence of bringing dishonor to her family. Recounting the traumatic incident, she describes, “He beat me hard mindlessly, yelling that he wanted to kill me, I who had dared to run away... I was beaten on my legs, on my back, and finally, my brother brought the bat down heavily on my head... there was blood all over, flowing, warm... as I had been spotted in women's clothes, begging in the apple market” (55-56). Amidst the turmoil, she seeks solace and understanding through prayer at the shrine of the Samayapuram temple, after her head is shaved as a symbolic act. In her plea to the deity, she questions the suffering she endures, saying, “Amma! Why must I suffer like this... I have known only pain... It was you who made me in form but with female feelings. And now, for your crime, I am being punished in your own shrine... Can't you understand another woman's feelings?” (57). The narrative delves further into Revathi's experiences, particularly during her nirvaanam surgery. She vividly describes the agonizing pain she endured, writhing for nearly two hours and feeling an intense pressure on her chest. The experience is so harrowing that she even contemplates the possibility of death, stating, “at that time it seemed as if I would surely die” (75). Throughout her journey, she faces rejection and ridicule from society. Questioning the prejudice and discrimination she encounters, she reflects on the burden that accompanies the daily life of a hijra, noting, “Do people harass those

who are men and women when they go out with their families? Why a crippled person, a blind person - even they attract pity and people help them... but we - we are not considered human” (83). Revathi's account paints a poignant picture of the hardships, physical and emotional pain, and societal marginalization experienced by hijras in India. Her story serves as a powerful testament to the urgent need for understanding, acceptance, and change in society's perception of transgender individuals.

As time passes, Revathi's relationship with her family deteriorates and her father and siblings divide the ancestral property, giving her a meager sum to relinquish her claim. Despite her efforts to maintain silence and distance, they continue to interfere in her life. Her brothers express their disapproval and unleash their anger upon her when they discover her friendship with a movie theatre employee in Namakkal. They harshly chastise her, using derogatory language, saying, “You Pottai motherfucker, you are a man, after all. We did not mind you traipsing around in a sari. But how dare you want a husband? If we hear that he is visiting you again, be sure that we'll tear your guts out... we'll finish you off as well” (184). In Indian culture, finding love and companionship is particularly challenging for transgender individuals, and Revathi's desire for a partner is met with hostility from her own family. Consequently, her landlord evicts her, further exacerbating her instability and vulnerability.

Engaging in sex work becomes Revathi's means of survival, but it exposes her to significant risks and dangers. She faces regular harassment from the police, who demand money from her and encounters brutal treatment from customers. Her life in Mumbai is characterized by excruciating pain and degradation, as she struggles to find alternative employment. She laments the plight of individuals like her, stating, “people like us always have problems. If you go out to do sex work, you get into trouble with rowdies, you bribe the police... if at times we don't earn enough, and they go to shops and beg” (190). Wherever she goes, whether it is Bangalore or Hyderabad, she faces bullying, stone-throwing, tomato-throwing, and verbal abuse as common occurrences.

One heartbreaking incident involves an encounter with a police officer while she is pretending to engage in sex work. Desperate and vulnerable, Revathi falls at the officer's feet, pleading for mercy. Instead, he responds with cruelty and violence. She describes the dehumanizing experience, recounting, “I fell at the policeman's feet. He kicked me with his boots... asked me to take off my clothes - right there,

while the prisoner was watching. I pleaded with him and wept... when I was standing naked, he struck his lathi where I had had my operation... struck at that part with his lathi... there was not a soul there to take pity on me” (206-208). Revathi's life is filled with continuous trials and hardships, no matter where she goes. The discrimination, violence, and abuse she endures reflect the harsh reality faced by many transgender individuals in India. Her story serves as a powerful reminder of the urgent need for societal change, acceptance, and the protection of transgender rights.

In another distressing incident, she finds herself in a vulnerable position when a rowdy strips her naked on the road. Despite several onlookers witnessing the assault, no one comes to her aid, further emphasizing the terrible existence faced by hijras in India. Revathi's autobiography not only sheds light on the hardships they endure but also illuminates the unique culture and values of the hijra community. Due to their marginalization, status as a sexual minority, and widespread unacceptance in India, hijras often find solace and support within their own group. Revathi's job as an office assistant at Sangama offers reassurance to readers as the organization actively works to support sexual minorities through seminars, workshops, and public forums.

Although Revathi's narrative explicitly portrays her family's suffering, she never dominates the stories of others. As highlighted by Minu Ittyipe in *A Clap is Affirmative*, hijra “life tales often begin with an early awareness of their difference, leading to confusion, varying degrees of rejection, and ultimately the triumphant joy of claiming their true selves” (50). Through their memoirs, hijras offer readers and society a glimpse into a world that has seldom been understood or explored. These accounts reveal the profound yearning for freedom to proclaim their individuality, introducing a new world of experiences to readers and challenging societal perceptions.

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The Woman of *A Song of Ice and Fire* Who Fit into More Than One Shoe, Cersei Lannister

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Abstract

Women have been the object of classification ever since the beginning of time. Literature, especially fantasy literature has promoted this trend of categorising women. This paper hopes to analyse George R. R. Martin's portrayal of women in his work *A Song of Ice and Fire* as those who are far more complex beings and not even close to traditional conception. The scope of this paper is limited and thus the analysis is narrowed down to one prominent character of the novel series, Cersei Lannister. There is more than meets the eye to this vicious woman who is also a helpless, yet loving mother, and a child longing for her father's approval.

Keywords: *A Song of Ice and Fire*, Cersei Lannister, Empowerment, Gender disparity, George R. R. Martin, Tropes, Women empowerment.

Categorising women into general tropes has been the trend set by fantasy literature around the world across time. Womanly features have been generalised and worse, made exclusive. There are many general tropes like the 'warrior woman', 'evil queen', and the like, and these characters do not budge from their assigned personalities, neither do they adopt an extra one nor do they dispose of the present. The scope of low fantasy is limited and thus the author cannot be expected to spend pages describing the thoughts and feelings of a character which is important in personality development. Whereas in high fantasy literature, the author is at liberty to make characters be born, perform actions, learn, and grow in front of the readers' eyes. Being a work of high fantasy, George R. R. Martin has developed his characters at a comprehensible pace in a long span of five books so far in *A Song of Ice and Fire* series. The women of his novel series do not easily fit into tropes and if they do, they do so into more than one trope. Additionally, unlike other fantastical works, they are given equal importance here. Cersei Lannister is treated with as much importance as Catelyn Stark or Brienne of Tarth, and they do not fall into the

nonsensical tropes of ‘evil queen’, ‘loving mother’, and ‘warrior woman’ (respectively) just like that. Rhiannon Thomas in his article *A Song of Ice and Fire: Misogynistic or Feministic* writes:

A Song of Ice and Fire is the only fantasy series I’ve seen that features a wide variety of complex female characters and treats them all as though they have equal worth. They don’t fall into easily accessible (or unrealistic) tropes...although these labels could describe the vague concepts of many characters. Arya and Sansa are given equal importance and respect in the narrative, despite the fact that one is an emotionally damaged, sword-wielding rebel and one is a quietly dignified romantic lady, and their narratives even mirror one another as they continue through the books.

Apart from the characters mentioned above, an additional female character who is noteworthy for her complexity is Brienne of Tarth. She is a knight, which is quite unusual for a woman of the Middle Ages. Furthermore, to show how complex a woman Brienne is, it can rightly be said that her disposition is a conglomeration of both Arya and Sansa Stark. She is a warrior, determined, and possesses a strong sword hand like Arya, but she is also in quest of honour and romance. Therefore, Brienne does not just fit into the trope of the strong warrior woman, but she is also a lady of a noble house and desires companionship and romance.

This paper deals with such a complex character who cannot step into just one trope; in fact, the readers are exposed to a variety of tropes with this particular character, Cersei Lannister.

Cersei of *A Song of Ice and Fire* is the queen of Westeros when the novel begins but the readers are not introduced to her point-of-view chapter until the fourth book of the series, *A Feast for Crows*. Her story until this book is narrated by external characters and presented mostly through male point-of-view chapters. If one thing is clear from her perception by other characters, it is that she is a woman of pride, manipulative and clever, unwilling to step back from her position of power, and willing to protect her very few dear ones at any cost. Cersei is well aware of her position as a ‘mere’ woman in a patriarchal world and so holds on tight to her royal state of power. Her younger brother Tyrion, one of the characters through whom most of Cersei’s disposition is revealed notes: “[Cersei has] always resented being excluded from power on account of her sex” (Storm of Swords, 909). For the record,

despite being the most powerful woman of Westeros, she is oftentimes, the most objected to of male misogyny.

Cersei had been tossed around in the hands of different men since her childhood. She was the daughter of the fearsome lord Tywin Lannister of the wealthiest noble house Lannister of Castle Rock. Her affluent birth made her a desirable object of political alliances, in simpler words, marriage of political convenience. This is not surprising given that Martin had his influences set in the social arena of medieval England. Lord Tywin had fathered two other children, both males, one the all-convenient Jaime Lannister, and the other not so convenient, the ‘cripple’ Tyrion Lannister. While Jaime followed his passion for becoming a knight, and Tyrion whiled away his time in the dark corners of libraries, indulging in exquisite red wine from Dorne and exotic women from across the Narrow Sea, Cersei was forced to be a ‘lady’ and please the man her father would choose. Lord Tywin was hell-bent on using Cersei as a means of linking House Lannister to the Crown. He had plans of wedding her to the handsome prince Rhaegar Targaryen before Robert Baratheon usurped the throne as a result of his infamous rebellion. This leads to a sudden change in Tywin’s plans, drastically consequent in Cersei’s life. She ends up marrying a stranger who killed the man she believed she would be spending the rest of her life with. In spite of Cersei being the cleverest and bravest of Tywin’s children on many levels, she and her opinions were often ignored for being a woman.

Because of these reasons, Cersei had carved a niche for herself in the kingdom and built a protective realm around her being with her manipulative skills. She had dreamt of being the queen of Westeros in her childhood, but reality turned out to be a nightmare, for her marriage was nothing but a rotting puppet show. Over the years, Cersei and Robert had grown to hate each other. Being King made out of Robert a lethargic man given into carnal passions as opposed to the warrior he was before being crowned. Cersei on the other hand was engaged in an incestuous relationship with her brother Jaime Lannister. Despite all these errs in her marriage, she was bound to the diplomatic importance of it and held harmony even when she was invisible to her husband. Above all, she also knew that whatever power she held as a woman vested in her position as the queen and a legal divorce would mean the end of this power, and therefore she could not risk it. Her queenship empowered her.

Cersei's empowerment process as a woman might seem questionable. She even goes to the extent of eliminating the King for she could not possibly divorce him as it might lead to a civil war, and she would eventually lose whatever power she currently held, the very man responsible for her queenship from her life to gain more power. But one cannot completely shun Cersei for resorting to the sort of means she adopts, even though extremely horrifying at some points, to achieve her ends. It is to be understood that it is her survival mechanism at play in a castle and kingdom full of patriarchal eyes awaiting her disposal. Here it is to be noted that Cersei was never loved by Robert. He, in fact, was in love with Lyanna Stark who was killed during his rebellion by Rhaegar Targaryen. He never fathered any children with Cersei, (rather he fathered many bastard children all over Westeros) but her children were all pure Lannister blood, born of the incestuous relationship between her and Jaime. Her love for Jaime has multiple underlying meanings. It was important for Cersei to bear children because otherwise, she would be forced to step down from her position for failing to produce an heir. Having 'pure bred' Lannister children meant that she might be able to stay in King's Landing forever.

Cersei believes that a woman has many weapons at her disposal, and among them is the one between her legs. When a naive and dreamy Sansa comes to King's Landing as her son's betrothed, she tries to advise her in the words she knows, however shocking it might be: "tears are not a woman's only weapon. You've got another one between your legs, and you'd best learn to use it" (*Clash of Kings*, 847).

Cersei's manipulative powers rise into play after the death of her husband when she serves as the queen's consort. She fills the court with Lannisters. The different roles of the queen like regent, consort, mother, and their influence were all viewed as threats in medieval Europe and this might have been Martin's influence in portraying Cersei as an even more empowered woman after becoming the queen consort to her son. "Councillors worried about the queen's access to the king; her capacity to persuade him in private to particular courses of action, often to use her influence in favour of her own kinsmen, were one recurrent anxiety" (Larrington, 108). This fear on the part of councillors of a queen may be viewed as the fear of women gaining access to royal affairs and empowering themselves.

All these manipulative circumstances might give the impression of Cersei being the evil queen, but the truth of the fact is that she is an overprotective mother

who craves her father's attention. Cersei's mother died giving birth to her brother Tyrion and thus she grew up as a child who did not have a womanly guidance in her life. Of course, she would have had the counsel of her septa but nothing equals the presence of a mother, and essentially, Cersei was clueless about being a good mother. Her actions to protect her children are justified when considering the purity of intention but they were unhealthy often. In conclusion, it is evident that Cersei is not someone who can be crushed into a convenient trope; she is much more than just an 'evil queen'.

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**Tone and Temper: A Vociferous and Vandalistic Vocalization in
Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale***

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Abstract

“Words are pale shadows of forgotten names. As names have power, words have power. Words can light fires in the minds of men. Words can bring tears from the hardest hearts” says Patrick Rothfuss in his novel, *The Name of The Wind*. Canadian Literature has always been noted for its vibrant content on landscape and human identity. Margaret Atwood is one among the popular Canadian writers who had won laurels to her nation with her works on various concepts of historical and dystopian fiction. *The Handmaid's Tale* that was published in 1985 describes various issues ranging from feminism to the dystopian world. The researcher attempts to talk about discrimination through language as a medium by inculcating the philosophy of Michael Foucault in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Keywords: - Discipline, Language, Supremacy, Tone, Voice.

Once I spoke of the sea to a brook, and the brook thought me but an imaginative exaggerator;

And once I spoke of a brook to the sea. And the sea thought me but a depreciative defamer.

Khalil Gibran

Patrick Rothfuss in his novel *The Name of the Wind* said, “Words are pale shadows of forgotten names. As names have power, words have power. Words can light fires in the minds of men. Words can bring tears from the hardest hearts” (734). Glancing over the successful history of mankind, readers can find that every government ruled with war and not with words. Right from Plato to the common

man, everyone has witnessed the importance of the art of speaking. If domination was seen more in terms of speech against man, it was seen even more against women. Women have always been suppressed in their right to speak yet when they were given the freedom to talk, they were allotted to speak only what was taught and there was no room for personal views. The authority over women was by both violence and love coated manipulation. Critics and authors have researched so much about women being dominated by men, but then the topic of women subjugating women has gone unnoticed.

The aim of the paper is to bring out the component that authority was not often from a man to a woman but were also from women conquering women by using language as a medium. The objective of choosing Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* is to familiarize the circumstance that women face double alienation and are deprived of their basic rights.

Canada is acknowledged primarily for its multiculturalism and climatic conditions. Moving down the history, readers can find that Canadian history was formed by travelers and explorers. Since the chief population of Canada was from the British, French and Aborigines, English and French have been their major divisions in terms of language and culture. During the ancient times, Canadian literature was subjected on the themes of geography, nationalism, immigration patterns and identity. In the recent era, writers from Canada focus more on failure, humor, ironies and urban concepts. Major John Richardson is called as the Father of Canadian Literature, who was remarkable for his imagination and war writings. With a variety of philosophies around, Canadian writing has its underline theme captivated by inferiority and national insecurity. Few famous writers from Canada are Margaret Atwood, famous for her *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), the 2013 Nobel Laureate Alice Munro, Rohinton Mistry, who is noted for his novel *Such a Long Journey* (1991) and Stephen Leacock who was the best-known English humorist in the world.

The most prevalent Canadian writer, Margaret Eleanor Atwood is a novelist, poet, teacher, literary critic and environmental activist. Her works fall into the genres of historical, speculative, climatic and dystopian fiction. Atwood's life spans from 1939 to present and most of her poems have been noted for their inspiration from mythology and fairy tales. Few of her themes include references to Canadian identity as portrayed in *Survival* (1972), where literature is seen as a symbol of survival.

Though she did not accept the fact of feminism dominating her novels, most of her writings have been termed as strong feministic works, as seen in *The Edible Women* (1969), *The Handmaids Tale* (1985) and *Lady Oracle* (1976). Apart from these Atwood's minor themes are animal rights, science fiction and political movements that were described in *Surfacing* (1972), *Cats Eye* (1988), *Oryx and Crake* (2003). Atwood also has numerous honorary degrees and awards; her latest being Emerson-Thoreau Medal in 2020.

The Handmaid's Tale is a dystopian novel that has its setting in the future United States of America, dominated powerfully by patriarchy. Set in the state of Gilead, where the fertility rates are diminished, fertile women are owned without their permission by a group of men called commanders. The novel begins after the death of the President of the United States, where women are suspended from their rights to earn, read, write and use money due to the new political change. The story is narrated from the perspective of the protagonist Offred, one of the handmaids in the Gilead government. The term handmaid is taken from The Bible, where in the Book of Genesis Rachel gets her handmaid Bilhah to bear children from Jacob because Rachel was infertile. Offred describes her life in the Red Center, her illegal relationship with her commander's servant Nick, the indoctrinations of Aunts, and her failed attempt to escape to Canada. Atwood concludes the fictional piece when Offred is found guilty for her mistakes and is taken by the secret police, not knowing what the future has for her. There is also a metafictional epilogue, where a conference is held in the year 2195, and the key speaker discusses about the Gilead Period where Offred's life was recorded onto a cassette. The novel portrays the themes of lost individual female freedom, suppression of women's reproductive rights and yearning for love and independency.

The term social discourse was framed by Michael Foucault, the French Philosopher in his work *The Archaeology of Knowledge* in 1969, who argued that power and knowledge were the main reasons for social war. Social discourse is often made up of regulated resentments between incompatible notions. Major writers of social discourse are Antonio Gramsci, Mikhail Bakhtin, Raymond Williams and Michael Foucault. At the outset, social discourse is analyzed by focusing on power relationships in society as expressed through language practices. Michael Foucault says that power is divided into two types, Empirical Power and Theoretical Power, where the former is derived from the powers down the history and the latter is from

the theories based on philosophies. Empirical Power is further divided into Sovereign Power, Disciplinary Power and Bio Power, each having its own distinguishing thoughts.

Disciplinary Power according to Foucault targets individuals where they are forced to create a self-control based on the rules bestowed upon them by the government. In this type, power is internalized and there is no need for an external force. From the theory based on power, Foucault argues that disciplinary power does not oppress individuals but renovates their patterns of conduct and interests. Focus is applied on the habit, skills and time of an individual and how they use it. In most of the cases, disciplinary power uses assessments, panels and surveillance for predestined goals.

The Handmaid's Tale has the disciplinary power of Foucault, where women are forbidden from their rights to speak as it is seen as a taboo to the regime of the Gilead government. As Michael Foucault in his *The Order of Discourse* quotes that, "The three great Systems of Exclusion which forge discourse- the forbidden speech, the division of madness and will to do truth" (243). Offred in the opening passage says, "We learned to whisper almost without sound... We learned to lip-read" (14), forbidden speech has been the opening theme of *The Handmaid's Tale*, as women are enforced to restrict their speech.

The handmaids have authorities over them to control and teach them lessons. They are called as Aunts who take charge of these handmaids and confine their freedom. One challenging figure in *The Handmaid's Tale* is Aunt Lydia and her concepts of 're-education'. Drawing a character sketch of Aunt Lydia, readers can find that she is responsible for the misogynistic statements in the novel and is also one of the least likable faces in the Gileadean regime. She has also been an eloquent speaker who knew the art of speaking, as Offred comments on her saying, "She has always known how to space her pauses" (289). Aunt Lydia's approach to freedom is a key to the dominated society as she claims it to be encouraging. She says, "There is more than one kind of freedom. Freedom to and freedom from. In the days of anarchy, it was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from. Don't underrate it" (34).

The manipulation of Aunt Lydia is so strong throughout the novel that describes how women were dominated by women, where at one-point women blame

a woman for a man's behavior. For instance, in the novel when the commander's servant Nick tries to take advantage of Offred by talking to her, even though Nick is not supposed to talk, Aunt Lydia says, "Of course some of them will try...All flesh is weak...they can't help it. God made them that way but he did not make you in that way. He made you different. It's up to you to set boundaries. Later you will be thanked" (55). Atwood has been ironic in commenting upon the use of Christian ideologies, where she portrays realistically as how people use God's words for their own convenience.

Foucault's argument of knowledge being power explains how Aunt Lydia's Biblical knowledge becomes the power over the handmaid. In every advice and command, Aunt Lydia has been taking passages from The Bible to claim her act of rule. An instance in the novel describes how Aunt Lydia made a handmaid called Janine to talk about how Janine was gangraped at fourteen and had an abortion. It was a pathetic incident that happened to Janine, but then there was no room for sympathy or empathy. This process was called as testifying in the Red Centre, where every time each handmaid narrates their story of pain, the Aunts manipulate the pain into a lesson and finally it is always the mistake of the woman and not the man.

Even though the gangrape was not Janine's fault, the Aunts made sure that Janine and the other handmaids understood it to be Janine's mistake. "But whose fault was it?... *Her* fault, *her* fault, *her* fault, we chant in unison. Who led them on?... *She* did. *She* did. *She* did. Why did God allow such a terrible thing to happen? Teach her a *lesson*. Teach her a *lesson*. Teach her a *lesson*" (82). This episode can be parallel to the one that Hester faced in the *Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne. In order to punish Hester for her sin of adultery, the Puritan society makes Hester stand on the scaffold near the market for an entire day. Standing on the scaffold in *The Scarlet Letter* represents revelation of sin and guilt for an unmade mistake, the same way the testifying process in *The Handmaid's Tale* represents the revelation of sin and acceptance of unmade mistake.

Another occurrence at the end of the novel describes how a man was killed by the handmaids since he committed the sin of adultery. The man is unnamed, but details provide that he was once a guardian, and he is convicted of rape, hence Aunt Lydia says that the penalty for rape is death. Even here, she uses the Biblical reference of Deuteronomy 22:23-29, that says, "...But if out in a country a man

happens to meet a young woman pledged to be married and rapes her, only the man who has done this shall die. Do nothing to the woman; she has committed no sin deserving death...” (NIV, 197). All the while when Aunt Lydia was explaining these, her tone and temper kept fluctuating so that the audience understood that what she was conveying was the truth. “Her [Aunt Lydia] voice trembles with rage, and a kind of triumph” (290).

Comparing the testifying event of Janine and penalty of the man, it can be noted that Aunt Lydia has used power according to the situation. Aunt Lydia said that it was Janine’s mistake for getting raped, even though the Biblical reference of Deuteronomy 22:26 that she later used for the man says, “Do nothing to the woman; she has committed no sin deserving death. This case is like that of someone who attacks and murders a neighbor” (NIV, 179). These incidents show how discourse is acknowledged as a form of social power. One particular idea can be portrayed in a way that, is both judicial and disputative by the mode it is use.

An example that Foucault uses is the mad man’s speech in his essay, *The Order of Discourse*, “It is curious to note that for centuries in Europe the speech of the madman was either not heard at all or else taken for the word of truth. It either fell into the void, being rejected as soon it was proffered, or else people deciphered it in a rationally, naïve or crafty, which they regarded as more rational than that of the sane” (240). The Aunts speech was only exercised and not recorded or listened to, only power was recognized by the aunts’ speeches. For their gain, these aunts use verses from The Bible to justify every unrighteous act that the handmaids were asked to do.

As Foucault disputed that disciplinary power tries to reconstruct the behavioral pattern and interest, the cyclic nature of women conquering women has become a reason for escapism and envy. In the Gilead regime, the aunts regulate the handmaids because if the aunts refuse, then the government will kill them. In order to escape the weapon of death, the aunts do the work that is assigned to them and accept their fates. As Michael Foucault in his essay *The Order of Discourse* states, “That in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality” (239). Hence these powers have been a reason to

keep the state under control. By joining the aunts, women escape the redundancy and consequent shipment to the infamous colonies.

But then, the impression that is thrown light here is, it's a one-man army concept that keeps ruling the entire state, the ratio can be 1:1000. So, if the population of the entire state stands against the one-man army, then problems can be sorted out and there will be no inconveniences. It was this impression that gained freedom for India from the British, it was this impression that made Hitler commit suicide as the entire world was against him, and it was this impression that made the ruling standards move from monarchy to anarchy in the history of the world.

Maybe if the Aunts in *The Handmaid's Tale* supported the other women, the Gilead government would not have thought about bringing the entire women race down. For its impossible to kill every woman in the state and then have a place full of fertile men for no use. In this process men and women would have gained equal rights and freedom. The willingness of the Aunts to live as slaves for their male masters have become a reason for fertile women to become captives of their commanders.

The Aunts behave like nurses and staff in a Mental Asylum. During the nineteenth century, the mental asylums were filled with patients and the psychiatrists were not the only observers of the patients. The nurses and staff working there were also observing the behavioral patterns of the patients so that the patient's condition was kept under surveillance. Just like the nurses noting the timing and habit of the patients, the Aunts in *The Handmaid's Tale* keep track of everything that the handmaids do.

The Aunts are complicit and are also among the worst offenders accountable for the psychosomatic exploitation of the handmaids. They even teach the women in the Red Center to betray other women, that is why women are sent in groups of two. As Offred says, "The truth is that she is my spy, as I am hers" (29). Aunt Lydia believes that what is done in Gilead is not wrong, it is just different and as time goes by it will become normalized. As she says, "Ordinary is just what you are used to. This may not seem ordinary to you now, but after a time it will. It will become ordinary" (43). It is here, the ideology of Helene Cixous can be compared. In Cixous essay *Sorties* published in 1975, she argues that "Woman is always on the side of

passivity... Either the woman is passive; or she doesn't exist" (283). The handmaids are expected to be in the same way in the novel.

The struggle that the handmaids faced under the rule of Aunts and the Commanders were similar to the conflict African women faced under the Britishers and Africans during the rule of British. This is called 'double alienation' as Sara Sulari in her *The Rhetoric of English India* points. The novels, *Color Purple* by Alice Walker and *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison gives a detailed account of how African men treated their women with violence and vehemence. An instance in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* describes how the protagonist Celia advises Harpo to ill-treat his wife Sophie because Celia was jealous of Sophie's strength. Celia says, "You have to let 'em know who got the upper hand. Nothing can do that better than a good sound beating" (35). This domestic violence that goes unnoticed later become state violence that is seen in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Imtiaz Dharker in her poem, *Purdah I* portray the piteous life of women who face rejection inside and outside the four walls of the world and is still expected to stay calm, "Voices speak inside us, echoing in the spaces we have just left" (254). The same can be reflected in *The Handmaid's Tale*, where at the end of the novel, the metafictional sequel comments on Offred's life saying, "The past is a great darkness, and filled with echoes. Voices may reach us from it; but what they say to us is imbued with the obscurity of the matrix out of which they come; and, try as we may, we cannot always decipher them precisely in the clearer light of our own day" (324). Even after struggling hard to record all her life events, Offred's life is never taken seriously, the concept of double alienation can be noted here. Offred was not given physical freedom in her past nor was she accepted of her mental freedom in the present.

The paper is an attempt to enlighten the concept that gender inequality and women dominated by women must be seen as a serious issue. The voices that have gone voiceless must be adhered with compassion. The twenty first century mankind should understand that women too have a voice with a tone that can be raised by temper. As Margaret Fuller in her essay, *Women in The Nineteenth Century* said, she is making a call for the woman who will teach women to be individuals. The researcher had attempted to bring an insight into the readers for a world where every human is treated with same dignity and respect.

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The Lady in the Painting: A Glimpse into the Hidden World of Pre-Raphaelite Women

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Abstract

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood is described by David Daiches as “a painter’s movement founded in 1848... in revolt against the eighteenth-century academicism which still prevailed in official artistic quarters where the achievements of, for example, Blake, Turner, Constable and Samuel Palmer were ignored.” As suggested by the name, it was a men-only group steeped in the culture of art, poetry and criticism, often using women as models and muses for their works. It is no surprise then, that several female artists and craftspeople from this era were erased from the turnstiles of history, for this movement arising from Victorian England is largely viewed as a male-centric one- though ironic, considering the lady immortalised in each of the brothers’ works. This paper explores that very lady in the painting and delves into her role, her depiction in the artwork, and the manner in which she slowly started breaking away from playing the part of the passive mannequin in the midst of this largely male-centric movement.

While glancing at the Pre-Raphaelite Brothers, a group of painters, poets and critics originating in 1848 London, one must take note of the mesmerising portraits of women born out of this movement, showcasing them in all their tabooed feminine glory. On the topic of the group’s origin and aim, David Daiches mentions:

The Pre Raphaelite-Brotherhood was originally a painter’s movement founded in 1848 by Dante Gabriel Rosetti (1828-82), William Holman Hunt (1827-1910), John Everett Millais (1829-96) and others, in revolt against the eighteenth-century academicism which still prevailed in official artistic quarters where the achievements of, for example, Blake, Turner, Constable and Samuel Palmer were ignored. The movement believed in simplicity and accuracy of detail, in freshness and directness and precision, and it looked to mediaeval art to find them...”

This Brotherhood, as suggested by the name, was a group of only men, whose aim was to “shake up the stuffy Victorian Establishment” ²(as elucidated by The Guardian), and to reject Raphael’s art form as promoted by the Royal Academy

at the time.

To dissect the female condition and perspective amidst this movement, one must observe the paintings she has been immortalised in made, of course, by the doting hand of the man, who was in turn, granted immortality too, in the pages of male-centric art history. Let us now delve into some of these works, before bringing the hushed lives of the females who modelled for the painters to the forefront.

John Everett Millais' 'Ophelia', one of the most notable pieces that arose out of this movement, channels the similarly-named character from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Millais artfully recreates her tragic death after she fell into a ditch while collecting blooming buds, driven to a state of madness and grief upon hearing the news of her lover, Hamlet, killing her father. Eyes half-shut in mysterious ecstasy, mouth slightly agape, perhaps crooning eerie melodies into the air (as suggested by Queen Gertrude while she recounts Ophelia's death to her brother in *Hamlet*), half submerged in a ditch where magnificent blooms lay scattered all around her delicately pale frame, Ophelia lies moments before death in Millais' ode to Shakespeare.

Elizabeth Siddall was the woman on the other end of Millais' easel. Day after day, for months on end, she would model for him in a bath of water slightly warmed by oil lamps placed underneath, even developing severe illness due to the uncomfortable London chill. Donning a delicate silver dress, floating passively as though she were one with the currents- she is the focal point, the tragic heroine brought to life in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. It is a point to be noted here, that enduring such severe conditions was not in vain for Siddall as she was using her earnings from such jobs to fund her artwork: watercolours of mediaeval scenes in stock Pre Raphaelite manner, even dabbling in poetry in the side which dealt with her unsuccessful marriage, the birth of her stillborn child, and other such instances from her life. However, her artistic practice was severely side-lined by her male counterparts' achievements- occurrence women were all too familiar with in the contemporary period. She eventually died from overdosing on the opiate, laudanum.

One must also pay heed to 'Lady Lilith' by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. According to Jewish literature, the enchantress Lilith was Adam's first wife. Rossetti placed lines from Goethe's *Faust* in the original frame to emphasise Lilith's

character: “Beware . . . for she excels all women in the magic of her locks, and when she twines them round a young man’s neck, she will not ever set him free again.”

The woman immortalised by Rossetti with the name of Fanny Cornforth. Many of his works captured her lovely face and mass of red hair before she passed away at the Sussex County Asylum, poor and suffering from dementia. Her portfolio of works posing for Rossetti as a model includes ‘Aurelia’, ‘Bocca Baciata’ (the kissed mouth, from a Boccaccio narrative), and ‘The Blue Bower’, which depicts her against a lavish background of oriental tiles. After she put on weight and Rossetti lost interest in her, she started working as his maid and was mercilessly referred to as "the elephant." However, she met her comeuppance in a series of auctions of artwork and other antiquities that she had "acquired" while residing with the family. Many of the valuables she stored in the "elephant hole" are now part of prestigious museums' collections, like the Delaware Art Museum. In 1909, she was buried in a common burial.

‘Mariana’, another one of Rossetti’s works, finds the following description on the Met Museum’s website:

Long attracted by Jane Burden Morris’s unconventional beauty, Rossetti placed her at the centre of this sheet, which he began as a head study, then developed to represent Mariana from Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure* and Tennyson’s poem *Mariana in the Moated Grange*. Her expression and dejected posture convey frustrated desire and weary resignation—in both sources, Mariana waits unhappily for a tarrying fiancé. The artist likely intended the theme to echo Jane’s real-life dilemma, as about 1868 her nine-year marriage to William Morris grew strained and she became increasingly close to Rossetti.”³

The model for the painting, Jane Morris, was married to the Pre-Raphaelite painter, William Morris. She embodied the Pre-Raphaelite ideals of beauty and was featured in several paintings, but lesser known is her tryst with the arts and crafts.

As a skilled embroiderer and hostess, she was actively involved in her self-fashioning and a pioneer of artistic dress: for instance, she created and embellished the unusual Blue Silk Dress that Rossetti depicts her wearing in his portrait of her from 1868. She was a successful embroiderer who collaborated with her sister,

Elizabeth Burden, to produce exquisite pieces besides using her expressive face to bring fabled figures like Proserpine and Pandora to life with Rosetti's stroke of the brush.

She was also a pioneer in the Arts & Crafts Movement as a designer and embroiderer. A year after her wedding, Morris and her spouse relocated to the Red House in Bexleyheath. Working with her husband, William Morris and their daughter, May Morris allowed her to hone her embroidery talents. They created textiles, embroidered work, and designs. Her artwork was transformed into stencils that could be applied to metal, glass, furniture, wallpaper, and ceilings. She was, therefore, much more than just a muse, for she produced legendary textile designs and embroideries for Morris & Co.

By placing these notable yet overshadowed women in mediaeval and mythological settings, the Brotherhood explored the taboo topics of adultery, motherhood, love and death. This came as a rude awakening to Victorian society as women here were regarded as barely more responsible than children: they were debarred, for example, from owning a bank account or voting. Success for them entailed marriage, children and the smooth functioning of domestic affairs.

One critic, Richard D. Altick states, "a woman was inferior to a man in all ways except the unique one that counted most [to a man]: her femininity. Her place was in the home, on a veritable pedestal if one could be afforded, and emphatically not in the world of affairs"⁴

Charles Petrie explains in his article, "Victorian Women Expected to be Idle and Ignorant," what exactly the Victorian man was looking for:

Innocence was what he demanded from the girls of his class, and they must not only be innocent but also give the outward impression of being innocent. White muslin, typical of virginal purity, clothes many a heroine, with delicate shades of blue and pink next in popularity. The stamp of masculine approval was placed upon ignorance of the world, meekness, lack of opinions, general helplessness and weakness; in short, recognition of female inferiority to the male."⁵

Therefore, this depiction of women in a light other than the sacrificial mother or the highly virtuous goddess-like figure was shocking for the largely orthodox society.

Among these stalwart “Brothers”, works of women were obscured considering their inferior position in society. Evelyn De Morgan was one such pioneer. Born Mary Evelyn Pickering in 1855, she was educated at home by the efforts of her mother, who desired her daughter to benefit as much as her sons. At age 15, she started taking drawing lessons and immediately realised that she was meant to be an artist. On her seventeenth birthday, she wrote: “Art is eternal, but life is short... I have not a moment to lose.”

In 1873, she was among the first women admitted to London's Slade School of Art, where she immediately honed her unique style. ‘Evelyn’, a name then used by both men and women, was her middle name, which she began to use for her artworks in an attempt to be evaluated on her abilities rather than her gender. *Tobias and the Angel*, her first piece to be sold, was produced in 1875.

De Morgan would develop loose compositional drawings, often of nude figures, and then add garments and other details. On a canvas with double lining, she would employ oil paint for the process. She frequently used demons to symbolise the Boer War and the First World War in her protest paintings, and is reported to have been an active voice in the cause of women's rights: the 1889 Declaration in Favour of Women's Suffrage bears her signature. She joined the likes of the “Brothers” as a result of her friendships with William Holman Hunt and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. And yet, her legacy remains largely unknown.

Maria Zambaco, another model and muse, made portrait medallions cast in metal. Joanna Mary Boyce, the sister of the pre-Raphaelite watercolourist, GP Boyce, is another female artist overlooked by the largely male-centric history. Her excellent artwork deemed her the critique of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, an eminent Pre-Raphaelite painter, as a “wonderfully gifted woman”.

These hitherto unnoticed individuals were finally given their own space in 2020 as a result of an exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery in London, which revealed their experiences through artwork, poetry, and embroidery. "Pre-Raphaelite Sisters," on display through January 26, looked at 12 women and their contributions to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood's male-dominated story. The lineup included names like Christina Rossetti, Effie Millais, and Elizabeth Siddal, among others. “Far from passive mannequins, [...] these women actively helped form the

Pre-Raphaelite movement as we know it,” says curator Jan Marsh in a statement. “It is time to acknowledge their agency and explore their contributions.”

Returning our roving eye to the Brotherhood’s immortal works, a shocking revelation comes to light: the absence of eye contact between the female subject of the work and the onlooker. The protagonist often appears to be lost in her world, head bowed in contemplation and sometimes, even death itself (‘Ophelia’, Millais). This absence of requited gaze reduces the lady to an object of desire incapable of fostering the same carnal pleasure she invokes. Edward Burne Jones’ ‘The Mirror of Venice’ exemplifies this. The women in this painting only exchange eye contact with their own reflections in an ethereal pool, ignoring the intruding eye completely. Rosetti’s ‘The Annunciation’, JW Waterhouse’s ‘The Lady of Shalott’, and even Millais’ prized ‘Ophelia’, all blatantly make use of this tradition, successfully erasing the lady herself. Given the models’ attractive achievements outside the frame, isn’t it imperative, then, for us to peer deeper into these paintings to reveal the humane figure hidden in them, overshadowed by centuries of misogyny, forsaken rights and male-centric retelling of history? Moreover, paying heed to Evelyn de Morgan, Maria Zambaco, and Joanna Mary Boyce’s treasures, one must contemplate the scores of other unnamed Pre- Pre-Raphaelite “Sisters” obscured by the sands of time, drowned out by the roar of the brothers’ male-centric legacy.

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**Gender - More an Experience than a Natural Feature: A Foucauldian
Approach to Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy***

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Abstract

Gender and sexuality have been discussed widely by theorists down the ages. Queer theory is a challenging and interesting area where identity issues recently legitimatised are analysed. Queer theory has emerged as a result of the popularised gay and lesbian culture. It basically encourages multiple interpretations of gender and sexual behaviour. Queer studies focus on the lives of people who are identified as queer. As an upcoming branch of study or theatrical speculation, it can be regarded as an outcome of gay/lesbian studies. It looks at and critiques anything that falls into normative and deviant categories particularly to do with sexual inclinations and identities. Queer theory insists that all sexual behaviours, identities and all categories of normative and deviant sexualities are social contrasts. Sexuality becomes a complex array in queer theory which interacts with what is normative and deviant and analyse its working under the rubric of what is 'natural', 'essential' and biological'.

The emergence of the theory in the 1990s, witnessed a visible shift from empirical research into gay/lesbian lives, towards readings of literacy and cultural texts, with a Foucauldian and Lacanian approach.

Keywords: Foucault, Gender, Lacan, Queer, Selvadurai.

Kath Browne and Catherine Nash in “Queer Methods and Methodologies” say, “Queer is after all connected to emotions as much as it is a body of theory” (41). The word “queer” can be considered as a noun, adjective and a verb. In whichever way it is taken, the meaning of it goes in opposition to “normalising” or “normal”. “Queer” was used in the beginning as a slang term to cite homosexuals. Today it is more of an umbrella term that covers sexual identities and discourse related primarily to gay and lesbian studies.

In recent writings, queer theory is applied not just to analyse the binary of homosexual and heterosexual, but it also recognises and breaks down other contributing factors like race, class, religion, etc. Queer theory questions the limitations in traditional identity politics. It focuses on recognition and self-identity. Theorists who have worked on this theory have attempted to pay attention to the problems in the biological classification of gender and traditional distinctions in particular culture.

Queer theory also has feminism as its basis. Women were the first to initiate and explore gender differences. Kath Browne and Catherine Nash in “Queer Methods and Methodologies” say:

... women were the first group to explore gender difference, so lesbians, gay men and other groups whose sexualities are defined against the norm of heterosexuality have been foremost in the exploration of the politics of sexuality. In challenging our most basic assumptions about sex, gender and sexuality, including the oppositions between heterosexual and homosexual, biological sex and culturally determined gender, and man and woman, these thinkers are developing new ways of exploring the issue of human identity. (7)

Theorists have taken efforts to establish their ideas on queer thereby giving a diverse range of critical thinking. One among them is Michel Foucault. He was a French philosopher associated with structuralist and post-structuralist movements. The first volume of his work *History of Sexuality* published in 1976, can be viewed as a study on modern sexuality. The book extended itself as a powerful narrative on Victorian sexual repression and moved through the 20th century showing progressive liberation. It was left incomplete even at the time of his death. Foucault rejected what was called “repressive hypothesis” - repression of sexuality in the Victorian era. This leads to the vital question: What is sexuality? Foucault’s argument was “... that

sexuality was not a natural feature or fact of human life but a constructed category of experience which has historical, social and cultural rather than biological origins” (12). Sexuality has been simplified in the past. It was in the twentieth century that it was realised to be a personal and special matter that involved the innermost desires- to be precise, “...who we want, what we want, how we want.” (13).

This paper deals with Shyam Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy*, a powerful work that falls into the category of gay fiction. Published in 1994, the setting is Selvadurai’s native land, Sri Lanka. Technically the novel is unique in the way the story is in the form of six stories that revolve around a boy who is experiencing a crisis in identity. The book also brings out the political tension of the 1983 riots. Sexuality and gender become the primary concern and raise several questions about the outlook of the same. The novel also deals with the beginning of the civil war and its effects on people. War and the trauma it caused in people are skilfully portrayed.

Born in Colombo, in the year 1965, Selvadurai moved to Canada with his family when he was just 19 years of age. Coming from a family of a Sinhalese mother and a Tamil father, the family was forced to witness ethnic riots and leave the country. Selvadurai has a background of studying creative writing and also holds a Bachelor’s degree in Fine Arts. His first work *Funny Boy* was published in 1994 followed by *Cinnamon Gardens* in 1998. He published a collection of short stories, *Story - Wallah, Short Fiction from South Asian Writers* in 2004. *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea* was published in 2005. In 2013 his next novel, *The Hungry Ghosts* was published. He is a writer whose trajectory of creative writing shows a steady rise and maturity. He has been the recipient of several awards including the Bonham Centre Award, Best Adapted Screenplay and The Lambda Literary Award.

Shyam Selvadurai’s debut novel, *Funny Boy* is a text that can be read as a bildungsroman. Set against the backdrop of the Sri Lankan Civil War, the novel deals with the nationalist struggle between Tamils and Sinhalese and discusses the question of homosexual relationships in contrast to heterosexual relationships. Selvadurai presents to the readers a first-person unfailing narrator, Arjun Chelvaratnam or Arjie, the second of a wealthy and privileged Tamil family. *Funny Boy* is the story of Arjie who comes to terms with his reality and personal identity, recognising his own self amidst the pandemonium of the Sri Lankan Civil War.

The novel covers a span of seven years, from 1976 to 1983. The title *Funny Boy* within this frame of reference means that the protagonist of the novel, Arjie, is not normal but funny or queer. The word 'queer' means strange or the opposite of being normal. It is used to describe minorities who do not come under the biological dimensions of sexuality and men and women who are interested in people of the same sex. The usage of the word 'queer' was rather negative than positive. In Arjie's case, his queerness or his trait of being 'funny' which is used in the text plays an inevitable role in his identification of self as he walks past a stage of repression and retraction to an imperceptible and gradual acceptance of his own reality or what society describes as an abnormality.

The novel is divided into six chapters. In the first chapter, *Pigs Can't Fly*, the solid traditional familial setup of the Sri Lankan Tamil community is unfolded. During *Spend the Day*, the one Sunday of the month when the extended family came together at his grandparents' house, Arjie was the only boy who did not play cricket with his other male cousins in front of the house. He played 'bride-bride' with his female cousins instead. They had clearly defined spaces and games or activities of boys and girls:

The front garden, the road, and the field that lay in front of the house belonged to boys, although included in their group was my female cousin Meena.... The second territory was called "the girls", included in which, however, was myself, a boy. It was to this territory of "the girls", confined to the back garden and the kitchen porch...(FB 3)

Arjie showed "certain tendencies" (FB 166), as what his father described them, in the time of his childhood and teenage. He challenged the traditionally accepted ways in which men and women were supposed to act and behave.

Arjie was the "bestest of the brides" (FB 10). The act of bride-bride was of great importance to him as he got a chance to dress up in a sari. It gave him the freedom to be what he wanted to be, devoid of the force exerted from any conventionally assigned gender roles- "I was able to leave the constraints of myself and ascend into another, more brilliant, more beautiful self, a self to whom this day was dedicated, and around whom the world, represented by my cousins putting flowers in my hair, draping the palu, seemed to revolve" (FB 4-5).

Arjie demonstrates that sexuality is not a natural feature, but an experience. Though he was born as a male, his inclinations were towards feminine attributes. Sexuality is revealed as a purely personal choice which involves one's innermost personal desire.

In the chapter *Pigs Can't Fly*. Arjie is gravitated naturally, without any external efforts, towards the girls' territory. He is comfortable and happy playing with his female cousins. He is unable to find the same level of ease while playing cricket with his male cousins. "The pleasure the boys had standing for hours on a cricket field under the sweltering sun, watching the batsmen run from crease to crease, was incomprehensible to me" (FB 3).

Arjie's family was worried about his sexual preference and orientation. His family feared that he would turn out to be 'funny'. His father thought that his sexual orientation was a result of bad parenting and was concerned about what the society would say, think or perceive. Arjie's Amma was frantic with worry as she thought he would turn out to be homosexual. To keep him away from that state which they thought was abnormal, she prevented him from playing with his female cousins. The thought of 'people' or society blaming her for her child's deviation too distressed her. "If the child turns out wrong, it's the mother they always blame, never the father" (FB 19).

It is evident from Arjie's parents' behaviour that they practised the regulations of the society. Out of pure fear that he may turn out funny, they disallowed him from playing "bride-bride". The humiliation and dejection Arjie underwent while playing cricket shows lack of acceptance from his cousins. The nickname "girlie-boy" (FB 25) set him apart from other boys and gives him the status of an in-between state, neither a boy nor a girl. Gender had not played a part within their girl's group until her fatness, Tanuja, his cousin called him "a pansy... a faggot... a sissy..." (FB 11). These titles made him realise that he was different from others around him. He stood alone, embarrassed and isolated.

Foucault did not rule out the biological dimensions of sexuality, but he gave priority to the formation of sexuality. As a person grows, his sexuality is also formed. Sexuality is not binary, there are more than two genders. There is in fact a spectrum. A person's gender identity need not necessarily be the same as their biological identity. Gender can be different from their assigned sex. Gender identity is an

internal experience and is purely subjective. Considering Arjie's life as an example, it can be concluded that traditionally stereotyped vision about sex and gender is not an equitable concept. Sexuality or gender identity should be regulated. It should not be judged or debased. The 'other', as society classifies them, should not be marginalised and humiliated.

The title of the chapter *Pigs Can't Fly* signifies the idea that the 'other' or people who are in-between cannot reach where they want to be. It questions the concept of who we want, what we want and how we want in life. Marcus Rediker in the "Review of Books" comments on *The History of Sexuality* by Michel Foucault saying, "Small wonder that sexual irregularity was viewed as so dangerous and that sexuality itself became a matter of truth" (638-639). Arjie's father suspects his identity or sexuality and feels that he needs to be transferred to Victoria Academy, the best of all schools. He sends him to the academy to make him more masculine. "The Academy will force you to become a man..." (FB 210).

Being a man means to be strong, bold and tough. A man "never complains" (FB 211). It was believed that Victoria Academy moulded real and powerful men. "Once you come to The Queen Victoria Academy you are a man" (FB 211).

The stereotypes of gender, forced by Arjie's family leaves him in an oblivious state. He struggles to recognise his own desires and come to terms with his own identity. It was extremely surprising that Lord's Academy, the place his father thought would make him a man, is the very spot he meets Shehan Soyza whom he falls in love with and performs a sexual act to. It is through Shehan, his lover, Arjie experienced the outer limits of his innermost feelings for the first time.

Diggy, his brother had warned him and, on the day, Shehan visited his house he asserted that their father will "...definitely know that you're..." (FB 255) and stopped naming what Arjie is. After his first sexual encounter, Arjie was afraid and guilty of facing his parents. "I looked around at my family and I saw that I had committed a terrible crime against them, against the trust and love they had given me" (FB 262). He was ashamed of it and thought that he should have never done it. "I wish to God I had never done that.... I'll never do it again" (FB 265).

Arjie was brought up in a safe sphere that followed the commandments and standards of the traditional society. He was enforced to take up conventional and

established identities set on the grounds of what the society wanted. It took him a long time to question the traditional identity politics and walk towards recognition. The question of how one sees himself and how others see him as an individual is acknowledged towards the end of the novel. An individual is what he is and he has all the rights to experience what he wants. Arjie came to the realisation that “What had happened between us in the garage was not wrong. For how could loving Shehan be bad?” (FB 273-274).

Arjie’s acceptance of his real or true identity gives him the power to stand against the stereotypical idea of gender binary. Manisha in “Challenging Gender: A Study of Shyam Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy*” comments, “Arjie gradually overpowers his inner turmoil and comes to terms with his homosexuality” (1408). The identity crisis these individuals go through is traumatic. Tradition and familial love prevent them from prioritising themselves. Caught between these extremes, they still strive to seek satisfaction in what they are.

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Delineating Domestic Violence: A Study of Joanne Harris' *Chocolat*

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Abstract

Domestic violence is a social problem that affects women in many societies. Women are subjected to different forms of domestic violence, which include physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. Joanne Harris, in her work *Chocolat*, showcases the pervasiveness of domestic violence. Joanne Harris is an English-French writer who was born in Barnsley, to an English father and a French mother. She has written many acclaimed novels in different genres of literature. Many of her works revolve around the theme of identity, food, occultism and relationships.

The novel, *Chocolat* explores domestic violence through the character Josephine Muscat who has been subjected to physical and emotional abuse by her partner Paul Marie Muscat. *Chocolat* was published in 1999 and became an instant bestseller. It was later adapted into a film in 2000. The story is set in the fictional village of Lansquenet-sous-Tannes in France, where Vianne Rocher and her daughter Anouk arrive and open a chocolate shop during Lent. The arrival of the Rochers in the village bring about a significant change in the community, and it also exposes the domestic violence that some of the women in the town experience.

The research paper analyzes the theme of domestic violence against women in the novel *Chocolat* by Joanne Harris, with a focus on the various forms of abuse and the effects of it on women.

Keywords: Domestic violence, Emotional abuse, Patriarchal dominance, Physical abuse, Verbal abuse.

And one day she discovered that she was fierce and strong, and full of fire and that not even she could hold herself back because her passion burned brighter than her fears.

– Mark Anthony

Domestic violence is a prevalent issue in contemporary society. It is a topic that has been addressed in various forms of art, including literature. Ravneet Kaur in her article, *Addressing Domestic Violence Against Women: An Unfinished Agenda* published in Indian Journal of Community Medicine, asserts that "Domestic violence is not an isolated phenomenon but is deeply rooted in the social, cultural, and economic structures of a society" (73). Therefore, the cases of domestic violence can be witnessed regardless of country or society.

Joanne Harris, a writer of food and domestic magic, highlights the issues of domestic violence experienced by the women of Lansquenet-sous-Tannes, an imaginary village in France. Harris is an English-French writer, who has written more than twenty-five novels on various themes such as food, magic in everyday life, patriarchal dominance, self-identity and mother-child relationship. In many of her novels, she brings women into the spot light of being a strong character who single handedly overcomes the barriers in life.

Harris through her work *Chocolat* highlights on the violence encountered by women from their male partners. The novel *Chocolat* was published in the year 1999. It has won Creative Freedom Award (2000) and the Whittaker Gold and Platinum awards (2001, 2012). The novel is set in the fictional village of Lansquenet-sous-Tannes in the Gers region of South-Western France.

Chocolat tells the story of a single mother and her six-year-old daughter who arrives in the French village of Lansquenet-sous-Tannes at the beginning of Lent, a season of abstinence. Vianne Rocher, the single mother and Anouk, her daughter opens a Chocolatiere named La Cèleste Praline on the square opposite to the church. Though it is a season of fasting and self-denial, Vianne changes the lives of the villagers with an accumulation of subversion, sympathy and little magic. This threatens Francis Reynaud, the village priest because of which a high tension runs between Father Reynaud and Vianne. As Easter approaches, the ritual of the church is pitted against the indulgence of chocolate and both the main characters face an inevitable showdown.

Chocolat also sheds light on the pervasiveness of domestic violence in the village of Lansquenet-sous-Tannes through the character Josephine Muscat.

Josephine Muscat is one of the female characters in the novel who is verbally, physically and emotionally abused by her counter-part. She is married to the abusive and controlling local aristocrat, Paul-Marie Muscat. Mr. Muscat runs a café named Café de la Republique in the village of Lansquenet. He constantly belittles and abuses his wife Josephine and also controls her finances and her every move. His verbal and physical abuse affects the psyche of Josephine which then makes her look like a lunatic.

Mr. Muscat repeatedly belittles her for her grumpy attitude and blames her for not being smart. In his conversation with Vianne, Mr. Muscat, says that, “She talks, that’s all. She’s all talk. Doesn’t do anything but, he? Day in, day out” (Chocolat 53). Mr. Muscat never respects his wife for she is not able to bear him children and hence abuses her verbally. He calls her with malign words like bitch and fat cow. In his conversation with Vianne, Mr. Muscat says that, “I want you to tell that fat cow of mine to get her arse out of there right now, or I’ll be in to get her” (144). While talking with priest Reynaud, once again he calls her that, “She’s a stubborn cow ... When I think of the things I gave up for that crazy bitch — the money she’s cost me?” (153).

Apart from verbal abuse, Mr. Muscat abuses her emotionally by constantly comparing Josephine with Caro Clairmont, one of the influential women in the village. Josephine on commenting about it says to Vianne that, “I don’t see why I should have to do what that bitch Clairmont wants all the time! ... It’s always Caro this, Caro that. I’ve seen the way he looks at her in church. Why can’t you be like Caro Clairmont?” (80). Josephine gets furious when Mr. Muscat urges her to follow Caro Clairmont. She evidently senses Mr. Muscat eyeing her which eventually makes Josephine angry but she still puts up with everything that Mr. Muscat does. Carole B. Fink in her article “The politics of Emotion: Domestic Violence, Patriarchy, and the Law in Fin-de-siecle France”, mentions that, “Emotional violence often goes unrecognized and unreported, yet it is equally damaging to the victim. Emotional abuse can erode self-esteem, create anxiety and depression, and ultimately lead to physical harm.” (12). This is precisely what happens to Josephine. Mr. Muscat’s emotional abuse is subtle but powerful, and it wears down her self-esteem and confidence until she becomes trapped in her marriage.

Mr. Muscat also physically abuses Josephine by beating her black and blue. Vianne, in her first meeting with Josephine perceives the bruises of her. Therefore, she gives the description that,

Josephine Muscat muttered and rocked and dug her large ungainly fists into her stomach...The large hands are surprisingly nimble, rough quick hands reddened with housework...I closed my eyes. The thoughts she sent me were complex, troubling. A rapid series of images flickered through my mind: smoke, a handful of gleaming trinkets, a bloodied knuckle. Behind it all a jittering undercurrent of worry. (Chocolat 18)

Later, when Josephine meets Vianne to warn about her actions with the river gypsies, Vianne clearly witnesses the bruise in Josephine's face as she hides it with a scarf. Vianne says, "There was a fresh bruise just beneath her lower lip, bluish in the failing light" (Chocolat 79). But Josephine did not want to open up about her bruises and about her husband. She takes the blame upon herself saying that everything is an accident. She says to Vianne that, "I never blame him. Not really. Sometimes I even forget what really happened...Walking into doors. Falling downstairs. St-stepping on rakes...Accident-prone, that's what he says I am. Accident-prone" (79).

The main reason for her to tolerate her husband's behaviour was because of the fear of his anger, financial dependence and also the norms of the religion and society. Ratika Pai, in an article entitled, *12 Reasons Why Women Stay In Abusive Relationships*, featured in the blog, Mom Junction, affirms that:

"Some women find themselves in toxic relationships where the abuser uses a fear-mongering attitude to keep them under control. The abuser threatens to harm the victim, their children, or themselves. In cases where the victim is dependent on them, they threaten to annul the financial support. They ensure that the consequence of leaving becomes more scary and daunting than the experience of abuse. It leaves the women with no option but to put up with abuse. (Pai)

Ratika Pai, further states that, questioning the self-worth also leads the victim to tolerate the abuse. As, Mr. Muscat is a prominent member of the village, he uses his power and influence to control Josephine. He is able to do this because

of the patriarchal structure of the society in which they live. Therefore, Josephine bears all the abuses and blames herself for the accidents.

Nevertheless, when she meets Vianne and listens to her consoling talks, she quits blaming herself as she understands that there is someone to accept her and take care of her. Therefore, when she comes to know that Mr. Muscat was the man who kept fire to one of the house boats she immediately leaves him as she was confident that Vianne will accept her and provide her shelter. At first, Josephine wants to escape the village but Vianne convinces her to stay with her and Anouk as she cannot escape reality for long time.

Josephine seeks solace in Vianne Rocher. Vianne becomes a friend and confidante to Josephine, and helps her to find the courage to leave her abusive husband. Josephine's journey is a powerful portrayal of the strength and resilience of women who are victims of domestic violence. And through Vianne, Harris emphasizes on the importance of women supporting each other and finding the courage to stand up against abuse. On the whole, the novel serves as a reminder of the devastating effects of domestic violence and the need for continued efforts to raise awareness and prevent it.

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**Consent an Enigma: The Law on Cheating on the Pretext to Marry
with Reference to the Novel *The House with A Thousand Stories* by
Aruni Kashyap**

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Abstract

The honourable Supreme Court of India, in April 2019, passed a pathbreaking yet controversial verdict that a woman can sue a man for rape under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) Section 375 if the man had gone back on his promise to marry after having sexual intercourse with her. Technically speaking, rape happens when one person has physical intimacy with another without their informed consent. An adult having physical relations with a minor or with someone under the influence or under the threat of life is also considered rape. Backing out of a marriage after intercourse though was not considered in that category till then. The judges who were part of the bench passed the notion that if a man had coerced a woman into intercourse under the pretext of marriage, the consent she gave during the time of the act would be null and void if he backed out of the marriage afterward. This gives the woman the provision to charge a complaint at the nearby police station for rape.

In a first-world country, the same situation would be considered as cheating and not rape. In India though the law stands its ground. This paper intends to show the validity of this law in a place like India with its strong set of moral and societal norms by applying Foucault's Theory of Heterotopias to the novel *The House with a Thousand Stories* by Aruni Kashyap.

Keywords: Aruni Kashyap, Consent, Heterotopia, IPC Section 375, Rape.

The House with A Thousand Stories is the debutant novel of Aruni Kashyap, the Athens-based Assamese writer. Kashyap was born and raised in the bustling city of Guwahati, the largest metropolis in the northeastern region of India. He won the prestigious Charles Wallace India Trust Scholarship to the University of Edinburg and migrated to America. After graduation, he went on to become the Director of the Creative Writing Program at the University of Georgia, Athens. He is the author of intense works about the tumultuous political situation of his native state of Assam like *His Father's Disease* and *How to tell the Story of Insurgency: Fifteen Tales from Assam*. He has also translated the celebrated Assamese writer Indira Goswami's last work of fiction, *The Bronze Sword of Thengphakhri Tehsildar*. His poetry collection, *There is No Good Time for Bad News* was a finalist for the 2018 Marsh Hawk Press Poetry Prize and 2018 Four Way Books Levis Award in Poetry.

The novel *The House with a Thousand Stories* focuses on the life of young Pablo Prachurjya Medhi, a city boy who has mostly lived a sheltered and privileged life in Guwahati. It tells the story of the two eventful times he visited his native village of Hatimura in the Mayong district of rural Assam. Through the sweet and sorrowful tale of a teenager's life and the boiling insurgency that plays as a backdrop, Aruni Kashyap introduces the reader into the interiors of a traditional rural Assamese households. The paper though focuses on his father's cousin, the unnecessarily strict and unwed Ohalya Bhishoya. The spaces affect the character's life so much so that she due to a trivial reason gets forced into living the life of a matron-like old maid.

The honourable Supreme Court of India passed the verdict in April 2019 that a woman can sue a man for rape if he had coerced her into sexual relations under the pretext of marriage and then backed out after the act. The bench headed by Justice DY Chandrachud made it clear that "where the promise to marry is false and the intention of the maker at the time of making the promise itself was not to abide by it but to deceive the woman to convince her to engage in sexual relations, there is a "misconception of fact" that vitiates the woman's "consent" under Section 375 (rape) of the IPC" (Tripaksha Litigation). The woman's consent during the act would turn null and void if the man backed out of marriage after having intercourse. This gives her provision to legally move against the man under Indian Penal Code (IPC) Section

375 for rape. She can register a complaint against the man in the nearby police station and get him arrested.

Rape is committed when an individual commits sexual acts to another without their informed consent. Committing the same to a minor, someone under the influence, and/or under the threat of life is also considered rape. People, especially in the urban areas, reacted mercilessly against the law against Cheating on the Pretext to Marry stating that it does not come under any of the aforementioned criteria for rape. They claimed that it should just be considered as cheating and not rape but the Supreme Court held its ground regarding the law. This paper aims to show the necessity of such a law which intends to protect the women in culturally and morally diverse India by taking into consideration the life of Ohalya Bhisoya of *The House With A Thousand Stories*. French philosopher Michel Foucault's theory of Heterotopias can be deployed to prove this point.

Michel Foucault explains the impact of the spaces through his Theory of Heterotopia which he introduces in his paper titled "Of Other Spaces". Etymologically the word heterotopia came from the Greek terms 'hetero' meaning other and 'topia' meaning space. The word Heterotopia thus means 'other space'. These are spaces where norms of human behaviour remain suspended. Heterotopias can be explained as a physical representation or approximation of a utopia or a parallel space that contains undesirable factors that make a real utopian space impossible. These spaces become a veritable stage where performers, irrespective of one's sex, construct and modulate every aspect of life which includes culture.

Foucault enumerates six types of heterotopias; each having special purposes and characteristics. The heterotopia of crisis is a space where individuals are in a state of crisis, especially due to the physical growth that has happened to them as they grow older. Examples of this type of heterotopia include menstruation homes and hostel rooms. Heterotopia of deviation refers to the spaces reserved for the individuals who have defied the norms of society. Examples of this type of heterotopia include jails and mental asylums. There is another heterotopia where several spaces are juxtaposed or overlapped in one specific space. A great example of this type of heterotopia is a conference hall where delegates from several races and countries have gathered. Heterotopia of time is a space where time stands still, where objects from different times coexist. Examples of this type of heterotopia

include museums and libraries. Heterotopia of ritual or purification are spaces that may look like they are freely accessible but actually require the performance of a ritual or an act of purification to enter. A great example of this type of heterotopia is a temple where one has to wash his or her feet before entering or a public urinal where one has to undergo the ritual of paying a small amount as an entrance fee. The final heterotopia encompasses the function of illusion and compensation. Heterotopia of illusion provides for the people who are put in this space a sense of illusion, tampering with their emotions. Water parks and fairs are examples of the same as people experience a sense of joy due to the dopamine hit experienced while participating in the games and rides even though their lives are not affected in any manner. Heterotopia of compensation creates an alternate space as if to compensate or commemorate the absence of the original space. Cemeteries and memorials are examples of this type of heterotopia. Foucault also mentions an additional heterotopia which he calls 'the ship'. This is a perfect space where there is equality like a ship being rowed by an equal number of people on both sides. There will be no powerplay in this type of heterotopia making it quite rare. The room shared between a couple who are equal partners in their relationship is an example of this type of heterotopia.

These spaces are created and recreated according to human behaviour, laws, and needs. Foucault while discussing the relevance of heterotopic spaces in the psyche of human beings in his work *The Order of Things* says that "We do not live in a homogenous and empty space. . . . The space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs, the space that claws and gnaws at us, is also, in itself, a heterogeneous space" (3). A single space could come under any one or more of the six heterotopias depending on the people as it varies according to culture, geographical area, and emotional state of a person. These spaces can influence the lives of people so much so that they determine their futures at times.

Pablo, the protagonist of the novel *The House with A Thousand Stories*, has always considered Ohalya-jethai, his aunt, as an antagonist if not a villain. He was scared of her scathing remarks and hawk-like gaze. People, including Pablo, rarely considered her as a human with a past or feelings of her own. They only knew that she was part of the biggest gossip that hit Hatimura and she remained unwed since then.

Ohalya Bishoya was not a matron-like angry person since the beginning. She was born as the second of the seven children of Dinobondhu and Binapani Bishoya. In her youth, she was very beautiful. She fell in love with a government doctor who was posted in the village when he came to examine her father and he reciprocated her feelings. They got engaged soon. Kashyap elaborates on the volatility of the scenario as he says that:

She even went to his house in his standard car – they were rich. Stayed over at his place for several nights after the ring ceremony. That hadn't gone down well with the villagers. Mai had asked her not to go, but she wouldn't listen...She went; the villagers were furious. They said they wouldn't come for her wedding and the family would be excommunicated. Everyone talked about it. In the early seventies, things were different. The panchayat is strong now but was even stronger in those days. (HTS 161-162)

In the small village in rural Assam, falling in love itself was frowned upon. Ohalya stayed overnight several times at her fiancé's house after their engagement. In a modern scenario of say a developed nation, the space where two consenting adults stayed together, having or not having intercourse, after engagement would have been considered as a heterotopia of crisis. It is the natural progress for a healthy relationship and there would have been nothing to shame the couple about. But the case for a place like India is different; the rural area of a small backward state is more so. This is because the culture prohibits young couples from cohabitation or copulation before marriage. This made the doctor's house a heterotopia of deviation and not a heterotopia of crisis for her. Because of the space that Ohalya was put in, the villagers did not react well to her act. It gave them the power to threaten to boycott her wedding and even excommunicate her family. They would have done it if she was not part of the prominent family of the Bishoyas.

Ohalya's story though did not have a happy ending. Prashanto, Ohalya's youngest brother told Pablo upon asking about Ohalya-jethai's unwed status that:

‘The doctor cancelled the wedding. His family had issues. They were too rich, owners of a Standard car, and we were too poor. When he had come to tell her this, she had thrown a chair at him in rage. “I don't need your gold ring.” She had thrown it at him from the

same veranda. He waited in the courtyard for a long time, with bowed head. He couldn't go against his parents' wishes... They never met again. His family applied for a transfer on his behalf, and he was posted in Guwahati.' (HTS 162-163)

The family of the doctor wanted him to cancel the wedding with Ohalya as she was poor and they were very rich. This made her fiancé's house a heterotopia of juxtaposition instead of the heterotopia of ritual and purification that it should have been for his family if she entered the space. They decided against their son marrying her due to this reason. The doctor had no option but to listen to his parents and break off the engagement. Ohalya threw the ring at him and stood like a stone for hours in her room.

As expected by everyone, Ohalya did not get any other marriage proposals. She started to wear white and follow all the rules adhered to by the religion and the society. It was because "... an unmarried, unemployed woman has no respect, no ground beneath her feet in the society. The only way somebody can hold her head high is by adhering strictly to what society expects from her. By becoming a jealous guardian of the rules and regulations, she buys acceptance and respect, carves a place for herself" (HTS 161).

The act of staying over at her fiancé's house practically ruined her life. If she just had a broken engagement, it would not have been a huge problem. Having entered the heterotopia of deviation that was her fiancé's house was a crime so harsh that she had to commit a life like a widow. She had to be a strict matron to the family, scolding the people for every small miss-step and thereby being a killjoy. She would not have had any place in the society if she had not reduced herself to the jealous guardian of rules and regulations from the enigmatic strong-willed woman that she used to be.

Ohalya's incident took place in the seventies but the sad reality is that women are equally if not more at a disadvantage in the present day. The society still has the veil of chastity, modesty, and such dated concepts that muddles its judgement on women. In the novel, the man backed out of marriage due to familial pressure but in reality, there are sexually frustrated men who fester the matrimonial sights and other such mediums through which one meets a partner. They coerce the women into sexual activities and back out soon after. The women would be bullied and shamed

into a life like that of Ohalya or worse. There are instances where women get stoned to death or even pressured into committing suicide in certain communities for having premarital sex.

India as a society needs to develop into a better place for women, for people to think of it as just cheating when one backs out of marriage after intercourse. It would take a long time for the space people, especially women, are put in after intercourse to be that of a heterotopia of crisis and not a heterotopia of deviation if they are unwed. This is the reason why the law protecting women against cheating on the pretext of marriage stays relevant; to prevent the aforementioned category of men from taking advantage of the position women are put in, the one where they are bullied and looked down on for the wrongs committed by men.

Application of the Foucauldian theory of Heterotopias into the novel shows the need for special laws like these protecting women for their smoother and better living conditions. The paper also guides future scholars to delve deeper into the study of the various spaces. It also introduces them to the works of literature of the North-Eastern states of India which is an upcoming modern literary arena. The novel has special detailing that makes the readers understand, identify, and appreciate a community that the people in the Indian subcontinent have been indifferent to for centuries. Thus, the study paves the way for future scholars to apply the theory into indigenous literature making them part of the mainstream scholarly endeavours.

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Masterful Mothers of Malayalam Cinema: An Overview

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Abstract

This paper examines the portrayal of unconventional mother characters in Malayalam cinema through the analysis of two films; *Meleparambil Anvedu* (1993) and *Home* (2021). The first mother taken for analysis is Bhanumathi portrayed by Meena Joseph. She is a hardworking home maker and mother of three in a farming family. Bhanumathi challenges traditional maternal roles, contradicting the delicate portrayal of motherhood in Malayalam cinema. The second mother is a retired nurse, Kuttiyamma, portrayed by Manju Pillai. She navigates the challenges of raising a family including a technologically challenged husband, a struggling YouTuber son and another son who is a budding scriptwriter dealing with professional setbacks. Both the women are from middle class backgrounds who refuse to bow down to convention.

The paper intends to show how these women, though portrayed nearly thirty years apart, are perfect representations of their times. The anger, frustration and quick and independent decision-making skills that these women possess makes them real and rooted characters. By taking examples of contemporary representations of motherhood, the paper exposes how Bhanumathi and Kuttiyamma exemplify, though unconventional in cinema, real mothers.

Keywords: Home, Malayalam cinema, Meleparambil Anvedu, Middle class, Motherhood.

Meleparambil Anvedu is a 1993 Indian Malayalam language romantic comedy drama film directed by Rajasenan and scripted by Ragunath Paleri from a

story by Gireesh Puthenchery. Rajasenan is an Indian film director and former politician who has worked in Malayalam cinema. He is one of the most successful directors in nineties Malayalam film industry and have also worked in the TV serial industry. His major films include *Kadinjool Kalyanam* (1991), *Ayalathe Adheham* (1992), *Meleparambil Anveedu* (1993), *Vardhakya Puranam* (1994), *Aadyathe Kanmani* (1995) *Kadhanayakan* (1997), *Sreekrishnapurathe Nakshathrathilakkam* (1998), and *Darling Darling* (2000). He was also a Kerala state council member of BJP.

The movie *Meleparambil Anveedu* delves into the life of Harikrishan, the youngest son of Thiruvikraman Pillai and his wife Bhanumathi. His brothers Jayakrishnan and Gopikrishan are uneducated and unmarried. He wants to earn a good living and so sets forth to a Tamil village as manager of a courier company. The heart of the narrative centres around Harikrishnan's journey and love story while Bhanumathi, his mother, assumes a role deeply rooted in familial responsibilities. As the keeper of the household's peace and stability, she navigates the complexities that arise while being the only woman in the titular 'Anveedu' meaning house full of males. Harikrishnan, falls in love with Pavizham, the daughter of landlord Pollachi Gounder. Fearing societal disapproval, Harikrishnan conceals Pavizham as a maid in their home. Bhanumathi's response to the revelation of Pavizham's pregnancy becomes a pivotal point, highlighting her role in steering the family through the challenges of love, societal expectations, and the pursuit of familial acceptance. Her journey reflects a delicate balance between cultural sensitivity, support for her son's choices, and the enduring strength required to uphold family unity in the face of societal norms. The film was remade in Tamil as *Neyyandi* (2013).

Home is a 2022 Indian language Malayalam language drama film written and directed by Rojin Thomas. He is a film director and script writer who works in the Malayalam film industry. He made his directorial debut with *Philips and The Monkey Pen* (2013). His second film was *Jo and The Boy* (2015). His third film *Home* (2021) was released directly to the OTT platform Amazon Prime Videos in the middle of the second lock down of the Corona pandemic of 2021 August. The film received widespread critical attention. He has received a selection of accolades including the Sixty Ninth National Award for best film in Malayalam (2023), Kerala State Award for Best Children's Film Director and Best Children's Film (2013).

The plot of the movie revolves around Kuttியamma, a retired nurse, and the unconventional looking yet beautiful home she keeps. Juggling the roles of caregiver and homemaker, she skilfully manages the daily affairs of the household. Her technologically-challenged husband, Oliver Twist, relies on her assistance in fixing things around the house and tending to their garden. Kuttியamma's life takes on added complexity as she deals with the diverse career paths of her two sons. Anthony, the elder son and a former architect turned budding scriptwriter, faces professional struggles and a troublesome relationship with his girlfriend, Priya. Charles, the younger son, is a lazy young man immersed in the challenges of being a struggling YouTuber. She also has her husband's aged father dealing with dementia in the house who needs around the clock care.

Amidst the family's dynamics, Kuttியamma's supportive and nurturing nature shines through. Despite the chaos, she stands by her family members, especially her sons, offering unwavering support in their pursuits. However, her patience wears thin when Anthony mocks Oliver in front of Priya and her parents. This sparks an outburst with Kuttியamma expressing her frustration at her sons' tendency to blame their parents for their misfortunes. In the face of criticism directed at Oliver for attending sessions with a psychologist and joining Tai Chi classes, Kuttியamma's role becomes even more significant. Her perspective on these activities, while not explicitly mentioned, likely plays a part in shaping the family's response. As the narrative unfolds, Kuttியamma's character adds depth and authenticity to the family's story, contributing to the rich tapestry of their shared experiences and challenges.

In the vast landscape of Malayalam cinema, various films have delicately portrayed the intricate facets of motherhood, each contributing a unique perspective to this timeless theme. Malayalee mothers over the years in the movies have cried and wept and waited for their sons to come home but few stood out by raising their voices and breaking conventional norms. Bhanumathi and Kuttியamma are among the rare gems who stood their ground in their testosterone filled houses where there are no other females.

Bhanumathi of *Meleparambil Anveedu* challenges conventions by adapting to changing times and circumstances, breaking away from the idea of mothers being resistant to modernity. Bhanumathi also exhibits support for her children's

unconventional choices and also her clarity of thought about her children's strengths and weaknesses might challenge the notion of the perfect, flawless mother who looks at their sons as if they are God's greatest gift to humanity. She criticises them vehemently almost in a crass manner when a situation arises where one of them might have impregnated a servant girl. A great example of how mothers in Malayalam movies react in a situation where their children are wrong is Rajesh's mother Lakshmi in *Jaya Jaya Jaya Jaya Hey* (2022). Rajesh has serious anger management issues and is unnecessarily dominating towards his own family members. He even beats his wife Jaya for no particular reason on several occasions. Lakshmi witnesses these and turns a blind eye. She when questioned about her son's acts of domestic violence defends him and even goes on to say that he is a sweet person. Bhanumathi is very different from mothers like Lakshmi as she would not let anyone, even her own sons, walk charge free when it comes to an indiscretion from their part.

Bhanumathi's youngest son Harkrishnan had secretly married Pavizham, and kept her in the house disguised as a servant. When the lies are exposed and the house of cards falls down it is revealed that Pavizham was pregnant with her own husband's child. The family was about to disown Harikrishnan for cheating them when Bhanumathi steps up. She declares that she would have accepted Pavizham if her son loved her and her language or caste would not have mattered to her. She criticizes Harikrishnan for making Pavizham go through all the hardships of living like a servant and makes sure that the other family members also accept her as the daughter-in-law of the family. Usual mothers of Malayalam cinema either would not have an opinion in such a matter or would confine to the upper-class norms of segregation. An example of such a mother is Kanchanamala's mother Janaki in the movie *Ennu Ninde Moitheen* (2015). Janaki would rather have her daughter live like widow confined in her room than let her marry the good man she loves just because he was from a different religion. She does not make the decision overtly but makes it clear to Kanchana that she is happier seeing her in white clothes than with her lover Moitheen. Bhanumathi unlike mothers like Janaki, bridges the gaps of cultural norms by happily welcoming the girl her son loves into her home. She also makes the family members comply to her decisions as she knows she is right.

Bhanumathi's character is involved in decision making processes within the family. She is not confined to a passive role but plays an important role in the

economic stability and shaping the destiny of her family. She is an active participant in the family's farming and related business ventures and makes sure that her efforts are seen and appreciated. She refuses to reduce herself to just a shadow in the background or the kitchen. Malayalam movie *Veruthe oru Bharya* (2008) is a great example of how women who do not work outside the home are portrayed. This movie talks about a home maker Bindhu who is emotionally trapped in a challenging and oppressive family dynamic. Her husband, Sugunan, habitually underestimates her contributions, expecting traditional gender roles in managing the household and tending to their life stock. Bindu is not allowed to participate in family decisions especially concerning her teenage daughter as Sugunan belittles her to being just a senseless unpaid servant. Bhanumathi on the other hand is a far cry from the same as she contributes to the economic stability as well as decision making of the family giving competition to her husband and sons.

The motherhood portrayed by unconventional characters like Kuttiyamma in *Home* differs from Malayalam cinema's motherhood portrayals in several aspects. Unlike several mothers who might be depicted as technologically challenged, Kuttiyamma showcases resourcefulness by learning and using smart phones. Her willingness to embrace technology challenges the stereotype of mothers being resistant to modern advancements. Traditional gender roles often confined women to domestic responsibilities, reducing exposure to technological advancements outside the home.

Kuttiyamma supports her sons in their unconventional pursuits, such as Charles' endeavours as a YouTuber and Anthony's journey as a scriptwriter. Instead of imposing unrealistic expectations, Kuttiyamma accepts the imperfections of her sons. This contrasts with conventional portrayals where mothers might be shown pressuring their children to conform to societal norms and expectations. The movie *Oru Vadakkan Selfie* (2015) portrays the pressure the protagonist Umesh faces from his mother Sreelakshmi. She does not like Umesh going in the career direction of movies and expects him to become an engineer. Sreelakshmi does not even give him second chance to explore his creative realms even when his short film was good. She is also unaware of technical advancements in the world as she refers to YouTube as if it were a person. She, reprimands Umesh when he tells her that he can make revenue by uploading videos online. In contrast Kuttiyamma in *Home* accepts her

children's interests and supports them in their journey. Her being technically adept helps her understand her children better.

Kuttiyamma's professional background as a retired nurse adds complexity to her character. She challenges the notion that mothers are solely defined by their roles as home makers while men take up the role of the bread winners. The movie *Vinodayathra* (2007) showcases Vimala, the protagonist's sister, who is a great example of how educated woman confine themselves to their household as per the demand of the husband. Vimala does not work despite being a postgraduate as her husband is happy being the sole bread winner. She though not a mother is left to mother her own younger brother and her husband's younger sister. It is societal norms that limits a woman's mobility and looks down on her and her husband if she works while her husband takes care of the home. This is rooted in traditional gender roles and beliefs that prioritize a woman's role as a homemaker and caregiver. In such contexts, some families may view a woman's employment as a potential challenge to the traditional family structure. Kuttiyamma on the other hand had insisted on working even when her husband had a shop. She proudly holds on to her professional background in healthcare and provides for the family, harbouring no shame in herself or her husband in her role as the financial backbone of the family.

Kuttiyamma is also unique as most Malayalam movie mothers assume a holier than though attitude keeping their heads and voices down when an argument arises between the children and the father. In some cases, the mothers support the children and spoils them even when they are wrong. In a particular juncture in the movie, she reacts angrily upon the disrespectful behaviour of her son Antony when he made fun of his father in front of his potential in-laws for being a house husband after his shop got shut down. Kuttiyamma being the matriarch of the family, felt the need to address and correct her son's behaviour to maintain familial harmony and uphold values of respect within the household. In the movie *Meesha Madhavan* (2002) the typical mother portrayed by the protagonist's mother Sumathi. She supports Madhavan, her son, in the act of stealing which is unethical and wrong. Sumathi exemplifies the kind of woman who would try to find goodness in her child even when his acts are ethically wrong. Kuttiyamma has clarity on right and wrong and refuses to waver from her moral ground. She would rather correct her children than find ways to justify them.

Kuttyamma and Bhanumathi exhibit strength in dealing with family problems. They are resilient figures who try to maintain harmony with their household but would raise their voices and cause chaos if situation needs be. Both characters are deeply invested in the well-being of their children and family while being well rounded individuals. In conclusion, Mothers are often idealized as kind, flawless figures, embodying a sense of holiness and selflessness. However, it's crucial to recognize that mothers, like any other individuals, are multifaceted human beings with their own emotions, including anger and frustration. The societal pedestal on which mothers are placed sometimes obscures the reality of their struggles and challenges. Acknowledging a mother's capacity for frustration and anger doesn't diminish her love or kindness; instead, it emphasizes her humanity. Recognizing their emotional spectrum allows for a more authentic understanding, fostering empathy and compassion and eventual representation on the celluloid. Embracing the complexity of motherhood paints a truer picture of the human experience, breaking free from idealized stereotypes. In examining the portrayal of motherhood in films consistent theme emerges, a deep-rooted emphasis on traditional notions of familial relationships and the inherent responsibilities that come with motherhood. Usually, films explore the sacrifices and unconditional love associated with maternal roles, often romanticizing the idealized image of the selfless and nurturing mother.

Amidst this commonality, however, two exceptional characters, Kuttyamma in *Home* and Bhanumathi in *Meleparambil Anvedu*, stand out by providing a more realistic and nuanced representation of motherhood. Bhanumathi exhibits her support to children by accepting the flaws at the same time she criticises her children vehemently. She also works as the best decision maker in the family. Bhanumathi's character navigates the complexities of a large, affluent joint family, but the film relies on her to convey the message of communal tolerance. The film carefully delves into the multifaceted aspects of her character, portraying her not just as a traditional matriarch but as an individual with her own thoughts and opinions. Kuttyamma's character in *Home* deals with her husband's comedic struggle with gadgets and supports her sons in their unconventional pursuits. She singlehandedly manages the finances of the household as retired nurse. These portrayal breaks away from the traditional mould, infusing a refreshing and relatable dimension into the fabric of motherhood in Malayalam cinema.

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Womanhood in Mieko Kawakami's *Breasts and Eggs*

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Abstract

This paper deals with investigating the idea of broken femininity in Mieko Kawakami's *Breasts and Eggs* (2020) using feminist theory. In a modern setting, Kawakami emphasizes the wounds of womanhood through the three female protagonists in the book. The battle of women in the twenty first century to actualize femininity is exemplified by Midoriko's battle with her biological self, Makiko's quest for feminine body standards, and Natsuko's grudging acceptance of convention. By rejecting the socially manufactured idea of femininity, these women are able to maintain a sense of empowerment. Kawakami suggests that creating a feminine identity in a postmodern context is far more difficult than it seems by testing the idea of femininity and demonstrating that it is the product of nurture rather than nature.

Keywords: Empowerment, Feminist, Identity, Womanhood.

Mieko Kawakami was born in 1976 into a low-income family in Osaka, with her father being mostly absent. By the age of 14, she was employed in a plant that produced electric fans and heaters. Before beginning a singing career that she abandoned after multiple albums due to a lack of autonomy, she worked as a hostess. Her unsuccessful attempt to write her own songs inspired her to turn to poetry, and her first collection of poems was awarded the esteemed Nakahara Chuya Prize. In

addition, she gained notoriety as a well-liked blogger who wrote candid pieces on sex, family, and womanhood in her native tongue.

Breasts and Eggs (2020) explores these concerns by posing queries on the institutionalized subjugation of women and how it affects specific people. When her sister Natsuko muses over whether or not she wants to have children, Makiko, a bar hostess, muses over getting breast implants to stay youthful in the company of her younger coworkers. The fact that both women were raised in impoverished conditions adds to the difficulty of their decisions.

Breasts and Eggs by Mieko Kawakami is a sophisticated story about how societal pressure and expectations cause female identity to be damaged and expressed in a variety of personalities and components. In the work, Kawakami introduces three female protagonists who each stand for a different aspect of feminine identity. Natsuko is the main narrator and protagonist of the story. She is an ambitious writer living in the busy city of Tokyo who appears to be a long way from fulfilling her dream of writing novels. From Osaka, their more rural hometown, her sister Makiko pays her a visit. Her entire life is consumed by her appearance, particularly her breasts, and she works as a hostess at a low salary.

She is accompanied by her twelve years old daughter, Midoriko. She is so afraid of everything in life, particularly her mother and the idea of femininity, that she has opted to keep quiet and communicate only through written words. These three women, who each focus on a distinct aspect of femininity and its politics, weave together Kawakami's investigation of the fragmentation of gender. They are similar in certain ways. Midoriko acts as an unduly restrained superego; Makiko gives the unrestrained drive to project sexual-social attraction; and Natsuko supplies the conscious voice.

Yet, there is also a crucial element to the way that technology acts as a mediating factor in this identity conflict. Makiko is a prime example of this, since she is obsessed with getting breast implants because she thinks they will increase her social status, femininity, and desirability. Determining the points at which technological interventions and feminine identity interact is, therefore, a crucial component of the reading assigned in this essay. It is imperative for the modern feminist endeavour to comprehend how, as Gillis points out in her work *Feminist Criticism and Technologies of the Body*, "... technology is the site of power,

mapping and reading the ways in which the body is mediated by technology – whether the washing machine, the telephone or the computer” (332). Makiko's wish for technological intrusion on her body might therefore be interpreted as a move in the direction of empowerment or submission to stereotypically masculine impulses. As a result, a crucial subject addressing the construction of femininity in this postmodern, contemporary setting that runs throughout *Breasts and Eggs* comes to light.

The interpretation of how Kawakami employs the three female characters in the book as building blocks to create a frequently contradictory picture of femininity is fascinating. These women's bodies serve as literary and figurative arenas where traditional notions of femininity are challenged in a number of ways. They can thus be understood in relation to Helen Cixous's notion of stigmata and her concept of the literary scar. Cixous postulates that language and social expectations meet at the place of the body, contending that language has historically marked the bodies of women in particular. These scars or marks might be understood as symbolic depictions of the patriarchal rhetoric that limits women's autonomy and self-expression by inscribing it on their bodies.

Midoriko's rejection of her physical self, Makiko's active pursuit of society's body norms, and Natsuko's reluctant adherence to tradition symbolize the battle of femininity to be realized within these expectations. But in their quest for agency, these women also leave their marks or, as Cixous might put it, stigmata- by utilizing a variety of inscriptional techniques, such as writing, journaling, and bodily modification. As a result, this paper examines these characters in the light of the themes of the body, feminine identity, scarring, and fragmentation using Cixous's feminist theory.

When narrating her reality, Natsuko is both transparent and detailed at the same time. She is straightforward and truthful in her assessments of the world around her, on the one hand. As Alzante points out in *Embodiment and its violence in Kawakami Mieko's Chichi to Ran*, a “... continuous stream of consciousness, veers in and out of the main plot without necessarily making sense” (524). Her perspective is nevertheless essential to the story. Despite the fact that Natsuko's story contains random components, she is the sole credible intermediary between what occurs and

the reader. But this reality highlights a lot of her character's fundamental paradoxes. She can be both a vigilant participant and an observer at the same time, for instance.

As such, Natsuko is shown as a paradoxical figure who is both perceptive in her understanding of other people and unsophisticated in her understanding of the social factors influencing her gender. She constantly brings out Makiko's mental and physical imperfections, for instance, as she is acutely aware of them. Her observations are incisive and analytical in this sense. She has an uncanny ability to thoroughly examine her sibling. However, she clearly lacks objectivity because she reserves judgment. For instance, she is shocked in the first few pages by what she perceives to be her sister's hideous fixation with getting breast implants. She thinks Makiko's breasts and overall appearance are unsightly, but she also finds the entire process awkward and disgusting.

Using the same perceptive abilities, she keeps a close check on people in the environment, seeing anything from a stranger's inebriation on the subway to the subtle body language of an unknown individual walking down the street. Natsuko's memories, on the other hand, seem a little hollow in contrast, or at the very least, startlingly devoid of reflection. She only knew her father for seven years; therefore, one instance of this is when she talks about him. It almost seems contradictory to how she describes him. She starts off by characterizing him as an absolutely useless and slothful person who would use a mirror to see in front of himself rather than turning around. She does, however, also portray him as possessing a vicious streak that would make one shudder. Although Natsuko doesn't "... find some reason to slap around me and my sister" (Breasts and Eggs, 18). This raises the question of why her initial impression of her father is that of a completely useless man who accomplishes nothing.

This slug of a man, though, is capable of beating his wife and kids. What appears to be a survivor's approach to neutralizing a fundamentally violent and unpleasant figure in her life could be this discordant image in her memory. She struggles to make ends meet and pursue her writing goals in the present; thus, it may also partially explain other aspects of her seeming passivity. It appears that she is caught between opposing forces, like sexual liberation and submission to conventional gender norms, or victimhood and heroism. Natsuko seemed to be

satisfied to let her life unfold naturally, without much resistance or pushing in one direction or another.

Natsuko adopts the social ideals of the novel, which emphasize the great value placed on feminine beauty and she muses over her lack of success in life in part because she believes that beauty is a prerequisite for success. Occasionally, Natsuko's voyeurism demonstrates characteristics that Gieske mentioned when talking about how people internalize gender stereotypes.

A couple at a bathhouse catches Natsuko's attention, and she starts to wonder if one of them is a man or a woman. She starts to imagine various scenarios based on what the couple is supposed to be. Speaking on the expectations society has for couples, Gieske in *The Ideal couple* claims that "... the unconscious production of this specific bodily regime in everyday life means that this social compulsion has gradually turned into a self-compulsion" (377). Gieske proposed that people absorb and project societal expectations onto the outside world in this way. This is where Natsuko gets confused because she has been following a very strict regimen for her body and it seems like people are playing roles that they have chosen instead of ones that society has assigned them. Her self-imposed need to fit in is contrasted with those who have defied social norms and expectations associated with gender and relationships.

In the meantime, Natsuko occasionally raises overt criticisms of the social construction of gender. Alzate in *Embodiment and its violence in Kawakami Mieko's Chichi to Ran* notes how Natsuko expresses dissatisfaction with "the repetitive nature of feminine expectations through her images of menstruation" (523). This gets so bad that women are obliged to follow a number of socially prescribed rituals in an attempt to protect others and themselves from the alleged crime of menstrual blood and scents. While complaining about the hassle of changing sanitary napkins, staining underwear, and taking precautions to lessen the odour of her period, Natsuko is also highlighting the fact that this is a normal hormonal occurrence. By enumerating these insignificant behaviours, which are usually ignored and understated, she elevates a conversation that is centred around women into the literary spotlight.

It is feasible to interpret Natsuko's observations as a subversion of the male gaze trope to some extent. According to Hartley's *Feminism and Japanese*

Literature, "...postwar Japanese literature has been rife with instances of the male gaze, objectifying women and reducing them to objects meant for male visual enjoyment" (92). This technique is subverted in the instance of the narrator of *Breasts and Eggs*, who offers a wholly non-objectifying interpretation of femininity in favour of objective gender-related interventions. Thus, one interpretation of Natsuko's character could be that, in a modern Japanese literary tradition where female power relations have remained mostly intact, she symbolizes a critical feminist intervention. Even while Natsuko's obsessive thoughts about the specifics of her menstrual cycle may seem pointless, they have a significant impact on almost every woman of reproductive age. An alternative perspective on Natsuko is through the prism of Cixous's notion of the writer.

Cixous proclaimed, "My business is to translate our emotions into writings. First, we feel. Then I write. This act of writing engages the author. I write about the genesis that occurs before the author. How does one write the genesis? Just before? I write on writing. I turn on the other light" (*Stigmata: escaping texts* 118). In this regard, it is possible to apply Cixous' theories regarding the female body as a contested site of language and culture where patriarchal standards are ingrained. The women fight against and challenge cultural conventions, such as the objectification and monetization of their bodies and make an effort to claim their agency and autonomy. Writing thus serves as a tool of emancipation and resistance because it is the act of inscribing language and culture. These women are the heroes of their own stories because they communicate their needs, disappointments, and obstacles through spoken and written words.

The depth of Natsuko's character is highlighted in the last few chapters. She examines the complexities of having and raising children as she mulls over having her own in the second part of the book. She has notably distanced herself from the idea of love or sex in order to have a child, acknowledging that she has had few and bad sexual experiences. Therefore, it seems that Natsuko can only imagine reproduction with the aid of technical intervention—more precisely, in vitro fertilization. She talks with Yuriko, who sees having a child as an act of violence where a reluctant soul is pushed into life and their interactions seem to solidify her conversations:

Why do people see no harm in having children? They do it with smiles on their faces, as if it's not an act of violence. You force this other being into the world, this other being that never asked to be born. You do this absurd thing because that's what you want for yourself, and that doesn't make any sense. (Breasts and Eggs 614)

In addition, Yuriko experienced maltreatment throughout her childhood, albeit a more subtle sort that she was unable to escape than Natsuko. Yuriko also sticks out as someone whose existence is the product of a heartless scientific intervention because she was created using sperm from a donor. Furthermore, Yuriko was abused during her early years, however it was of a more covert nature from which she was unable to recover than Natsuko. Because Yuriko was formed using donor sperm, she stands out as someone whose existence is the result of a callous scientific intervention.

Natsuko spends a major portion of the book describing her dislike of sexual intimacy and her generally uninterested attitude toward raising children, which has never been very appealing to her. Even so, the book concludes with her having a daughter and thus continuing a pattern that she had thought was unbreakable before. A negative interpretation of this would be that Natsuko finally gives in to the position of a life bearer, even if it seems that she is willing to fight against the sexist stories that are thrust upon her. An alternative perspective would be to see her choice as an exercise of her agency. Natsuko had made the decision to have a child, but she did it on her terms and without caving in to conventional notions of romance or love. Rather than giving in to peer pressure or expectations, she followed her own rationale and chose to have the kid with the person of her choosing.

Midoriko seems to have moved past her teenage anxiety-driven fear of conception and even displays interest and joy at the possibility of her new cousin's arrival. In the novel's epilogue, Natsuko holds her new born child against her chest, symbolizing the strength of both breasts and eggs. The novel's last illustration, which shows Natsuko as having chosen parenthood, is confusing and paradoxical. From Alzante and Yoshio's *Reimagining the past, present, and future of reproductive bodies in contemporary Japanese women's fiction* point of view, "... [they] hope for a feminist future, one that is more just, where bodies are supported and free" (482). The narrator's attempt to put together who she is from the endless fragments of the universe that fly at her is reduced to the most basic, hazardous, and essential human

act that is giving birth. Natsuko carries on the process of creating a life and identity that are uniquely feminine.

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Damsels in Distress to Damsels in Delight: A Representation of Women in Tamil Cinema

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Abstract

This paper examines the transformation of damsels in distress to empowered women in contemporary movies, which hold significant influence over people while serving as a reflection of reality. Numerous instances in films have highlighted gender inequality. However, in the 21st century, there has been a shift towards empowering female characters, resulting in the creation of more films with a strong female focus. Tamil cinema is renowned for its portrayal of female characters and female-centric films, where both are given equal importance. The paper provides insights into how female-centric films employ strong plotlines and female characters.

Keywords: Entertainment, Social concerns, Sports, Tamil cinema, Women.

Representation of gender in cinema has always been a mixture of both positive and negative portrayals. Besides entertainment, there are other significant considerations while making films. The concept of the gaze format depicts how audience perceive the characters on the screen. These representations prioritize character development and plotlines. A diverse range of individuals enter the cinema industry seeking either fame or livelihood. It has been a prevailing notion that women are primarily portrayed in romantic movies, while men dominate action genres. However, in the present era, this stereotype has been shattered by various directors, actors, and actresses. The focus now lies solely on the character rather than gender roles in the twenty-first century. This representation holds importance because it leaves a profound educational impact on the audience, drawing from real-life experiences.

In the 1970s, Indian cinema played a significant role in objectifying women. It was common to see scenes where women were attacked only to be rescued by a supernatural hero figure. The music in these films also contributed to the

commodification of the female body and many people embraced this trend. However, the portrayal of female characters has undergone a drastic transformation since the early twenty-first century. In Tamil Nadu, movies have had a profound impact on a diverse audience, capable of completely altering one's perspective on various subjects.

Tamil Cinema, also known as Kollywood, originated in Kodambakkam, Chennai during the nineteenth century. Initially, the movies were silent interpretations, but over time, a wide range of genres emerged, providing both educational and entertaining content. Tamil cinema has been deeply rooted in the cultural aspects of the state, drawing influences from historical periods such as the Chera, Chola, and Pandya ages, which were traditionally enacted as a form of entertainment accompanied by dance and music. These early beginnings gradually evolved into full-length movies. The growth of Tamil cinema has now extended beyond borders, with its presence felt in countries like Singapore and Malaysia.

The Tamil film industry has experienced growth by casting women in feministic roles and producing films with female leads. To debunk the myth that films centred around men are the only ones that can recoup their investment, it has been demonstrated that movies focused on women can also achieve financial success at the box office. Female-centric films have proven to be successful across various genres, whether they aim to convey a social message, entertain audiences through comedy and thrillers, or explore the realm of sports. As Sowmya Raju highlights in her article *The Portrayal of Women in Tamil Cinema*, director Prakruthi aptly states, "Movies nowadays have a huge influence on the people, even though they are just a mirror to reflect reality. Objectification of women is not just female actors are cast in roles for the romance factor." (Raju)

One of the pioneering industries that have treated women's skills equally is the Tamil cinema industry. Over the years, Tamil cinema has evolved from portraying women as mere love interests for the hero to featuring them as female leads, thereby opening the doors for films that centre on women. In the twenty-first century, when the fight for women's rights spans across all sectors of society, Tamil cinema, as one of the largest entertainment sectors, actively supports gender equality. Consequently, it has levelled the playing field between films with female leads and those with male leads. Thiruvaiyaru Panchapakesa Rajalakshmi, popularly known as

T.P. Rajalakshmi or ‘Cinema Rani T.P.R,’ holds the distinction of being the first South Indian female director, screenwriter, singer, music director, producer, and heroine in Tamil and Telugu cinema. Her breakthrough came in 1931 when she was selected to play the lead role in *Kalidas*, the first Tamil talkie. Rajalakshmi went on to become a prominent leading lady of her time. As stated in the article *Women-Centric Films - The New Trend of South Indian Cinema*, women have transformed into feminist icons on movie posters, transcending their previous portrayal as damsels in distress and subjects of mere objectification. They now embody strength and lead films. In a recent promotional interview for her movie *Connect*, actor Nayanthara stated, “There are many women-centric films today. Many producers are willing to produce such films. This change itself is good. If 15-20 films with male leads are made in a year, at least 5-6 films are made with female leads.” (Kalyani)

Aramm, *Aruvi*, *Kanaa*, *Kaatrin Mozhi*, *U Turn*, and *Magalir Mattum* are a few examples of female-centric movies in Tamil cinema, showcasing their success at the box office. These films span across various cinematic genres, including family entertainment, comedies, thrillers, and sports.

Aramm, directed by Gopi Nainar in 2017, features Nayanthara in the lead role. The film revolves around an empty borewell that is dug in a rural area, bringing to light the issue of children falling into such wells and losing their lives. Nayanthara portrays a district collector who courageously strives to rescue a young child trapped in the well, despite facing opposition from local politicians and other conventional figures of authority. Throughout the film, she confronts various challenges but remains unwavering in her determination to save the child. Nayanthara's character displays immense strength and resilience in overcoming obstacles and fulfilling her commitment.

Aruvi, directed by Arun Prabhu, is an emotionally charged social drama. Aditi Balan plays the prominent role of Aruvi. The story takes a dramatic turn as Aruvi is expelled from her home after testing positive for HIV. Amidst abuse and harassment, a shattered Aruvi makes a stylish comeback on a reality show, challenging societal norms. Throughout the film, Aruvi undergoes a transformation from being her father's little girl to becoming a self-sufficient adult. The movie vividly depicts the struggles and mental abuse that women face in their lives.

Kanaa is a 2018 Indian Tamil-language sports drama film starring Sathyaraj, Aishwarya Rajesh, Sivakarthikeyan, and Darshan. Directed by Arunraja Kamaraj, who made his directorial debut, the film was released on December 21, 2018. It was edited by Ruben, with cinematography by Dinesh B. Krishnan and music composed by Dhibu Ninan Thomas. *Kanaa* was produced by Sivakarthikeyan under his newly launched production company, Sivakarthikeyan Productions. The plot revolves around a village girl with big ambitions who faces the challenges of class domination in the realm of sports. It presents a realistic portrayal of the obstacles women encounter in the field of sports.

Kaatrin Mozhi is a 2018 Indian Tamil-language comedy-drama film written and directed by Radha Mohan, starring Jyothika in the lead role. The movie narrates the story of an aspiring housewife who joins a late-night relationship advice radio show as a radio jockey. The film draws inspiration from the song *Mozhi* from the movie *Mozhi*, which was also directed by Radha Mohan and featured Jyothika in the lead. *Kaatrin Mozhi* challenges the stereotype of housewives being confined to domestic duties and portrays the sacrifices women make to sustain their families while nurturing their own dreams and ambitions.

U Turn is a 2018 Indian supernatural thriller film written and directed by Pawan Kumar and produced by Srinivasa Chitturi and Rambabu Bandaru under the banners of BR8 Creations, V. Y. Combines, and Srinivasa Silver Screen. The plot revolves around the killing of motorists who violate traffic rules at a particular flyover and the subsequent efforts of an intern journalist and a police inspector to uncover the identity of the offender. It is a remake of the director's own 2016 Kannada film of the same name, which was simultaneously shot in Tamil and Telugu. *U Turn* is a female-centric film with Samantha playing the lead role, delivering a thrilling narrative with numerous twists and turns.

Magalir Mattum is a 2017 Indian Tamil comedy-drama film written and directed by Brama, marking his second directorial venture after *Kuttram Kadithal*. The movie features Nassar, Livingston, Gokulnath, and G. Marimuthu in supporting roles, alongside Jyothika, Urvashi, Bhanupriya, and Saranya Ponvannan in the lead roles. The story revolves around three former high school classmates who, against societal pressure from the men in their lives, reunite after thirty-eight years. Produced by Suriya and featuring music composed by Ghibran, the film commenced

production in July 2016 and premiered theatrically on September 15, 2017. *Magalir Mattum* received positive reviews, with Jyothika being nominated for Best Actress and Urvashi and Bhanupriya for Best Supporting Actress at the South Filmfare Awards.

These films are just a few examples of the various plot lines that explore the representation of gender in Tamil cinema. Though gender has been a debated topic, the world has undergone significant changes, and the pursuit of equality has gained momentum. The true essence of content lies in people watching movies and extracting meaningful messages, regardless of the gender of those delivering them. In the twenty-first century, individuals are more concerned about the ideas being conveyed rather than the gender of the individuals expressing them. As highlighted in the article written by Shiva Virman's "A Study on Men's Perception of Women Centred Films in Tamil", states, "People being neutral on feminism portrayed correctly in women-centred films. People think that women doing the same mistake by portraying themselves as objects of sexual attraction in the name of feminism. Recent Tamil films of women lead characters are more respectful and entertaining" (1227). The audience appreciates a film for its positive family-oriented message, irrespective of the gender focus. Even when a movie has a female-centric theme, there are no disagreements. This aspect truly showcases the beauty of the Tamil cinema industry and the discerning Tamil audience.

In conclusion, the representation of gender in Tamil cinema has evolved significantly. Audience now prioritizes the messages conveyed by films over the gender of the characters or creators. The industry's ability to produce impactful and engaging movies with a female-centric focus exemplifies its progressiveness and inclusivity. Tamil cinema serves as a source of inspiration and entertainment for all, transcending gender boundaries and delivering powerful narratives that resonate with the audience. The world is witnessing a shift where gender is no longer the central concern, but rather the ideas and messages conveyed through the medium of cinema. The Tamil cinema industry and its audience embody this change, embracing the beauty of diverse perspectives and celebrating the power of storytelling, regardless of who is delivering it.

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**Breaking the Ice: Gender Inequality and Subversion in Devika
Rangachari's *Queen of Ice***

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Abstract

Gender inequality is one of the most persistent challenges facing society around the world. Gender discrimination was prevalent in ancient Indian royal families where women were often considered inferior to men and had limited rights and opportunities. The study explores the various forms of gender inequality depicted in the novel *Queen of Ice* by the well-known Indian author and historian Devika Rangachari. This includes restriction of women's education and mobility, forced marriage and the Sati system, and the marginalization of women in political and economic spheres. The paper argues that the novel offers a nuanced and complex portrayal of gender inequality that highlights how individual agency and resistance can challenge and subvert oppressive social structures. The paper concludes by arguing that *Queen of Ice* offers an inspiring and powerful vision of women empowerment and resistance that can help to inform and inspire contemporary efforts to challenge and transform gender inequality.

Keywords: Empowerment, Gender inequality, social structure, Women.

Gender inequality is not a novel idea that took its present shape or form a year or two ago. While there is no single definitive cause, some scholars argue that gender inequality emerged as a result of the agricultural revolution, which led to the development of patriarchal societies and established traditional gender roles. Keeping India in focus, gender inequality has deep roots in the country's history and culture. The caste system and religious and cultural practices, have reinforced patriarchal norms and beliefs, which have led to gender disparities and discrimination. While several measures have been taken in recent years to address this problem, gender inequality remains a pervasive social evil that affects women around the world.

Women of lower castes or backward sections of society are not the only victims of gender discrimination. Even women from royal households are

discriminated on all fronts, no matter how powerful and rich they are; and queen Didda is a notable example of this. Right from the day she was born, Princess Didda was discriminated by her father King Simharaja of Lohara. She was a doubly marginalized woman because she faced discrimination on two fronts: gender and disability. Didda was born with a clubfoot, which made her an outcast in her society. She was expected to do the jobs of any other woman by her father, who tried his level best to hold her back. Despite this, she rose to power and became a capable ruler who expanded the kingdom's territories, built infrastructure, and promoted cultural and religious diversity.

Queen Didda's life has been enticingly portrayed by Devika Rangachari in her novel *Queen of Ice* (2014). The novel brings to the forefront the inequalities and sufferings undergone by a Kashmiri Queen and how she subverted the traditionally assigned gender roles and emerged victorious in her life. The novel which has won several awards including the New Young Adult Book Award, vividly depicts the turbulent and untold history of Tenth century Kashmir profoundly.

Right at the outset of the novel, it is revealed that King Simharaja was disappointed with the birth of Princess Didda for he always desired a "full-term son" (QOI 22). She was never doted upon by him and was always looked down upon, giving her only a secondary status. Even after being born into a royal family, education was denied to Queen Didda. King Simharaja used to say "Learning is wasted on a girl" (6). The whole administration of the palace and finances were safe with the powerful male officers and women were often assigned the roles of housekeeping, kitchen management, and gardening. Though Didda had great innate potential, nothing of that was given due attention just because she was a crippled female child. At one point, she retorts "I am your daughter, not some worthless servant" (23). But she gets an immediate response from her father: "But that's exactly what you are to me-worthless" (23). If this was the treatment that a royal member received in the country, one cannot even dare to think of the predicament of the ordinary masses.

Living with the same mental state for a few decades, King Simharaja is seen finally happy with the birth of his son Prince Udayaraja. But this does not lessen his rage towards Didda. When she attempts to hold the baby, he fumes with anger and

shouts at the midwife, "Giving my precious son to a cripple to hold? If she had dropped him, I would have had your head. (33)"

When Didda asks him why can't she be his heir, Simharaja replies, " A woman doesn't rule, Didda. Only a man can occupy a throne. You know that. (25)" This discriminatory remark made by the king, who is the supreme ruler of the land, shows that the whole nation was unfair towards women, relegating them to the margins of society. The only way in which women could find meaning in their otherwise subjugated and desolate life was through the institution of marriage. This is in line with what Simone de Beauvoir once said, "we build factories, offices, and facilities for women, but we continue to believe that marriage is the most dignified career for a woman, liberating her from the need to participate in society in any other way (De Beauvoir 67)". This is how the Didda's cousin Vigraharaja speaks about her marriage: "You are being sold Didda. Your father has sold you for a paltry bit of land (QOI 29). The lifelong subjugation and marginalization can undoubtedly cause long-term psychological issues in women. But even at that point, women have no power but to endure these verbal and physical tortures in silence and darkness.

Sex determination and female infanticide are common practices in the backward parts of the country even after the implementation of stringent laws and rules. This practice is said to have existed during the Vedic age itself in many royal households. In the novel, Princess Didda remarks, "If I have a sister my father will... Her voice trails off but we both knew what she wants to say (QOI 32)". By exquisitely combining fact and fiction, the author tries to bring out the fact that women, wherever they are born and bred, are subjected to various atrocities, both during their lives or sometimes, even before they are born. Such age-old traditions and customs are followed generation after generation to this date, when people, despite being educated cling to these irrational practices.

When Queen Didda is married off to Kashmira king Kshemagupta as his second wife, one would expect her future to be bleak and misery-ridden. On the contrary, that is where her fortunate destiny begins. Upon entering the land of Kashmira with her all-time favourite companions, Narvahana and Valga, she would have never thought that Kashmira was the land that held lots of hopes and fortune for her.

Amid several power-seeking and evil-minded wolves, Queen Didda strengthened her hold and influence slowly and steadily. With the support of Narvahana, she could anticipate the moves of suspicious Phalguna; and in a couple of years, Queen Didda was a truly new woman in all its sense. She even dared to defy the system of Sathi, which was a compulsory practice for all Hindu women, irrespective of their background and status. At this point, the author describes how Phalguna thinks of Queen Didda, "in his mind, I am a usurper of sorts, an unnatural woman who did not die alongside her husband but chose to play a part in the real world, the world of men" (QOI 98). Here Phalguna stands as a representative of all other men of the nation who despises and looks down upon the progress of women. In that sense, several Phalgunas can be spotted among today's men, especially those with a patriarchal mindset. When Queen Didda becomes a regent after the death of Kshemagupta, she rules the kingdom in a highly efficient manner. It is on that day that she realized her dream which she always longed for, "It is the power that I want- the power to be acknowledged and respected for who I am, the power to crush those who taunt and humiliate me, the power to command those who dismiss me as a cripple" (QOI 40). Lazar's feminism aims to investigate how gender, ideology, and authority interact intricately in societal discourses. He defines power as, "one's capacity to influence the actions of others" (Lazar 145). She speaks of two parts of her mind: one which craves love and support and shuns evil; and the other part of the mind which makes her want to "... harm all her rebels and maul the world for mauling her with its indifference for she is not a man" (QOI 40). The author tries to say that not all women can be meek and submissive for all time. There comes a point in their lives when they resist and protest against the prevailing discriminatory social order and shakes the hierarchy to restore balance. Later when she achieves power, she says, "I am now king and queen in one. Kashmir belongs to me and mine (149)". Even after losing all her loved ones, including her parents, husband, son, and all the grandsons, she does not let go of her grip on kingship and tries to rule with even more vitality and strength.

There are several instances where Rangachari contrasts the rule of a male and a female ruler. The rule by a female monarch can happen only once in a blue moon and here the difference is in the fact that monarchy did not fall upon Queen Didda, rather she, with her shrewdness and wisdom, herself took the responsibility to rule the entire Kashmir region. She describes her as, "a woman who does not

hide her gender in male garb but flaunts her beauty and femininity like a weapon” (QOI 150). Yet she does not fear away from impeccably ruling her subjects. Facebook COO and renowned author Sheryl Sandberg opines, "Women should lean into their jobs and take responsibility for the work they accomplish, be ambitious and unafraid to compete, to question the status quo, and to fight for a better world with a unique viewpoint” (Sandberg 36).

From a naïve girl who was taunted and criticized for all her deeds by everyone, Didda rose to become a queen who surmounted one obstacle after another. This is the sole reason why she commands respect from her subjects and they hail her rule. even during that period, she faced criticism and opposition from the male members of the royal court who felt threatened by her leadership. Her disability also left her vulnerable to increased marginalization and stigma. Despite these challenges, Didda was able to leave a lasting legacy and her achievements are remembered and celebrated even to this date. Towards the climax of the novel, the author writes, "... for generations to come will remember her as the queen who established her rule on this land so effectively that none dared to oppose her at the end (QOI 159)". Didda's story is also a reminder of the importance of understanding and addressing systemic inequalities and the resulting marginalization. In this sense, Queen Didda's life is a testament to the resilience and strength of marginalized women throughout history.

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**Dawn of Gender Neutrality: Embracing Feminism in Reference with
Dear Ijeawele, or a Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions by
Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie**

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Abstract

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Dear Ijeawele, or a Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* gives the reader an insight on the feminist within the author. She suggests uncomplicated change in one's life to abolish gender inequality. Being a staunch feminist, she lays out fifteen suggestions to make gender equality in all fields of life a possible one. Women empowerment works in different levels and Adichie concentrates on the change that one can do on an individual level which would aid in making a huge difference in the society in the future. She suggests methods on raising a girl child unexposed to gender bias as it would create a positive environment for nurturing the young mind and think beyond one's basic identity. Adichie provides guidance to parents who play a vital role in hampering the liberation that a girl child rightly owns. These suggestions focus on empowering women right from birth and not turning them into feminists but women with equal rights as their male counterparts.

Keywords: empowerment, liberation, guidance, gender inequality.

Adichie is one the brightest and realistic writer of the contemporary age. Coming from Nigeria she throws light on the real life problems faced by women in a male chauvinistic society. Her first novel, *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) focuses on the life of a thirteen years old, Kambili and her mother, Beatice. It analyses the trauma they go through in terms of gender, religion and culture in the hands of her father, Eugene. Her second novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) brings to light the sufferings of civilians during the Nigerian Civil war. She exposes two groups of women: one being the educated women while the other being illiterate village women. Both group of women work together for the sustainment of their society during times of war. Her third novel, *Americanah* (2013) deals with triple oppression faced by Nigerian

women in America namely gender, race and the status of immigrant. Apart from these novels, all her other short stories and public talks exhibit her staunch believe in feminism.

Adichie not only preaches the ways of achieving equality for women but also shows them do it through her narratives. Though her short stories deal with numerous situations the protagonists are women and they rise above all towards emancipation. Her TED talks give a sense of confidence and the aspiration to attain empowerment. A specific work of Adichie answers to her friend's question of how to raise her daughter to be feminist in the future. These suggestions are simple in form, capable of guiding any young girl wanting to change the world into a gender-neutral one. Before comprehending the measures to remove gender inequality it is important to analyze the background to gender.

Gender is the, "... social process of dividing up people and social practices along the lines of *sexed identities*" (Beasley 13). It is an analytical category which was widely argued showing the distinction between biological sex difference and the behaviors attributed to it. It is used to show the demarcation between the masculine and feminine demarcation. The main purpose of assigning gender distinction is to highlight the physical and biological difference between the binary division (men and women) which can be used to maintain a patriarchal power structure and instill in the minds of women that they are better suited for domestic life rather than public life. The change in their meaning overtime can be divided into three time zones. Before 1960s, the meanings were restricted to language code mainly masculine and feminine. In the 20th century it was brought down narrowly to social identities broadly men and women. Whereas in the contemporary times it is used to express personal attributes.

Gender has always been a subject of debate. Women are considered to be inferior because of their natural boon to reproduce. As mentioned earlier, it began with the inception of men dominating women in all spheres of life. They instantly wanted to use the boon to procreate to increase the population of their clan by excluding women herself. Each time a girl baby was born she was confined within the walls of her house and made to learn household chores. The minute she hits puberty she gets married off to a member outside the clan (occasionally within the clan) to produce children. It is described by Claude Levi-Strauss as the Law of

Kinship or Law of the Father. He explains that women were treated as material goods and exchanged within groups as a symbol of friendship. In such a case, women neither had an identity in her clan nor has one after she gets married. It is considered to be the genesis of gender inequality and it holds significance even in the present age as it is still practiced in many countries.

As women were treated different because of their gender for centuries change would be impossible within few days or months. It takes deeper understanding into the working of the socially constructed vice to annihilate it completely. Most often, women willingly accepted the subjugation as they were conditioned to believe that they no longer belong in the social spheres and their sole duty was to serve their husband and nurture their children. Men exploited women physically and emotionally to enjoy their status as the patriarch of the family and the society. Culture was used as a tool to oppress women by justifying all their actions. Men married more than one woman and produced many children to prove their masculinity in their clan. Women followed the rules of their clan and allowed men to utilize their boon unknowing of its repercussions. To put it in a nutshell, as Simone de Beauvoir says in *Second Sex*, “One is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one” (Beauvoir 301).

Judith Butler took the world of gender studies by storm after the publication of her work, *Gender Studies* (1990). She brought out the Theory of Performativity which gives a substantial definition to women being oppressed by men. Butler in *Gender Trouble* states that, “...gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts” (140). She convincingly explains that enactment and experiments were repeated for a long time and has established a set of meaning to it which is already socially established. The performance is done to maintain the strategic aim of that particular gender within the binary system. To explain her theory, she uses the example of ‘drag’ in which men and women dress up like the opposite gender in a hyper-feminine or hyper-masculine manner. Butler calls it ‘double inversion and illusion’ which makes her theory credible.

Butler claims it to be a hint which would explain the meanings that have been accorded to gender. She says, “The performance of drag plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being

performed” (137). There are three categories to it namely gender identity, anatomical sex and gender performance. If these three categories are distinct from one another a dissonance is created not only between sex and gender but gender and performance also.

When witnessed from the above perspective drag seems to reveal the imitative attribute of gender and its contingency. Butler stated that the displacement establishes identity to be fluid. The male and female are in a state of flux which indirectly specifies that the gendered subjectivity is never fixed. It gives space for reification and contextualization. She connects gender to parody stating that, “The notion of gender parody defended here does not assume that there is an original which such parodic identities imitate” (138). Butler tries to claim that gender parody exposes original identity in which gender expresses itself to be an imitation without proper genesis. Gender is performative and not expressive which makes their distinction very crucial. If all the attributes and acts are performative, its attributes cannot be measured as there is no preceding identity. Butler says of gender as:

That gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender’s performative character and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality. (141)

According to Butler gender can never be true, false, real, apparent, original or derived. From Butler’s justification of gender being performative answers to a lot of the stereotypes that have been accustomed to a particular gender. Adichie tries to break these stereotypes in *Dear Ijeawele, or a Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* by asking her friend to give up and take up few attitudes to help her daughter grow to be a feminist and an empowered woman. She suggests fifteen measures that have to be followed by parents to provide a nurturing environment for their daughters to flourish.

Adichie starts her work by asking her friend to keep two things in mind which is common for all the women around the world. One being that the ‘women matter equally to men’ and the second being, will the results be the same if the roles were reversed. These two points are the basic for every human being and women should never overlook the importance of these necessities as they had always done.

It is worth trying to do it as it would solve all the inequality that happens to women. Adichie's first suggestion asks her friend to not feel guilty for pursuing her career. Women are forced to give up their jobs once they have a child and Adichie strongly rejects that idea because women have their own passion and needs. Being a mother is one of the many roles they play and it must not be compromised. If people try to convince women saying that tradition expects one to give up their employment after having children, they must be reminded that women worked in fields and traded in the Igbo tradition. Motherhood must be cherished and not seen as an object of hindrance in any aspect. She also expects her friend's husband to take part in child care because he too is a 'parent' and has all the responsibilities of a father. Adichie says, "I have no interest in the debate about women 'doing it all' because it is a debate that assumes that care-giving and domestic work are singularly female domains, an idea that I strongly reject" (7).

Women have the innate quality of tending to the needs of their children and do not ask for help. They end up criticizing other's help and not feeling satisfied. Adichie expresses in her second suggestion that it is complete hokum. It is father's duty to take care of his child and women must never thank their husbands for babysitting their child because a father has all the responsibilities that a mother has. Adichie asks her friend's husband Chudi to share child work. There is an exception with single parents if not it must be done together. She says, "My friend Nwabu once told me that because his wife left when his kids were young, he became 'Mr Mum', by which he meant that he did the daily care-giving. But he was not being a 'Mr Mum'; he was simply being a dad" (8).

The third suggestion is a powerful one as it talks about 'gender roles'. Adichie was made to sweep the floor when she was young and not her brothers because she was a girl child. Girls are taught chores and cooking in a very young age as they are expected to get married comparatively quicker than men. It makes them believe that marriage is their only goal. Adichie finds it even more annoying that certain colours and toys decide the future of children. The colour 'pink' is considered to very feminine and it is attached to girls while the colour 'blue' is attached to boys. The mandatory cliché attaches itself to an infant the minute they are formed in the mother's womb.

Adichie advises her friend to consider her daughter, Chizalum as an individual before reprimanding her based on her gender. Girls should also be given less rules like boys to help them believe in their self. Even if she fails, she would never regret trying. Adichie shows her intolerance towards the ‘Feminism Lite’ in the fourth suggestion when she professes that women are naturally inferior and must expect to be treated well by men who are superior. It naturally gives the upper hand to men and they feel grateful to them for ‘allowing’ their wives to achieve their dreams. The word ‘allow’ irks Adichie because a woman does not require her man’s permission to accomplish her desires. If tables were reversed people would not claim the same for a married man to be ‘allowed’ by his wife. She says, “But here is a sad truth: our world is full of men and women who do not like powerful women” (10).

The fifth suggestion tells her friend to teach her daughter to read. It will help her realize her interest in a certain field and work passionately to achieve it. If she fails to show any interest in reading Ijeawele can bribe Chizalum to read. Bribing children to read books is an investment. The sixth suggestion talks about the understanding of language. It is important that her daughter is given the freedom to question language as it holds a deep-rooted link with history. She says that words like patriarchy and misogyny must be avoided as it feels abstract. Adichie says, “Teach her that if you criticize X in women but do not criticize X in men, then you do not have a problem with X, you have a problem with women. For X please insert words like anger, ambition, loudness...ruthless” (11). It is not necessary to include gender before profession like lady mechanic or lady pilot because it is misogynist. Women need not be revered but considered equal.

The seventh tells that marriage should never be seen as an ‘achievement’. As it would make a woman settle down quickly and would only cause an imbalance in the relationship. Women being mentioned as ‘wives’ publicly is not acceptable to Adichie because men are not mentioned as ‘husbands’. In the same way a woman’s name can stay the same even after she gets married. The title ‘Mrs’ need not carry the value it does because a man’s title remains unchanged even after he gets married and so women too can neglect it. The eighth suggestion asks her to reject likeability because women are always expected to be liked. Women worry if they ever hurt another person because they have been conditioned from birth to be gentle and kind. But it must be rejected as it makes them suppress their feelings within themselves and instead, they should be brave and outspoken.

The ninth suggestion is very important as it says, “Teach Chizalum a sense of identity” (14). Children should be taught to embrace their background namely their tradition and culture. Igbo tradition must be taught to their children to acknowledge its rich heritage. Race must be taught to them to sensitize them about the working of the western world. Children grow up watching fair skinned people believing that to be the standard of beauty. It must be removed. They must be taught to take pride in Africa’s history and black heroes must be introduced to them. Adichie says, “Give an Igbo nickname. When I was growing up, my Aunt Gladys called me Ada Obodo Dike. I always loved that. Apparently, my village, Ezi-Abba, is known as the Land of Warriors and to be called Daughter of the Land of Warriors was deliciously heady” (14).

The tenth suggestion asks her friend to be deliberate about the way she talks about her daughter’s appearance and the manner in which she engages with her. Girls should not be made to feel guilty of their bodies as it might make them quit sports because they might feel very self-conscious. They must be allowed to wear makeup and short skirts. It is wrong to compare their choice of clothes being immoral. Hair should never be linked with pain as it carries a lot of beauty within it. They too must be handled with care. The eleventh suggestion says, “Teach her to question our culture’s selective use of biology as ‘reasons’ for social norms” (16). She says that a mother should never compromise her lineage for the sake of raising her child and she must understand that the child belongs to her and her husband. But the Igbo women believe that their children belong to their husbands and can never let go of the sense of ownership. Chizalum must be taught that biology is interesting but it never justifies social norms as the latter was created by men for their benefit.

The twelfth suggestion asks her to converse about sex with her daughter and teach her that her private part must be called by its proper name. It will help her understand that sexuality must never be linked to shame. The thirteenth suggestion warns her friend to accept the fact that her daughter will definitely get into romance once she becomes an adult. Adichie wants her friend to be a mother to whom her daughter can talk about everything and not a friend. The fourteenth suggestion tells that history should never be oppressed into saints and children should never be taught that way. She says, “...the assumption that women are supposed to be morally ‘better’ than men. They are not. Women are as human as men are. Female goodness is as normal as female evil” (19). The last suggestion asks her to sensitize her child

on difference and that difference is normal. It can be applied to all forms of life situations and experiences.

Adichie through the specific work shows the path through which the stereotype behind gender can be uprooted from life. Instead of feeding the thoughts of gender inequality to children and then removing them it would better if people follow the above suggestions to bring about the change that is much required. Adichie does give credit to the theory of Performativity indirectly and proposes the way to annihilate it. Gender equality cannot be achieved immediately as few changes in life can be done to eradicate it in the future. Thus, the suggestions of Adichie will help all parents imbibe the notion of equality in the minds of their young ones.

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“Looking as if she were alive” – The power of a Portrait in *My Last Duchess* by Robert Browning

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to study art as a means of objectification in “My Last Duchess”. In an attempt to reduce the Duchess into something lifeless and two-dimensional, the Duke’s purpose and manner of execution makes the Duchess look “as if she were alive”. Through allusions and parallels drawn with ekphrastic poetry, this study will be based primarily on how the Portrait works on several levels to expose not just the Duke, but the Duchess as well, and exercises as much control as the Duke himself, if not more. The symbols of art in the poem reveal not just their personalities, but offer a detailed study on the power and gender politics operating within the domesticities of the marriage in the duchy of Ferrara.

Keywords: Art, Control, Objectification, Power

“That’s my last Duchess painted on the wall / Looking as if she were alive.”

We stumble upon a psychopathic murderer with the opening lines of *My Last Duchess* by Robert Browning. The Duke of Ferrara draws a curtain unveiling his deceased Duchess, whom he still detests for her ‘transgressions’. The portrait of the young Duchess, with a seemingly harmless “spot of joy”, wields enough power to unveil the true image of the Duke.

Art has often been used to illustrate complementary works of literature. However, works of literature that surround works of art often reveal a lot about the speakers, or the poets themselves. Portraits of individuals have often been used in literature to express varied emotions, psyches and personalities. The Duchess, even if reduced to an object of art, wields more control over the Duke than she did when she was alive, ironically with her verisimilitude.

Robert Browning's *My Last Duchess* provides a subtle, yet complex presentation of Romantic "Vitalism": his conviction, like Shakespeare's "Antony and Cleopatra", that a "healthy spirituality is based upon an affirmation of life in all its infinite variety". "Such a creed grows from Browning's belief", says John Ower, "that while on earth we can only know God through a succession of limited experiences".¹ Divinity reveals Himself in the material particulars of His creation, which, when unrevealed, might stand for divine acceptance or divine apprehension.

B.R. Jerman is of the opinion that "the artist, Fra Pandolf, achieved his work so rapidly that it must have been inferior: Fra Pandolf painted the portrait in 'a day', surely a supreme achievement even for a master doing a perfunctory job, let alone painting a 'wonder'." The Duke of Ferrara has been associated with the stereotypical patriarchal figure with a warped psychology, a personification of the male ego which leads to dangerous, and fatal consequences for the Duchess, "too soon made glad". The Duke's story, "painted" with the Duchess' 'frivolities', is in itself a character sketch of the Duke himself.

*"Strangers like you that pictured countenance, / The depth and passion of its earnest glance, / But to myself they turned..."*² There is a clear indication that the portrait of the Duchess has often been unveiled, on several occasions as indicated by the Duke, and he himself had been the sole performer of this 'act'. The Duke does not engage the Count's envoy in a conversation – rather, he dictates the actions, and even the speech of the later. "Strangers", says the Duke, have often 'asked' him "How such a glance came there." The Duke reiterates, "they seemed to ask, if they durst", and hence, the envoy is not the only one to turn and "ask thus."

Nowhere in the poem does the envoy turn to talk. The phrase, "they seemed to ask" is evidence enough that a question of this vague, ambiguous kind is clearly psychological. No stranger would be inclined to enquire as invasively to a Duke as is mentioned in the poem. It is clear that this entire episode of unveiling of the portrait is almost a performance on part of the duke, enacted several times. The Duke had been instrumental in silencing the Duchess, and even if this entire performance is a

¹ Ower, John. "Neptune Taming A Sea-Horse: Theme And Symbol In 'My Last Duchess.'" *Cla Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 2, 1980, Pp. 164–72.

² Browning, Robert, et al. *Robert Browning's Poetry: Authoritative Texts, Criticism*. 2nd ed. New York, W.W. Norton & Co, 2007.

veiled threat for the future Duchess, this also shows the compulsion the Duke feels to enact the same. The portrait of the Duchess, now a mere two-dimensional object in apparent control of the Duke, still exerts enough power to propel the Duke to unveil the portrait, revealing the true nature of the Duke again, and again, and again. Paintings have often been used to reveal the true nature, that is, the Freudian Ego of the mind. Indeed, the portrait of the Duchess almost works with a mind of its own, ‘unveiling’ the Id, Ego and Superego of the Duke. The portrait shows the basal, primal Id instincts of a warped sexual fetishism of the Duke, juxtaposing it with the Superego of a feigned morality through :

*“The Count your master’s known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretense
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter’s self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object.”³*

Even though it is the Duke who unveils the portrait, it is the Duke who is unveiled through it. There lays the power of the inanimate portrait.

The Duke is a connoisseur of art. His treatment of a painting as a “piece” is justified, when he says “I call that piece a wonder now”. What stands out are his later references of the portrait as “she” : “There *she* stands” and “look at *her*”, as if it is the Duchess, frozen in time, but still alive, that he talks of. “Her visionary innocence opens to the ‘flood’ of life through an ‘intercourse’ that is at once sensory, emotional and spiritual”, says Ower⁴, referring to the portrait of the Duchess. The Duke says “Looking as if she were alive” twice in the poem, once as he starts his narrative of the character of the Duchess, and once he ends it. There is a subtle hint of a mockery unleashed at the Duchess, dead that she is, at the tremendous life force that she symbolized, while she was alive. The Duke's extreme reaction to his wife's delight in existence suggests that he is frightened and repelled by the flow of life. He can see in the vitality only a crass and potentially anarchic lack of restraint. The

³ Browning, Robert, et al. Robert Browning's Poetry: Authoritative Texts, Criticism. 2nd ed. New York, W.W. Norton & Co, 2007.

⁴ Ower, John. “Neptune Taming A Sea-Horse: Theme And Symbol In ‘My Last Duchess.’” *Cla Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 2, 1980, Pp. 164–72.

seemingly aloof and self-possessed aristocrat is thus weak and insecure, and this becomes magnified with the portrait, which, lifeless and inanimate, has a verisimilitude with the real Duchess, alive and smiling with that haunting “spot of joy”. The Duke almost seems to be convincing himself that his last Duchess is indeed dead, and not right in front of him, and hence the jeering of “as if she were alive”.

The jealous memories still aroused in the Duke by the painted “spot of joy” show his insecurity even after his wife's “imprisonment” in the portrait. Even her reduction to a two-dimensional portrait still did not deprive her of vital energy. An additional control over her threatening energy was required, and this was of course provided by the curtain, which the Duke alone has the right to draw : “since none puts by/ The curtain I have drawn for you, but I”. When the Duke has been by the ebullience reflected in a portrait still been psychologically threatened, it is little wonder that he has had his subject eliminated from threatening his authority and possession, only to be further threatened with a portrait.

*“...She had
A heart—how shall I say?— too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.”⁵*

The Duke often pauses in his speech, either struggling to explain to the envoy what exactly it had been that troubled him about the Duchess's behaviour, or simply because he pretended to struggle to explain, to foster sympathy for his doing. Either way, the fact that he does pause multiple times in his confession is a clear indication of the fact that it is the portrait which makes him do so. The portrait of the Duchess, associated directly with her brutal murder, is like an enigma that makes it a compulsion for the Duke, either to feign innocence with his speech, or genuinely feel the need to plead not guilty.

The Duchess' capacity for a universal love, her delight in the simplest of things in life, was accordingly a manifestation of her spiritual vitality, of her growth towards art, and God. Her husband, however, could only see delight and exuberance

⁵ Browning, Robert, et al. Robert Browning's Poetry: Authoritative Texts, Criticism. 2nd ed. New York, W.W. Norton & Co, 2007.

as “la donna è mobile “. She had been, in the eyes of the Duke, committing adultery of the soul by ranking the narcissistic Duke’s gift of “a nine-hundred-years-old name with anybody’s gift.” Her behaviour hence contradicted the need for absolute mastery and possession, the fixation with order and decorum, which were the Duke's chief defenses against life.

The portrait of the Duchess and in death, her ironic opposition to the Duke’s control and the statue of Neptune taming a seahorse are complementary to each other. Both of these pieces of art show the power dynamic that is central to the poem. The key to the statue could be found in W. H. Auden's spectacular analysis of the Romantic sea-imagery in his “The Enchafèd Flood” (Ower, 1980). “The sea”, he says, “symbolizes for the Romantics the creative unfettered vitality. In typifying a primal energy, the sea is opposed to the sterility of human civilization”. In the sculpture's mould, the fiery, liquid bronze is caught and chilled into a fixed statue. Neptune taming a feminine creature like the seahorse shows the adamant patriarchal ego to exert control, whether social or domestic. To an overly Apollonian mentality such as the Duke's, the ocean would represent disorder, chaos and primal vitality, all in opposition to what the Duchess represents.

The petrification of the seahorse and the objectification of the Duchess both exert equal power of control on their oppressors. The seahorse portrays the fragility of Neptune in the sculpture, the obsessive, unnecessary impulse of a god to “tame” a mortally weak creature. The portrait of the Duchess exerts a phantom-like control over the Duke, almost a puppeteer who manipulates the Duke’s every move, every speech, just like Porphyria’s death drives her lover to justify himself by forcing in the divine, “And God had not said a word.” Gods usually do not “say a word”, making it easy for the psychopathic murderer to justify himself in his own insanity. Like the eyes of Nancy haunt Bill Sikes even upto the moment of his death, the portrait of the Duchess make it impossible for the Duke either to discard the portrait, or live in peace with his false conception of having “tamed” the Duchess. It is indeed a “dagger of the mind” for the Duke. While the portrait of Dorian Gray brings out his true self, the portrait of the Duchess exposes the character of the Duke of Ferrara. The painting of a drowning Icarus at Musée Des Beaux Art shows the nature of mankind, much like the statue of Neptune taming a seahorse shows the nature of the man. The portrait of the Duchess thus manifests an ironic ambivalence. The painting

at once reflects its owner's attempt to protect himself against life and love, and the inevitable failure of any such defence.

The Art Connoisseur fails to restrict the flow of life in art, and their lies the victory of the Duchess.

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**Subaltern Voices: Women Narratives in the Short Stories of Manik
Bandopadhyay and Mahasweta Devi**

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Abstract

Women's issues have been an incomplete area of discussion since times immemorial. However, through the writings of eminent writers, there has been a surge of subaltern voices. Women from every arena of life are taking strong responsibility for their sexuality. Rather than being the desired object of lust, domination, and oppression, women have begun to shed the mask of the passive image of "Bharat Mata" seeking her son's protection. Mahasweta Devi and Manik Bandopadhyay's writings on women showcase a concrete sense of history imagined in fiction. Their stories deal with the unfortunate fate of underprivileged women who attempts unfathomable acts in their state of desperation, attempting to provide for themselves without relying on a man's help even if it comes at the cost of one's well-being. This transforms the women characters from their subaltern state to beings who are formidable. The paper would focus on Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi" and "Stanadayini" and Manik Bandopadhyay's "KushthoRogir Bou," "Duhshashonio," and "Upay."

Keywords: Mahasweta Devi, Manik Bandopadhyay, Subaltern, Underprivileged women.

Mahasweta Devi's timeline extended from 1926 to 2016. Her writings often revolved around the plight of Dalit and tribal communities, with a particular focus on marginalized and poor women. She stated in the introduction to "Agnigarbh" that "Life is not mathematics and the human being is not made for the sake of politics. I want a change in the present social system and do not believe in mere party politics" (Devi 8). Through her stories, she was able to highlight the social change she was advocating for underprivileged women. Her writings are devoid of the use of sentimentality. Instead of playing with the reader's emotions, she approaches them in a straightforward manner by starkly delineating the experiences of marginalized women. Her fictional works allow the readers to observe the intricacies of social

institutions, cultural practices, and sexual roles and how these function in areas having different power dynamics. In particular, Devi's stories point to a distinct change in the discourse of sexuality. The sexuality of the marginalized woman becomes the platform for her liberation.

Manik Bandopadhyay was born in 1908 and died in 1956. His writings also centered around the plight of disenfranchised communities. His stories focusing on the poverty of people affected by incidents such as the Bengal famine and the Partition provide readers with a sense of history imagined in fiction. In one of his essays entitled "Why do I Write," Bandopadhyay states: "I write because I have the urgency to share a fraction of the way I have seen and felt life. No one else knows what I know" (Bandopadhyay 10). Like Mahasweta Devi, Manik Bandopadhyay also chose to break away from the use of sentimentalism in favour of action-oriented plots that portray the stark realities of contemporary situations.

Despite the difference in the timelines of the two writers, one of the central issues that they focus on is the emancipation of marginalized women—those who were subjected to extreme disenfranchisement, neglect, and even abuse. In the short stories of Mahasweta Devi and Manik Bandopadhyay, the 'Pater Familias' or the man of the house becomes incapable of playing an active role in providing protection. They are reduced to mere figures of 'masculinity' who are in reality insignificant non-entities. They rely on vague notions and words that ultimately fail to provide any solutions to pressing problems and crises. Whether it be Mahasweta Devi's Senanayak and Kanganalicharan or Manik Bandopadhyay's Bhushan, Pramatha, Anwar, and Jatin, the male figures represent nothing more than feeble images of support. Abject poverty is dealt with primarily by the female characters in the stories, who are exasperated by their lives of extreme deprivation, shame, and torture.

The term "subaltern" was coined by Antonio Gramsci in his *Prison Notebooks* in the context of his discussion on the cultural hegemony that excludes specific groups of people from the socio-economic spheres of society. Gayatri Spivak extended the idea of "women as subalterns" in her essay, "*Can the Subaltern Speak?*". One of the primary objectives of the essay was to draw attention to Western colonial discourses that revolved around how "white men" were saving "brown women from brown men" (Spivak 92). In the process of being 'saved' or 'rescued,' these women were not only being denied the opportunity to speak up for themselves

but were also being manipulated into a false belief of safety. Women, in this sense, were doubly marginalized figures. Whether it be in the colonial or post-colonial contexts, women suffered oppression under the administrative as well as patriarchal powers, intensifying their vulnerability. However, the stories of Mahasweta Devi and Manik Bandopadhyay, bring to the foreground the voices of women who reject the passive role of the 'subaltern' seeking masculine protection. Despite their state of desperation and apparent helplessness, these female characters are willing to perform unfathomable acts to challenge and subvert the power structures that oppress them, even if these actions threaten their own well-being. These powerful moments of resistance are captured memorably in the stories that I have selected for my paper.

Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi" published in 1997 is set against the background of the Naxalite revolt of 1971. The central character, Dopdi, is a Dalit activist who along with her husband Dulna murders wealthy landlords who deprive them of their land rights. The hegemonic power of the administration is represented through the figure of 'Senanayak' who wields his "male organ of a gun" (Devi 18) and aims to annihilate the Dalit Naxalites. However, the process of making Draupadi reveal the hideouts of her companions is evidently a demonstration of the rage associated with toxic masculinity. Senanayak's role is not only that of an army officer performing his state-sanctioned role but also that of a man who is unable to tolerate the idea of a woman asserting her power. Instead of directly killing Dopdi like her husband Dulna, Senanayak's soldiers commit an act of irreparable torture and violation of Dopdi's body.

Dopdi, instead of being a passive sufferer, approaches Senanayak with her unarmed but furious rage, unsettling him even if it is for a moment. In *Draupadi* Dopdi despite being unarmed stands up against the male-constructed authoritative system with her "thigh and public hair matted with dry blood. Two breasts, two wounds..." (Devi 33). Even the masculine voice of Arijit, their Naxalite leader, fades away towards the end and Dopdi assumes complete authority. As Senanayak offers her clothes to cover herself up, she refuses them, for a torturer cannot be a provider. Dopdi revolts "You can strip me, but how can you clothe me again?" (33). In "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Spivak discusses how 'white' men claim to rescue brown women from brown men. Considering Spivak's point of view, Senanayak in *Draupadi* is "the closest approximation of the first-world scholar" who commands the act of violence on Dopdi, the third-world female. Dopdi's assertion towards the

end of the narrative is an expression of what Spivak calls the woman's "voice consciousness" (Spivak 80). The theatre of Manipuri legend Heisnam Kanhailal powerfully presented the assertive image of Dopdi where one can view the 'terribly afraid' expression of Senanayak as Dopdi reveals her wounded self to him and confronts him without a tinge of shame. Dopdi is a palimpsest and a contradiction. *The Theory of Gender Performativity* by Judith Butler may be applied to the figure of Dopdi. According to Butler, "gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed" (Butler 527). Dopdi refuses to perform the female-ness assigned to her. The notion of disgracing her through repeated rapes to put her in "her" place is nothing but an attempt to reinforce socially constructed hierarchies of gender and caste. The moment she refuses to perform her assigned role, she emerges as an indestructible entity.

Mahasweta Devi's *Stanadayini* or "Breast Giver," published in 1997, depicts the oppression that women face irrespective of their caste. At the center of this story is Jashoda, a Brahmin woman, who cannot remember a time when there was no child in her womb, and who "... never had the time to calculate if she could or could not bear motherhood" (Devi 34). Jashodha is forced to earn a wage for the family when her husband Kangalicharan becomes lame after an accident. She earns her wage by becoming the wet nurse for the Haldar family. Even though her mode of self-assertion is different from that of Dopdi, she emerges as a pillar of strength who serves without any expectations. She knows that "Such is the power of the Indian soil that all women turn into mothers here and all men remain immersed in the spirit of holy childhood" (42). The Haldar house disconnects its phone to avoid the information about Jashoda's death. They are too weak to accept the guilt that they bear. Jashoda's silent protest, depicted by her death is evident. She states to the doctor "...you grew so big on my milk, and now you are hurting me so?" (68). Jashoda is portrayed as a powerful character who provides for her own family in a crisis and also sustains the Haldar family. Even though she dies forsaken, she asserts her voice before she dies. She dies after she provides for a helpless community. As Mahasweta Devi states, Jashoda's death may be seen in the context of 'sanctioned suicide' or 'Icchamrityu'. She knows that now that she has exhausted herself, no one can come to her rescue. Jashoda realizes that "one must become Jashoda if one suckles the world" (69). She cannot depend on a husband who forsakes her the

moment she fails to provide. Thus, she frees herself of a system that has no respect for her, thereby emancipating herself from the ‘subaltern’ label.

Manik Bandopadhyay’s 1934 narrative of *Kushthorogir Bou* or “The Wife of a Leper” taken from the “Bou” series is yet another tale of women’s emancipation from the clutches of patriarchy. The story focuses on the characters of Jatin and Mahasweta. Jatin becomes a leper at the age of twenty-eight. Since then, Mahasweta, his wife has assumed his responsibility. She cares for him day in and day out with little regard for her own needs. Jatin, however, fails to acknowledge her devotion and care. He becomes envious of her good health and accuses her of engaging in an extramarital affair as well as killing her child. Jatin goes as far as to rub his wounds vigorously on Mahasweta’s hand in the hope that she may contract his disease. The narrator states: “...Being in pain, Jatin wishes to provide pain to others as well. But he only gets hold of Mahasweta. She has to carry the burden of his sick body and mind” (Bandopadhyay 63). Unable to tolerate the increasing wrath of her husband, Mahasweta orchestrates a clever solution. She visits Kalighat leaving Jatin behind. When she returns, she tactfully convinces Jatin that a spiritual man has advised her to open a care center for her husband’s good health. The situation turns ironic as Mahasweta begins to care for the lepers instead of caring for her husband, thereby unshackling herself from her husband. From the mere identity of a leper’s wife, she is now transformed into Mahasweta Devi.

Mahasweta redefines her notions of womanhood by creating a personal space for herself detached from her husband’s dictates. It is to be kept in mind that the story is set during a time when women did not have property rights. Even though Mahasweta has the financial resources to open a care center, she is aware that the wealth belongs to her husband. At one point in the narrative, she is even threatened with the loss of her home. Under the circumstances, the only power that she can wield is the power of her voice, and she uses it to manipulate the situation available to her. She feigns concern for her husband when in reality she harbors hatred for him. She tells him, “This is solely for your benefit. I met a spiritual man in Kalighat. I have never seen an intelligent man like him in my life! He told me to open a care center for the lepers for your speedy recovery” (69). Through the clever use of her voice, she emancipates herself from her subaltern status.

Manik Bandopadhyay’s short story “Duhshashonio” or “Bad Governance,” published in the revolutionary newspaper *Jugantor* in 1946, depicts the sufferings of

the poor people, especially women, in the village of Hatipur during the Bengal Famine of 1943. Bandopadhyay highlights the bad administration prevailing in the village of Hatipur where the rich deprive the poor of their basic rights. The readers get a glimpse into the lives of different people in the village. The women are the worst sufferers and some of them have no option other than to participate in the flesh trade. The women are referred to as 'Chaya' or shadows who due to the lack of clothing are only able to move out of the house at night. When the sixteen-year-old Bindu refuses to submit herself to prostitution, Malati, a prostitute tells her "Come with me to work otherwise give up your clothes and go home" (93). The villagers keep on waiting for the share of sarees designated for Hatipur. However, the clothes are never provided to them. Those who are influential are motivated by profit, and their bad governance deprives the villagers of their share of clothing. Rabia, one of the female protagonists in the story tells her husband Anwar "If you do not bring clothes today, we are done. I'll sink to the bottom of the pond" (93). Indeed, Rabia commits suicide when Anwar fails to bring her saree. Instead of stooping to prostitution and the shame of nakedness, she "...sleeps in the bottom of the well" (97). She is wearied with the false promises of the men and the repeated failure of her husband to provide for her. Her suicide is an act of protest against the bad governance of men who offer nothing but a 'shadow' of security. She assumes responsibility for herself through her self-inflicted death.

Manik Bandopadhyay's *Upay* or 'The Final Solution' is set against the background of the 1947 Partition. Many people became homeless as they travelled to and from the two dominions of West and East Bengal. The capitalists took advantage of the situation to exploit the homeless, especially the women who were more vulnerable. Mallika, the main protagonist of the story, is one of the homeless refugees. She is crammed with her sick husband, her two-and-a-half-year-old son, Khokon, and her sister-in-law in her 'mattress kingdom'. In a state of desperation to provide for her son, she accepts the assistance of Pramatha who belongs to the 'Help and Welfare Society'. However, the true nature of the 'Help and Welfare Society' becomes clear to Mallika when she understands the real intentions of her ostensible 'provider,' Pramatha. He wishes to "enjoy her first" (Bandopadhyay 60) before introducing her to the flesh trade. The idea of the exploiter feigning the role of the provider is again brought to the limelight here. Pramatha tells Mallika to "pull on fresh clothes" (59) only to exploit her. Like Dopdi, Mallika stands up against her

oppressor. She even goes a step ahead to finish off her predator. She not only strangles Pramatha to death but also takes the money from him. This act is ‘the final solution’ to her.

The act of murdering her predator, Pramatha, empowers Mallika and liberates her from the position of a ‘subaltern’. She decides to carry a knife in the future while engaging with men, for violence has become the new currency during the partition. While men were using the abstract idea of ‘Bharat Mata’ to promote nationalistic fervor only to simultaneously engage in violence against real women, Mallika resolves to use violence as a weapon against the men who subjugate her. In this context, attention shall be drawn to the phrase ‘Bharat Mata Ki jai’, which was widely used during India’s freedom struggle. Bharat Mata has been depicted in several paintings as a demure mother figure who relies on the protection of her sons. However, historian Romila Thapar argues in “On Nationalism” that intense mother love is a camouflage for misogyny. Devotion towards the idea of an abstract Bharat Mata does not translate into respect or affection for flesh-and-blood women. In Bandopadhyay’s story, Mallika detaches herself from the image of the submissive Bharat Mata seeking masculine protection. She assumes responsibility for herself and her family. Any moral guilt that she may have felt is dismissed by her fierce maternal instinct. The text is left open-ended as the writer does not wish to punish her morally or legally. Even the readers are compelled to withhold their judgment in the context of the plight and sheer desperation of the refugee mother.

Both Mahasweta Devi and Manik Bandopadhyay reverse the concept of the provider in their stories. Draupadi in *Mahabharata* remains clothed by Krishna’s grace. However, the women in these narratives are deprived of their clothing by their providers and take the initiative to provide for themselves at any cost. In *The Final Solution*, Mallika is initially seen to submit to the authority exercised on her but is finally able to break away from the stereotypical role figuration associated with women. Mallika acquires her agency by reclaiming authority over her body. Jashodhara Bagchi states in her book, *The Trauma and the Triumph: Gender and Partition in Eastern India* that “The only good woman is a dead woman one who when she is bad she lives, or when she lives she is bad” (Bagchi 26). Manik Bandopadhyay’s Mallika confirms this stance. To gain her emancipation in an unjust society, she has to commit a deed that is socially and legally construed as a crime.

The women in the narratives of Mahasweta Devi and Manik Bandopadhyay are symbols of empowerment. Instead of living in oblivion and submitting themselves to the roles assigned to them, the female characters establish their individuality with the means available to them. Dopdi openly displays her wounds as she comes face to face with Senanayak, Jashoda dies without the assistance of her husband and sons, Mahasweta uses her intelligence to liberate herself, Rabia rejects the 'help' of corrupt men and Mallika strangles her predator. Even though the narratives are distinct, they are united by a common objective of capturing the voices of marginalized women as they resist and subvert existing hierarchies of power and subjugation.

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