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# **SAMYUKTA: A JOURNAL of GENDER AND CULTURE**

Literature and Literariness

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## Editorial

This number of Samyukta examines the complex registers of literature and literariness. Defining the terrains of the 'literary' has always been a contested act. Narrating the lives of those who are kept away from the mainstream has hardly ever found a space there. Therefore we have included a paper by Shimi Shajan A that brings together the problematic aspects of queer identity and black citizenship. Mainstream cinema has largely ignored homoerotic relations between the 'non-white-skinned' people. The film under discussion, Barry Jenkins' Oscar winning film, *'Moonlight'*(2016), addresses the homophobic tendency within the Black community. The film also talks about the issue of normative masculinity and the difficulty faced by young boys to live up to the societal expectations. In keeping with the professed editorial policy of Samyukta, we include papers that attempt a re-reading of established critical positions. Laura Mulvey, in her canonical essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", has naturalised male gaze prompting everyone to look at the world through the eyes of men. This has in fact had the opposite effect from what Mulvey might have intended. In the paper "Photographs as Cultural Text: Decoding Mary Ellen Mark's Falkland Road: Prostitutes of Bombay", Gopika Gopan discusses the work of the American photographer, who used her photographic proficiency to challenge the discourses concerned with prostitution. Through her female gaze she exposed the unnoticed world of prostitution in India. Her photos of the prostitutes of Kamathipura presented the condition of women who were used for the sexual gratification of men. Mary Ellen Mark gave the world a new style of photography, that of unapologetically documenting the vulnerable sections of society.

We have also included Sreya Miriam Shaji's paper which discusses a uniform taxonomy and theory of Fanfiction, a new genre that is garnering attention in the digitization of literary spaces. It is a popular form of fan labour and is an enormously popular genre with a niche audience.

**G. S. Jayasree**

**Chief Editor**

**Samyukta: A Journal of Gender and Culture**

**<https://samyuktajournal.in>**

## **Contextualizing Fragmentation: An Analytic Study of Trauma Theory**

**Raj Sree M.S**

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**Abstract:** This article attempts to elucidate the experience of fragmentation from the perspective of trauma studies, an offshoot of psychology. This study originates as an inquiry into psychic trauma, a phenomenon that one cannot locate exclusively within the domain of the cultural, historical, and the personal, but at the crossroads between these realms. Trauma studies came to prominence in the early 1990s and moved away from medicine and psychiatry during the past half-decade. Trauma theory belongs to the tradition of post structuralism. Post structuralism demanded a new way of thinking about how events in the past return to haunt the present. Trauma theory, adhering to Post structuralism is analytical and speculative and attempts to work out what is involved in experiencing traumatic events, in its representation and the like. Trauma theory suggests ways of re-conceptualizing decisive directions in critical theory. It focuses on the rhetoric of poststructuralist and postmodern theories and their emphasis on decentering, fragmentation, the sublime and apocalyptic and seeks to explore the relation they have to the traumatic historical events as well as personal events. Thus trauma theory serves as a tool to analyze and resituate the experience of holocaust and foreground the aftermath of traumatic events. More over trauma narratives demand a new mode of reading and critical thinking. Current trauma theory, which draws heavily on nineteenth and twentieth-century psychoanalytic theories, emphasizes trauma as a psychic wounding, an encounter of the mind with violence and the crisis of meaning.

**Keywords:** fragmentation, trauma theory, diaspora, trauma, post structuralism, Post traumatic stress disorders, holocaust, cultural trauma

Cultural criticism and Post Modernism explains fragmentation in terms of cultural integration and the fragmentary existence of postmodern consumerist life full of hybrid identities and simulacrums. Post Colonialism and Diaspora Criticism view it in terms of

displacement and exile, acculturation and acclimatization. In this article, I attempt to elucidate the experience of fragmentation from the perspective of trauma studies, an offshoot of psychology. This study originates as an inquiry into psychic trauma, a phenomenon that one cannot locate exclusively within the domain of the cultural, historical, and the personal, but at the crossroads between these realms.

Over the past few decades, the crisis of recording and narrating traumatic experiences has been at the core of the literature on war, holocaust, riots, refugees and genocides have contributed to the birth of the genre of trauma theory. Nancy K. Miller and Jason D. Togaw suggest that the discourse produced by the Holocaust “has affected other domains of meditation on the forms the representation of extreme human suffering seems to engender and require” (4). Freud’s essay is considered the historical and intellectual antecedent of trauma theory, and his declaration that “through repetition a trauma from the past may eventually be recognized and mastered” (Buse 174) is considered the most compelling definition of trauma dynamics to this day as this entails an integration of the fragmented self. Ruth Leys proves that trauma “is fundamentally a disorder of memory” in *Trauma: A Genealogy* (2). The foundation of the discourse on trauma was laid by Freud but was later carried on by various theorists like Judith Herman, Cathy Caruth, etc. Psychologists and theorists like James E. Young, Eric Santer, Saul Friedlander, Dominick LaCapra, and Berel Lang have contributed to the field of trauma theory by investigating the trope of the unspeakable and the unrepresentable in relation to the Holocaust and debating about ethically necessary forms of representation that allow Holocaust victims to give voice to their experience. Trauma theory, according to Karyn Ball, became conspicuous to many academics in the 1980s and 1990s as it provided a nuanced way to maintain a claim on historical experience in the wake of poststructuralist challenges to naive alternatives to authentic experience. Trauma studies came to prominence in the early 1990s and moved away from medicine and psychiatry during the past half-decade.

The word, trauma, originates from a Greek word, *traumatize*, for a wound or an injury to the body, and has evolved to mean a wound to the mind. Its primary denotation is bodily injury but, with the work of Jean Martin Charcot, Pierre Janet, Joseph Breuer, and Sigmund Freud, it came to bear a more psychological meaning. The mention of trauma can be traced back to Herodotus in the fifth century and the myth of Er in Book X of Plato’s *Republic*. Epizelus, mentioned by Herodotus, is partly dead after he witnessed the death of his companions in war and Plato’s Er was cast out of the normal cycle of time and metempsychosis, and is like living dead among the living. In the late nineteenth century trauma theory developed to understand extreme psychic disturbances. The term trauma

actually refers to both the forces that cause a psychic disorder and the resulting psychic state. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, Text Revision (DSM-IV-TR: American Psychiatric Association [APA], 200) defines trauma as Direct personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury, or other threat to one's physical integrity: or witnessing an event that involves death, injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of another person: or learning about unexpected or violent death, serious harm, or threat of death or injury experienced by a family member or other close associate (Criterion A1). The person's response to the event must involve intense fear, helplessness, or horror, or horror (or in children, the response must involve disorganized or agitated behaviour) (Criterion A2). (463)

Lenore Terr, a child psychiatrist writes:

Psychic trauma occurs when a sudden, unexpected, overwhelming intense emotional blow or a series of blows assaults the person from outside. Traumatic events are external, but they quickly become incorporated into the mind (8).

Van der Kolk makes a similar point about the complicated nature of trauma when he says, "Traumatization occurs when both internal and external resources are inadequate to cope with external threat" (393). The internal and external world of the survivor seems fragmented and fails to incorporate the external reality. The depiction of traumatic events and its aftermath opened new vistas after the 9/11 event. Now, trauma refers to the overwhelming impact of some violent or catastrophic event that produces psychological effects that are often devastating. Concomitantly and consequently, the meaning of recovery too shifted from a material notion of recompense, or restitution to an immaterial conception of cure or restoration. Laplanche and Pontalis point out that "...in adopting the term [trauma], psychoanalysis carries the three ideas implicit in it over to the psychical level: the idea of violent shock, the idea of a wound and the idea of consequences affecting the whole organization" (317)

Post structuralism demanded a new way of thinking about how events in the past return to haunt the present. New Historicism, fascinated by the ideological omissions and repressions of historical narrative, developed a mode of dissident or countervailing recovery of what had been silenced or lost in traditional literary histories. Finally, deconstruction, particularly in its American Yale School version, redirected its concerns with reference, representation, and the limits of knowledge to the problem of trauma, Shoshana Felman and Geoffrey Hartman turned from work on the undecidability of

interpretation in literature to publish work on Holocaust memory and witness in the early 1990s.

Trauma theory belongs to the tradition of post structuralism. Post structuralism developed initially in France in the 1960s from the work of Derrida, Lyotard, Foucault, Deleuze and Baudrillard. While post structuralism shares structuralism's radical questioning of the problematic of the humanist subject, it challenges the way structuralism was elevated to the status of a universally valid theory for understanding language, thought, society, culture, and economy. Post structuralism can be defined in terms of both its affinities and continuities on the one hand and its theoretical innovations and differences with structuralism on the other. The affinities center on the critique of the humanist subject as rational, autonomous and self-transparent. Post- structuralism also shares with structuralism a theoretical understanding of language and culture as linguistic and symbolic systems. Both the movements point out unconscious processes, hidden structures and socio-historical forces that constrain and govern human enterprises. Finally, they share a common intellectual inheritance and tradition based upon Saussure, Jakobson, and the Russian formalists, Freud, Marx and others. Post structuralism's innovations revolve around the reintroduction and renewed interest in history, especially as it involves the 'becoming' of the subject, where genealogical narratives replace questions of ontology or essence. When it comes to trauma theory, it is the becoming of the trauma subject. Post structuralism challenges the rationalism and realism that underlies structuralism's faith in scientific method, in progress, and in discerning and identifying universal structures of all cultures and the human mind. Post structuralism explores the notion of difference which serves as a motif not only for recognizing the dynamics of self and other, but also contemporary applications in multiculturalism and immigration. Poststructuralism invokes new studies on power, particularly Foucault's analysis of power and the notion of power/knowledge, which differ from liberal and Marxist theory, where power is seen as only repressive.

Theory according to Jonathan Culler is 'interdisciplinary- discourse with effects outside an original discipline...Theory is analytical and speculative- an attempt to work out what is involved in what we call sex or language or writing or meaning or the subject...Theory is a critique of common sense, of concepts taken a natural...Theory is reflexive, thinking about thinking, enquiry into the categories we use in making sense of things, in literature and other discursive practices'. Trauma theory, adhering to Post structuralism, is analytical and speculative and attempts to work out what is involved in experiencing traumatic events, in its representation and the like. Trauma theory suggests ways of reconceptualizing

decisive directions in critical theory. It focuses on the rhetoric of poststructuralist and postmodern theories and their emphases on decentering, fragmentation, the sublime and apocalyptic and seeks to explore the relation they have to the traumatic historical events as well as personal events. However, a theory of trauma will intersect with other critical discourses like discourses of the sublime, the sacred, the apocalyptic, and the Other in all its guises and attempt to define its limitations. Drawing on the recent developments in Post structuralist theory, trauma theory enables a more critical reading of holocaust/genocides. Trauma theory provides “the necessary language and reading skills to produce a different political story, a story not tied to the individual as such nor a story told in the general terms of gender, patriarchy and power” (Kilby, preface xiii). Its blatant commitment to moral codes set it apart from the poststructuralist theories in which it has its roots. Having criticized about insignificance and indifference to ‘real-world’ issues like history, politics, and ethics because of its predominantly epistemological focus, this earlier, ‘textual’ paradigm was largely obscured by explicitly historicist or cultural approaches, like new historicism, cultural materialism, cultural studies, etc. In this scenario trauma studies can be regarded as the reinvention in an ethical pretext of this much maligned textualism.

Cathy Caruth, one of the leading figures in trauma studies along with Shoshana Felman, Geoffrey Hartman, and Dominick LaCapra, counters the oft-heard critique of Post structuralism outlined above by arguing that, rather than leading us away from history and into “political and ethical paralysis”(Unclaimed 10), a textual approach can afford us unique access to history. It makes possible a “rethinking of reference,” which aims not at “eliminating history” but at “resituating it in our understanding, that is, at permitting history to arise where immediate understanding may not” (11). There is something contemporary about trauma studies. Geoffrey Hartman claimed ‘reflecting our sense that violence is coming ever nearer, like a storm- a storm that may have already moved into the core of our being, trauma theory tries to turn criticism back towards being an ethical, responsible, purposive discourse, listening to the wounds of the other’. But if it is truly to do this, this point of convergence also needs to be the start of a divergence, of an opening out of theory to wider contexts. Critics view that trauma theory is intrinsically multidisciplinary and if it is to have a future, it needs to displace older paradigms and look into new configurations of cultural knowledge.

It is the task of trauma theory to analyze “The vexed, and often impossible, difficulties associated with remembering and understanding traumatic events” (Buse 174-75). Thus trauma theory serves as a tool to analyze and resituate the experience of holocaust and foreground the aftermath of traumatic events. “Trauma theory is mainly linguistic in

orientation, interested for the most part in trauma as it relates to literary and historical issues such as representation, narrative and truth” (Buse 175). This aspect of trauma theory, its connections with issues of representation and narrative, will be generated throughout this study in an attempt to prove that this is a helpful theory for our reading of not simply Holocaust fiction but all narratives on trauma. By bringing the insights of deconstructive and psychoanalytic scholarship to the analysis of cultural artifacts that bear witness to traumatic events like Holocaust, the critical practice on trauma secure access to extreme events and experiences that defy understanding and representation. Moreover, trauma narratives demand a new mode of reading and critical thinking. Current trauma theory, which draws heavily on nineteenth and twentieth-century psychoanalytic theories, emphasizes trauma as a psychic wounding, an encounter of the mind with violence and the crisis of meaning. According to Caruth trauma “brings us to the limits of our understanding” (*Trauma* 4). The emergence of trauma studies as an academic discipline in the 1990s has been largely credited to the work of Cathy Caruth and Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, but of late a critical consensus has gathered around their work charging it with universal acclaim.

Trauma theory is a discourse of the unrepresentable, a discourse of the event or object that destabilizes language, consciousness and perceptions. Freud states that an overpowering event, unacceptable to consciousness, can be forgotten and yet return in the form of somatic symptoms or compulsive, repetitive behaviors. Laub adds:

Trauma survivors live not with memories of the past, but with an event that could not and did not proceed through to its completion, has no ending, attained no closure, and therefore, as far as its survivors are concerned, continues into the present and is current in every respect (69).

By the term fragmentation, I refer to these somatic symptoms and the related compulsive, repetitive behaviours which are classified under post traumatic stress disorders in trauma theory.

Trauma is registered through an apparent forgetting that occurs because the mind is unable to absorb the shock of the traumatic event. The subject does not experience the trauma at the moment it occurs, but only belatedly as the psyche re-experiences the event through flashbacks and dreams. Freud states:

the patient cannot remember the whole of what is repressed in him, and what he cannot remember may be precisely the essential part of it. . . . He is obliged to *repeat* the repressed

material as a contemporary experience instead of, as the physician would prefer to see, *remembering it* as something belonging to the past (18).

As such, trauma is constituted by the seemingly opposing forces of remembering and forgetting. Memory of the event, rather than a reflection of a distant past, comes back in ambiguous and fragmentary forms, causing traumatic symptoms to occur that disrupt and torment the present.

Thus, while Caruth and others might be accurate in formulating trauma as an experience that “brings us to the limits of our understanding,” the assertion “that the impact of the traumatic event lies precisely in its belatedness, in its refusal to be simply located, in its insistent appearance outside the boundaries of any single place or time” shifts attention away from the silent materiality of trauma and emphasizes instead the cognitive framing and understanding of it (*Trauma* 49).

Fragmentation is phenomenological and eludes easy definition. Unlike cultural criticism, which essentialised, universalized and celebrated fragmentation, psychological criticism acknowledged it as the condition of selfhood. It is a psychological dysfunction which involves a loss of connectedness of life. The fragmented persona experiences thoughts and emotions that seem to occur with complete randomness and a feeling of disconnected experience. The disconnected fragments can be emotions, physical reactions, behaviors or thoughts. Erikson defines integration in terms of wholeness. “Wholeness seems to connote an assembly of parts, even quite diversified parts that enter into fruitful association and organization” (Erikson 80). Integration is a state of an individual in which his various habits, perceptions, motives and emotions are fully co-ordinated, resulting in an effective adjustment. The integrated person acts as a balanced whole. He comprehends the various aspects of the situation that he faces, and relates them to appropriate past experiences. The disintegrated personality reacts in a fragmentary and partial manner, ignoring significant cues that should aid him in adjustment.

“The journey of the survivor is from fragmentation to wholeness, but the whole is marked by the struggle. The survivor works to integrate her [or his] experiences and her [or his] beliefs, to create a space in the world where her truths can be heard, to see rather than to merely look” (Tal 222). In the introduction to a recent book on trauma, Nancy K. Miller and Jason Tougaw note the force of discourse about the Holocaust for trauma studies: ‘If the Holocaust supplies the paradigm of modern, incommensurable suffering, many of the

ethical and aesthetic, moral and formal dilemmas involved in bearing witness to the horrors of the Holocaust reappear and are reconfigured indifferent national and political contexts’.

If Erikson and LaCapra presume an easy conversion from individual to collective trauma, Ron Eyerman, in his study of slavery and the formation of African American identity, claims that “there is a difference between trauma as it affects individuals and as a cultural process” and, that “as cultural process, trauma is mediated through various forms of representation and linked to the reformation of collective identity”(1). This theory of cultural trauma is further developed in Eyerman’s work with Jeffrey Alexander, Bernhard Giesen, Neil Smelser, and Piotr Sztompka in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*. They define cultural trauma as occurring “when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (1).

The cultural construction of trauma happens when a traumatic event is transmitted through dominant cultural mediators such as the mass media and religious, aesthetic, legal, scientific, and state institutions, which define and redefine the nature of the traumatic event, trauma and the victim. These cultural mediations institute the relation of the trauma far beyond the limits of its direct impact. As Barbara Zelizer sums up:

Unlike personal memory, whose authority fades with time, the authority of collective memories increases as time passes, taking on new complications, nuances, and interests. Collective memories allow for the fabrication, rearrangement, elaboration, and omission of details about the past, often pushing aside accuracy and authenticity so as to accommodate broader issues of identity formation, power and authority, and political affiliation. (3)

Cultural trauma refers not only to an experiential crisis in the lives of some, if not all, of a nation or community, but also registers a disruption in the symbolic order. Erickson wrote that individual trauma is “a blow to the psyche that breaks through one’s defenses so suddenly and with such force that one can’t respond effectively,” and “collective trauma, . . . [is] a blow to the tissues of social life that damages the bonds linking people together and impairs the prevailing sense of community” (32). “Cultural trauma” becomes a metaphor for the damage or wounding to the complex system of representations and meanings that the society weaves around itself to record and understand the experience. The response to this breach in the collective fantasy that mediates the nation’s identity and reality, then, is to garner the forces of cultural representation to position the event within a

causal narrative that would redefine the community and restore its sense of agency. In the contemporary scenario the concept of cultural trauma has emerged as a highly visible and expanding domain of discourses marked by deliberation, disagreement, and intervention for negotiating the wide range of traumatogenic events that marked twentieth century history, especially the holocaust, Iraq War, Terrorist Attacks, Ethnic Cleansing, Partition of India and the related murder and rape of lakhs of civilians, etc. The multifarious interpretations and representations of trauma in art, painting, film and literature is colossal. Growing out of traditions of ethnic and post-colonial writing, contemporary novels of historical and cultural trauma explore events from the margins of history and probe politics of power and cultural hegemony.

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## **‘Geist’ in the Shell: The Erasure of Japanese Identity in select Hollywood Films**

**Gowri Meenakshi S R**

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**Abstract:** Hollywood Cinema forms the core of American soft power. It is the expression of America’s political, ideological, and cultural aims. It is also a medium of propagation of the ideas of American Orientalism which shaped the perception of Eastern culture and identity. This paper discusses the myriad elements of American Orientalist ideas about Japan in Hollywood Cinema, and the various techniques used to erase Japanese representation, particularly in the movie, ‘Ghost in the Shell’.

**Keywords:** Techno-Orientalism, erasure, white-washing

American Orientalism is far too often seen as a supposedly ‘positive’ set of ideas about the identity and culture of the East, which though a bit shallow and stereotypical doesn’t do much damage other than a slight Western appropriation of Eastern cultures. Americans accepting and embracing yoga, belly dancing, bonsai trees or even the celebration of immigrant success is considered a type of ‘benign’ racism. However, Orientalism is a double-edged sword that imposes ideas, standards and expectations onto the East. Unless they can prove themselves to be true to the Western idea of the East they become ‘undesirable’. These ideas, standards and expectations are propagated mostly through Hollywood Cinema, which is an effective tool to shape global perception. Japan was one of the major Asian countries whose culture was appropriated to serve Western interests. America utilised both hard power and soft power to bring down Japan and eliminate any and all of its potential as a threat to their global standing.

America, after the Second World War, took careful steps to prevent the re-emergence of the Japanese Empire. Between 1945 and 1952, the US led the Allies into the occupation and rehabilitation of Japan and enacted a widespread reformation of its political, economic, social and most importantly military sectors. They essentially made an entirely

new constitution. The most extensive changes made were; they lowered the Emperor's status to a mere figurehead with zero political control, placed more power to the parliamentary system, gave greater rights to women, but most importantly the Allied advisors completely renounced Japan's right to wage war, thereby eliminating its non-defensive armed forces and negating its war potential. Present day Japanese consider their forces to be 'jeitai', a self defense force rather than a military force, i.e. they consider themselves defenders or helpers rather than warriors which is a striking difference from the Japan of the past. However, in the recent years, Shinzo Abe has pushed Japan into holding more responsibilities regarding its Self Defense Forces. He wants to revise Japan's pacifist constitution, whereby Japan is reliant on America for its defense, and instead possess a military force capable of coming to the aid of its allies when necessary.

Globalization was another tool America used to perpetuate convenient interpretations of foreign cultures and their identities through powerful mass media like the Internet. Ideas of American Orientalism are spread via the Internet and Hollywood which shaped global perception of Asians, their cultures and identities. Japan was also on the receiving end of the prejudices and stereotypes perpetuated by the United States through Hollywood Cinema. America presented Japan to be the land of geishas, samurais, robots and tentacle porn. During the early nineteenth century they were thought of as an undeveloped country with primitive beliefs and traditions. However, this image got entwined with robots and the extensive technological progressiveness that now characterizes it.

Academics perceive these two distinct images through two models; Traditional orientalism and Techno-orientalism, to understand the Western perception and interpretation of Japan. As Said states, Orientalism is a "Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient". (Said 11) Through traditional perspectives, the West perceives Japan in two ways; a country with aesthetic, elegant qualities associated with images of the kimono, tea ceremony, geisha, Zen etc. making them exotic; and another, a martial country that is ruthless, impassive, and cold-blooded associated with images of a katana, ninja, samurai and seppuku etc. This stereotypical framework projects an image of a country that is both aesthetic and menacing, however it conceals the American agenda of dominating and determining the identity of Japan. Hollywood Cinema is used as a medium of propagation of the ideas of American Orientalism which shaped the perception of Eastern culture and identity. It forms the core of American soft power. Considering the fact that Hollywood Cinema has such an enormous global audience, America had the power to pass judgements on what is beautiful and what is dangerous about Japan and the audience took those words to be the truth. In addition, America is considered to possess the most seductive

culture as seen in the huge success of American products like Coco-Cola, Levis, Apple etc. worldwide. Thus, even though present-day Japan has developed into its current state of technological superiority, it is considered to be an absorption of the West. Though America has shown instances of Japonism, i.e. the imitation of Japanese aesthetics, it is rarely mentioned, while the Japanese reinterpretation of anything Western is immediately publicized. For instance; in the novel and movie, *Memoirs of a Geisha* (Golden,1997; Marshall 2001), Hollywood projects the image of a traditional Japan that meets the expectations of the general public. The movie is also a typical example of the erasure of Japanese identity as a Chinese actor plays the role of Sayuri. *The Last Samurai* (2003), by Edward Zwick patronizingly portrays an undeveloped Japan being modernized by a Westerner. The recent movie, *The Wolverine* (2013) by James Mangold is scattered with images of a traditional orientalist Japan consisting of temples and Japanese gardens. The movie shows a beautiful Japanese girl, Mariko, who is the heir to her dying father's company. But instead of showing her competency as a leader or a businesswoman she is depicted as a damsel in distress saved by the American, Logan. It also displays Japan as sort of a crime capital overrun by Yakuza.

In the 1980s Japan rose in economic power so much so that it was catching up to America and Europe in terms of technology. Now, America could no longer manipulate the public into believing Japan to be a primitive undeveloped land. Japan instead started to get associated with robots, artificial intelligence and cybernetics. Academicians coined the term Techno-orientalism to describe this discourse. But this discourse was not based on some new-found respect, instead it had a resentful, racist side. The West portrayed Japan to be obsessed with robots and artificial intelligence so as to dehumanize them and label them as a cold society, where the citizens are soulless machines living under an authoritarian, bureaucratic culture. Japan became the image of the dystopian future of capitalism. Instances of a techno-orientalist Japan can be seen in the movie *Blade Runner* (1982) by Ridley Scott, and in the novel *Neuromancer* (1984) by William Gibson. An infamous conception of this techno-orientalist view of Japan is the hit song *Mr. Roboto* by the band Styx. The key part of the song is the chorus where there is an electronically produced phrase "domo arigato, Mr. Roboto" (Mr. Roboto), meaning 'thank you very much, Mr. Roboto'. This iconic chorus became a catchphrase in the eighties. The song criticizes Japan for being a dehumanized society. The lyrics of the song are so, "you're wondering who I am, machine or mannequin, with parts made in Japan, I am the modern man" (Mr. Roboto).

But there existed another dimension to Japan that couldn't be understood through the existing models, the country's supposed weirdness. Many Western articles and channels in YouTube posted information with the captions 'WTF Japan' to discuss the country's strange traditions and myths, for instance; cuddle cafes and panty vending machines. General public never understood the fact that America was establishing standards of normalcy by branding Japanese popular culture as weird or 'wacky'. Thus, a third model was created named Wacky orientalism to understand the agenda behind labelling Japan and everything Japanese as weird by the US. The Wacky orientalist view of Japan fuels the idea that Japanese customs and popular culture is weird. It showcased festivals like the Shinto fertility festival, named Kanamara Matsuri or the Festival of the Steel Phallus, where the creation of life is celebrated. However, since the festival includes cross-dressing, penis-shaped lollipops, and giant phalluses on moving shrines, images of it cemented the belief that Japanese customs are 'wacky'. It is also important to note that this wacky orientalist perspective is fluid. During the 1980s, Japanese men were considered hypersexual, while today they are regarded as hypo-sexual. For example, BBC2 aired a documentary named *No Sex Please, We're Japanese* on October 2013 to explore Japan's declining population. But they interview only two men, who are well below pension age. They also criticize Japanese men's interest in virtual girls and dating simulator games and purport it to be the cause of their population decline.

The Kawaii culture is another cultural aspect of Japan that America deemed odd. Japan's obsession with everything cute or 'kawaii' looks weird to non-Japanese cultures as it is embraced not only by the younger female population but instead is a part of a Japanese person's everyday life. Kawaii has many guises in Japan. There is the old-school Hello Kitty kawaii and also the high-brow cute as seen in Takashi Murakami's cartoon-apocalyptic canvases which are sold for millions at art auctions. One may think, how exactly did Japan start integrating cute culture into almost every aspect of its daily life? It began as a consumer culture, starting from Sanrio's Hello Kitty, a white bobcat with a red bow, and later embedded itself into other cultural aspects like fashion, music and even the food industry in Japan. Hello Kitty went on to become a world-famous Japanese icon and generated over 80 billion in sales. It shows that matter your preferences, you can't help but be drawn to anything cute on display. In Japan, the use of kawaii ranges from Hello Kitty stickers on constructional vans and street-corner police boxes shaped as gingerbread houses to Self Defense Forces recruitment ads as three cute cartoon soldiers calling people to arms. They have even managed to add an element of cuteness to tsunami warnings, where waves are drawn with teeth making it look menacing yet adorable. This would raise the question, do the Japanese have to go so far? The non-Japanese fails to understand why this peculiar

culture is so important to Japan. Kawaii exists to soften the rigid social hierarchies present in the Japanese society. It helps people transcend its stratified nature. For instance, Former Opposition Party Leader, Yukio Hatoyama who had distinctive facial features, used the nickname 'Alien' and distributed toys shaped like an extraterrestrial being with his resemblance to increase his popularity. Kawaii culture forms a bridge that connects the younger and the elder population that otherwise has no commonality. The West, however, perceives this preoccupation as societal infantilization. Watching authority figures put on displays of cuteness to reach the masses and female pop stars dress half their age and sing in pre-adolescent voices further strengthens this belief. While this cute culture was merely a commodity to the rest of the world, the Japanese embraced it as part of their daily lives. The West reasons the psychology behind the relevance of this culture in two ways ; as a result of the surplus parental instincts in the Japanese that is without an outlet due to their low birth rates, and as a reflection of their deep nostalgia for childhood and a reaction to the emotional restraint expected in their intensely regimented lives. Japan is a country that values youth. The aging population cannot help but want to appear youthful. Added to that, their adult lives are laden with expectations to conform to strict social norms and as people who work long hours every day, they feel enormous social pressure as well. This leads to a need to go back to one's childhood, particularly since children are considered precious in Japan. Thus, contrary to the Western perception that Japanese are obsessed with acting half their age, Kawaii culture is something that soothes the Japanese and helps them escape the harsh realities of their lives.

Japanese anime and manga are other commodities that are just as popular and successful as cute culture. In fact, both aren't mutually exclusive. They were used as a vehicle to propagate Japan's idea of 'cute'. However, there is an element of fetishization that surrounds the consumption of these commodities. East Asian women in particular have been fetishized and objectified as a result of anime and manga consumption. We must understand that to non-Asians, all Asians look the same. They do not make differences between the Chinese, the Korean, the Japanese etc. Thus, the consumption of these Japanese contents resulted in the fetishization of East Asian women in particular. In addition to that, America normalised the casual racism and harassment against these women that exists particularly in the online communities. It goes beyond looking at pre-adolescent female characters and finding them cute. There seems to be an obsession towards East Asian women, imagining them to be the submissive yet promiscuous, which is quite similar to the yellow fever that existed during the Second World War and the Vietnam War. This issue isn't something to be brushed off as a case of Asian women being sensitive. There have been many cases in the US and UK, where Asian women were stalked

and killed. “Fetishization dehumanizes, hurts, rapes, and kills. It creates a culture that starts with lewd comments under a drawing of a 12-year-old wearing cat ears and a maid uniform. And continues with yelling random Japanese words at any unsuspecting East Asian woman or girl on the street. And it ends with bloody violence against Asian women. As reported by the National Network to End Domestic Violence, 41% to 61% of Asian women experience sexual and physical violence from their intimate partners.” (Seah)

Another misconception that is a result of the overconsumption and obsession towards Japanese culture is the expectation of seeing Lolita dresses and Gyarū get-ups along the streets of Tokyo. They instead reveal what is known as the Genderless Kei. It is essentially a move towards style that goes beyond the gender binary, challenging traditional ideas of gendered clothing. We see young slim bodied men with cute faces and dyed hair wearing make-up, contact lenses, nail polish and accessories, which are traditionally considered feminine. This should not be confused with cross-dressing or transvestism. These aren't men trying to look like women but are young men trying to create a new genderless standard for beauty. Although Japan isn't a country that promotes a gender-progressive attitude, homophobic and transphobic abuse is still very much a prevalent issue and although same-sex marriage has been legalised in Tokyo, when it comes to sexuality and gender identity people exercise a don't-ask don't-tell attitude. This raises the question as to how the Genderless Kei gained such traction in the Japanese media. It was the result of two things; the increasing influence of South Korean boy bands and the obsession with feminine men or 'bishonen' in mangas. The Neo Ikemen or the Genderless Danshi aren't trying to look like anime characters, who have marked Western facial features. Nor do they identify themselves as gay or transgender. They are simply youngmen who are moving towards an unfettered androgynous standard of beauty. It is an evolution in fashion where they can unreservedly express themselves whatever their sexual or gender identity. This radical step towards blurring the lines of masculinity and femininity in appearance is one that challenges the traditional norms of gender expression.

Hollywood cinema is one of the most influential platforms when it comes to propagating stereotypes. Similarly, stereotypes regarding Japanese identity and culture are spread through films to meet the audiences' expectations of what Japan is. For instance; the ninja has been commodified by America through Hollywood films to be a mysterious and cool warrior, while in truth they were essentially spies who were taught to avoid confrontations at all costs. “Most people imagine the ninja flew through the sky and disappeared, like Superman, waving ninja swords around, sneaking into the enemy ranks and assassinating generals.... This is a mistaken image of the ninja introduced by movies and comic books”.

(What is Ninja?) There are countless American movies that depicts ninjas. One of them is *Ninja Assassin* (2009) by James McTeigue, starring Rain (Jung Jihoon), a Korean actor. Thus, the idea of a ninja that is now widely known is the American perception rather than based on Japanese culture. These stereotypes do not fully express the truth behind the ninja culture, instead they are embellished to fit the Japanese exotic image.

*Karate Kid* (1984) by Robert Mark Karmen is about a 16-year-old boy who takes up an interest in Karate as a way to deal with a high school bully and he is taught by an old Japanese handyman names Mr. Miyagi. The movie encourages the false belief that all Japanese men are well versed in martial arts. This movie was later remade by The Sony in 2010 starring Jaden Smith and Jackie Chan. It was an instant hit in the box office sweeping in 56 million dollars during the opening week. Jackie Chan's casting in the remake adds to the authenticity of the plot. The actor is well known for his incredible martial arts skills. In fact, Jackie Chan's presence in Hollywood movies has been almost exclusively used for characters who are well versed in martial arts. He is used as a medium to portray the Western perception of Asians as Kung Fu masters. Other successful films were; *The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift* (2006), where Japanese women are hypersexualized and are presented as submissive and voiceless; and *Big Hero 6* (2014), where the protagonist Hiro is a biracial character (half- Japanese and half- Caucasian) who is the stereotype of an Asian male who is a geek. The popular American TV show *Supernatural* (2005-2020) in an episode from season 5, shows the main characters Dean and Sam finding themselves in a Japanese variety show. In that particular segment, the characters are part of a quiz show where the loser is hit in the crotch with a huge plastic hammer. The scene is directed as if the two characters are the only 'normal' elements while everything else that goes on in the background is simply absurd.

Existing orientalist theories help reveal the problematic racial and cultural representations present in Hollywood films. *Ghost in the Shell* (2017) is one such movie where there can be seen a blatant Americanization of what was originally Japanese. It is an American film directed by Rupert Sanders, starring Scarlett Johansson, who plays the main character Major Mira Killian, also called Motoko Kusanagi; 'Beat' Takeshi Kitano as Chief Daisuke Aramaki; Michael Carmen Pitt as Kuze, also called Hideo; Pilou Asbaek as Batou; and Chin Han as Togusa. The film is based on a Japanese animated movie series of the same name, which is based on a Japanese manga by Masamune Shirow. It generated much publicity as the manga and the anime series is considered a classic among fans. Its fan base stretches from Japan to the rest of the world. It would be right to say that thousands were anticipating the release of this movie.

The original manga earned its classic status because of the mangaka's, i.e. the manga artist Shirow's peculiar approach towards the theme of finding the meanings of humanity, and the portrayal of the complex dynamics that exist between humans and technology. For instance, he explores the intricate and convoluted relationship between humans, cyborgs, and cybernetics. His unique perspective of humanity was influenced by the work *The Ghost in the Machine* by the German Philosopher Arthur Koestler. Koestler doesn't use the word 'Ghost' in its literal English meaning of spectre or phantom. Instead it is connected to the philosophical ideology from the German term 'Geist'. In Hegel's work *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Geist is described as an inclusive term that can be given different meanings like spirit, ghost, and mind. Koestler uses the term with this particular definition in mind and Shirow, inspired by Koestler uses it with similar meaning.

The marked difference between the anime and the movie is the depth of identity exploration. The plot of the original manga is very Japanese in its soul. The confusion and dilemma faced by the main character is not merely a dichotomy between a person's real self and their persona as shown in the movie. It is a lot more profound. Kusanagi faces the dilemma of understanding her true identity as she is part machine and part human. She wants to understand where her human self begins and where her machine counterpart ends. This identity crisis is very much Japanese. As discussed before, Japan and its people are considered robotic by non-Japanese people. In present day Japan AI is part of a person's everyday life. Human-machine interaction is a lot higher in Japan than in other countries. Added to that, the people of Japan live a strictly regimented life in a rigidly stratified society. Like the machines around them, the Japanese are mostly stoic people from whom a great amount of emotional restraint is expected. This suppression of their human side pushes them to identify themselves with the robots that are everywhere in Japan. Without a proper understanding of Japan's social order and the psychologies of people of that country, the plot of this story cannot be given justice. This failure to understand a Japanese person's soul deep dilemma regarding their human identity is what marks the movie as a mere cyberpunk story rather than an exploration of what it means to be human. The original work portrays the postmodern woes of existential crisis. In addition, a cyborg lead character is capable of bringing about debates of racial identity, as cyborgs do not have a race. Audiences are shown that race is a social construct and has nothing to do with an individual's capabilities. This breaks down the foundation on which Western supremacy is built. Thus, Mira Killian from the movie and Motoko Kusanagi from the manga feel like entirely different characters. Whereas Killian has issues regarding her persona, Kusanagi is scrambling to hold onto her human self and not lose herself to her robotic side.

The movie is set in a futuristic world, no specific location is shown, where people enhance themselves with the help of cybernetic innovations like networking, vision, intelligence, strength, etc. However, the technological advancement leads to serious cyber terrorism and internet crimes. Mira Killian (Scarlett Johansson), is the sole survivor of her family who were attacked by cyber-terrorists. Hanka Robotics, one of the top technology corporations design an anti-terrorism project to counter the cyber-terrorist force. Killian's body is damaged beyond repair during the attack except for her brain and Hanka Robotics decides to use her as a part of the counter-terrorism force by making her into a cyborg. Later she becomes the Major of the Section 9 anti-terrorist bureau, where she works with Batou (Pilou Asbaek), and Togusa (Chin Han) under the command of Chief Daisuke Aramaki ('Beat' Takeshi Kitano). While discharged from her duties, she meets Kuze (Carmen Pitt) who is another one of Hanka Robotics' projects. Her interactions with Kuze leads to her realizing that her memory is not her own and that the corporation implanted one in her. This results in the entire Section 9 learning the truth that they have been deceived by Hanka Robotics. The main question propounded by the movie is, 'what is humanity?', which is the cardinal theme of the original manga. It also gives significance to Killian's journey in finding her identity (Ghost) as Motoko Kusanagi inside her cyborg body.

One of the major controversies surrounding the movie even before its release was its casting. The source of the film shows that many of the characters are Japanese. Hence the casting of non- Japanese and even non-Asian actors drew a lot of attention and criticism from fans around the world. This was also noted by people who weren't even aware of the original work. Scarlett Johansson being casted as Motoko Kusanagi received large scale criticisms from fans, there were even petitions for a recasting. The producer Steven Paul reacted to the complaints saying, "There [are] all sorts of people and nationalities in the world shown in *The Ghost in the Shell*... I don't think it was just a Japanese story. *Ghost in the Shell* is a very international story, and it wasn't just focused on Japanese; it was supposed to be the entire world" (Berman). While the director of the original animation film, Mamoru Oshii commented that, "The Major is a cyborg and her physical form is an assumed one. The name 'Motoko Kusanagi' and her current body are not her original name and body, so there is no basis for saying that an Asian actress must portray her" (Original *Ghost in the Shell*). The producer's argument is hardly an answer because the original manga is very specifically set in Tokyo and the essence of the story is directly connected to Japanese people and their culture. In addition, except for the lead and other main characters including the villain they used Asian features to present 'evil robots. The director's defense on the casting issues is based on the fact that the Major's shell is a cyborg

and thus the audience wouldn't be able to distinguish her racial identity since her physical form concealed her true self. But Oshii's comment makes one wonder whether the Japanese are resigned to the fact that to make a successful film they need to cast white actors. The controversies surrounding the casting was not without basis since Hollywood has a history of whitewashing and using yellow faces to portray Asians. A similar whitewashing controversy had surrounded another American adaptation of a Japanese manga series named *Death Note* in 2017.

The theme of Japanese identity is predominant in the original manga of *Ghost in the Shell*. Shirow's manga portrays a story where the experiences, the relationship between humans and technology, and culture is inherently and uniquely Japanese. Though the setting of the Hollywood movie gives off vibes similar to that of *The Matrix* and other cyberpunk films, the original setting is more of a representation of our modern day even with its technological advancements. The Japan shown in the original *Ghost in the Shell* is a country that is reckoning with its own national identity, which is why the white casting becomes a huge issue. Even though Kusanagi's inner identity conflict has its universality, it is more of a Japanese experience. She is a woman who possesses Japanese features, but she feels even more alienated because of those features. This crisis is very much relatable to the Japanese population. Her interactions with her non-augmented partners and her fights against foreigners remind her of her humanity and her Japanese identity. However, Johansson being a Caucasian woman is unable to bring out that inherent duality in Kusanagi. Since Johansson is non-Japanese, Kusanagi becomes a foreigner in a foreign land and the character's inner conflict transforms into one that is caused by her nationality. Whereas in the original work, the main question was that even though ethnically she is one with her peers, what is the extent to which she is connected to them. Thus, Johansson's Kusanagi removes the uncertainty that forms the core of the character. The movie also fails to represent the political and social dimensions of the original work.

When researching live action adaptations and remakes of Japanese manga or animation films, it is important to consider the visual features of the medium of the original text. Even while accusations of whitewashing were increasing in number, there were arguments commenting that many Japanese characters from anime and manga have Western oriented features. Consider the popular anime and manga series *Sailor Moon*; the main character Tsukino Usagi has long blond hair, big blue eyes and 'white' skin. Mamoru Oshii explained this leaning towards the West saying that the anime is a product by modern Japanese and they often try to evade the fact that they're Japanese. Popular film director Hayao Miyazaki once said the same through a provocative statement, "the Japanese hate their own

faces” (Napier 25). Susan J. Napier, a Professor of Japanese Studies, argues that Japanese anime is “stateless” (Napier 24). She comments that though Japanese anime is an exotic Japanese commodity exported to the West, it does not embody Japanese culture and this can be seen in how non-Japanese the characters from anime looks like. According to her, the reason behind the popularity of anime in Japan is the flexibility, creativity, and freedom of the medium. She continues this hypothesis saying, “it is not just Japanese audiences who search for more and varied forms of electronic entertainment, who long for an ‘anywhere’, or who are tired of their own faces” (Napier 26). However, one must wonder whether decades of prejudice and racism have resulted in the Japanese hating their own ethnic features that they consciously depict their very Japanese characters through non-Japanese representations. But it is debatable that Napier’s argument could be extended to the American audience in the case of *Ghost in the Shell*, as international fans wanted an all Asian cast very arduously. The casting of a Caucasian female actor reinforces the need for a white actor, i.e. Western aesthetics, for the possible success of a film. Napier also argued that,” the anime medium - precisely because it often highlights characters and settings that are neither Western nor clearly Japanese – offers a space for identity exploration in which the audience can revel in a safe from of Otherness unmatched by any other contemporary medium” (Napier 27). But Napier’s argument of Mukokuseki or ‘stateless’ aspects of representations is not applicable in cases of Western adaptations of Japanese anime and manga like *Ghost in the Shell* since it was made and released in Hollywood while being played by a mostly non-Japanese cast because these adaptations merely strengthen Western aesthetic representation and doesn’t properly depict Japanese culture.

Another factor regarding the Hollywood adaptation of *Ghost in the Shell* to be considered is the Japanese response towards the movie. Many Japanese viewers were content with the Hollywood adaptation and this shows the cultural differences between Japanese and American audiences in the comprehension of issues like whitewashing. The foremost issue that caused displeasure among the American audience, i.e. the casting of Scarlett Johansson, was received with positive feedback among the Japanese audience. Their opinion was that since Johansson isn’t Japanese, she would look more anime-ish than an actor from their nationality. They were only concerned with her similarity in looks with the character from the original anime. Most Japanese viewers had no issues with the racial identities of the cast. Some did not even know why it generated so much criticism in the West. However, the continued debate over the whitewashing resulted in murmurs among the Japanese over the need for a Japanese actress. Many are aware of America’s economic influence in Hollywood and so they believe the casting of a white actor is much more profitable. One even commented, “it’s just the way things are because it’s Hollywood”

(That Japanese Man Yuta 00:04:23-24). Many Japanese believe that mangakas are often fascinated by the white people and their Western physical features. Some even argue that the anime world is an imaginary world separate from reality. But art is always representative of real-life experiences, so it could be that even while depicting Japanese stories and Japanese cultures, they are unable to disentangle themselves from the expectations imposed by the West. The American and Japanese responses about casting issues as seen in movies like *Ghost in the Shell* and *Death Note* also points towards the differences in the perception of race and racial identities between them. Whitewashing is an inexcusable issue concerning racial discrimination to other viewers, since it not only takes away job opportunities but also perpetuates racial stereotypes. This difference in responses can be attributed to the fact that the Japanese actually prefer Caucasian actors as discussed above. However, what received negative criticism about the film was its treatment of the theme of the original movie. The core of the movie is the coexistence of machines and humans, it is about identity and soul. Issues of whitewashing are directly related to identity. The ghost, i.e. the soul or the consciousness inhabiting the ‘shell’, is what differentiates a machine from a human. The original anime version shows an exploration of the concept of a soul and identity of a person, which the adaptation completely ignores.

Decades of conditioning have made the Japanese think that they must aspire to become like their Western counterparts, which is reflected in their art. Reiji Kobayashi, in his work, *The Toy Industry*, comments that, “This portrait of [Western oriented visual feature] is a condensation of the dreams Japanese have held towards Western culture since the end of World War II” (Kobayashi 63). Even while possessing their own distinct cultures and traditions, the Japanese started to get heavily influenced by the Western culture, almost as if they were seeking validation from the West. This fascination towards the West set standards and expectations on the Japanese. Therefore, we must consider the fact the East wasn’t at all free from the all-pervading effects of American orientalism, in fact the ideologies perpetuated by the West were subconsciously practiced by the East, which can be seen in the Japanese belief that Caucasian is white perfection. Japanese responses towards the film suggest the cultural gap between the Japanese and the Americans in terms of race. Japan, unlike America, is a racially homogenous country and thus it can be considered natural that they aren’t as sensitive as the West when it comes to discussions of the race. On the other hand, America is an amalgam of different races, which leads to sensitivity in topics like racism. Eliza Berman in her *The Hollywood Reporter*’s interview with members of Japanese movie industry and fans of the original work noted that:

Many applauded Johansson as the right choice for the role based on her suitability for the movie's cyberpunk vibe. Others expressed resignation that a white movie star seems to be a prerequisite for getting a Japanese property successfully distributed to an international audience. Some were disappointed, but not as much as with the past instances of substituting one ethnic identity for another, as with the casting of Zhang Ziyi, a Chinese actor, as a Japanese character in the 2005 drama *Memoirs of a Geisha*.

Unlike in *Memoirs of a Geisha*, where a Chinese actor played a lead Japanese character, the film *Ghost in the Shell* doesn't clarify Major's true racial identity as Japanese and thus the controversy surrounding it wasn't as intense. And as discussed above the controversy issues about casting decisions were more intense among Americans rather than in Japan.

Research into the history of Japanese immigrants and the tension between the two countries in the past will reveal the key notions behind such misrepresentation of Japanese culture and identity, which includes Yellow Peril, Orientalism, the model minority, yellowface and racial stereotypes. In order to satisfy audience expectations, moulded through Hollywood films, and to serve America's personal interests, the big screens continue to present Westernized representations of Japanese identity and culture. Ever since the Second World War, America has actively tried to brand the Japanese as savage or villainous. They have continued to place Japan as the 'Other' by making clear distinctions between the two cultures, America is superior. America continues to establish what is 'normal' by placing Japan and other Asian countries as 'abnormal'. Even worse is the fact that American hegemony over Japanese identity is rooted so deep that even the Japanese are influenced by it. A change would mean educating the global population, especially the Asian population and among them the Japanese in particular, thereby sensitizing them towards racial issues. Hollywood cinema showcases Japan's supposed inferiority and primitivity by picking out certain aspects of Japanese culture, exaggerating them and juxtaposing them against American culture. America seems to be trying to own this particular narrative. As to why America feels the need to control global perception of Asian cultures, it is to maintain their position as a hegemonic power. After all, hegemonic power is essentially cyclic in nature, i.e., one power will be ultimately replaced by another as uneven economic growth fundamentally transforms power relations between states.

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## The Deranged Femme Fatale in Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl*

Arsha Subbi

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**Abstract:** Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl* presents one of the most intelligently portrayed deranged heroines in recent times. She attains the tag of a Femme Fatale archetype. The classical Femme Fatales delved within the outline that conventional patriarchy and society had set for her. The Femme Fatales have taken on various forms and demeanors since their arrival into the literary and cultural arena. They have been the 'preying' mantis, the bloodsucking vampire, a lethal siren or wanton courtesan. The protagonist of Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl*, Amy Elliot Dunne represents the most evolved form of Femme Fatale depictions. She chooses to be the excruciatingly sly beauty who attempts an absolute annihilation of the patriarchal structures around her. Her childhood trauma and subsequent psychological disability goes into making her the Femme Fatale that she later becomes. Amy Dunne's psychological state is not what we call 'normal'; however, she turns this disability into her armor, as well as her weapon, to defy the patriarchal norms she is forced to adhere to. Thus, by making her disability her shield, she turns out to be the most evolved form of the Femme Fatale character type.

**Keywords:** Femme Fatale, Archetypes, Gender studies, Gender identity, Cultural Studies.

Gender hegemony encompasses the varied set of characteristic traits expected to be followed by men and women separately. Men and women are divided into two different categories with differing sets of traits, abilities, qualities, feelings, and emotions. Those qualities defining men come within the term 'masculinity' while those defining women are defined under the term 'femininity'. This dichotomy maintains a hierarchical affiliation to patriarchy and hegemonic ideals of gender. Connell (1987) states, "Femininity organized as an adaptation to men's power, and emphasizing compliance, nurturance, and empathy as womanly virtues, is not in much of a state to establish hegemony over other kinds of femininity" (188).

The diversities within the categories of masculinity and femininity were further accounted for by theorists like Simone De Beauvoir, Andrew Tolson, Margaret Mead, etc. Beauvoir has specifically concentrated on the different types of feminine identities like that of the female whores, mothers, working women, lesbians, etc. 'Emphasized femininity' is a term that represents the cultural concepts associated with 'domesticity' and the 'home'. These concepts are further expounded in mass media and popular culture. However the resistant and deviant models of femininity are oftentimes unreasonably removed from the historiography of femininities. According to Connell,

What is hidden from it is the experience of spinsters, lesbians, prostitutes, madwomen, bachelors and maiden aunts, manual workers, midwives and witches. And what is involved in radical sexual politics, in one of its dimensions, is precisely a reassertion and recovery of marginalized forms of femininity in the experience of groups like these.

A single deviation from the 'ideal' kind of femininity often renders women with names. They are identified as 'contaminations' to the hegemonic ideals of gender. Therefore one such deviant trait classifies the individual as a "slut", "vamp", "bitch", "lesbian" or a "shrew". Dominant discursive representations often portray women as individuals staying remote from violence and aggressive motives. However, these qualities of hegemonic masculinities when enacted by women, that is, want for a feminine object ("lesbian"), aggressive nature ("badass"), lack of compliance and authority ("slut", "bitch" etc), they are marked as deviant or 'transgressive'.

The Femme Fatale archetype under study, refurbishes the entire set of ideologies governing the conventional patriarchy. These women depart from the embodied relationship between masculinity and femininity insisted through gender hegemony. They contradict from every norm defined for women and slowly slither into the established 'masculine' traits of violence and aggressiveness. The Femme Fatale denies fitting into the roles of a dutiful wife or a nurturing mother that the patriarchal system prescribes for her. She finds the institution of marriage to be confining, loveless, and dull. Her wildness and sexual magnetism are often put into use to help herself out of this muddle. She nevertheless persists in the face of her annihilation. And despite the inevitability of her death she leaves behind the strong picture of an unremorseful, bold, and daring woman who adheres to her ideals rejecting the rules put forward for her to obey.

Although more than a few decades old, the Femme Fatale character type had her etymological origin only towards the 1900s. Theoreticians trace it back as being ascribed

to certain frightful women of lethal nature then found in the public sphere, literature and other cultural representations. Besides these women of lethal nature, representations of extremely powerful women with farfetched physical and supernatural capabilities were adjacently presented within the *Femme Fatale* genres. The early representations purely belonged limitedly to the monotonous and clichéd representations of women as witches, seductresses or vampires. However, there were only a few female representations that were elite and laudable in terms of their intellectuality or intelligence. These categories of ‘powerful’ women were simultaneously portrayed as impotent regarding their psychological and logical state of mind. In literature and other texts, they were often portrayed as being driven by an unquenchable desire for attractive heroes or monetary benefits. Nevertheless, a pragmatic view on the representations of these archetypal figures reveals a recurrent pattern, where oftentimes these characters relied on unrealistic activities like witchcraft or magic.

Interestingly the *Femme Fatale* character type has thrived, flourished and transgressed their initial representations in the literary arena. The true identity of the *Femme Fatale* character type has not yet been discovered despite the growing interest of authors and writers in this lethal woman archetype whose extensive presence was seen throughout the nineteenth and twentieth-century literary and cultural texts. The *Femme Fatales* have taken on various forms and demeanors since their arrival into the literary and cultural arena. She was the praying mantis, the bloodsucking vampire, a lethal siren or wanton courtesan.

*Femme Fatales* archetypes have made their captivating presence in the nineteenth and twentieth century literary and cultural representations. The composite idea of the identity of the *Femme Fatale* archetype has not been traced yet, despite her unwavering presence and pursuance of authors and writers. The *Femme Fatale* figure has acquired numerous forms since her arrival into the cultural arena. She is the Egyptian Sphinx, half-human, half-animal. She is the Bible’s teenage seductress, Salome. She is the devious World War I spy Mata Hari. She is the evil Queen in *Snow White* (1812). She is the Egyptian Queen Cleopatra, the Roman empress Messalina, the much maligned Renaissance princess Lucrezia Borgia, and the misunderstood second wife of English King Henry VIII, Anne Boleyn. While mainstream historiography stubbornly traced the indubitable evilness in these representational figures, it conveniently ignored that the similar temperaments were displayed by a number of male counterparts.

A *Femme Fatale* makes use of her sexual prowess to instigate the male characters around her. She leaves them hanging in an eternal longing for the confirmation of her true love.

Virginia Allen, an American educationalist, attempted to trace back the etymology of the term 'Femme Fatale' and discovered its usage back in the 1900s. The term is believed to have been initially formulated in popular journalism. Mario Praz, an Italian critic of art and Literature devoted a whole chapter of his work, *The Romantic Agony* (1933) to elucidate his findings on the Femme Fatale archetypes. She has made her presence felt through early mythologies and fictions. Praz studied each of these figures to provide a set of consistent traits to define this figure. Praz states that the Femme Fatale figures were in most representations presented as an exotic and irresistible figure. He mentions about her youth, sexual cannibalism and the loose naïveté of her lovers. Writers and critics condemned her as the 'malignant, threatening, destructive and fascinating' heroine. Villainous to the very core, these archetypal figures display a morally confusing nature, exemplifying a sense of mystification and unease in their demeanor. Femme Fatales have been the antagonist figures in numerous fictional works. While some redeem themselves by the end of the tale, some pave way for the greater good by ensnaring the villain and reforming him through her lethal treatments.

Murder is one of the weapons made use of by a classic Femme Fatale and she often uses it to free herself from the clutches of an oppressive marriage or a relationship. They feel trapped by husbands or lovers who treat them as objects with meager value. Marriage for the Femme Fatale represents unhappiness, boredom, and the absence of romantic love and sexual desire. A certain kind of myth is generated within the society rendering the family home as the center of safety, fulfillment, and love. This sense of safety associated with marriage and domestic life especially in the conventional romantic discourses are actually absent in reality.

Throughout the years the Femme Fatale character type has made a recurring presence in literature, other art forms and films. The perpetual position of unpredictability and mystique displayed by these character types paves way for further exploration. She is simultaneously represented as an ineffaceable female stereotype and is by no means wholly knowable, leaving her out of definition. A camouflaged identity and conundrum of expressions are identifiable features of a Femme Fatale. Mary Ann Doane opens her most important discussion of the Femme Fatale by positing 'unknowability' as her key feature: "the Femme Fatale is the figure of a certain discursive unease, a potential epistemological trauma. For her most striking characteristics, perhaps is the fact that she never really is what she seems to be" (Doane 1991:1). The fetishism of her beguiling façade is held against the need to reveal her real identity. Writers and critics place her within the locus of mystery complemented by the additional features of darkness, mystery, violence and revelation.

The origin and evolution of this character type lies across different cultural representations and periods. A careful expedition of transnational and historical works would reveal the in-depth enigma of these archetypal figures. The primate depictions of Femme Fatales in film noirs shocked the critics and viewers for the raw and astute portrayal of women. This came as an opposition to the earlier heroines who were dependent on and obliging to the leading male characters in the movies. These characters therefore exhibited their want for freedom and expressions, slowly moving away from the male dominated discourses. They carefully rupture the prescribed gender codes.

The protagonist of Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl*, Amy Elliot Dunne represents the most evolved form of Femme Fatale depiction. *Gone Girl* is a psychological thriller novel by Gillian Flynn published in 2012. Following the pattern of noir narratives, *Gone Girl* begins with a crisis where the protagonist goes missing. It is later revealed that Amy herself staged her own disappearance, to castigate her husband for being infidel to her. Amy's identity as a Femme Fatale gets revealed from her actions.

Amy Elliot Dunne seeks a deep psychological probe into her deranged temperament of revenge-seeking nature. Amy is born right into the threshold of demands, being born into the world after a series of miscarriages and stillbirths in her family. She believes that she was never even supposed to be born. Her parents named all their stillborns Hope, who were all treated as angels as they were all lost to death. Amy was overpowered and shadowed by these 'angels' and she felt unbearable pressure throughout her childhood. Amy's childhood was further made convoluted when her parents used her as the inspirational prototype for their children's book series, 'Amazing Amy'. In consequence, Amy has to be identified as the by-product of a purloined childhood. Her parents irrevocably illustrated Amy as the little prodigy in their highly popularized book series, 'Amazing Amy'. This is how Amy becomes 'amazing' Amy and she inadvertently becomes subjected to the pressure of attaining this ideal image all through her life. Her fabricated childhood brings fame and wealth to her parents. As a child, she was brutally denied her right to have small failures or breakdowns; everything Amy went through was transformed into a triumphant climax. The fictional character becomes the unreachable little prodigy with whom the child in real Amy eternally strives to keep up. Nevertheless growing up doesn't rescue her from the pressure of being as good as the fictional character her parents created. She is forced to live under the shadow of this flawless fictional character, the amazing Amy. As a grownup, she takes over the Femme Fatale identity, where she tactfully remains to be the unknown and ambiguous. The real Amy is unknowable and mysterious. Flynn takes the readers

through Nick's (Amy's husband) and Amy's lives and Amy's missing. Amy's real intentions are never really uncovered until the climactic moments.

Amy is a response to modern patriarchal norms. An assessment of the early stages of female history reveals evident patriarchal predomination, however, modern patriarchy displays a more evasive, shifty and shrewd style of domination. This demands a different sort of resistance as in the case of Amy Elliot Dunne. The early *Femme Fatales* restricted themselves within the scaffoldings set by the early writers. They delved in the fringes of their beauty and magical abilities alone, giving little importance to qualities like intelligence and reasoning. Amy Dunne impregnates the *Femme Fatale* archetype with a tinge of sophistication and poise. Amy, as lethal as her predecessors but far less compromising rewrites the entire genre of *Femme Fatale* narratives. She rejects the male expectations and frameworks and rises to be one of the most provocative anti-heroines of all time.

Amy fits perfectly with the pattern of *Femme Fatale* narratives. She lures her husband into marriage, displays a stereotypical persona of feminine perfection and when her husband is found infidel, she employs methods at her disposal to plot her own missing to later frame him for her murder. A psychological reading of Amy as a *Femme Fatale* reveals her to be the result of a subjugated childhood and a subjugated marital life. Every single character dwelling within the darker shades of characterization demands to have a more psychoanalytical investigation that reads through the wormholes in their personalities. The deeper traumas they faced at some point in their lives, later surface to be the reasons behind their gnashing behavioral patterns.

However, love results to be the fissure in the fatal woman's armor. Amy's character revelation as a *Femme Fatale* begins when she openly plots her revenge against her infidel husband. Amy fiendishly drags Nick to his ultimate downfall by faking her murder. Regardless of recognizing the bogus appeal Nick makes on national television for Amy's return; she once again falls for him. But her return only adds to the tremors Nick further faces in their life together as a married couple. Amy remains to be the most dramatic and maneuvering of all *Femme Fatales*. While earlier *Femme Fatale* narratives have shown these archetypal figures to have either died or being punished for their acts, Amy remains triumphant. Amy's final staged collapse, in a blood-soaked white dress into Nick's arms when she returns, shows her inherent and effortless ability to deceive others. Amy makes use of all her childhood experiences to pretend to be the 'naïve' victim. Amy gets her

‘ideal’ fictional ending at the end; one with a home, husband, and baby. The domestic accountability of the future baby keeps Nick under her eternal control.

Having played the sculpted figure for her parent’s ‘Amazing Amy’ book series, Amy never fails to acknowledge the prevalent ambivalence in her reality. Conversely, Nick is among the very few who is well aware of Amy’s past struggle as a child, one who was always eclipsed by this faultless ideal. This partly becomes a reason for Amy’s metamorphosis into a fatal narcissistic personality. She eternally yearns for admiration and adoration from people around her. The tangential kid in her pushes herself to be as good as the ‘ideal’ image. She does very little to redeem herself and further puppets her husband to play along with her plans to get their ideal make-believe domestic life. He is forced to play his part in her version of the story. Her vicious yet intelligent revenge plan involving a made-up pregnancy spewed bloodstains, swindled money transactions and insurance points to her obsessive need for perfectionism.

One attribute that differentiates Amy from the other psychopaths has to be the close contacts she maintains with others. She voluntarily acts out the roles of a friendly neighbor, an expecting mother, and a victimized wife. Amy gracefully manipulates people to do her bidding. She lacks a conscience, which is evident in the way she makes use of Desi, her ex-boyfriend who is later brutally murdered by her. Amy is a person with ‘antisocial personality disorder’, who is least bothered about rights and.

When examined at multiple levels, this fatal woman archetype corroborates with man’s impulse to idealize women and brand them malicious once they challenge these very expectations. Femme Fatales are marked fatal figures by malice, dishonesty, and brutalism they exhibit. These women are portrayed as mystifying, intense individuals, like the way Amy is described by Nick in the prologue. This projects the perpetual fear of men about being betrayed by women, a suspicion that rises out of pure misogynistic viewpoints they carry of women, as evidently deceitful creatures.

Amy’s feminist assertion of freedom and her objection to playing the roles she is bound to play is contradicted by her character. She was trained to pretend as a child and she keeps pretending all through her life. Unlike the other noir fictions, Amy is the one who instigates her husband to stay within the boundaries of their married life. She transforms him into her kind of an ideal mate. Amy does not limit her revenge plans to murder alone instead put up an act to bring the utmost destruction to Nick’s life. She even includes her death just to ensure his incarceration and destruction.

A gender stereotype has to be perceived more as a general concept that demands certain qualities or features that are expected to be possessed by women. Though noticeably guileless these are damaging and disconcerted misconceptions that often limit the aspirations of a woman. Similarly harmful concepts can be both hostile and negative, for example, stereotypical phrases like, “women are irrational”, “seemingly compassionate”, or “women are nurturing” depict the inherent stereotypical ideologies prevalent in mainstream society. It is a common misconception that child-rearing responsibilities solely fall on women alone. This gender stereotyping effects the society in an adverse manner, where oppressions faced by women get buried within these concocted patriarchal structures of rules and regulations. Women are forced to stay within the ascribed norms and patterns. This amalgamation of gender norms leads to unfair conditions for certain factions of women like those from marginal categories, migrant women, women with disabilities, etc. In the thick of these factors, characters like Amy project a different sort of resistance compliant in this modern patriarchal setting.

Femme Fatale narratives are most appropriate in a society that has an innate and consistent feeling of a threat from the female characters. Femme Fatale narratives overthrow the existing gender power ideologies and emphasized female roles. A Femme Fatale character negates the narrative frameworks where women are always under control or “in their place”. Hence the most recent feminist principles and circumstances heighten the growing importance and precedence of this character type. *Gone Girl* throws light on the sociopolitical, cultural atmosphere of the whole society.

The fatal woman created an unwavering aura in nineteenth-century literary and cultural texts. This presence sheds light on the vital role she played in developing a particular genre of cultural narrative, representing gender and power. Nineteenth-century literary and cinematic genres saw the complex union of available cultural forms and the Femme Fatale archetypes, which exposed major alterations in thoughts about gender, sexuality, and eroticism. Her uncertain aura and irreplaceable fame are possibly found in the strongest Gothic ballads, realist novels, and sensation fiction and vampire tales, which were the narrative forms that enhanced her mystifying charm. The fatal woman character in such experimental forms depicts a marked departure from the conventional characteristics and popular trends.

Gillian Flynn tactically portrays the overarching presence of media and its influence over the creation of stereotypical concepts. Flynn presents the insensitive nature of media play. *Gone Girl* depicts how media creates perceptions. *Gone Girl* demands a

comprehensive reading through the lens cultural studies of *Gone Girl*. This interdisciplinary field of the study evaluates the role of social institutions in the creation and instigation of ideologies in the working of established social systems. Cultural studies extend its pervasive presence in all aspects of social situations in the creation of rights and wrongs. Gender remains to be one of the most significant areas of study within the realms of cultural studies.

Psychoanalytic theories and feminist concepts when applied together to *Gone Girl*, reveals the passive oppression faced by Amy at the hands of Marybeth Elliot, her mother and Nick Dunne, the two characters who instigate her transformation into a deadly psychopath. Amy Elliot Dunne's character embodies this non-assertive kind of oppression she faced from her parents and husband. *Gone Girl* illustrates the ease with which opinions are hastily formed and altered. It provides a realistic glimpse of a distressed relationship. It effortlessly questions the truth and lies in marriage, affection and reliance, the multiplicity of how different categories of people observe the truth in different situations and how these truths control people. Amy is also a victim of this phenomenon. Amy herself is controlled by her psychological state even when she is a pro at controlling and manipulating others. These factors are planted by her 'self'.

Femme Fatale narratives are believed to be an outcome of unjust gender stereotypes prevalent in society. Subjugation and mistreatment lead to unjust structures within the gender hierarchy. These gender structures derive from the concepts created by patriarchal institutions. *Gone Girl* gives an unprecedented account of several institutions indulging in the procreation of several cultural concepts and practices. These so-called ideologies are produced, introduced, operated and inculcated into the ideologies people possess. Amy herself is a victim of these levels of emphasized femininity demanded by such institutions. These institutions and their defining practices pass through several generations. The very same concepts are later reproduced, manipulated and sometimes become a reason for transforming the existing structures of power. Studies based on cultural studies recognize the historical foundations from which certain ideologies spring. Every individual is subjected to the demands of cultural power structures but eventually adopts ways of survival, struggle, resistance, and change.

Femme Fatale character type is the true embodiment of growing patriarchal fears. They demand the scope of interchangeability in gender roles. The fatal woman, especially those in the 19th-century literary works personify multiple concerns like violence, sex,

epidemics, lunacy, infections, and social degeneration. Later periods saw the Femme Fatale narratives addressing widespread concerns like prostitution, pornography, and sexual diseases. These fatal women were ultimately punished for their devious acts.

The Femme Fatale character has gone through many changes and developments and has adapted to the changing times and society. The contemporary Femme Fatale in Amy strives for total male submissiveness, which she achieves solely through her intelligence. *Gone Girl* begins and ends with the depiction of Amy's beautiful blond head along with Nick's monologue expressing his cluelessness as to what is going on inside Amy's head. He is clueless in the beginning, so is he in the end. Amy the Femme Fatale remains incomprehensible at every level. *Gone Girl* presents a completely evolved form of Femme Fatale.

Amy's broken psychological state forces her to play furthermore roles throughout her life. She simply makes use of the roles imposed upon her to achieve her ends. The crude antagonist in her is nothing less than an actor playing another role in the long line of roles she had to play throughout her life. Amy Dunne as a woman is expected to be empathetic and feminine. She refuses to fit into the frame of set norms and rules traditionally laid down for women. Rather than limiting her into the boundaries of a typical woman, Amy Dunne chooses to be the intricate deranged personality, a blemished villain-like human being, fit for the feminist frame.

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## **Photographs as Cultural Text: Decoding Mary Ellen Mark's *Falkland Road: Prostitutes of Bombay***

**Ms.GopikaGopan**

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**Abstract:**The American photographer Mary Ellen Mark, used her photographic skill to challenge the discourses concerned with prostitution. Through her female gaze she exposed the unseen world of prostitution in India. Her photos of the prostitutes of Kamathipura, exhibited the condition of women who were used for the sexual satisfaction of men. Mary Ellen Mark gave the world a new style of photography, the style of unapologetically documenting the vulnerable sections of society.

**Keywords:** Photography, Mary Ellen Mark, Subjectivity, Female Gaze

Photography is an art that captures life as it is. Photographs are the universal language that speaks to us directly to our hearts. A camera helps us to seize special moments of our lives. They offer us a chance to evaluate how our lives have changed through time. Social media has laid a huge platform for the improvisation of the photographic skills. The photographic art helps us to express matters that might not have been feasible with words. Pictures can attract human eyes more than words. Pictures can convey ideas much faster and easily than words.

Photographers take great effort to capture the known, unknown or the ignored into images. They call our attention to the things that we miss in our day to day lives. Through the medium of photos they ask us to look at people who are far away from our patch of the universe. Photography is an art that can defeat time. Photos can keep the memory of the loved ones alive. It has the capacity to hold a moment in history for future generations and the ability to be a witness to tragedy or joy. Photographers are devoted and passionate in their attempt to show us the unexplored world that is to be seen and known. Mary Ellen Mark, an amateur American photographer, was one such photographer, who used her photographic skill to showcase the plight of the people who

were kept away from mainstream society. Her works highlighted the condition of the ostracized sections of the society and thus to hold a mirror up to contemporary society.

Mark had mentioned in one her interviews with New York Times that “I feel an affinity for people who haven’t had the best breaks in society. What I want to do more than anything is acknowledge their existence.”(Ghorashi, *Photographer Mary Ellen Mark Has Died at 75*) Born on March 20, 1940 in Philadelphia, she earned a B.A. in art history and painting and an M.A. in photojournalism from the University of Pennsylvania. Mark is best known for her documentary photographs, *Streetwise* (1984) and *Ward 81* (1979). *Streetwise* portrays the lives of nine desperate teenagers who were thrown too young into a seedy, grown up world while *Ward 81* exhibit the lives of women locked in the Oregon State Mental Hospital, who were considered dangerous not only to the outside world but also to themselves. Ellen Mark always placed women at the centre of her photographic projects. While visual representation of the closed worlds can often slip into voyeurism, Ellen Mark ensures that the authentic voice of her subjects can be heard. She brings to all her photographs can unflinching yet compassionate eye. Her photographs are the archetypal saga of a photojournalist who conquers all the obstacles and emotional shocks to bring back accounts of unexplored territories such as the Indian brothels, Indian circus, women in mental hospital etc.

In *Falkland Road: Prostitutes of Bombay*, Ellen Mark brought her lens to expose a private world filled with sexual desire and complex power dynamics. Her camera cut through the constructed sexual fantasies, and in a wider context, the preconceived ideas about sex and power in society. Ellen Mark had mentioned in her interview with New York Times that the novel *Falkland Road: Prostitutes of Bombay* is meant as a metaphor for entrapment, for how difficult it is to be a woman in this male oriented world. The novel *Falkland Road: Prostitutes of Bombay*, is interesting not because it shows nudity in its plain form but because it includes things that makes us think and rethink. The book talks about prostitutes working in the brothels like slaves. It shows how women in India, and many other countries, are used for the gratification of men. Ellen Mark’s photos have a strong street feel. Her photos have emotion and soul. Each photo of Ellen Mark is strong and can stand alone. She has photographed the underbelly of urban life and the outcasts of society. She was one of the first to attempt to give a clear sight of the life of prostitutes of Mumbai’s Falkland Road while the Indian photographers looked at them from a distance fearing the dirtiness of their lives. In most of Ellen Mark’s photographs of Falkland Road the prostitutes would be wandering around, gazing out from behind the iron-grills of their prisons with their sorrows hidden behind their dazzling dresses. Mark is best known for

establishing close relationships with her subjects. They talked and laughed with her and let her photograph intimate moments in their lives. A single picture that particularly stands out portrays the unrestrained smile of one of the prostitutes who is peeping out from below the curtain as the deep veined hands of her fifth customer of the day clutches her. India and Bombay which shut its eyes to them had finally awakened to take a look of Falkland Road through Ellen Mark's photos.

Mary Ellen Mark got to know her subjects very well. She was able to convey who they were and how they lived and to portray a sense of their interior lives. She was among the last of an extended line of western photographers who came to India with a keen interest and was totally captivated by what was hidden there and built up a body of work. Mark, engraved her place in photography by maintaining the documentary nature of her work and by trying to look into the life of people on the margins.

Ellen Mark found young women in cages. Men watched women who beckoned and raised their skirts and then decided which one to prefer as if they were selecting a brand of shampoo or eatables in the supermarket. That was the sight that Mary Ellen Mark confronted in 1968 when she visited Falkland Road, India's notorious red-light district. It took ten years of repeat visits before she managed to gain the trust of the sex workers. The work was accepted globally for bringing light to the biases that were meted out to young women who were marketed by pimps and madams and were frequently crushed and exposed to sexually transmitted diseases. Through Ellen Mark's lens, street prostitution and dim brothels popped in vibrant hues of blue and green and the dingy rooms and drawn curtains gave a sense of place. The expressions on the women inside the brothels were sombre, helpless and weakened. Ellen Mark's photos brought that place to life. Mark's images are striking, absorbing, electric, shocking and remarkable for their emotional power and for the instinctive brilliance of their colour. Together with Mark's descriptions and introducing text, Falkland Road is an astounding work of insight into a raw and scary world that was made reachable by the wholeness of the photographer's participation, by her humanity and by the way she depicts the variety of individual life with the colour, passion and tenderness that exist there.

The cover photo of the novel *Falkland Road: Prostitutes of Bombay* is an eye-catcher. Ellen Mark had captured the photo of a naked child and explained that "Putla, a thirteen-year-old sex worker, comes from a small village. She was sold to the brothel by her mother. Putla's family is very poor. Her mother brought her here from the village last year.

She was only twelve then. But her family needed money desperately. Her mother still comes to visit every year.”(*Falkland Road: Prostitutes of Bombay*, pg.no 67)

Mark’s intimate and shocking photographs of the brothels of Falkland Road, form a captivating portrait of an exotic and enclosed world. Working from extremely close quarters, Mark photographed the sex workers in the rituals and realities of their world: waiting for business, applying makeup, having sex with customers, smoking in the café, napping, bathing, and crying. The resulting painterly tableaux of prostitutes, madams and clients are remarkable for their intimacy and emotional power and for the instinctive brilliance of their jewel like colour. The life of the working girls of Falkland Road is projected in the novel with all its shades of grey. Each of Mark’s photos in the novel brings out the silent suffering of women who sell their body for feeding their family and the same that rejects them by blaming them for living a shameless life. Her photographs touch upon the very core of the conflict, and even keep aggravating it, stirring controversy and provocation. For Ellen Mark photography is a vehicle that helps her explore the disruption of stereotypes and the obliteration of taboos. Her photographs of Indian sex workers present a nuanced, alternative take on sexuality and an antidote to the rigid definition of sex that we see in the mainstream. Unfolding against a background of riotous colour, lives that one might expect to be unremittingly grim and tragic was shown to be full of warmth and ordinary humanity.

As mentioned before, the novel portrays the pictures of wire-fronted cages that opens into the street, where women and transvestites are on display like goods in a shop window or animals in a zoo. Other photos were taken in the tiny cubicles behind the cages and on the floors above them. Here the women, dressed in gaudy clothing, live and practice their trade in brightly painted rooms decorated with patterned bedspreads and curtains. The visual impact of these photographs is extraordinary, for example, a young girl wearing gold jewellery, a lime green ribbon in her hair, and fuchsia lipstick reclines on a pink-and-green bedspread against a bright blue wall.

“When I was young I was beaten up by my madam and the other transvestites. It cost me four thousand rupees to buy my freedom.” (pg.no.16) These are the words of a transvestite named, Champa. Champa’s words give us the vivid picture of the hardships and mental torture that the sex workers face in their life. For them, a red-light district is not a place of desire and pleasure. It is a place of agony. Kamla with a potential customer said that “Last night a customer paid me one hundred rupees to spend the whole night. A man that stupid is not worth marrying.” (pg.no.29). It means that Kamla doesn’t consider herself valuable

for hundred rupees as she had never received such a huge amount in her life. The 32<sup>nd</sup> photograph of a naked girl, a teenager taking her bath in a brothel shows that they are no longer ashamed to reveal their nudity in front of a photographer. The naked photographs captured by Mark emanated a sense of concern rather than sexual stimulation. A significant feature of Mark's work is that the novel is an attempt to document the personal lives of the sex workers, instead of simply snapping their sexual lives. It is evident on seeing the flexible nature of the images where the women are found doing things like putting makeup and wiping the floor. In each photos the novel, we can notice that even though most of them do portray sex, the joy of sex is absent in almost all of them. They portray the sex which is forced upon the prostitutes due to their professional boundaries.

Visual redefinition of the body is considered as the main social effect of the invention of photography. The power of naked images lies in their photographic realism, an alluring illusion of medium transparency, a belief that if something was photographed, it must have existed in front of the lens. A photograph has all the requirements to become a fetish. The illusion of physical proximity is to a large extent what made photography so popular. The 46<sup>th</sup> photograph is again an eye catcher as it portrays a topless woman, Kanta. Kanta says, "I could never visit my parents. I haven't seen them for years. I don't know if they are dead or alive. But I could never visit them. I would bring shame to them."(pg.no.46) Most of the sex workers came into the field of prostitution out of sheer poverty. They send the money that they earned by selling their bodies to their family. The family accepts their money but not them. The 54<sup>th</sup> photograph portrays the picture of a girl in a red top and skirt who is sitting ready with all her make-up while another woman applies lipstick on her lips. The picture shows that the old woman is preparing the young girl to meet her customer. "The girl was brought to the brothel by the people of her village because her husband had left her... they changed their minds and came to take her back. She was an epileptic and they were afraid that the goddess inhabiting her would get angry and avenge herself on the village." (pg.no.54).

The term female gaze was a reply to the feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey's term, male gaze. The female gaze is used to refer to the perspective of a female viewer that would be different from a male view of the subject. Mary Ellen Mark, picked up a camera in order to reclaim female representation. In an image obsessed culture saturated with social media, Ellen Mark used her photography and her female gaze to reformulate the field of photojournalism by making a profound impact on our visual world. "Seeing or gazing is so powerful that one's identity is carved out by the power of this single activity; the other is the other because he is seen as the other; the woman similarly becomes a woman that is

how she is perceived.” (*The Male Empire under The Female Gaze: The British Raj and the Memsahib*, pg.no.12 ) Female gaze illustrates a diverse range of female perspectives while exploring the themes of sexuality, objectification, body image, mental illness and addiction. It is a frame of female mind that allow all females to program vibrant discussions that enable them to look at the world from a different perspective, engaging with complicated themes of female identity, beauty and sexuality in a way that is sure to resonate. Through female gaze the audience can see a part of this world that is often left out of sight by the male.

If the male gaze is all about what men see, then the female gaze is about making the audience feel that which women see and experience. In one of the photographs of the novel, Ellen Mark’s camera has wiggled towards a post-makeover woman in a skin tight dress, who is ready to seduce a customer. Her photographs embody social consciousness, visual power, deep filial attachment and closeness with her subjects from Falkland Road. Each photograph looks beyond the dust, the clutter and the crowd to discover those hidden treasures. The presence of a strong female gaze is exhibited in every photo of Mary Ellen Mark. This gaze is demonstrative and intimate. It perceives people as people. It is respectful. It is technical and tells the truth, is feminine and unashamed. Ellen Mark’s photographs are full of tenderness. There is no judgement on her part. There is no morality. She is not glamorising her photographs and not trying to move away from the difficult aspects of her subject’s lives.

It is this strangeness between the dependence of women and their instantaneous empowerment that grabs our attention to the female gaze. Female gaze refers not to any woman who watches but to a constructed space of viewing. It highlights how we tend to identify subject-hood with men and object-hood with women. Mary Ellen Mark’s pictures were marked by plain disparities in textual and lightning, unusual angles and vibrant figures emerging from gloomy backgrounds. Throughout her career, Ellen Mark conveyed a deep humanity in her black and white photographs, but her gaze was not one of pity.

*Falkland Road; Prostitutes of Bombay* 1981, captured that seedy world with all its foulness, colour and pathos. For all the heart wrenching desperateness in her images, Ellen Mark does not illustrate her subjects as strangers or specimens. They are described as human beings driven by circumstances to the shabby edges of society. “If the oppression of women is socially scripted, the re-envisioning of social fabrics overturns that position, some photographs achieve this re-envisioning, this re-arranging, the visible, and overturn that which can take place wrenching the framework of patriarchal capitalism. Photographs

that advocate feminism, they carry forward a feminist aesthetic work through perception: the event of vision that takes place in the viewer. The photograph itself is an uncanny purveyor of perception.”( *Women Photographers and Feminist Aesthetics*, pg.no.13)

Ellen Mark removes these partial portrayals of women by using her female gaze to project their exceptional beauty. Her photographs stand as an example for how women can be represented in art as she de-sexualizes female bodies and decentres the male perspective. Ellen Mark often captures women in a fierce, honest and vulnerable light where we can see her subjects pose for her photo sessions without any hesitation or frustration towards the photographer. She photographs women comfortably allowing them to be themselves. The 49<sup>th</sup> photo in the novel is an example, a prostitute washes her menstrual blood while her customer waits for her in bed.

“From inside their street-level cages, prostitutes try to attract potential customers: men who walk up and down the busy street sizing up each woman.” (16).“In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role, women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness.” (*Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, 62) As Laura Mulvey had proposed, in an image the photographic perception of male gaze is the positioning of the camera as the spectator’s perspective as that of a heterosexual man whose vision loiters upon the female body. But in female gaze women identifying with women and female bonding are the ways of circumventing patriarchal domination. A photograph conveys a sense of proof, evidence, and testimony. A photograph is a proof of that subject’s existence. A photograph is an evidence that validate the presence of an object or a person that existed when the photograph was taken. Mary Ellen Mark pictured monsters. They were not the monsters in a beastly or demonic sense but instead the way Mary Shelley conceived her monster in *Frankenstein* that signifies the creatures both inside and outside humanity.

Mary Ellen Mark has photographed elderly women, women on the street, women in the circus, autistic women, women who have lost limbs to leprosy, women who have been institutionalized for madness, girls with cancer, homeless girls, and sex workers. Every woman in Ellen Mark’s photographs holds the same caption- “I exist”. Her main interest was in capturing reality, to take photos of things as such. Taking photos of the ostracized was, for Mark, to expose the hidden world as it really is. Mark always wanted to bring her

subjects out of the darkness and to make their existence real for those viewing them. In Ellen Mark's photographs each subject's presence fills the frame. Mark didn't believe in the total objective portrayal of her subjects in which the photographer is supposedly absent. What makes her photograph stand unique is that her subjects were always aware of the person who was taking their pictures. The existence of the photographer in the angle of a photograph, and in the position of the subject can be sensed. The photographer's image is echoed in the gaze of her subject. Ellen Mark lived with her subjects actually and figuratively. The existence of non-sexual and personal photos in Ellen Mark's work shows that she wanted to cover Falkland Road in a healthy manner rather than to portray it in morbid ways.

“The body one is born with shapes one's identity and patriarchy perpetuates a false dichotomy between body and mind, equating “man” with “mind” and “woman” with “body”. The patriarchy has riveted women between two horrifying myths: between the medusa and the abyss, that is, they will become monsters if they escape patriarchal prescription but in any case are nothing, “lack”, because we are not male. On the other hand, in feminist art, the female grotesque is not the source of horror, but of a wild energy; the horror is the oppression against which she revolt.” (*Sexuality, the Female Gaze and the Arts: Women, the Arts and Society*,23).

The female gaze challenges the continuing dominance of masculine worldviews in film and media. Female gaze is the view that the camera lens, which is trained to be dominant can eventually change in female hands by launching a new fundamental aesthetic. Female gaze is the essential thing that women share.

A visualization that is spherical, filthy, menstrual, close and wise. Through her female gaze Mary Ellen Mark challenges the discourses surrounding prostitution. The male gaze should not be taken for granted in the field of photography. The consciousness of an active female gaze can change the ways in which we understand popular culture, photography, and media. The female gaze thus turns as a mode of impermeable reading that allows alternate methods of analyzing and interpreting the female characters and the gendered issues and themes of a text irrespective of the gender of the makers or readers.

Through the novel, *Falkland Road: Prostitutes of Bombay*, Mary Ellen Mark was able to tell the entire story of the prostitutes of Falkland Road which includes their life, happiness, misery, joy, patience, grace and all the possible human emotions encapsulated in one frame. Through her photographic representation of stigmatized individuals Mary Ellen Mark throws open doors for searching debates on necessary reforms in social norms and

approaches.

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## **Beyond Appetite; Food Inclusion in Socio-Political Contexts**

**Samra Fuad**

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**Abstract:** From being the basic sustenance of life food has become one of the most important cultural markers in the history and the evolution of human civilization. Even though food, its preparation, its producers and its evolution has happened right alongside human history and development, the study of food as a cultural marker is not a very old or tired discipline. In fact food discourses are a relatively modern branch of study. In this paper I have tried to trace the various influences and collusions of food and food myths that have become deeply entrenched into various lifestyles throughout history till this very day, only changing patterns and interpretations. The paper highlights the corporeal influences of food associations on social and political movements; food has a much deeper and infinitely more powerful grip on our socio-political scenarios than appears on the surface.

**Keywords:** Commensality, Inter-communal dining, Gendering of food, Culinary Triangle, Sustainable nutrition.

“Reformers attempt to invent a better future by changing the unjust present. The paradox is that in attempting to move forward, they are often constrained by views, values, recipes, patterns and structures inherited from the past.”(Belasco, pg.179)

The most commonly quoted sentiment about food is that it brings people together. The role of food as a glue for social groups is one of its most important as well. Food as a social tool is a powerful factor. It has spearheaded social and political movements and acts as a link between people - those of the same social group living in different geographical regions, between diaspora all over the world, and bringing together of different social groups under a common cause. This chapter examines social movements and political statements in which food, its preparation, laws or incidents around it which precipitated notable changes in the fabric of a society.

Food is often seen as a metaphor of the collective self. In the essay ‘Anthropology Of Food’, R Kenji Tierney and Emiko Tierney discusses how food becomes a metaphor; first the food embodied in each individual serves as a metonym. Secondly, food as consumed historically in groups – this communal consumption renders food a metaphor of “we”- the social group and often of people as a whole.

“This double linkage-metaphor underscored by metonym- gives foods a powerful symbol for the collective self not only conceptually but also at the gut level. This visceral experience of eating together provided the foundations for a range of communities, from families and school groups to the “imagined communities” of modern nations.” (Tierney, pg5)

One of the biggest historic changes brought about by consumer preference is that of the medieval spice trade and the insatiable European demand for spices in the late Middle Ages. This trade and subsequent colonization changed the course of human history. Colonizers in Asia, Africa and the Americas brought their style of food and life into these countries while taking back nothing more than the material wealth of these places and thus altering the cultural fabric of these places forever. One of the most direct and visible results of the mixing of cultures in cuisine is that of the birth of fusion cuisine in these colonies. When the colonies started their struggles for independence, elements of food became important factors. It was the refusal of soldiers to taste animal fat-covered rifle cartridges which would be a violation of their religious beliefs that led to the First War of Indian Independence in 1857.

Another major milestone in the Indian freedom struggle was the Dandi March, also known as the Salt Satyagraha. It was an act of nonviolent civil disobedience in colonial India led by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. The march was a direct action campaign of tax resistance and nonviolent protest against the British salt monopoly. Gandhi made salt by evaporation of seawater at different places and gathered meetings. The choice of salt as focus point was ridiculed by most in the beginning; Gandhi justified it by saying that an item of daily use could resonate more with all classes of citizens than an abstract demand for greater political rights. The salt tax represented 8.2% of the British Raj tax revenue, and hurt the poorest Indians the most significantly. Thus salt, one of the most unassuming ingredients of daily life, united hundreds of people to face an injustice.

Gandhi’s civil disobedience also extended to voluntary fasting. Already a part of all major religions, fasting has been performed contextually as a symbol of both confirmation (to

religious beliefs) as well as protest (sacrificing sustenance in rebellion). Gandhi, along with many of his followers went on hunger strikes demanding the repeal and revocation of unjust British rules. He was repeatedly arrested for it as well. This method of nonviolent protest have inspired thousands of people across the world in a multitude of fights against injustice. In India today, hunger strikes and proclaimed fasts unto deaths are almost a daily occurrence. One of the most famous civil and political rights activists of contemporary India, Irom Sharmila began a hunger strike against the Armed Forces Act of 1958. It resulted in the Malom Massacre. She fasted for sixteen years while under forced nasogastric intubation and became an icon of public resistance.

Modes of protests that are the opposite of refraining from food have found its place in the part of social history. Public consumption of certain banned or prohibited foods as well as public inter-communal dining to assert fundamental human rights or to show solidarity to a group or a cause is often practiced. Indian culture definitely understands the importance of the commensality of food. Even while glorifying the sacredness of food and displaying the splendor of it, the fact that India has one of the biggest divide between the rich and the poor is often skimmed over. The stark difference between the food habits of the upper-caste, upper-class population and that of the Dalit, lower-caste demographic is staggering. A common factor found in almost all Dalit narratives, is the detailed description of the food they lived on. Bread made from ground millets plucked off of the digested remains of the fodder fed to the cattle of the upper caste, meat salvaged from carrion, dried and used for a long time, and watered-down soups made from scraps are a common description found in these stories. In fact, Om Prakash Valmiki, one of India's most famous Dalit writers titled his autobiographical novel *Joothan*. It is a reference to the leftovers from the upper-caste weddings or parties that the *dalit* would be "allowed" to partake from. B.R. Ambedkar, in his revolutionary speech talks about how a certain group of upper-caste Hindus filed an official complaint against the Balai community because a *dalit* family had served 'ghee', a "pure, sacred" food to be associated only with the upper-caste, at one of their weddings.

Arjun Dangle's anthology *Poisoned Bread* talks about the food that had to be salvaged by the dalit, the poisoned bread, as a metaphor for the toxic caste system. Much of the country even today does not have access to clean water and hygienic, nutritional food and many suffer from diseases that arise due to nutrition deficiency. This, while the other part of India celebrates the biggest and most wasteful weddings and lavish parties with huge amounts of food and beverages that often go wasted. The inequality between the two is incredibly hard to bridge.

In addition to the open casteism practiced even today in India, a subtle and hidden casteism also prevails. For example, the famed Aranmula boat race in Kerala is accompanied with a feast or *sadhya*. This feast is inevitably prepared by the upper-caste chefs traditionally associated with the royal family of Pamba. So are the meals connected with the most prestigious festivals and important events of the country and the state, such as that of the annual Kerala School Kalostavam. Most temple chefs are Brahmins and the traditions have no sign of giving in. Interestingly and disappointingly, women are not associated with large scale community cookouts such as this one or with the cooking of temple offerings or *annadanams*.

Commensality is institutionalized in many cultures beginning with family meals eaten together. “Eating from the same pan”, is the social anti-thesis of drinking alone. “Breaking bread together” is a common phrase used to signify communal dining or sharing food with friends or family. The idea of commensality is present in school dining rooms, community cookouts and barbeques and carnivals and fairs. Commensality is by definition the act of shared eating: but cooking is also an equally important communal experience that reinforces both social ties and hierarchies. An example of hierarchies imposed according to class in matters of food is the court cuisines of medieval Europe. Of which the spices were imported at great cost from Asia, the game meat exclusively reserved for the aristocracy. “The stratification of food symbolisms appears not just through different food items, caviar as opposed to tomatoes, but even within the same food item- organic, heirloom tomatoes and tasteless, industrial hothouse varieties.” (Tierney,pg6)

One of the most successful and revolutionary events involving the use of food is the inter-dining demonstrations brought about by social reformer Sree Narayana Guru. Sahodaran Ayyappan, a disciple of the guru decided to publicly organize inter-dining or mixed dining as a challenge against the caste system. Those assigned the lower caste or outcastes were not allowed to mix with the so called upper-castes, let alone dine together. Ayyappan was influenced by the French revolutionary ideals of equality and fraternity and under guru’s encouragement, organized this public shunning of the caste system. Narayana Guru, Chatammbi Swamikal and many other reformers were known to be inter-caste diners, but an event as initiated by Ayyappan had been unheard of. This disregard for evil practices disguised as “traditions” was an inspiration in the progressive momentum of the state.

Similar to the caste politics that exists in India, racial inequality has remained a constant in the history of American foodways through labor relations that produce it, the access to

healthy diet, and the status accorded to particular foods. The slave labor imported from Africa fed much of America through ages, while the workers got the extreme short end of the stick. Colonial patterns of bland British cooking were slowly replaced in contemporary times by equally bland corporate, mass-produced food. However, a large mass of anti-hegemonic population began to eat across barriers of race and ethnicity. The migration of southern sharecroppers to northern industrial jobs reached the zenith during World War II and with this the Soul Food was born. The nostalgia felt by the migrants, combined with the continued segregation made home-style cafes and cafeterias into havens of commensality in Harlem and Chicago. Closely associated with the formation and evolution of Black identity in America, and the Black Power movement of the sixties, the term “Soul food” refers to the “Soul” culture that was adopted by the African American resistance. Today, soul food has evolved from the catfish, collard greens and chitterlings, scraps given by white masters to the slaves to spruced up versions of cornbread, baked macaroni and cheese etc.

Protests like the inter-dining movement by SahodaranAyyappan and the evolution of soul food into a fundamental identity of black culture are equally important in asserting fundamental rights and equality, whether racial, ethnic or otherwise. These milestones are even more impressive and relevant today when faced with alarming totalitarian impositions on the basic rights and liberties of any citizen. The state itself seems to be coming up with undemocratic and medieval restrictions on food rights and thereby creating cultural diversities among people. It is imperative to proclaim the organic human fraternity and freedom of choice.

One of the more politicized angles of food and dining is the role played by women. Traditional roles of cooking were assigned to women in most cultures. The hunter-gatherer relationships filtered down and distorted throughout human history. One of the more recent areas of study is the gendering of food. And indeed, food is one of the disciplines where gender can be clearly distinguished. Across cultures and epochs, gender has played a key role in foodways. Claude Levi-Strauss was one of the first to identify the gendering hidden just under the surface. Through his culinary triangle, he explains how certain acts of cooking (meat) such as roasting over an open fire was considered masculine and certain others such as boiling or frying in a vessel was considered feminine. In certain Mexican festivities, the parts of cuisine cooked by men and women are different; the men handle the cooking of the meat while the women handle the sauces. In Indian cultural history too, can we find that women were always the cooks when it came to feeding families, but in mythologies and histories associated with food cooked publicly, or in reference to palace

cooks or professional cooks, it is always a male cook. In fact, the very idea of “Nalapachakam”, when referring to a brilliant chef, is an allusion to the king Nala, blessed by the goddess Hingula who was said to have a special skill in making any food taste divine. There is almost no mention of connections between women and food or food traditions in Indian historical or religious narratives other than maybe the kheer that King Dasarata’s wives consumed in the Ramayana.

The concept of food democracy provides a useful lens to train on the question of gender and food activism. For Tim Lang, food democracy is “the ability for all citizens to have secure access to culturally appropriate, sustainable, and healthy food.” (Lang, pg.145) In many cultures, women have not had the opportunities to let their voice be heard publically and have had to find creative outputs. Historians have found many instances where women have expressed protest or opinion to attain social influence or piety through extreme fasting, donations for charity etc. There have been many expeditions into finding food voices of women. One of them was Ramona Lee Perez’s use of “kitchen table ethnography” where she talked to Mexican and Mexican-American women as they prepared and consumed food with family and friends to gain insight into the “transnational and cross-border experiences” (pg 234) of these women.

Food is also linked intricately with people’s relationships to their bodies in different ways across cultures, ethnicities, and genders. In Western cultures, and by an influential extension, throughout the world, ideas about appropriate consumption and the body reproduce gender, race and ethnic hierarchy, often under the guise of promoting “healthy eating habits”, especially among young women. This has led to a wide array of eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia, binge-eating disorders and avoidant or restrictive food intake disorder. Not surprisingly, statistics indicate that women are almost nine times more likely to be affected by eating disorders than men. There is definite and obvious evidence that women’s consumption is regulated by cultural values linking self-control and thinness with femininity, and hearty eating and body size with masculinity. There are also the cultural associations of certain foods like meat and alcohol with men and fruit and sweets with women. In fact, meat appears transculturally as a marker of masculinity. This association of men with meat goes hand in hand with patriarchal power, which links the dominance of humans over animals and with that of man over woman. Ironically, in some cultures, fatness is considered important and admirable, an indication of wealth, especially in those cultures that find surplus food rare.

The gendering of feeding and caring defines women in ways that confine and oppress them but also give them a channel for creating ties that bind. In fact, association of maternal

memories are intertwined with various foods, family meal traditions and religious family-specific customs, often linked to “secret recipes” passed down over the generations. However, this obligation to cook and feed others have been ambiguous sources of oppression, violence, power and also creativity for women. Men on the other hand have always had the choice to take or leave cooking; they are not expected to put their culinary expertise at the service of their families. This lack of reciprocity of feeding and caring upholds the hierarchy of the genders, both within and outside of the home. Oneway that women have managed to turn this traditional patriarchal assignment of making food into profitable business ventures is by small-scale entrepreneurship programs by marketing their homemade recipes. This model is followed all over the world, from farmer’s market stalls to backyard party kiosks to businesses that have blossomed into large scale production ventures. Pickles, jams and jellies, sauces, pies, cakes, cookies, snacks and canned imperishable and other condiments make the list of these items. In this regard, the women entrepreneur group of Kerala, the Kudumbasree, that employs over a million women, needs special mention.

Though traditionally more removed from cooking, men’s food voices are more frequent and louder than women’s. Men cooking assumes an air of importance or specialty as they are usually removed from the process. Studies show that women in general and South Asian women in particular more often than not had vitamin and mineral deficiencies. This is a result of the general dining trend that ensures that women partake in meals only after the rest of the family has eaten. This means that most protein and nutritious dishes including eggs, meat, fish and delicacies such as dessert is unavailable to the female member. It was also common to prefer to give meat and fish to male members over female members, even children. Food democracy seeks to replace customs and traditions such as these with equal accessibility.

Food reformers today seek to instill a third paradigm when it comes to choosing the food we eat- a sense of responsibility. The first two being taste and convenience, the former often forsaken for the latter. Warren Belasco refers to this highly moralized and political responsibility as the willingness to pay the full cost of one’s meal.

This extends beyond immediate market price of a product to what economists call the “externalities”, the wider, often unseen, long-range consequences of consuming it. These consequences may include the people who produce it, the acute and chronic health costs to consumers, and the impact on the resources available to future generations. (Bellasco, Warren)

Today, it is more important than ever to live sustainably. It is high time that everyone takes responsibility for the food eaten and the waste produced. For food activists, a morally clean plate does no harm. Bellasco says that “if we are what we eat” and more telling, what we don’t eat, then food becomes a medium through which to voice social identities and distinctions. Even when societies moralize about food by distinguishing them as original, unsullied and foreign, polluted, distinctions are not made on the basis of economic, ecological and social impact. One of the concerns voiced by modern food reformers is the poor quality of already existing, popular food: mass-produced, average, bland, artificial, adulterated and impersonal. The second major concern is the methods and means of production: large scale corporate farming, processing and manufacturing that is enormously damaging to the environment, exploitative of the workers and animals included in it etc.

One of the most intense controversies regarding food centre on genetic engineering. It goes beyond plant engineering; genetic engineering research and recombinant DNA technologies make the issue complicated. Especially in the case of ethics. Since most of the public’s only idea about genetic engineering comes from badly researched superhero story tropes, the technology does indeed appear daunting. In agriculture, products using recombinant DNA technology is termed as GMO or Genetically Modified Organisms. The doubts and controversies regarding these are about the technology and its ownership and use, such as, to what limit is the technology to be used? Who decides what technologies are acceptable? There are internationally set rules and regulations for genetic crop engineering; infact, there are GMO free zones and countries as a reaction to the seemingly overarching influence of technology in food production, which for many, is crossing a line from natural to unnatural. What is to be recognized however is that the potential of genetic engineering is not to be ignored; it needs to be pursued rigorously. Especially since it may prove a solution for global hunger and food scarcity problems or at least a beginning to the cause.

Today, large scale enabling of counter movements regarding food are happening. There is more integration and involvement of persons in food making. More and more people make the effort to find out the origins and disposal of their food. Many have turned to organic farming or at least small vegetable or herb gardens in their own backyards. Large scale grocery shopping is done via environment friendly outlets, opting for nutrition-rich, sustainable diet instead of cheap fast food options. Although vegetarianism has been around since time immemorial, newer demographics are transitioning to vegetarianism

today. Vegetarianism is a category of lifestyle with varied underlying motivations. Animal welfare concerns are the primary reasons for its adherents, followed by health considerations. A subcategory of ethical vegetarianism is feminist ethical vegetarianism which includes people who are concerned with not only animal welfare but with the systems of patriarchy promoted by the production of meat for food and its consumption.

Veganism in its present form is a more recent movement when compared to vegetarianism. Its originator Donald Watson says that “veganism starts with vegetarianism and carries it through its logical conclusion.” Veganism is predominantly taken as a stand against animal exploitation. There are debates about veganism to the effect of questioning its health benefits to whether it is evolutionarily appropriate to completely stop using all animals and animal products as foods. Scholars such as Roger Scruton have agreed that “advocating vegetarianism has become a new form of extremist religion among some adherents, and so instead we should attempt to reduce our meat consumption and to consume conscientiously.” (Scruton,pg.56) Thus, we must become more spiritually and morally aware of our food rather than just seeing it as fuel and focus on the fostering of relationships through a sharing of food and food habits, rather than trying to inhibit or eliminate certain food practices.

The intersection of food customs still occurs through immigration and international commerce and the slow but sure process of globalization. One of the most obvious areas where the ostentatious presence of food exists as a clear, distinct, cultural marker is diaspora studies. What could be a better example of hybrid culture and identity than food that is infused with racial memory and unruly assimilation of the foreign culture? Food is often the only thing that serves as a connection to the homeland and their roots for any diaspora, once language slowly, but mostly inevitably disappears as a link. The community not only continues to make sure that the delectable, edible part of their identity stays with them, but also adapt their cuisine to suit the geography and lifestyle of their new home, resulting in the creation of incredible fusion food. The expansion of Chinese, and Indian food in the U.S.A., the enormous popularity of Asian cuisine in Australia and that of Middle-eastern food in Europe all points to this fact. However, the sudden rise of global restaurant chains and food outlets like MacDonalld’s and K.F.C. are the result of continued Westernization and capitalist-centered globalization. Which seems to be the direction that food as a whole is moving towards.

Even when the malnutrition and poverty issues of much of the world remains unsolved, food scientists are racing forward with agricultural and nutritional advancements, from

making food look and taste better, to developing new edible substances, replacement foods (such as meat replacements and mock-meats) to pills to sustain the feeling and physical satisfaction of an entire meal, which was actually a trope in Asimov's science fiction narratives. This definitely signifies how the future is undoubtedly here. And it demands a more careful and close study of the constantly evolving association of food and cultures. Fighting nature's replacement techniques and tests are being developed in connection biotechnology. Unfavourable agricultural conditions are being combated by creating strong varieties of seeds and plants and recreating ideal environments.

Tracing the evolution and digressions of the food narrative and various different mini-narratives shows us the continued need to study food and its cultural equations. Instead of weighing the differences, the need of the hour rests in finding common factors that point to the similarities in the evolution of cultural habits. The questions raised in connection with culinary culture, and in extension, culture as a whole, is no longer about religious associations or meta-narratives. Indeed, it is necessary to study these to understand the deeper cultural significance, but definitely not enough. The discussions are regarding ethical consumption of food and related awareness movements, the validity of Genetically Modified foods, food safety, sustainability and responsibility. Discourse on food should grow to include learning from examining and verifying the past, using present global scenarios to build solutions for now and planning for an accountable and sustainable future, all the while not losing hold of the personality and taste of food.

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## **Anthems of Desire – A Study of R Raj Rao’s ‘*National Anthem and Other Poems*’**

**Huzaifa Pandit**

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**Abstract:** The paper proposes to study R Raj Rao’s ‘*National Anthem and Other Poems*’, to explore how Rao’s work constitutes a subversive discourse that illuminates the landscapes of queer desire constituted from the wide range of formulations of the queer self in post-colonial urban India. The paper argues that the texts are performative acts that create eroticised topographies created by and from the performance/consummation of sexual acts. Drawing from a close reading of selected poems, the study seeks to illuminate the politics and performance of a subversive aesthetic forged from an intersection between radical queer aesthetics, and the evolution of a queer subject both at odds and complicit with masculine right wing nationalism in contemporary India, a curious mix of free market liberalism, and celebratory post-colonial right wing majoritarianism that has strengthened the old heteronormative mores, rather than dissolving them even as India has decriminalised homosexuality.

Relying on close reading, the paper demonstrates that the idiom of decadence and decay in Rao’s poetry brings out in sharper relief not only the discordance and discontinuities of the heteronormative world but also its power to permeate subjectivities. His cityscape comes alive with deviant desire which paradoxically escapes the nuanced panoptic gaze of hetero-patriarchal hierarchies, only to write back into the confluence of bio-medical interventions, and the obsessive drive of post-colonial state to regulate and govern, even as it actively subverts and resists them by creating alternate mobile spaces where ‘taboo’ desire is articulated and performed. The contradictions draw attention to the complex nature of queer topographies in Post-Colonial Urban India, which must not be seen as a singular serotic space, but a highly contested space determined by confluences of ideology, power and class. The easy elision between marginality and marginalising in the poems brings to fore the larger contradictions of Post-Colonial India, where alongside a formal

decolonisation, a post-colonial subalternity contradicts and undercuts the democratic impulse which shaped counter-colonial movements.

**Keywords:** Raj Rao, National Anthem, Queer spaces, Section 377, Counter colonial resistance

*It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us*

-Charles Dickens

The argument that texts produced in the west are not indicative of realities in the non-west is one, which even a beginner in Post-colonial studies will argue with great conviction, and rightly so. That said, sometimes the temptation to invoke western texts is great, as the words seem to resonate with the times that are. I invoke the opening lines of Dickens' 'Tale of Two Cities' in this spirit particularly to illustrate this moment in history when the colony and the post colony, east and west are almost indistinguishable in their tilt towards majoritarian right-wing conservatism, yet the acceptance of dissent, difference and diversity has hardly ever been greater.

The case of 'queerness' illustrates this best: across the world, the support for and acceptance of queer sexualities, relationships, families, activism and marriages, and scholarship around it has hardly been greater. Yet, the hatred and anxiety generated by homophobic impulses, and contestations of 'queerness' have hardly been greater as reflected by the common place incidence of hate crimes against queer populations across the world. In America alone, where queerness finds more acceptance than India, for example, more than 100,000 hate crime offenses have been reported since 1991 alone. (Marzullo and Libman 5).

In particular, I invoke Dickens' paradox to remind of the seminal judgment whereby the Indian Supreme Court decriminalised homosexuality by diluting a 158-year-old provision of the penal code – Section 377 that outlawed consensual homosexual sex, calling it "unconstitutional, irrational, indefensible and manifestly arbitrary" (Rautray). Even as the court has stepped in to declare laws outlawing 'same-sex' acts antithetical to cherished notions of equality and freedom, little has changed on the ground. Kaushal Bodwa – a queer

scholar from JNU was victim of a vicious and brutal online troll campaign including by openly gay men after author and right-wing ideologue Shefali Vaidya tweeted a picture of Bodwal wearing a bindi and nose-ring at a protest by students. (Karthikeyan).

I invoke these contradictions in an attempt to situate the upcoming ‘National Anthem and Other Poems’ in the matrix of postcolonial desire. The poems by Raj Rao, who has made it his stated aim to extend “the frontiers of gay literature in India” (Shetty), need to be examined and mapped first along the axes of decolonisation (of desire), and the contestations around decolonised identities. Rao’s multiple roles – renowned equally for his activism, being one of the few and pioneering gay academics in the country, as for his literary pursuits, having authored four novels, three selections of poetry, a biography of Nissim Ezekiel and plays, and the unique position, both privileged and marginalised, offers a vantage point to examine the translation of desire in Post-Colonial India. It must engage with the specific material and cultural possibilities engendered by the war on desire, and dissent waged by the state that increasingly views non-conformity as incongruent with the ethic of discipline, uniformity, and unitary boundaries cherished, and sought.

Paola Bacchetta has argued for example that “queer- phobia is one of the pillars of Hindu nationalism. Second, the constructions of queer genders and sexualities, which appear in Hindu nationalism, are largely effects of Hindu nationalist reworkings of misogynist notions of gender and heterosexist notions of sexual normativity imposed through colonialism. These effects are manifested in a binary in which qualities of virile, militaristic masculinity combined with obligatory asexuality (for Hindu nationalist leaders) and forced heterosexuality (for Hindu nationalized masses) are valorized and placed in opposition to queer gender and sexuality (assigned to all Others). In this scheme, queer gender and sexuality are constructed as already outside the Hindu nation; when queerness re-enters, it must be immediately exiled.” (Bacchetta 43). The native texts produced by queer authors like Raj Rao can then be understood as a reclamation, a homecoming to topographies that house ‘vagrants’ and ‘outcasts’, and thus is marked by constellations of multifaceted desire.

Shraddha Chatterjee points out, therefore, that “Queer has become a repository of many things over time. To *be* queer is an identity; to *live* a queer life is embodiment; to *do* queer things is action, doing something *queerly/queering* something are processes.” (Chatterjee 1) Anna Marie Jagose also draws attention to this multiplicity pointing out that though queer is not aligned to any identitarian categorisation, yet it is “is largely understood to be the latest institutional manifestation of Lesbian and Gay studies. Queer can primarily be identified as a performative act that repudiates assumed coherences in hegemonic models

of sex, gender and desire by dramatizing and accentuating incoherencies”; the performance fuelled by the “definitional indeterminacy, elasticity.” of the label queer. (Jagose 1)

This definitional ambiguity is precisely the defining strength of queerness, as it shifts the body politic towards a non-conforming, non-normative and confrontational ethic. Fundamentally, queer exists therefore in the sphere of representation – a performative refusal and resistance to heteronormative representations. The term heteronormativity presumes a world order based on heterosexist representations and assumptions that allows for the perpetuation and acceptance of heterosexual models as authentic, natural and unproblematic representations of the lived experiences, and accordingly exert pressure by threat of exclusion and labelling to conform to such representations. Rao’s poems are precisely meant to resist these naturalised representations, by refusing to engage with or articulate them, and so seeks to expose the arbitrary nature of such ‘factual’ representations. Under the epithet of ‘terrorist of the spirit’, his poetry seeks to declare war on colonisation of desire, and is thus engaged in outlining theotics of post-colonialism in the Indian context.

To begin with the beginning, the prologue makes a bold proclamation of breaking with the tradition of restraint and censorship, declaring the speaker to be a “terrorist of the spirit” whose “colour of blood/it’s blue, /the colour of ink.” (Rao 1) The book starts, therefore, with the poem ‘National Anthem’, a gay anthem of sorts, which sets the tone for the book with its deliberately prosaic narration, and complete abandonment of standard poetic imagery, tropes or devices. At one level, the experiment works well. Set in a cinema, the poem revolves around a single scandalous incident where the speaker is fondling his ‘boyfriend’, when the cinema goers rise to the national anthem played before the movie. Unable to get his hand out as “his ripped jeans were so tight”, he concludes “To stand up at such a time/would be to make public the dirty games we were up to/in the dark of the cinema hall”. (Rao 3). The poem is apparently a jibe at ‘compulsory nationalism’, which among other things has manifested in the compulsory playing of the national anthem in cinemas. The highest court of the land – Supreme Court made it mandatory to play the anthem in cinemas in 2016. It also made it “mandatory for every member in the audience to stand up and pay their respects to the anthem... to instil feelings of constitutional patriotism and nationalism in them” (India Today). The poem brings an element of farce to a situation that demands ‘reverence’ by bringing in a reference to the famous British burlesque comedy sitcom – Mr Bean: (Rao) “We did not wish to be Mr. Bean/who, as a consequence of slipping his hand/into a stranger’s back pocket at a department store.../was obliged to follow him to the store’s washroom.” (Rao 3). The cinema, then, emerges as a

liberatory space, which repudiates the “universal heteronormative code that validates the heterosexual as a dominant signifier.... the ‘traditional heteronorm – the older bread winning protecting husband, the younger pliant dependent wife, the missionary position and the two children quickly conceived of it, the proud compliance with conjugal heterosexual morals that see sex as sticky, icky bed room business ratified by and in heterosexual marriage alone.” (Bose and Bhattacharyya 13). The dirty games emerge as an affront to a normative notion of sex as fundamentally procreative, which rarely leaves room for conceiving sex for pleasure. As the cinema allows a transgression and transcendence of the norm, it creates other possibilities including but not confined to homosexual sex, oral sex, and other non-penetrative forms like fondling.

The poem allows the cinema to be understood, therefore, as a dissenting ‘space’ translated by specific non-normative practices of intimacy from the original inanimate ‘place’. The distinction between ‘space’ and ‘place’ can be understood as explained by Michel De Certeau who distinguishes the two as part of evolving a semiotics of resistance against the ‘panoptic’ gaze of the omniscient city. Certeau argues that a place is marked by an adherence to discipline and hierarchy, and thus a stable “configuration of positions.” A space on the other hand is an unstable configuration formed by “intersections of mobile elements.... vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities.” (Certeau 117). However, a contradictory trajectory is at play too where the cinema becomes a space for articulation of virulent and violent masculinity that blends seamlessly with the colonial masculinity, where the orient is necessarily effeminate. The cinema allows the actor to transform into a ‘hero’ i.e. from a professional to an ideal, thus establishing him not only as a highly desirable ‘man’, but also a ‘man’ whose lead ought to be followed. This conversion allows the ‘hero’ the privilege and economic clout to escape his culpability, and “prove that he did not run his Land Rover/over pavement dwellers” by sharing the millions he made with “lawyers and judges” (Rao 3). The cinema then becomes complicit in the hetero-patriarchal violence that permits obfuscation of the narratives of suffering and violation in the post-colony.

By foregrounding the erasure of justice and collusion of the law, the poem then draws attention to postcolonial subalternity, and the failure of normative institutions like government and judiciary to alleviate it. The national anthem, which speaks of ownership and pride in the nation assumes an ironic hue as the nation fails its inhabitants to whom it promised security and justice irrespective of caste, creed or status. Moreover, the cinema

goers who rise to the anthem become complicit in the erasure of justice as their celebratory nationalism provides adequate and effective cover for evading discomfiting questions of justice and access. The gesture of the queer narrator, therefore, emerges as a protest against this complicity, and a refusal to respect and accept the power of normative structures, while establishing a solidarity and kinship with the marginalised ‘pavement dwellers’ – both symbolically (by his refusal to treat the anthem as sacred, and engaging in clandestine sex), and literally (by pleasuring a roadside dweller). The cinema emerges as a contested space where both contradictory trajectories – conformity and dissent coexist, and thus is marked by the double bind of post-colonial identity - an identity which seeks to declare its departure from colonial modes of identity, yet is necessarily (and increasingly in current times) complicit in them. It is interesting to note that section 377 of Indian Penal Code, which till recently outlawed gay sex, was drafted by Lord Macaulay during colonial times, and still continues to shape the outrage and disgust towards queer sex in the collective Indian imagination. The queering of the cinema hall offers an insight into the fundamental instability of ontological categories of identity, nationhood and citizenship which form the bedrock of normative imaginations of the nation.

The queering works at another level – that of form. As alluded to earlier, the poem is deliberately prosaic and a species of ‘bad poetry’. It embodies a definite ‘anti-metaphoric flavour’ and clearly espouses an ideological tilt of resisting state iconography. In its prosaic language it refutes the canonical standards of poetry and the academy’s insistence on style, form and diction. It also refuses conformity to the romantic ideal of inspiration and composition, since it is neither concerned with aesthetic pleasure, nor invokes the ideal of tranquility. This process of poetic production alludes back to the original debate on the function of literature – pleasure or instruction. Poetry such as the National Anthem tilts heavily towards instruction, even as it can provide pleasure in its own right by its humour. Its aesthetic is the aesthetic of decolonization, and transgression of colonial and canonical idioms, which mandates the adoption of clear ideological positions to counter subjugation of marginalized people as queer populations. As the sociologist Keith Ellis points out, “The tendency to dismiss much of third world poetry as ‘propaganda’ or pamphleteering derives in fact from the attempted universal legislation of what is a very local or regionally based definition of poetry, one which following Aristotle’s script in *Poetics* and the *Rhetoric* sees in metaphor the essential ingredient of poetic language.” (Ellis 48).

However, while the poem is engaged in constructing an idiom of decolonized desire, it embodies a contradictory movement as well that unravels its decolonizing impulse. This reversal draws primarily from the two contradictory impulses that fuel the poem’s quest to

establish an ethic of solidarity— an impulse of difference, as well as impulse of homogeneity. The ‘roadside boyfriend’ and the ‘country liquor bar’ contrast with the refined “English speaking poet” who possesses cultural capital (being able to not just *write poetry*, a genre that requires expertise with symbolism, metaphoricity and expressivity but also write it in *English*, the language of intelligentsia and social mobility, and moreover get it *published*, which confers a distinction of worthiness, and quality to the work), and presumably material wealth too. Besides, the adjective ‘roadside’ is clearly a class marker, which can only acquire significance when the other (the speaker) is not a roadside “riff-raff”. In fact, the speaker provides a clear introduction to himself in ‘Srinivasan’: “Both of us taught literature at the university/and were chairs of our departments.” (Rao 32) This poem is keen to foreground the transaction between these two characters at opposite ends of the social stratum to bring out the radical hue of their erotic transaction.

Contrasting with this is the homogeneity impulse which seeks to eradicate difference – all the cinemagoers stand up in reverence, thus temporarily suspending their differences (of caste, creed, religion, colour, sex and gender) in favour of a unitary identity – the Indian citizen. On a more visceral level, the hero-actor’s act of running over pavement dwellers must also be seen as an act of erasure – a literal erasure of occupants of lower class to demonstrate and perpetuate his privilege accrued from his class. This contrast is meant to demonstrate the difference between the real hero – the headstrong, carefree poetic speaker, who is on the right side of transgression, and the screen hero- corrupt, reckless and murderous, who is on the wrong side of transgression.

However, in its anxiety to spell out its intentions clearly, it ends up practicing the same obfuscation and erosion of subaltern agency that it set out to protest in the first place. In the first place, the poem allows the boyfriend little agency. He is marked as ‘roadside’ clearly to indicate his lowly origins, which makes it easier for him to be ‘picked’. Notice the use of passive, which shifts the focus of the sentence on the ‘boyfriend’ and allows the speaker to recede into the background. This receding contrasts sharply with the routine of the poem, where the boyfriend is always seen, and spoken in the company of the speaker, as constituting the other half of first person plural ‘we’ used not less than six times in the poem. No instance occurs in the poem, where the ‘boyfriend’ is described as independent of the speaker. On the contrary, he is doubly marked with the presence of the speaker by markers of possession, followed by being conjugated with ‘I’ – the singular authorial self. The phrase ‘my boyfriend and I’ occurs three times, while ‘my boyfriend’ occurs once. The two instances where the boyfriend appears to exist on his own: “because my hand was in his underpants/and his ripped jeans were too tight” are also significantly coloured by

authorial presence. The two lines supply the reason for the author's inability to pull his hand out as the anthem came on. While there is no reason to suspect that the transaction might be non-consensual, it is striking that the upper-class speaker appropriates all agency except 'picking up'.

What explains this discomfiture with 'picking up', and an almost obsessive impulse of ownership? A possible clue is found in author's choice of euphemisms – backside (rather than 'arse' as in case of slum dwellers), formal descriptions like underpants instead of simply pants or underwear, or snide euphemisms – 'Land of Pure', a cynical (and often denigrating) reference to Pakistan, and its theocratic origin. For an aesthetic concerned with breaking barriers, and determined to be as plain, and colloquial as possible, this euphemism, insinuation and decorum appear to strike a contrarian note. However, if read in the light of the earlier discomfiture with 'picking up', the unconscious ideological undercurrents of an exploitative class consciousness can be delineated clearly.

The act of 'picking up' in itself is non-normative, especially as it refutes the ideal of both 'romantic love' and 'love making'. Both terms imply a prior emotional investment as a prelude to sex, and therefore, sex emerges as a disinterested act. 'Picking up', on the other hand, solely prioritizes 'carnal desire' over 'romance', and seeks no prior acquaintance, albeit it brings an edge of dissent to the category 'boyfriend' by refusing the normative classification of a romantic partner. However, the application of 'picking up' to '*roadside*<sup>1</sup>' boyfriend brings in an additional element of 'commerce' to the liaison – a respectable upper class 'poet' solicits a 'roadside' male. In other words, the consent of the 'boyfriend' may not entirely be due to 'carnal desire', but also 'motivated' by need and deprivation. Such a transaction writes back into the exploitative hetero-patriarchal structures, where women/men (usually out of compulsion) trade off their bodies in return of money. This is clearly alluded to in 'You are Terrorists' where the speaker and his ilk are accused of *luring* "blue collared workers with fake currency notes/to make whores of them." (Rao 6) Moreover, it replicates the hierarchal with hetero-normative structures, the *upper-class male* presses his privilege to his advantage and benefit from the body of the lower-classes. Such a possibility of being complicit in exploitation stands uneasily with the professed politics of the poem, and hence the evasion of focus and employment of passive. The 'roadside' body gets 'picked', while the agent of 'picking' conveniently bears no responsibility for his complicity.

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<sup>1</sup>All italics for reference mine

This censoring also explains the revisionary tilt where the euphemism and cynicism writes back into the disgust, which arises from violation of ‘heteronormative’ codes of hygiene and decency like privacy. In his book “The Anatomy of Disgust”, Ian Miller recalls that the sentiment of disgust evokes a strong sentiment of aversion to an object/phenomenon conceived of as dangerous owing to its power to “contaminate, infect, pollute by proximity or ingestion”. (Miller 4) . One of the ideational notions that determines the notion of contagion and pollution has been provided by Mary Douglas, who argues that pollution behaviour is a label attached to “any object or idea likely to confuse and contradict cherished classifications”. She points out that notions of dirt and pollution are simply “residual categories, rejected from the normal scheme of classification” i.e. behaviour and cues that do not fit the behavioural matrix considered healthy and desirable by a society. Therefore, the label dirt and exclusion to maintain the sanctity of the norm. (Douglas 7) The Speaker’s censoring and euphemism then follows from the same impulse of categorisation and hierarchy, where ‘roadside’ boyfriends and ‘riff-raff’ are fit for ‘pick-up’, but not to speak or articulate their agency. The appropriation of the insinuation ‘land of the pure’ is interesting, since it occurs not as a direct quote attributed to the policemen, but as a reported claim. It implies that it is either the speaker’s description of ‘Pakistan’, or either the policemen indeed threatened to exile him to ‘the land of the pure’. Either way, it points out that the speaker sees no case to contest the insinuation, and is comfortable with the usage. While formal religion is understandably the target of queer ire, the particular description of ‘land of pure’ follows from meta-narratives of war on terrorism, which employs thinly veiled islamophobia, and is ardently subscribed to by Hindu nationalism that considers Islamic cultures to be contaminating aberrations in an ancient, pure, Hindu civilisation. ‘Purity’ is used as a denigration to expose ‘hypocrisy’ of people who are ‘inherently’ violent and consumed by ‘blood-lust’. The appropriation of the description, therefore, enacts the same erosion of marginality by rigging narratives, as the speaker accuses the actor of.

Moreover, by his insistence of not wishing to emulate Bean’s toilet shenanigans, and not wishing the cinema usher to die of shock, the speaker only ends up foregrounding the classic heteronormative formulations of privacy, hygiene and decency. By foregrounding the undesirability of the eccentricity of Mr Bean, and normalising ‘public indecency’ for Bombay slum dwellers. In this normalisation lies a peculiar violence, where not only are the slum dwellers mapped on the negative side of difference, which must be avoided by the queer protagonists, but also in the fact that such categorisation makes possible a host of possibilities and presuppositions about the conceiving the individual body in relationship to, and in negotiation with outside factors, foregrounding its capacity to make

vulnerable and contaminate them. In this formulation of risk and contamination, it seeks only to strengthen the bio-medical gaze of the state, which blends well with the neo-colonial nostalgia for and anxieties of originatory and purity that is the staple of post-colonial state, especially in its neo-colonial variant. While queering seeks to own and realise the radical potential of contaminating, subversion and crossing-over, the normalising anxiety of the queer poet stands in direct confrontation with the liberatory tenor of the queer ethic. If it were argued that the queerness employs self-deprecatory irony, and so the declaration of ‘shock’ and ‘dirtiness’ must be read as subtle sarcasm, it fails to take into account that one it amounts to intentional fallacy. The text provides no clue that it intends to be sarcastic, on the contrary its claim to poetry is the subversion of the aesthetic of ‘slant’, multiplicity and metaphoricity. Second, the uncontested appropriation of the language of normativity, without any mitigating circumstances to illustrate their operation and violence only ends up legitimising them.

This paradoxical impulse can be observed more closely by examining the poem *‘You are Terrorists’* in relation to *‘Flesh Trade’*. The former is an inventory of charges brought against queer men by homophobic societies. It is the closet approximation of the homophobic right wing anxieties where alpha masculinity is fetishized, and breeds a toxic nationalism, where all revisionary anxieties around diversity, debate, and dissent are crystallised into a violent and obsessive desire for conformity to the idea of a ‘pure’ and ‘uncontaminated’ nation: “You want to secede from the union/and have an independent homeland/where men fuck men/where you will say Gay Hind (haind) instead of Jai Hind.” (Rao 5) The majoritarian turn alluded to by these lines has always been a latent danger as being the natural culmination of the anti-colonial articulations, which first need a crystallisation of a single national identity to be reclaimed from the coloniser. The accusation draws from the binary of pre-lapsarian civilised antiquity versus the post-lapsarian wilderness of the present to create a meta narrative of nostalgia, which aids creation of easy ontological categories like traitor, anti-national, patriot etc. The accusation, therefore, foregrounds not only the realities of margins, but at the same time the confluence of identities, interests and ideologies that constitute the neo-liberal, post-colonial state. It is easy, therefore, to understand why queer men are placed in the same category as ‘Muslims’, the perpetual others, held responsible for promotion of social engineering and terrorism in the post 9-11, war on terrorism world: “This is sex jihad/You are pederasts. /You insert your tools into our kids’ backsides/just as you ram your planes into the windows of the WTC towers.” (Rao 5) .

In an interesting conflation, the accusers make a strange conflation: “You need laws to harness you, /370 and 377” (Rao 5). The verb ‘harness’ itself brings a rich ironic resonance to the narrative. Literally, it implies the act of reining in and controlling a problematic/rogue element, and so the penal power of law is evoked to warn and direct the deviant population to fall in line. However, harnessing is also a key technique in BDSM (Bondage Domination, Sadomachostic) kink fantasies where the recipient derives sexual pleasure out of being harnessed. The unwitting allusion then undercuts the piquancy of the remark, and seeks to demonstrate the employment of humour as a vehicle of subversion. However, while the punitive value of undiluted erstwhile Section 370 of IPC is clear, the same is not true of the now abrogated Article 377 of Indian Constitution. Under Sec 370, sex against the order of nature, which was largely interpreted as non-vaginal sexual intercourse, was criminalised. Since gay men inhabit more public spaces, owing to hetero-patriarchal mores, it was largely employed as an instrument of extortion and intimidation against them. Article 377, on the other hand, was a special concession to the erstwhile state of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh, enacted by the Government of India, in view of the special histories and realities of the princely state, post partition. It granted land rights to the permanent residents of the state, and prevented outsiders from seeking employment or domicile rights in the state. The question then arises is: How does Article 370 constitute a punitive instrument? The answer draws from the view held by right wing supporters, and articulated officially by the government that Article 370 acted as a roadblock to integration of the country, and promoted secessionism that fed into wellsprings of terror to intimidate legal citizens of the country. In this narrative, then, the Muslim population of the valley are imagined as supporters and proponents of terror, who were encouraged by Article 370. In this sense, 370 was a punishment since it implied that the people of Kashmir were prevented from accessing avenues of progress, and remained mired in ideologies of terror and conservatism. The similarity between Muslims and the Queer populations is thus well entrenched, as both suffer from the impulse of erasure of difference, and a hegemonic normativity.

In contrast ‘Flesh Trade’, is a vicious compendium of Indian Muslims, which employs every trope of right wing imagination. While the earlier poem employs the pronoun ‘you’ – second person plural, indicating an accusatory tone, this poem employs ‘We’ – First person plural to indicate a confessional voice. In a voice, inspired heavily by Rushdie’s Satanic Verses, the muslim narrators indicate their gluttony and greed, their toxic philandering masculinity and aversion to ‘hygiene’ after they have declared profession as ‘flesh trade’. While some sympathy is reserved for ‘sex workers’, who are perceived as ‘victims’, the men attract no sympathy, rather attract contempt as ‘pimps’. They attract

contempt not only for being exploiters, but equally as an aberration to patriarchal codes of ‘masculinity’ – where the Man (breadwinner) – woman (Dependent) equation is the desirable one, rather than Woman (breadwinner)- Man (dependent). As a pun on the ‘meat-trade’, the term evokes the stereotype of barbaric, violent men who slaughter helpless animals to satisfy their gluttony, who are contrasted with the genteel vegetarian Hindu bourgeoisie. More specifically, it evokes the common accusation against Indian Muslims that they slaughter cows, a holy animal in some strains of Hinduism, to satisfy their fanatic urges to put other religions down. On another level, it also borrows from the plot of ‘Satanic Verses’ where the dissident poet – Baal, who takes shelter in a brother where the prostitutes enact an elaborate and popular role play by taking on the names of the wives of the Prophet Mahound, a thinly veiled reference to Prophet Mohamad (PBUH). The poem therefore suggests “We are in the flesh trade/We Love the Profit” (Rao 11) However, while *Satanic verses*, with all its defects, is an attempt at creating a different aesthetic of play, fluidity and revolt against realistic fiction to highlight subjectivities in the Post-Colonial world, the poem’s clear reliance on statement, and confessional tone suggests that the descriptions must be taken to be authentic tropes. The appropriation of all stereotypes such as philandering, polygamous muslim men, the denigration of prayer: “In the name of prayer/we hump ourselves five times a day/like soldier doing drill/to stay fit” serve as particular reminders that queer experience can also be mediated through, and be complicit in a majoritarian consciousness, even as it suffers at its hands. This contradiction is a timely reminder of the unfinished project of decolonisation of desire in India, where heteronormativity exists in its most unadulterated, and naturalised form.

The complicity highlights the complex operations of networks of power, where gay men perform the power drawn from the naturalized connection traced between the male body and nodes of masculinity. As queer men exert their queerness under hetero-patriarchal systems, the male-male relationships are determined by hetero-patriarchal power dynamics of exclusion. The contradictions point out that the radical potentialities of queerness are tamed, and restrained by being appropriated by a class consciousness where privilege offsets and makes invisible the larger structural violence faced by the marginalised. The paradox evoked by these poems suggests that a radical decolonisation of desire may yet be a pipe dream, and especially draws attention to the power of class to interpellate by constituting paradoxical queer subjectivities through complicity in social-interactions, which mirror the larger hetero-normative structures that they apparently seek to oppose. The contestations which emerge by a study of the three poems draws attention to the complex nature of queer topographies in Post-Colonial Urban India, which must not be seen as an isolated linear erotic space, but a highly contested space determined by

confluences of ideology, power and class. The easy elision between marginality and marginalising in the poems brings to fore the larger contradictions of Post-Colonial India, where alongside a formal decolonisation, a post-colonial subalternity contradicts and undercuts the democratic impulse which shaped counter-colonial movements.

It can safely be concluded then the texts are performative acts that create eroticised topographies created by and from the performance/consummation of sexual acts. By their paradoxical impulses, they illuminate the politics and performance of a subversive aesthetic forged from an intersection between radical queer aesthetics, and the evolution of a queer subject both at odds and complicit with masculine right wing nationalism in contemporary India, a curious mix of free market liberalism, and celebratory post-colonial right wing majoritarianism that has strengthened the old heteronormative mores, rather than dissolving them even as India has decriminalised homosexuality. Their idiom of decadence and decay brings out in sharper relief not only the discordance and discontinuities of the heteronormative world but also its power to permeate subjectivities. His cityscape comes alive with deviant desire which paradoxically escapes the nuanced panoptic gaze of hetero-patriarchal hierarchies, only to write back into the confluence of bio-medical interventions, and the obsessive drive of post-colonial state to regulate and govern, even as it actively subverts and resists them by creating alternate mobile spaces where 'taboo' desire is articulated and performed. This performance helps peel away the naturalised and neutral heterosexuality of public spaces to highlight that they are created from a complicated matrix of power and difference, and charged with desire and its performance.

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## **Fanning Flames/Flaming Fans: Theorising Fanfiction**

**Sreya Miriam Shaji**

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**Abstract:** Fanfiction is an enormously popular genre with a niche audience. And this niche is growing bigger and wider as more and more people join fan communities. These communities establish their virtual presence through fan labor, and fanfiction is a major contributor to the influence that a fandom constructs for itself. Juxtaposing this phenomenon with the rise of the digitization of literary spaces opens up the discourse about the evolution of literary spaces and genres. Fanfiction is the new item on the agenda that is garnering attention. Although quite a vast field of study, this paper is concerned with a uniform taxonomy and theory of Fanfiction.

**Key Words:** fanfiction, cardinal fics, marginal fics, liminality, intertextuality.

The digitization of literary spaces has picked up pace with the turn of the decade and opens up the discourse about the evolution of literary spaces and genres. A new item on the agenda that is garnering quite some attention would be Fanfiction. Fan Fiction or fanfiction (also abbreviated to fan fic, fanfic, fic or ff) is a work of fiction based on characters or settings originating in another work, created by fans of the original work rather than by its creator. Fans may maintain the creator's characters and settings or add their own. It is a popular form of fan labor, particularly since the advent of the Internet. ("Fanfiction"). Although quite a vast field of study, this paper attempts to focus on the taxonomy and theory of Fanfiction.

The term 'Fanfiction' came into being in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when copyright laws had to differentiate between works that were approved by the copyright holder and those that were unapproved to use their characters or premises etc. Although there has been some dispute on the correct term being 'Fanfiction' or 'Fan fiction', there is tentative consensus in the community that the proper term should be 'Fanfiction'. This being said, both terms as well as their abbreviations are widely used. Fanfiction is an enormously popular genre with a niche audience. And this niche is growing bigger and wider as more and more people join

respective fan communities. These communities establish their virtual presence through fan labor, and fanfiction is a major contributor to the influence that a fandom constructs for itself.

For ease of classification and understanding in terms of content creation, the original author i.e. the creator of the parent content (canon) would be henceforth addressed as the 'Primary Author', and the fanfiction author i.e. the creator of the consecutive content (fan labour) would be addressed as the 'Secondary Author'. Author here refers to the creator or producer of the main narrative (canon) since it is not only the written word that spawns fanfiction. Fanfiction is now written centered on subjects from music/pop and TV shows to anime and video games. It is a way for fans to create their own narratives, to fix what they think went wrong in the canonical narrative, to explore sub texts or sub narratives, to create spaces that went unexplored or were never created in the original canon and so forth.

“Although all audiences bring their own interpretive frameworks to popular media, the deep interest and involvement in media content demonstrated specifically by fans has attracted the close attention of scholars.” (Sullivan 195). And two aspects of media fandom have caught the attention of theorists – the social and the interpretive. The social aspect is where fans come together in formal or informal structures to share their mutual interests while the interpretive aspect is where fans act as interpreters and producers of content. The interpretive aspect of fandom culture is what gives us fanfiction while the social aspects of fandoms are found as being mirrored in a smaller scale in Fanfiction. Besides the earliest two categories identified from the works in *Star Trek* 'fanzines' i.e. 'Mary-Sue' fics and 'Slash' fics, a study of fanfiction reveals the lack of any uniform categorization or taxonomy. The ten narrative styles in fanfiction identified by Henry Jenkins are useful as a preliminary guide and to get an idea of the variety in Fanfiction. However it is rather cumbersome and focuses more on the functions of the works rather than their characteristics. For ease of understanding and classification, two primary kinds of fanfiction have been identified – ones that remain independent of the secondary author and others that include the secondary author or 'Marginal Fics' and 'Cardinal Fics' are proposed. In the case of the first kind or 'Marginal Fics', the secondary author remains independent of the narrative. They may employ original characters and settings along with canonical characters, situations and settings. They may also manipulate canon characters to display original traits that they have created. Characters, both original and canon may be placed in innovative or new settings and made to tackle new situations or pre-existing ones in new ways. The work is usually narrated in the third person from an impersonal

point of view. The secondary and primary authors remain distinct from the work, remaining in the margins and the work retains a distinct separateness from its creators. In the case of the second kind, or Cardinal Fics, the secondary author creates a space for themselves to enter and function within the narrative. These are usually narrated in first person as the audience experiences the work through the eyes of the secondary author who performs a fundamental function within the secondary narrative. The ‘Mary-Sue’ fanfics that were first identified from the *Star Trek* franchise would fall under this category.

A subcategory of Cardinal Fics that have been observed are ‘Imagines’. Urban Dictionary defines Imagines as, “A type of fanfiction where the reader is included in the story as the protagonist. Oftentimes uses 'y/n' (for 'your name') to represent the reader's name. Popularized on Tumblr with stories about One Direction” (“Imagines”). Imagines may be short or long and are present on dedicated fanfiction sites as well as various social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter and Tumblr. Cardinal Fics and Imagines allow fans to write themselves into their desired narrative and be part of, and influence the narratives of their choice. Imagines are also found in meme format, i.e. in the form of text on an image along with the usual text formats.

Another interesting form of fanfiction involves ‘OneShots’ or ‘One Shots’. Urban Dictionary defines Oneshots as “A term used in fanfictions to say that there will only be one body of text” (“One shot”). These exist in the abovementioned formats and have also appeared in a slightly different avatar on YouTube. Oneshots are found on YouTube where a single scenario or chapter is tackled in the form of an artificially created video with accompanying text that conveys the plot and dialogue along with music and often sounds to accompany the action.

YouTube has its own style of fanfiction that involves videos and music along with text. These exist as both Oneshots and series. Just like fanfiction authors upload their chapters; these creators upload videos in the form of chapters. They can be both in the form of Cardinal Fics or Marginal Fics. When discussing YouTube, the concept of ‘Edits’ must also be mentioned. These are a unique kind of fanfiction involving the visual medium and a covert narrative rather than a plainly obvious one. Edits will rarely contain text but rather music, video clips, photographs etc. The text, if included are captions, song lyrics or text prompts for the narrative that is being built. In these, audio and visual matter is mastered to form a short narrative. This narrative rarely involves interference with the plot but rather, focuses on character development. They often portray their subjects in the light of sexual appeal or in the light of being cute or adorable. They often create ‘ships’ as well, ‘ships’ being those fan-made platonic or romantic relationships between pre-existing

characters where ‘ship’ is short for relationship. In this way, they portray a narrative, a facet of character, a situation etc. which may or may not be true but which the creator wishes to propagate. It must also be noted that in fanfiction involving the audio-visual media, not all content will be strictly that of the subject. Non related material in the respective media formats can be added to the narrative and with the subjectivity of the audience’s gaze, it becomes a unified whole under scrutiny. They are most commonly found on YouTube but can also be found on Instagram and Twitter along with other social media applications. This is another form of fanfiction that is not usually categorized under the term by conventional standards.

Similarly, there are entire narratives that are created through fanart alone. They may or may not involve the use of dialogue or minimal text to build a narrative. Instances of independent fan labour such as video manipulation and fan art, overlapping with fanfiction and narrative generation produce interesting fan content.

Twitter follows its own unique format for fanfiction. Works are composed in the form of tweets and continued as threads. Secondary authors usually have dedicated fan accounts for their works and a large section of the fandom community is often invested in these works and follow their favourite creators religiously. Another type of fanfiction that deserves a mention are those that are written in the ‘text’ format. In these, the entire narrative is conveyed through a series of ‘direct messages’ rather than plot or dialogue. This can be in the form of screenshots of conversations or works that are simply written in this format. It is thus clear that fanfiction can be categorized on the basis of medium, form and structure, as well as author position within the text.

The Y/N trope is so singular to Fanfiction that just the mention of Y/N calls the entire genre to mind. A primary component of ‘Cardinal Fics’, the Y/N trope has extended beyond just the text of fanfiction to games such as Episode, BTS Universe Story etc. as well as to the practice of Roleplay in fandoms. In Fanfiction it is not just Imagines that hold the Y/N trope, although they carry the trope exclusively. Y/N fics are the most overt representations of ‘Cardinal Fics’, directly addressing the need to be included in canonical narratives. This self-insertion plays on the borders of the erotics of roleplay. Although Roleplay already exists as a sort of build-a-bear version of Imagines, the erotics associated with this translation of a trope into a fan engagement are certainly interesting and worth addressing. This is even more interesting when we add the earliest two tropes of Fanfiction that were identified into consideration – ‘Mary-Sue’ Fics and ‘Slash’ Fics. Both were hugely controversial when they were first introduced and severely condemned as juvenile and inappropriate. The ‘Mary-Sue’ Fics emerged from a 1973 parody story of *Star Trek* where

the protagonist was named Mary-Sue and has hence gone on to describe fics with characters that are unbelievably perfect even for a fictional setting. They accomplish impossible tasks and upstage established protagonists and are severely criticized for being too self-serving or idealized. Although they aren't apparent self-insertions, the subversive message is often that of an unrealistic clone of the secondary author being inserted into the narrative. With 'Slash' fics on the other hand, although there isn't the issue of self-insertion, it is the transfer of audience expectations and fantasies onto canon that is criticized. 'Slash' fics are those that depict intense romantic, often homosexual relationships between characters that aren't romantically linked in canon. They are instrumental in challenging the heteronormative standards of canon literature. These fics "are written largely by women for women audiences." (Sullivan 204). Female erotic fantasies find a space in Fanfiction through these tropes and methods. Where the Y/N and 'Mary-Sue' fics focus on the possibility of relationships between the creator and the muse, 'Slash' turns the focus on relationships within the text which were previously unexplored or explored unsatisfactorily.

Although the sensual and the erotic has found its way into fiction, it still retains the taboo tag of the prudish sensibilities of mainstream society that still blanches at the explicit mention of a 'pussy'. Fanfiction has no such qualms and not only embraces but celebrates the sensual. This is a welcome avenue of expression for women and the non-conformists of gender and sexuality, and their subversive or transgressive love. Fanfiction offers a space to explore these illicit, erotic landscapes without censure or judgement. With the overwhelming presence of women as creators and consumers, the tradition male gaze of patriarchal society is upset in favor of women-centric pleasure. Content is created by, with, and for women and their pleasure. Themes such as BDSM often finds a place within Fanfiction where the Dom/Sub dynamics offer another narrative to be explored. For although the creative power still rests within the creator to insert themselves or their characters, they function strictly within the bounds of the Dom/Sub narrative. Aspects of characterization and plot are predetermined by these thematic frameworks. And although they have a slight limiting aspect, creators still pursue these themes relentlessly as an opportunity to express and explore the forbidden and the so-called 'unnatural'. Thus, the politics of the erotics of pleasure can be explored through Fanfiction which adds to the appeal of the genre.

Moving away from the taxonomy of fanfiction, we see that it exists in relation to its subject. It occupies the dual position of being related to the original canonical fictional universe, or canon as well as existing outside canon. Most fanfiction occupies a parallel

space with regards to canon. They are usually produced free of cost and exist on mediums that make them available to a large community. However, they usually appropriate elements from canon works which involve copyright violations. But since they are almost never officially published, they usually remain safe from legal prosecution. Also, it must be mentioned that although there are many works that simply tweak or alter one or two elements while remaining canon compliant, there are works that rewrite the entirety of the narrative while retaining only a few elements which means that the end product contains more of the secondary author's originality than that of the primary's. Thus, it can be argued that there are degrees of appropriation in fanfiction rather than plain and blatant plagiarism.

The most common critique against fanfiction almost always rages around the lack of originality or creativity. As an art, fanfiction exhibits both an abundance and a dearth of creativity. Inhabiting a liminal space of creation, fanfiction requires an enormous amount of creativity to see past established canon and create a new narrative. It also has to make the difficult choice of staying true to canon or diverging into new territory. However, the argument for lack of creativity can also be supported by the fact that fanfiction has an already prepared stock to fall back on. Where the secondary author's creativity fails, the primary text can provide resources to fill in the blanks. This means that the secondary author does not begin from scratch but rather on an established foundation laid by the primary author. As it is, a creative spark is of course required in order to deviate from established narratives and produce new content while still staying true to the parent text to an extent. This fine line is often trod carefully by skilled secondary authors. Contrary to popular notion, true literary gems with tight plot construction and infallible characterization can be found even in this genre against popular notion. But these are simply ignored and dismissed alongside the mediocre simply by virtue of the genre and the mass disdain for the subculture. Awareness about the literary merit and capacity of the genre would topple existing power structures and therefore remains dubious.

Fanfiction also spawns its own fiction. They often inspire other works that produce a series or subsequent works. It may also inspire fan labour in other media. For example, exceptional fanfiction often has fanart or fan video edits made for them. Videos are edited and manipulated skillfully to suit the secondary work and often acts as a teaser or trailer for the above mentioned secondary work. Same goes for fan art that is created to suit the secondary work that inspired it. These, if made by someone else other than the secondary author are often exchanged as dedications and many secondary authors include their gratitude to these benevolent fans who have now become tertiary authors and provide links

to their works. Together these media experiences transform the entire process of fanfiction. Often secondary authors themselves create their own tertiary works and aim for a multifaceted experience for consumers of their works. It can then be said that even these forms of fan labour that create their own narratives, albeit without the medium of the written language become a form of fanfiction then, as they alter and transform canon narratives. Thus the continuous organic generation of content might start with Fanfiction but it doesn't end there.

This process is continuous and as a result cyclical with every work coming back to the parent work or the primary text. This process can be seen as almost mirroring the transformative processes that occur in the world of open-source software. Wikipedia defines it as:

Open-source software (OSS) is a type of computer software in which source code is released under a license in which the copyright holder grants users the rights to study, change, and distribute the software to anyone and for any purpose. Open-source software may be developed in a collaborative public manner. Open-source software is a prominent example of open collaboration. (“Open-source software”)

Open source software has resulted in huge advancements in the technological arena while cutting down on costs and making innovation from around the world accessible to consumers. The source code that is owned by the copyright holder can be compared to the canon text or primary text. The only difference is that OSS was released to the public with the intention of them creating their own versions of the original. Primary texts however, were meant to remain as standalones, complete in themselves and unalterable. The fact that consumers have appropriated these texts to manipulate into their own narratives lends credence to Roland Barthes' 1967 essay, *The Death of the Author*. The primary author no longer owns or controls the secondary, tertiary or further texts. The production of such works is an infinite and continuous process with each work getting farther away from the primary text.

This however does not influence its position as fanfiction or take away from the specific credibility that its position offers. An apparent example of this phenomenon can be seen J. K. Rowling, the author and creator of the *Harry Potter* universe. With the completion of the seven-part books which is the original canon text, Rowling has branched out into movies, plays, theme parks as well as other storylines set in the original universe. However much of her later interactions with her original canon text and characters has caused the fandom to take a step back from her. Although her craft is venerated, almost the entirety

of the fandom has divorced the primary author from the continuous evolutionary process of the canon text and universe because of her failure to maintain the continuity of the universe. The power that would normally have been localized with Rowling as the sole creator of the primary text has been taken away in literary terms and the author dead to the fandom.

The liminality of fanfiction is an interesting aspect of discussion. Liminality is an intersection between structures. Malynda Taylor has stated that there are, "...two approaches to literary theory, deconstruction and feminism, that have, in my view, moved literature and literary studies into a liminality." (Taylor 172). Similarly, fanfiction occupies a liminal space, the borders of art and creativity. It exists on an alternate plane from mainstream media. However, it transforms this space by virtue of its presence. Existing in the between, the space of change, between the known and the unknown. As a genre, fanfiction occupies an intersectional space in terms of its creative interactions as well as its literary involvements. Fanfiction exists beyond traditional modes and structures of writing. A genre that encompasses a multitude of other genres, fanfiction, is truly a breakaway genre. It has the elements of surprise, longevity, the mantle of a literary legacy and attention, which is garnered on the strength of being the derivative of an existing, well-publicized work. However, at this juncture, fanfiction can be taken as both means and end. It is only when fanfiction is considered as the means to a revolution in literature, to the formation of a new style and form, that it is seen as intersectional. If, however, it is considered as the revolution, it is the end and therefore an independent structure already.

The creative possibilities in fanfiction on the other hand is related to the question of originality. The process of creating fanfiction i.e. appropriation and transformation occurs outside the framework of traditional creativity that demands complete originality. In such a case, the liminality of creativity in fanfiction can also be viewed as the means and the end. If fanfiction is viewed as a completely new product, it is the end but however if it is to be viewed as part of the process of change, it is the means to the end, i.e. an entirely different structure of creativity. However, what can be said with certainty regarding fanfiction is that it is change and the catalyst for change. Fanfiction is the change in process and mentality that is required in the new creative reality. "It is in such liminal, in-between spaces that exist between public and private where ideas can be formed, reformed, and redefined without the constraints of wider societal conventions. What emerges from the liminal space is not necessarily a definitive answer, but rather an alternative way of understanding social realities where artistic, political, cultural, and social ideas and concepts are in constant flux and contestation." (Andrews 85).

Liminality and marginality are so closely related that they are often used interchangeably. However, there is a need for an established distinction between the two as one is a change quotient while the other is a structural quotient. Unlike structured, canon literature, fanfiction involves a freedom of expression, passion and inspiration. This freedom is often construed as the lack of an overarching structure which leads to literary chaos. However, these perceptions regarding fanfiction are false because rather than anarchy, this genre operates within its own localized framework that is significantly different from mainstream frameworks. The presence of a malleable structure that is markedly different from mainstream ones offers Fanfiction its intersectional space. As an intersectional medium, it offers a refuge and an outlet to the literary subaltern of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. “Almost all fan fiction is written by women” (qtd. in Berger 180). Women have had a prominent position within fandom spaces and fanfiction from the advent of the first ‘fanzines’. With the virtualization of these spaces, women and the bearers of alternate narratives have made fanfiction their own. Gender and sexuality are expressed unfettered within the intersectional spaces of fanfiction, both in content as well as members of the community. Creators find expression for their very specific experiences and adopt gender or sexuality specific-identities to ensure maximum visibility for their unique narratives. The intersectional nature of the space ensures freedom of expression without fear of censure.

The position of Fanfiction as a subculture can be better explained with an understanding of the history of fandom scholarship. The very first wave of fandom scholars like Henry Jenkins, Camille Bacon-Smith, John Fiske etc considered the deep engagement with popular culture that is the hallmark of fandom to be a challenge to the existing status quo. Their primary focus was to rehabilitate the negative notion of fandom as the cheap entertainment of consumers of popular culture. The second wave of fan scholars however trained a more critical eye on the existence of the fandom itself and in particular at “the ways in which the attitudes and behaviors of fans may be unwittingly reproducing many of the same cultural, gender, and economic hierarchies that they were attempting to escape from in the mainstream.” (Sullivan 206). Both waves focused on the idea of fandom as a subculture where the first wave was more concerned with the counter tradition while the second wave concerned itself with the emulation tendencies of fandom.

Media fans are members of subcultures in the sense that they adopt their own linguistic codes (specialized ways of talk, unique forms of greeting and address, and the use of code names or titles, for example) and symbolic forms (including styles of dress) that delineate them from the rest of the population. For Hebdige and other British scholars who observed

and analyzed subcultural groups in Britain (McRobbie & Nava, 1984; Willis, 1981), such forms of cultural expression not only established a sense of self-identity for these groups, but also functioned as acts of emancipation from traditional authority. Early scholars of media fandom suggested that fans, while not necessarily posing the kind of threat to traditional cultural authority that punk music did in the 1970s and '80s, still challenge existing hierarchies by redeeming “trashy” cultural forms like TV soap operas, science fiction programs, horror films, and mystery novels. (Sullivan 196)

Fandom as a social subculture implies the literary subculturalist inclinations of fanfiction as a result, where fanfiction is the subcultural capital of the fandom subculture. Fanfiction even adheres to the six ways proposed by Ken Gelder in 2007 to distinguish subculture as follows:

1. They have a negative relation to work - Fanfiction is often considered to be easy to create and to require fewer creative faculties than canonical creations.
2. They have a negative or ambivalent relation to class – Fanfiction does not adhere to traditional class definitions and is not class-conscious.
3. Their association is with territory rather than property – Fanfiction is associated more closely with fandom and fan engagement than physical texts.
4. There is a movement away from home into non-domestic forms of belonging – Fanfiction is centered on the social community of the fandom rather than the family.
5. Ties to excess and exaggeration – Fanfiction has a powerful tradition of the hyperbole and the superfluous.
6. Refusal of the banalities of ordinary life and in particular, of massification – Fanfiction is notorious for its often-controversial views and methods of literary approach.

These nonconformist characteristics of Fanfiction are reminiscent of the Carnavalesque in literature. The four categories of the carnivalesque sense of the world as identified by Bakhtin coincide with the features of fanfiction such as the free interaction of ideas and individuals and their unbridled expression unencumbered by the regular laws of literature or society. Eccentricities of all kinds are welcomed in Fanfiction without fear of censure or curfew and natural responses are welcomed. ‘Carnivalistic *mésalliances*’ – the forbidden union of unlikely elements such as the holy and the lowly or the new and the old is a primary characteristic of Fanfiction with the seamless merging of various genres and

subjects. The genres of canonical literature are possessed and altered fundamentally to suit Fanfiction. The 'sacred' laws and traditions of canonical literature are debased and stripped of their terror and power in order to manipulate them to suit the medium and thus, there is a subsequent blaspheming of the canonical tradition as well as a sanctifying of the 'base' medium of Fanfiction.

One of the major sources of appeal for Fanfiction is the difference of separation between creator and audience. This separation is one that appears thrice within this discourse. The first separation is between the original creator and the passive audience. This separation follows the guidelines of age-old practices that dictate the terms of traditional author-audience contracts. Hence the separation is usually huge and the author remains separate and distant from their audience with the only point of commonality being the product or work. The second separation is between the original creator and the secondary creator since the secondary author is primarily an audience and consumer before they evolve into the secondary creator. This separation is larger than that between primary creator and passive audience. This is because secondary and subsequent material along with their creators and the community make noticeable efforts to distance themselves from the primary creator.

The secondary creative space is separate and uniquely elitist in that only a portion of the primary audience partakes in the ritual of secondary creation, although at the same time, it is not elitist because anyone of the primary audience can become a secondary creator. The third separation is between the secondary creator and secondary audience. Although secondary creators are mandatorily required to be primary consumers in order to acquire the material and category-specific information that is required to become secondary creators, it is not necessary that all secondary consumers have to necessarily be primarily consumers as well. The large majority would be in favor of this since the secondary content is specialized to appeal to those with prior knowledge of the creative context. There are however accidental consumers who stumble upon secondary content and then proceed to consume the content, thereby placing themselves within the fan community.

The Internet has long been the source and site of much discourse. It has been defined using methods such as the public sphere, multiple realities etc. However, Jodi Dean in her essay *The Net and Multiple Realities* argues that the Net or the Internet is a zero institution. "A zero institution is an institution which is not an institution but which nonetheless stands for (rather than is) a particular kind of social order - where voices are heard outside knowable channels of communication and reception and which is home to 'neo democratic' politics of resistance caught in globalised, networked, hyper-capitalism" (Dean 520-521). As you can see, Dean politicizes the Internet, recognizing and acknowledging its potential to host

resistance and disperse information. The principles of neo democracy which includes “mutating, provisional alliances between individuals and groups who may share common ground only in some causes perfectly suit the Internet landscape as a reactionary means against the hegemony of the nation-state” (Dean 521). These principles reflect in the formation of permeable relations that occur in the fanfiction space. The common ground here is often shared interest and a desire to influence narrative and the hegemony that they rebel against is the hegemony of mainstream literature. The Internet has been defined as not real, but the presence of real people creating discourses that result in real life implications cannot be dismissed as simply virtual. This comprehensive analysis of the Internet structure can be applied to fanfiction as well, a medium that truly possesses the capacity for resistance. The neo democratic politics identified by Dean in the internet coincides with the post structuralist views of destabilising the hegemony of the canon as well.

Fanfiction as a critique of mainstream canon is a Post Structuralist idea. A good example would be *The Hunger Games* series by Suzanne Collins. The books themselves and the subsequent movies that were spawned portrayed a dystopian world where children were forced to participate in a barbarian competition to fight to the death in order to secure food and necessities for their people. Contrasted against the abject poverty of most of the country was the opulence and extravagance of the Capitol. Human society as a whole has mirrored this power structure since the dawn of time. Sometimes blatantly as in the case of despots like Hitler or Mussolini and sometimes in more subtle fashion such as is the case with the world order today where a select few have monopolized control over the current economy. In the series, the media focuses more on the love triangle between the lead characters rather than on the harsh realities of their lives. In the real world as well, there is a tendency in the media to gloss over important and unpleasant news with trivial scandals and intrigue in order to play down the significance of the original news. And through it all, it is the children who pay the price of sustaining the system. Fanfiction of such a critical text has the potential to be all the more critical thus becoming a critique of a critique – a twice removed reality. Where established literature holds up the mirror of critique to society, fanfiction holds up the mirror to both society as well as its source canon.

Similarly, *Harry Potter*, which is set in a completely fictional universe, bears remarkable resemblances to existing human society although the parallels that are drawn are metaphorical and indirect. For example, the issue of racism is addressed through the pureblood agenda propagated by Voldemort and his Death Eaters, which even gains Nazi undertones with his ideas for mass genocide. The stigma against AIDS patients is addressed through the aversion to werewolves in the magical community with characters such as

Remus Lupin gaining our sympathy. Even mental illness is portrayed in the series with a prime example being the Dementors as symbols of depression. The cure for this, the Patronus spell is basically weaponizing happiness, telling people all over the world to cling on to their happiest moments and use it to overcome their own depression. Works such as these, monumental in form and ground breaking in substance, revolutionizing the reading public and an entire generation of young people, can be seen as the greatest critiques of society. By placing their works in fictional universes, authors deny real life parallels. They can deny accountability while at the same time, producing shrewd critiques of contemporary society. It is then only natural that such works would produce even more radical content. That such scathing critique will inspire and produce works with even more critical potential. This is where fanfiction comes in.

Fanfiction therefore, takes up the mantle where canon ends. It fills in the spaces in canon. Spaces that were ignored or left open, spaces that the marginalized take over. Thus, fanfiction becomes the narrative of the Other. According to Spivak, "...everybody thinks the subaltern is just a classy word for oppressed, for Other, for somebody who's not getting a piece of the pie." (De Kock 45). The Subaltern or the Other is defined by the lack of a voice. As Spivak said, "When you say cannot speak, it means that if speaking involves speaking and listening, this possibility of response, responsibility, does not exist in the subaltern's sphere." (De Kock 46). The literary subaltern speaks and isn't heard or is silenced by the dominant hegemony. Fanfiction becomes a medium to speak and be heard for the Subaltern here. Women who have historically borne the brunt of marginalization and being silenced find a voice within the Fanfiction space and make up a large percentage of this demographic. Also, to be taken into consideration is the fact that most fandoms, or at least the fandoms with more creative content generation, are mainly constituted of a female quotient. The presence of women in this space and their utilization of this particular medium facilitates the creation of feminist narratives that provide women with the chance to create and rewrite narratives to make their own. Similarly, alternative genders and sexual orientations are often expressed more fully and emphatically in this space rather than in mainstream canon. Fanfiction doesn't seek or depend on societal approval to exist and propagate. For these invisible narratives, fanfiction is more of a safe space than canon. This is not to say that fanfiction doesn't suffer from its own failings. But rather, because of its alternative nature and particular audience, more tolerance and understanding can be found in this space in relation to the external 'real' reality.

Critics and criticism abound in fanfiction, a space that literally allows anyone. Anything and everything that is posted is fair game and anyone and everyone can have an opinion

and voice it. This leads to interesting analyses and comments, often not very constructive in nature. However, the vast majority of this comment and feedback is aimed at the literary aspect rather than the representational one. Although there is no concrete censorship of either work or comment, communal censure assures that an atmosphere of tolerance is maintained within these spaces. This allows those with little to no representation in canon to create and place themselves fully within a relatively safe space and to include themselves properly and correct mistakes made by canon in representation.

Man has always felt the need to be included, to belong. The current interest in representation in media is indicative of that. Representation is important. It allows us to belong to a narrative larger than us. Society and religion perform the same function. Hence representation in narratives allows us to belong, to be part of a community, a group. For those who exist on the fringes of society, who are ostracized and alienated for their choices and things that are not their choices, representation is even more important. Fanfiction thus allows them to have their own avenue. A space that allows them to rewrite their favourite narratives inclusively. To create their own narratives, centred around them for once. It is just as empowering as it is for a little girl to see women superheroes such as Wonder Woman or Captain Marvel, or a young black boy to see a black hero such as the Black Panther. In the matter of inclusion, fanfiction leaps and bounds ahead of canon. The disruption of existing literary protocols is achieved by fanfiction.

When placed within the post structuralist framework, Fanfiction is heavily reliant on the idea of Intertextuality (Ram 1). Fanfiction is itself the expansion and alteration of an existing text and the very principles of Intertextuality navigate these relations between texts. Intertextuality is of three types: obligatory, accidental and optional (Ram 1). These differences are identified on the basis of two factors – the intention of the writer and the significance of the reference. Of these, fanfiction could be said to be a combination of both obligatory and optional Intertextuality in relation to the canon text. This is so because obligatory Intertextuality is deliberate and requires prior knowledge of the hypotext (canon) before the hypertext (fanfiction) can be understood. This is partially true because although there are fanfiction texts that require a thorough understanding of the canon text before it can be deciphered, there are also texts that are capable of being standalone texts although they exist within a canon-established framework. There are also texts where a minimum awareness of the characters or setting of the canon text will suffice in comprehending the fanfiction text rather than having to know all the nuances and underlying messages of the canon text and its associated fandom-space.

Optional Intertextuality however means that there might be connections to the hypotext. But it is not mandatory for an understanding of the hypertext. This knowledge will simply add another dimension to the hypertext. The standalone texts in fanfiction come into this category. Built within a canon-framework, they are however built independent enough to exist outside the influence of the canon in the case of a new audience. However, since Intertextuality occurs on both sides of the text, ie. On the side of the creator and the audience, accidental Intertextuality may come in during consumption of the hypertext, since most fanfiction texts require a venture beyond established canon to record unorthodox concerns.

Bakhtin has defined Dialogism as a means of meaning-making that incorporates differing voices and views in order to create a cooperative solution where these voices coexist rather than compete. Fanfiction follows a similar pattern where communal ideas are incorporated to form cooperative meaning. Readers and writers combine their knowledge and ideas in a common forum where everyone has access and can contribute to this. Secondary authors and audiences make use of the existing knowledge source of the canon to perpetuate and generate more and more content in close association. There is sharing of ideas and intellectual currency through a constant process of communication between both parties where the end product is designed to be the result of both their combined creative and knowledge resources.

Fanfiction is a constantly mutable space with permeable boundaries. Through this paper we have seen the changes that have occurred in the space in a matter of years and the changes that keep occurring. This happens on various levels from the constantly editable text, to the continuously evolving audience, to the impermanence of the creator-consumer dichotomy. Fanfiction therefore appears "...fixed and flexible, clearly demarcated and ostensibly limitless." (Conclusion 223). Constant rewriting, refashioning, reimagining and reconceptualizing are all markers of the current ethos. The alterable sensibilities of the era are reflected in Fanfiction as it dismantles the idea of the unity of the text, in this case the unity of the canon. Both sides of change can be argued with the constant evolution of contemporary texts being perceived as a reflection of the impermanence of the human condition as well as constant development and improvement of texts. At the same time, this constant alteration and tweaking of texts could be a destabilizing factor as it alters the text which is meant to remain as an unspoiled pillar of civilization. Literature and unified texts have long been considered the foundations of 'polite' society and civilization which is upset with the current practice of mutable texts. Nothing remains inalienable or sacred – both accessible to and changeable by all.

Fanfiction as a genre therefore has the ability to destabilize the centre of canon literature. However, the transformative properties of Fanfiction dictate that if Fanfiction destabilizes the centre, it will take up the position and lose its subcultural position, which will then be taken over by another. Between the changing sensibilities of the audience and the inevitable transition of literary spaces from physical to digital, it is vital that literary sensibilities evolve as well. Fanfiction possesses the ability to help redefine literary standards to suit progressive sensibilities and offers alternatives to the static condition of literary creation to induce a dynamic, evolving definition that rebels against the rigid structures of literature and merit. This can be achieved through the liminality of fanfiction that disregards constricting boundaries of meaning making to spark the flames of literary revolution not just in theme but in form as well. Thus resulting in the potential for the redefinition of elite literary spaces that is essential to keep pace with the vigorously evolving literary sensibilities of the times.

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## **Dalitism and the Case of Kashmiri Women**

**Mausumi Sen Bhattacharjee**

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**Abstract:** This paper contends how the parameters of Dalitism and Dalit-feminism are differently defined vis-a-vis the crisis of occupation in Kashmir and may be in certain ways applied to the case of the women there. Sandwiched between the politics of two battling nation states, India and Pakistan and their two conflicting discourses, the Hindu and Muslim positionality of Kashmiri Muslim women receive newer dimensions of double marginalisation as in Dalit-feminism. I would use a few case studies and literary tropes from Kashmir to validate this search for a different version of Dalitism and Dalit-feminism vis-a vis the majority Muslim population of Kashmir valley.

**Keywords:** Dalitism, Dalit Feminism, Kashmiri Muslim women identity, half-widow, double marginalisation.

*Harmukhbartalzaagaemadano*

*Ye daphamtelaagyo*

*Sher daphhumbalazaagaeyimadano...*

(‘An Epic and Enduring Kashmiri Song’)

This lyrical song or *lol* as it is popularly called in Koshur is possibly a variant of the Habba Khatun love song very dear to both Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims. The sixteenth century peasant queen of Kashmir Habba Khatun was wooed by Yusuf Shah Chak, the king, for her beautiful songs. Legend has it that he fell in love with this peasant class woman for the beauty of her voice and richness of her rhyme. The king was believed to have relieved her of her earlier marriage to take her away to his court where she reigned as a queen for six years. But then Akbar resorted to the tactics of cozenage for conquering

Kashmir. Upon reaching the Mughal court Yusuf Shah was flung into prison never to come back again and reunite with his lady love. Still her lyrical cadences refrain in the valley, generating nostalgia perhaps for a paradise lost to the generations to come.

This traditional lyric is an offering of love that is in keeping with the pristine beauty of Kashmir. Unfortunately, its beauty has been tainted and sabotaged repetitively down the ages and it has been a bone of contention for both the nation-states of India and Pakistan. From the very days of Dogra rule way back in the earlier century this much debated geopolitical terrain called Kashmir has been subjected to a hegemony that is unique in various accepts. Ashis Nandy explains it well in his essay “Negotiating Necrophilia: An Afterword” included in Nyla Ali Khan’s book *Islam, Women and Violence in Kashmir*:

Like Palestine and Northern Ireland, Kashmir is a typically twentieth century problem that has gate crashed into the twenty first century... beneficiaries of partitions mindlessly implemented by a tired imperial power, and are all associated with gory, repetitious, gratuitous violence that wean out outside observer and analysts.... The main issues in Kashmir... centre around national interest, strategic significance, territorial contest and security implications. Only ordinary Kashmiris trying to live ordinary lives in extraordinary times- Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists- sense that the problem of Kashmir has to do with the survival, clash of death machines, and the collapse of social ethics, that the pain of communities and families, however unfashionable and outdated the idea may sound in the security community and policy elite is the central reality in the land... Neither the official figures nor the unofficial estimates of human rights groups include the permanently maimed, those whose lives have been cut short by the trauma of uprooting, bereavement, or psychosomatic ailments. Everyone is bereaved and everyone is a mourner. The casualties include not merely the official and the unofficial dead and the incapacitated, but also those who have disappeared without a trace. (Khan, 149-50)

On the other hand, historicising the Kashmir Dispute Christopher Snedden explains it as an “intractable issue”:

Following Maharaja Hari Singh’s accession to India in 1947, the India and Pakistan governments, and then the United Nations, resolved to consult the people of J&K about their state's international status. This would be done via a United Nations supervised plebiscite. This poll has never been held – nor is it likely to be held. Despite being marginalized since about mid-1948, the people of J&K are still legitimate stakeholders in the Kashmir dispute. (Snedden, 1)

The caste configurations of Dalitism as it is seen in the other parts of India do not actually exist in Kashmir though the government has perfunctorily stipulated certain castes under its paradigm especially for the Hindu region of Jammu. They are listed as per government documentation. The notion of ‘untouchability’ and its ramifications has taken the rest of India into its toll for ages, but within the space of Kashmiriness or as it is popularly expressed or “Kashmiriyat” - it has never been a concern. According to the statistics provided by Mohit Bhatia the scheduled castes concentrate more in the Hindu based domain of Jammu:

Constituting a sizeable 17.44% of Jammu’s population, they are divided into 13 sub-castes, of which Megh, Chamar, and Doom are numerically pre-dominant forming 39%, 24% and 21% respectively of the total SC population. These three sub-castes are relatively better politically organized and educated than the rest of the sub-castes. The remaining sub-castes are Batwal, Barwala, Basith, Saryala, Chura, Dhyar, Gardi, Jolaba, Ratal and Watal. (Bhatia, 942)

Issues of caste and class are often closely coupled in different contexts such as the concentration of a large number of scheduled castes in low-paying menial jobs, thus indicating a reinforcement of their low caste and class-status to a large extent. Under the Hindu rulers, “Scheduled castes and other lower-caste Hindus, together with the vast majority of Muslims were subjected to various forms of oppression”. (946)

With the Big Landed Estates Act of 1950 however, there were transformations in the political power structure that weakened upper-caste dominance in the state and diluted caste-oppression. The scheduled castes too owned land substantially. According to Bakshi, the incidence of Indian landlessness is lowest in J&K. Only 11% of rural households in the state do not own any land other than homesteads, as compared to over 41% of households in rural India. Among scheduled castes in the state, the figure is nearly 22% in contrast to Punjab, Kerala, and Haryana, where landlessness exceeds 80%. (Bhatia, 951) Thus, landholding in the state in general and among scheduled castes in particular is much better than in India as a whole. Even exclusion, oppression and stigmatisation in everyday life of the scheduled caste community hardly exists in prevalent society. However, the Dalitism that is given a new connotation in the valley is of a different order. It is the “Kashmiri Muslim” who is ‘othered’/ marginalised and in the context of the nation discourse is the political “other”.

This paper contends how the parameters of Dalitism and Dalit-feminism are differently defined vis-a-vis the crisis of occupation in Kashmir and may be in certain ways applied to the case of the women there. Sandwiched between the politics of two battling nation states, India and Pakistan and their two conflicting discourses, the Hindu and Muslim positionality of Kashmiri Muslim women receive newer dimensions of double marginalisation as in Dalit-feminism. I would use a few case studies and literary tropes from Kashmir to validate this search for a different version of Dalitism and Dalit-feminism vis-a vis the majority Muslim population of Kashmir valley.

Sharan Kumar Limbale in his book *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature* defined 'dalit' in a way that may be seen to accommodate this position of the Kashmiri Muslim.

'Who is Dalit:

Harijans and neo-Buddhists are not the only Dalits, the term describes all the untouchable communities living outside the boundary of the village, as well as adivasis, landless farm-labourers, workers, the suffering masses and nomadic and criminal tribes. In explaining the word it will not do to refer only to the untouchable castes. People who are lagging behind economically will also need to be included. (Limbale, 30)

He further explains,

Revolt is the state that follows anguish and rejection. 'I am human, I must receive all the rights of a human being' – such is the consciousness that gives birth to this revolt. Born from unrestrained anguish, this explosive rejection and piercing revolt is like a flood with its aggressive character an insolent, rebellious attitude. (34)

The plight of a Muslim subject under the circumstances of occupation and conflict is similar to that of a Dalit in keeping with this definition. During the Dogra rule, scholars have noted that discontent grew amongst Kashmiri Muslims due to the favouritism bequeathed upon the Kashmiri Pandits. The Muslim population led a life of poverty, subjugation and exploitation. Sumantra Bose cites the report of Prem Nath Bazaz, a prominent Kashmiri journalist and political activist in 1941:

The poverty of the Muslim masses is appalling. Dressed in rags and barefoot, a Muslim peasant presents the appearance of a starving beggar ... most are landless labourers,

working as serfs for absentee (Hindu) landlords ... Almost the whole brunt of official corruption has been borne by the Muslim masses. (Bose, 16)

This establishes the hundred years regime as a disaster for the Muslim peasantry of Kashmir Valley. The Uprising of 1931 testifies this hegemony. It triggered the massive nationalist movement in the valley when the oppressed masses reacted against the regime to assert their identity and aspirations. Even post 1947 accession the air of oppression and conflict only took different shapes and worsened in impact. Elaborating on the nineties' carnage in Kashmir as Sumantra Bose further explains

In late 1947, as Hindu refugees from Pakistan poured into the Jammu region, the local RSS, headed by Prem Nath Dogra, led mass killings of Muslims in Jammu's southern the city. Tens of thousands of Jammu Muslims were killed and hundreds of thousands fled to Pakistan. In the Valley, the seemingly idyllic coexistence of Muslims and Pandits was always uneasy, the apparent harmony masking deep undercurrents of suspicion, resentment and fear. The façade disintegrated in 1990. (Bose, 43)

Shafi Ahmad in his novel *The Half-Widow* for instance, delineates the plight of the doubly-marginalised Kashmiri Muslim woman who in the background of the crises on the 1990s is oppressed both by the internal social strife and the larger oppression of terrorism and militancy. The novel expounds how existence in the conflict zone is doubly coercive and for the Kashmiri Muslim woman it imposes further barriers. She has been compelled by her circumstances to fight for her cause. Such cases are commonplace and almost everywhere in the valley. These socially outcast women were compelled to enter the public sphere due to such compulsive plights and inquire about the missing male members of their family:

Women who earlier did not venture into a butcher's shop because it was a male dominated space, were now forced to go to police station, army camps, jails and courts in the state and outside in search of their missing sons and husbands... This forced entry into public spaces was a double-edged sword. (Manecksha, 25)

However, for women like Parveena Ahangar such a plight was also empowering. Her venture called The Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons is one such attempt to resist and seek justice.

Again, the case of KunanPoshpora, the mass rape of Gujjar women are only to name a few of the ravages confronted regularly by the women of Kashmir.

Then there comes in such coinages as “half-widow”, “half-mother” and they are part of Kashmir’s cultural lexicon during the nineties and persist till date – women whose husbands, sons have gone missing or have suffered enforced disappearance. They have been compelled to live not just in emotional limbo forever, uncertain if their husbands and sons are alive or dead, if they have been detained or if his remains have been hastily buried in anonymous mass graveyards. In the novel by Shahnaz Bashir *The Half Mother* the irony of this prefix ‘half’ is exposed in all its uncertainties in the interaction between the advocate and Haleema:

‘Since we don’t know the status of your respective relatives who have disappeared... we don’t know whether they are alive or not... we cannot describe you as widows, or whatever the case may be. We are talking legal language here, and the status matters. So for all such uncertain cases for women whose husbands have disappeared, we will prefix the status with “Half”.’ Advocate Farooq explained.

Half. The word ringed in Haleema’s head. A cold pinch.

‘And what about mothers, Farooq sahib?’ Haleema asked, ‘Are they half mothers by rule?’...

Whether their children were dead or alive or missing, mothers would remain mothers – but Advocate Farooq was not sure. He didn’t know how to respond to Haleema. He couldn’t be certain what status of victimhood should be attested to her.

‘So am I a half mother?’ Haleema repeated. (Bashir, 142-43)

The concluding question in this excerpt in fact, not only spurs the social status of such women in patriarchy but also throws up a challenge against the dehumanised institutions of family and society and question the notion of motherhood. Such women are oppressed and ‘dalit’ not merely as widows but also as mothers.

Since husbands of half-widows were not officially dead (declared) there were issues of confusion over inheritance, property rights and bank-transfers all of which require death

certificates. Under such circumstances to make ends meet they were forced to unskilled labour as majority lacked education or vocational skills. To supplement their meagre income and run the household, their children would be forced to drop out of school and work in the carpet-making or affiliated industries. Hence economic problems aligned with social isolation make her plight doubly oppressed as Dalit women. It is not rare for the in-laws to blame the hapless wife, treat her as taboo, refuse shelter to her and her children or perhaps offer only shelter to the male grand children. Commenting on their plight FrenyManecksha points out in her study how even re-marriage for such women is fraught with uncertainty:

At one point, it was seven years but, in 2014 some clerics decreed that re-marriage was permissible after four years. Today there are half-widows who say they rejected the idea of re-marriage because they do not believe their children, especially their daughters, will be wholly accepted by a new husband, or because they fear that matrimony will get in the way of their full-time struggle for justice. (32)

She further cites how these half-widows “suffer from depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorders”. (32) She cites individual case-studies carried out by the APDP (Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons). These women believed that they had only one true relative in the world –“Jiji or ParveenaAhangar who heads the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons and have been instrumental in protesting and seeking justice for such women. The aid and ex-gratia relief that has been extended by the J&K government too is viewed with scepticism by Kashmiri men and women. Maneck Sha explains it as “layered” (41). There are times when they choose to accept relief but declare that it cannot be seen as a compromise – that their fight for justice will go on, which is a stance adopted by the like of Zaheeda, survivor of the MohraAachai massacre. To quote the words of another victim with similar plight of being forced to work as labourers, Zareena’s words haunt – “We remain faceless, identityless”. (41)

Cases of children of conflict are rampant in the valley. Manecksha in her study shows how the children of these women grew up to being mortified adults and suffer through the 1990s severe collateral damage.

One poem by a half-widow Mubeena’s son Arif with the title ‘A Conversation with My Mother on One of the Last Days of Ramzan’ underscores the agony:

*... Don't think about the war, pleads my mother  
her quivering voice a willow twig in August  
and a mid-summer drizzle hanging in her eyes.  
Don't think of the still-bleeding throat of the carpenter  
Whose headless body left the first floor of our home  
Without doors and windows for twenty years.  
Thoughts are very expensive, my dear.  
Kashmiris cannot afford them  
So don't think my child, don't think. (64)*

The anxiety of the Gujjars, a hill tribe in Kashmir too is worth noting in the context of the occupation hazard. Labelled to be among those most loyal to India in Kashmir, they were viewed with suspicion from 1990s till date. Pakeeza, a Gujjar woman in her narrative in Manecksha's study substantiates it and underscores how "sexual violence in conflict is very much a part of Kashmir's narrative". (63) In this context we could cite here some findings of Sans Frontieres report. It notes:

For most Kashmiris sexual violence is considered an inappropriate and difficult to discuss topic. Nevertheless a rather high percentage of respondents – 11.6 – in comparison to other conflict zones – said they had experienced a violation of their modesty since 1989.... Almost two-thirds of the people interviewed (63.9 percent) had heard over a similar period about cases of rape while one in seven had witnessed rape. (63)

In one of the world's most militarized zones lewd remarks, aging, wolf whistling and other forms of sexual harassment are rampant and come in the daily stride of life. Furthermore, according to the Amnesty International Report of 1992 – even Kashmiri boys had their genitals mutilated during interrogation. During the investigation into the mass rapes of KunanPoshpora, medical – legal reports of burn injuries on a man's sexual organs were evident. To borrow the phrasing of human rights activist Shrimayee Nandini Ghosh, "rape in conflict areas, is also a tool to emasculate men". (71)

Therefore, women here suffered *zulm* in double folded layers – directed at her by the state as well as society because they were subjected to oppression also by the state security i.e. police who is otherwise assigned to secure them and the army (who is sheathed by the verdicts of AFSPA). AFSPA requires sanction only from the Centre to prosecute perpetrators of a crime and there is no limitation to torture while investigating. The UNICEF report *Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War* echoes the sabotage it does:

Sexual violation of women erodes the fabric of a community in a way that few weapons can. Rape's damage can be devastating because of the strong communal reaction to the violation and pain stamped on entire families. The harm inflicted in such cases on a woman by a rapist is an attack on her family and culture as in many societies women are viewed as repositories of a community's cultural and spiritual values. (70)

Such women resistance has been coming again and again but never validated vis-a-vis the state of occupation. The lockdown imposed by the present Government shutting down the internet facilities altogether since August 5, 2019, has goaded the valley and its people further back to stone age. Abrogating Article 370 and the announcement of Kashmir as a Union Territory are steps where the majority Muslim community in the valley is silenced into further subjugation.

Foucault in an interview on 'Film and Popular Memory' says, "memory is a very important factor in struggle ... if one controls memory, one controls their dynamism. And one also controls their experience, their knowledge of the previous struggles". (Olick and Levy, 52-53) In this sense the ordeal of the Kashmiri women presides in such a Foucauldian realm of memory where 'popular memory' is equated with the force of resistance. Their assertion is unique and in no way lesser effective than the 'dalit's' challenge to form a new identity and seek agency. While the term 'dalit' reflects caste based identities, the Kashmiri women and their plight reassert unique dimensions of the oppressed, subdued and marginalized, neglected both within and without the society in a similar way the dalits are treated. Be it the taboo of caste or social and political status, they are equally deprived.

Dalit assertion in the mainstream is expected to challenge the dominant caste ideology and its influence on the dalit population. Here we may use Anand Teltumbde's observations on the notion of the 'dalit':

“Dalit” ...is a political term, a quassi-classidentity, devised during the Ambedkarite movement, distinct from the demeaning “Untouchable”, and from the inert administrative labels “Depressed Classes”, “Scheduled Castes”, and certainly from Gandhi’s patronizing “Harijans”. The term “Dalit” reflected Ambedkar’s aspiration that all the untouchable castes would wear this new identity and form a formidable “Dalit” constituency....The term “Dalit” as such, does not reflect social realities. It reflects caste-based identities which continue to remain the fundamental identities of people. (Kumar, 11)

Instead of appropriating the definition what strikes us here is the similitude of paradigms where the plight of Dalit women and Kashmiri women with missing family members are concerned. Both are doubly exploited and oppressed by the patriarchal domains of society as well as family. Moreover, what the study infers is that both equally seek assertion and reach out their voices in protest. This sense of agency however oppressed is a positive gesture. In their protest lies the efficacy of constituency and identity.

Agha Shahid Ali expresses in his prose poem *The Blessed Word: A Prologue* how it was since Akbar’s act of imperial injustice, Kashmir ceased to be free. He also writes how it was Habba Khatun’s grief ‘alive to this day’ that ‘roused the people into frenzied opposition to Mughal rule’:

And will the blessed women rub the ashes together? Each fall they gather *chinar* leaves, singing what the hills have re-echoed for four hundred years, the songs of Habba Khatun... And will the blessed women rub ashes together? Each fall they sing her songs. They create their rustic fuel for winter: they set fire to the leaves, sprinkle water on them as they burn, and transform them into fragile coals. (Ali, 172-73)

The continuum between the historical tragedy of Habba Khatun and the present Kashmiri women that exist now is quite explicit here. They have struggled with marginalisation, rejection, sabotage and violence since then but still pursued to seek agency and identity.

The fight is still on and we wait...

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## Black Boys Look Blue in Moonlight; Queering the Black Identity in the Film Moonlight

Shimi Shajan A

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**Abstract:** The depiction of homosexuality has seen a great change over the past few decades. The shift has been in a positive direction where sensible portrayals have been made. However, the mainstream cinema has often dealt with white homosexuality at its centre with the black characters being ignored or sidelined. There are only a few films which have made the effort to portray Black lives realistically. Barry Jenkins' Oscar winning film, '*Moonlight*'(2016) is significant in this aspect. The film depicts both the beauty and the precarity of Black lives. The film also addresses the homophobic tendency prevalent within the Black community. The film talks about the issue of normative masculinity and the difficulty faced by young boys to live up to the societal expectations. The insightful representations of Black gay identity are absolutely necessary, especially in the sense that such representations would give room to healthy discussions about homosexuality in the Black community. Moreover, it gives a space for coming out of the closet and embracing one's true identity and feeling proud about it. It also becomes essential because of its crucial function of helping to comprehend the complex and difficult network entwining homosexuality, homophobia and Black Americans. These efforts would prove to be beneficial in a society that is diverse and multi cultural.

**Keywords:** Homosexuality, Black, Homophobia, Identity, Constructionism, Essentialism, Masculinity, Culture, Power, Precarity, Livability.

“Gay visibility has never really been an issue in the movies. Gays have always been visible. Its how they have been visible that has remained offensive for almost a century.”(*The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movie*)

The American film historian, Vito Russo's observation is definitely true of the gay representation in films and can also be applied to the portrayal of Black identity on screen. The earlier movies portraying homosexual characters as sad and suicidal or unstable and psychopathic are disturbing and to a greater extent are exaggerated and lack veracity. During the past few decades the films involving gay characters have undergone a vast change in terms of characterization and content. The tropes of 'the closet' and 'coming out' have become central metaphors in Western Culture, particularly American as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick points out in the *'Epistemology of the Closet'*. The development of cinema on queer people continues, with films becoming increasingly complex and sophisticated in their representation of queer lives. There are increasingly truer to life portrayals of gay relationships in the contemporary cinema. The movies like *'Milk'* (2008), *'Carol'* (2015), *'Call Me by Your Name'* (2017), *'Do You Take This Man'* (2017) are examples. These movies assume the role of advocates for normalizing homosexual relationships rather than making them sensuous or merely spectacle worthy.

However, it is saddening to note that gay activism has generally tried to focus on white men. The highly discussed movie *'Brokeback Mountain'* (2005) is an example of this sort of perception. The representation of Black gay male in art and more specifically in films remains a politically volatile undertaking. The confusion remains over whether a Black gay man's primary identification ought to be with a fellow African American (heterosexual) or with other gay people (predominantly white). Henceforth, the film *'Moonlight'* directed by Barry Jenkins is significant as it not only speaks about homosexuality and the apparent homophobia that is related to it but also of the intersectionality of race, culture and identity. The film is significant in the sense that it portrays a Black gay man as the protagonist.

The film is based on Tarell Alvin McCraney's unpublished semi-autobiographical play *'In Moonlight Black Boys Look Blue'*. The film holds a special position as it is the first film with its entire cast being Blacks and also the first ever LGBTQ related film to receive an Oscar. *Moonlight's* wide acclaim and its subsequent success at the Oscar reflect the occasional recognition of the social and cultural dimensions of the Black people by the wider public. The film disturbs the white, dominant heterosexual society and culture which is upheld as the norm. The film portrays the growth of a black man through the three stages of his life- childhood, adolescence and adulthood. The film beautifully delineates the ecstasy, pain and beauty of falling in love as experienced by the protagonist while struggling with his own sexuality. The film unfolds in the form of three chapters that provide three different identities to the protagonist- 'Little', 'Chiron' and 'Black'. With each chapter he moves towards attaining maturity and a better understanding of himself

and his surroundings. The emotions of love and companionship find new dimensions in his life.

The film set in Liberty City, Miami is about Chiron who is derogatorily referred to as 'Little', owing to his meekness and aloof nature. Chiron's family comprises only of his mother, Paula who fails to provide him the love, care and security of a family. Paula's frustration due to her impoverished social circumstances leads her to drug addiction and eventually into abusive relationships. Her irritability finds an outlet in the abuse she inflicts upon her son. Chiron finds it very difficult to thrive in a harsh society dominated by the narrow standards about what it means to be a 'man'. The struggle to attain the glorified status of being a 'man' has always been a universal one. Societal institutions like family, education, religion, books, and media are keen on projecting an otherwise unattainable masculinity of being strong and devoid of any emotions. Chiron struggles with his identity when he gets placed against these set standards of masculinity and is expected to abide by the popular norm of being an aggressive male. The pressure that young Black boys are put to becomes clear in the words of Trevante Rhodes, the actor who played the role of grown up Chiron:

Growing up, you're told that being a black man, you have to be better than your counterparts. You have to be stronger, more masculine and the most dominant force in the room at all times. So that automatically puts up that block and you don't think it's possible to have any kind of vulnerability about you. (*The Guardian*)

Chiron befriends Juan, a Cuban drug dealer. He considers Juan to be his confidante and caretaker. Juan, along with his girlfriend Teresa gives him asylum whenever he flees from his house. Juan comes across as a facilitator who provides comfort, care and solace to Chiron. Chiron finds a mother figure in Teresa.

Chiron's life is at a very crucial juncture as he develops a special bond with his close friend Kevin. Chiron comes across as an emotional and sensitive boy who is far beyond the clutches of the oppressive society and does not wish to fit into the roles dictated by the society. On the other hand Kevin is symbolic of all those who fall prey to the so called morality and double standards of the society. Kevin forsakes his true desires and feelings just to be accepted by the hypocritical society. The scene where the two boys exchange a kiss on the beach under the moonlight is intense and deep. Unfortunately, Chiron's life takes an unprecedented turn when Kevin, the one whom he trusted the most turns him down. Kevin takes part in the 'hazing' ritual upon the school bully, Terrel's invitation. Kevin knocks down Chiron in front of the entire school despite the fact that Chiron is his friend.

The incident hints at the power dynamics that is at work. Kevin becomes a mere puppet in the hands of the society that holds control over each and every individual to such an extent that one's choice of clothing, food, lifestyle and above all one's sexuality and identity are decided by the society. Chiron gets completely disheartened and breaks down at the principal's office. His words to the principal "you don't even know" sets a disturbing tone as it seems to be directed towards the audience who pretend to be ignorant of the situation of people like Chiron.

The society merely remains as mute spectators about the issues of bullying and the use of sexually charged insults towards those who are vulnerable by any means. Terrel seems to be only an agent of discrimination whereas the entire society stands guilty of breeding people like him and entertaining notions of aggressive and toxic masculinity being the norm. The traumatic incident changes Chiron as a person as he takes revenge on Terrel by hitting him with a chair. The scene is amusing, a surprise act of revenge from a character whom the audience has experienced as sensitive and sweet. The scene is crucial for the Black gay men who have experienced something of the similar kind. The scene comes across as a possibility of being both a Black and a gay man at the same time and to be able to exact revenge against the perpetrators who find sadistic pleasure in bullying, humiliating and cornering those perceived as the 'other'. The popular victim-perpetrator narrative gets tarnished here as the Black boy has stood up for his rights and identity and henceforth has moved away from the status of being a victim. However, it also highlights the grim reality of pushing one into a zone where one does not want to venture into. Chiron never wanted to be an aggressive person but the societal agency, which acts through the fellow student Terrel in the film, has forced him to assume the role of a hooligan. Chiron grows up to assimilate all the external features that attribute to the popular notion of masculinity- toned down muscular body, wears grills on teeth. Following the footsteps of his mentor, he becomes a prominent drug dealer in Atlanta.

The film '*Moonlight*' is about one discovering one's true self. There is a reference in the film to Black boys looking blue in the moonlight by Juan. The colour blue highlights peace and tranquility and the moment of being with one's true self. The moonlight is symbolic of being the actual self and not what society dictates. Chiron and Kevin's intimate moment occurs on a beach under moonlight. Being under the moonlight indicates the importance of owning and being oneself. Each and every shot in the film is purposeful as it adds to the narrative of the film.

But director Barry Jenkins' genius return to cinema, which is based off Tarell Alvin McCraney's play *In Moonlight Black Boys Look Blue*, seems to put an extra weight on

shades of blue. It paints the school walls where Chiron is bullied within. It's the color of the moonlight that illuminates his dreams. It's the color scheme of his broken home. Blue is both Chiron's imprisonment and salvation. (*Spin*)

The ocean breeze indicates a sense of peace and tranquility. While Chiron drives to meet Kevin, the image of children playing on the beach under moonlight is shown. The scene is significant as the image of the beach; ocean breeze and moonlight are symbolic of tranquility and liberty. The image of children is symbolic as childhood is always portrayed as less complicated and the worries about the judgmental society do not haunt one.

The film clearly manifests that sexuality is something on which the dynamics of power is exercised. Michel Foucault in his '*History of Sexuality*' (1977-1986) theorized sexuality as located within the structures and discourses of power.

What we think of as our sexual identity-heterosexual or homosexual-is, Foucault argues, a category of knowledge only understandable within a specific culture, paying attention to the common sets of assumptions and conceptual parameters that underpin particular arguments, diagnoses and characterizations of sexual behaviours and practices. In other words Foucault argued for a constructionist view of sexuality, that is, a view that sexuality is produced within and through our ways of thinking and talking about sex. This approach is commonly termed 'Foucauldian Constructionism'. (*Studying Sexualities*, 22)

He did not accept the notion of sexuality as a biological construct. Foucault firmly believed that sexual identity was the product of cultural discourses and is prone to vary from one community to the other. He argues that notions of homosexuality or heterosexuality is merely a set of knowledge constructed within a community and thereby ought to be understood by that specific culture alone. In '*Moonlight*', Chiron's final image of possessing a rough and hard masculinity is the notion of an ideal sexuality that has been constructed by the society which he adopts to be in tune with the society where he lives. Chiron grows up to realize that his safety and well being resides in accepting a sexual identity that is propagated as the norm in his neighbourhood. Thus, the overtly masculine image is a mere façade to escape the harsh censure of the society in which he resides. This constructionism as Foucault suggests is in stark contrast to essentialism which argues that identity is innate, inherent or an essence.

However, it must be noted that Foucault does not argue that one learns one's sexuality from one's own culture. Foucault identifies that sexual acts signify differently in different

cultures and the identity constructed by these acts will also vary according to the cultural context.

In Ancient Mediterranean cultures, for example, sexual identification was not divided into 'heterosexual and homosexual' as it is in contemporary Western culture. In Ancient Greece, an adult Greek male could have sexual relations with anyone, provided his sexual partner was his social inferior and provided he maintained the active role during sexual penetration. The objects of the adult Greek male's attention were therefore his 'social inferiors'; women, slaves and boys. (*Studying Sexualities*, 24)

There are many contemporary societies that do not view same-sex inclination as a sin or sexual aberration. In the contemporary Latin American culture sexuality is not defined in terms of the sex of the partner but the way the sexual act is performed. In Chicano culture if a man plays an active role during the sexual act then he is labelled as heterosexual irrespective of whether his partner is male/female and only the man who is passive during the sexual activity is labelled as homosexual.

The contemporary Western Culture identifies all sexual acts between men as acts of homosexuality and henceforth men try to avoid such labelling by resorting to aggressiveness in the form of wrestling or extreme physicality. The feminist scholar Pumla Dineo Gqola in her book '*Rape: A South African Nightmare*' talks about how violence and aggression are considered to be desirable traits in men. In the film, '*Moonlight*', the scenes of wrestling among the boys and the one between Chiron and Kevin are symbolic in this sense. The famous British author and critic Mary Mackintosh, in her popular essay '*The Homosexual Role*' (1968), states that the idea of the purity of the society is reinforced by labelling some as deviant or criminal. The label thus becomes a form of social control that assumes some people to be naturally deviant. The society in which Chiron resides tries to utilize this agency of social control upon him. His interests, feelings, forms of expression and articulation and freedom of mobility are curbed by putting a check upon them. His visits to Teresa's house get stopped as he is showered upon with sexually charged abuses on account of his relationship with Teresa. He avoids being free and interactive with his peers out of the fear of being subjected to humiliation. He does not exercise his free will to interact with his peer group. The constant fear of being labelled a 'faggot' as his mother called him remains deep within the boy. The society wilfully closed its eyes towards Chiron and sat back to become mute spectators to the kind of injustice being meted out to him. The pressure of the societal expectations imposed upon him eventually affects the boy deeply. He ends up being someone else, an identity produced and propagated by the

oppressive hyper-masculine society around him. He symbolizes Judith Butler's categorization of life as precarious and livable.

In "*Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics*", a 2009 article, Butler outlines that the normative framework of gender operates to condition life and enhance the precarity of certain lives who are unrecognisable within dominant scripts of living and being gender. (Critical Legal Thinking)

The gay activist and historian Jeffrey Weeks too argues that sex attains meaning only in social relations. The power relations acting upon the structure of sexuality limit the possibilities of choice and autonomy as evident in the character of Chiron. Kevin too comes across as a symbol of the effect of power relations acting upon 'individual' beings. He cleverly abstains from confessing his true desire or self which rewards him with a 'livable life'. His statement that the song 'Hey Stranger' brought Chiron's memories to him can be taken as his confession. The song has romantic connotations to it which hints at the 'romantic' nature of his relationship with Chiron, far from being mere companionship. The moments that he spent with Chiron at the beach and in his apartment involves him caressing and comforting Chiron. These moments clearly suggest the depth of the bond that the two shared with each other. Unfortunately, Kevin could not admit his desires and stand up for himself. Hence, it can be stated that just as Chiron transformed into a totally different individual than what he personally identifies himself to be Kevin too ended up being different from his own true self. The concept of 'coming out of the closet' as proposed by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her highly influential work 'Epistemology of the Closet' (1990) becomes relevant here.

The closet is a figure of speech for the self-imposed silence a person maintains around their sexual orientations. People are in the closet if they don't 'confess' their homosexuality or they hide it by 'passing' as heterosexual. Throughout her writings, the closet is an important symbol of the 'open secret' of sexuality pervading Western culture and everyday life, and it is this symbolic resonance of the closet which makes Sedgwick's work so useful to analysis of popular texts. (*Studying Sexualities*:50)

The discourse of homosexuality as a shameful secret produced the concept of 'closet'. The idea of being closeted is not necessarily a choice as in the case of Chiron who scarcely knew anything about being homosexual as a young boy. However, the mannerisms, clothing, and attitude strips one of one's false pretensions and reveals the true identity as in the case of Kevin towards the end of the film. The people like Kevin prefer to hide their desires and preferences out of the fear of shame and humiliation.

In '*Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*' (1990) Judith Butler talks about gender as a performative construct. She writes, 'there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results' (1999:33). The gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality' (136). Thus, 'gender' becomes a series of acts within specific discourses of law, medicine, religion, and family and so on. Like Foucault, she proposes that gender is not natural or innate, but the effect of discourses that are controlled by power structures.

Chiron gets mocked and bullied by his peers as they feel, that he does not fulfill the prerequisites demanded by his gender role. The 'effeminate' mannerisms and tight jeans worn by Chiron earn him the sarcasm of the people around him. Even his mother calls him 'faggot', a derogatory term used for gay people. Chiron gets portrayed as the 'other' or the deviant only because he does not perform the premeditated gender roles. The act of performativity begins with one's birth itself with the declaration of one's sex. Thereafter, the parents, religion, educational institutions, peer groups, media and the society start to function in a particular way so that the child is interpellated into the dominant and normative gender regime.

Kevin performs truly according to the set norms of his gender. He comes across as the 'cool' guy who gets detention as he is caught in a sexually intimate situation with a girl. He willingly takes part in hazing and is ready to knock down anybody, even his own friend. The notion of performativity works in the case of Kevin and helps him to escape humiliation and mental agony and thereby guarantees him 'livability' as Butler suggests. Butler, in her sequel '*Bodies that Matter*', stresses that 'performativity must not be understood as a singular or deliberate "act", but rather as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names' (1993:2). For the notion of heterosexuality to be normative and natural it is necessary that gender remains as a concept of binary opposites-masculinity/femininity and this differentiation is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desires.

Juan represents a greater part of the youth of the Black American community who have turned to illegal activities like drug peddling and other criminal offences. The neighbourhood in which Chiron resides clearly indicates the dilemma of the majority of the Black communities around the world, especially in Miami. The destitute and impoverished surroundings create more people like Juan and Chiron. Juan's words come across as an enlightenment to Chiron, "At some point, you gotta decide for yourself who

you gone be. Can't let nobody make that decision for you.”(21:01) Juan tries to make Chiron realize the significance of being true to oneself. The colour ‘blue’ relates to the idea of being free, far from the restricting boundaries of the society around. The advice given by Juan is significant as it finds resonance with the marginalized people who are struggling to make a space for themselves in the society and also groping with the issue of identity crisis. The words of Juan also serve as an attack on the mentality of the community of isolating and torturing someone who falls out of its order.

The film becomes noteworthy owing to the fact that the Blacks in the contemporary American society have to live in a constant threat of losing their belongings, land and in a wider sense identity. It also highlights the incarceration of Black gay people in the contemporary society. The act of ‘coming out of the closet’ seems to be much more difficult in the case of the Blacks due to the fear of the intense censure and humiliation. For a white man, he has to be conscious of his sexual preference alone but for a Black man he has to take into account his racial status as well. The prominent films dealing with the theme of homosexuality have always focused on the whites and their subsequent dilemma. Even if the Black characters are shown to be homosexuals, they are not usually treated with the same depth and seriousness as seen in the case of white gay men. The passion and love between Black gay men seldom get represented on the screen in a faithful manner. The film ‘*Moonlight*’ succeeds to do so. The passionate encounters between Chiron and Kevin on the beach and the subsequent one in Kevin’s apartment are symbolic of this. The film shows the essence of Black humanity in a beautiful manner and also the precarious nature of Black lives.

Jenkins, through his film, portrays the Black boyhood as a precious one as opposed to the popular norm of revering white boyhood. This is symbolized in the scene where Chiron drives to Kevin’s place and the image of a group of Black children playing on the beach gets projected on the screen foregrounding Chiron’s car. This clearly hints at the effort, made by the director to project the innocence of the Black kids which get ultimately lost in white society. It also subverts the popular notion of Black boys being disruptive and prone to violence. The idea of the naïve white boy, less susceptible to societal scorn and abuse is strongly questioned by Jenkins. The distorted family background, the impoverished conditions of the house and an unapologetic drug addict mother contribute to make Chiron’s life utterly miserable. Paula knows that she cannot do anything for her son and it becomes clear in her lamentation, “You don’t love me no more. You’re my only, and I’m your only.”(58:10) She comes across as the representative of the Black women who are doubly marginalized because of their gender and race. She is disheartened at the realization

that her son will not fit into the normative gender role as prescribed by the society. The alienation between the son and the mother mainly emerges because of the sexual deviance of Chiron. If the society had been more welcoming, Paula would have felt at ease with Chiron's identity. The film can be perceived as a tribute to all the Black gay men who have been struggling with their identities and also opens up a space for all the young Black boys out there who are perplexed over their sexual identity and place in the society.

The reconciliation between Chiron and his mother towards the end of the film does not completely account for a very normal mother-child relationship but one can have hope that things will be better between the two. The director tries to subvert the notion of familial bonds in the Black families as portrayed by the conventional white dominant historiography and culture. It has always been a question of ambiguity about the family structure prevalent in the Black community. The western society has always denied the presence of emotions of companionship, love, compassion and familial bonding in the Black community. Jenkins becomes successful in the portrayal of the Blacks as human beings with feelings as common to any other individual.

The film also addresses the homophobic tendency prevalent within the Black community. The story emerges, grows and evolves within the Black community which highlights the need to confront the reality of Black gay men in its entirety.

Finally, *Moonlight* is an all-black world, devoid of respectability politics. While it tells the story of ambiguous sexuality, it does so with unambiguous blackness and shame. Similarly, seeing black kids beat each other up in *Moonlight* is not a call to abandon black masculinity as insufficient to cope with black homosexuality, but to wrestle with the reality of the black gay men in its totality. (*The Guardian*)

Often films deny faithful reflection of Blacks which in a sense is an act of violence of their identity and selfhood. The film places the Blacks at the centre of the narrative who are otherwise seen around the fringes of the mainstream historiography, culture and society. The Black gay man at the centre of a popular narrative cinema not only calls for a revival in the set standards of the society but also encourages millions of Black men who live eclipsed by the weightage of their colour and sexuality.

The film projects the humanity and complexity interwoven in the Black experience. Jenkins tries to normalize the Blacks who are perceived as the 'social abject' by the white mainstream western society through the representation of the Black people as emotional, vulnerable and at the same time possessing the qualities of goodness, virtues, morals and

the passion to live one's life in a dignified manner. It is true that films have been made earlier with Black characters at its centre but those films focused on two types of portrayals. The first type include Black characters who are aspiring and facilitate upward mobility in the society while the other focused on the struggling, miserable lives who could never make it to the heights. But '*Moonlight*' does not fall into either of the two categories. The film apart from portraying a true episode of Black community also shows what it means to be the 'other' within one's own community. Thus, Chiron has to fight the outside world but also has his own people standing against him.

The insightful representations of Black gay identity are absolutely necessary, especially in the sense that such representations would give room to healthy discussions about homosexuality in the Black community. Moreover, it gives a space for coming out of the closet and embracing one's true identity and feeling pride in it. It becomes also essential because of its crucial function to help to comprehend the complex and difficult network entwining homosexuality, homophobia and Black Americans. These efforts would prove to be beneficial in a society that is diverse and multi cultural like the American society.

The films like '*Moonlight*' serve a greater purpose of removing the dichotomization seen within the gay community, a divide between the white gay man and his Black counterpart. The film doesn't show the 'coming out' experience of the protagonist but nevertheless shows the growth of a young naïve boy into the realization of his own sexuality. He finally embraces his sexual orientation at the end of the film and accepts his true self without any inhibition or shame. The film also holds an optimistic tone as Chiron finds refuge in his once lost love Kevin which sends a ray of hope to the millions of Chirons out there in the world, particularly in the Black community. Such films that end on a predominantly positive note of reconciliation and reunion suggest the fact that homosexuals can lead happy, healthy and productive lives. The presumable 'happy ending' of the film tends to challenge the negative representational patterns mentioned by Russo in his work.

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## **Behind the Memory Lane: The Toponymy of Select Places in Thiruvananthapuram**

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**Abstract:** We are shaped by a plethora of tales. They elucidate, educate and escort throughout our lives, sometimes adding a sparkle to our lives. Behind the place names in the city of Thiruvananthapuram is a colourful blend of its age-old memories and contemporary lifestyle. This paper explores how the city got its name and takes us towards its camouflaged past. There is a veritable mine of memories intertwined with myth and mystery. Delving into the toponymy of the place revives, through a cognitive process, the splendid images of its by-gone days. It is then carved into our memory, giving us a sense of belonging to this land of magnificent origins that is surrounded by the towering Western Ghats and the vast Arabian Sea.

**Key Words:** Toponymy, Thiruvananthapuram, memories, place names, history, identity

A person will die, but a place associated with his name lives on, unless the march of Time and the clash of civilisations do not start a pogrom of erasure that seeks newer significances and histories. The name of a place is a slice of its history- its coded identity. These names are the links that connect us to generations and landmarks that provide an insight into the history of Man. They are the repositories of the knowledge that contain within them a ready compendium of who ruled it once, or perhaps a historic event, a battle, the outcome of the battle, a sentiment or perhaps a distinctive geographical feature. Place names thus hold the reverberations of a tale left unsaid.

The study of names of the places of a region is referred to as Toponymy. The word is derived from the Greek word *topos* meaning 'place' and *onoma* meaning 'name'. A toponym is a place name, and toponymy refers to "the systematic study of the origin and history of toponyms" (Monmonier, 2006, page 9). Toponymy, therefore, is the love towards 'his story' or rather a history.

An enthralling city located at the extreme southern tip of the Indian subcontinent, Thiruvananthapuram, is a land that holds variant names in its narrative history. It is the capital city of the south Indian state of Kerala. 'Travancore' to its sobriquet 'Trivandrum', the very name of Thiruvananthapuram indicates a transition from the earlier recorded names. The transformation of these names showcases the extent to which the manners, institution, customs, and religion is still preserved in its name.

'Travancore' is the abbreviated English form of *Tiru-Vithan-Kodu*, once the capital of the kingdom and the residence of the court, but now a petty village thirty miles to the south-east of Trivandrum (Thiruvananthapuram). *Tiru-Vithan-Kodu* is said to be a corruption of *Sri-Vazhum-Kodu*, i. e., a place where the Goddess of Prosperity dwells. Fra Bartolomeo, who resided for a long time in Travancore, says that the country was called *Malai-Nadu* - the land of hills.

The city is surrounded by seven hills like Rome. It was also known as the Land of Contentment as it is said to be an altered form of *Aanandapuri*.

The city was known by different names of which *Syanandapuram* and *Anandan Kadu* were perhaps the more popular ones. In *Varahapuram*, written in the sixth century AD, the place is referred to as *Syanandapuram* whereas in Mathilakom Records it is referred to as *Thiru Ananda (Anantha) Puram*. Thiru Anantha Puram, or the city of the Holy Anantha, is said to be named after Ananthan, the cosmic serpent with a thousand heads, on whose coils Lord Mahavishnu reclines (iconic representation of the chief deity in the Sri Padmanabhaswamy Temple). *Vanchidesham* or the land of treasure; *Dharma Bhumi* or the land of charity; *Vanavarnad*, abridged into *Venaud (Venad)*, or the land of the celestials; *Tripapur* or the land of the bearers of the sacred feet; Rama Rajyam or the kingdom of Rama Raja and *Kerala* or the land of coconut - palms are some of the names. Its last denomination was *Travancore*, which is a form of the Sanskrit *Srivardhanapuri* or the land where the Goddess of prosperity resides.

Travancore is also known by the names of *Venad*, *Vanchi-desham*, and *Tiru-Adi-Desam*. *Vanchi-Desam* means either the land of treasure or the land of bamboos. *Tiru-Adi-Desam* is probably derived from *Tiru-adikal*, one of the titles of Chera kings. *Tiru - Adi* means 'holy feet' or 'the Royal feet' and represents the usual form in which the kings of the land were addressed. (Travancore State Manual, Vol 1)

But how did the place gain its name? Well, how did these places and names come to be? What influenced them? Which language families played a decisive role in shaping them

into the form they take at present? And taking the wheel of time into account, how did these names manage to survive the decay of time and survive as a perennial force?

Generally, the place names in Kerala show the importance of the specific areas like the existence of a tank or a reservoir or a water body in the areas having the place names ending in *kulam* (Kunnamkulam, Ernakulam, Tiruvanjikulam), *puzha* (Murukkumpuzha, Moovaatupuzha), the existence of a forest in the area having place names ending with *kaadu* (Chavakkad, Kalliyenkad, Palakkad), the existence of a market or bazaar in the areas having place names ending with *angadi* (Parappanangadi, Tiruangadi, Pazhavangadi and *chanta* (Meenchanta, Puthenchantha). The habitation places like Ur and Cheri can be noticed from Thalasseri, Kannur, Payyannur, Balusseri, Chenchery, and so on. Some place names reflect the geographical peculiarity of certain names. The elevated region is commonly known with *medu* and the garden lands with *paramba* (Peerumedu, Cheraamanparambu). The names ending with *palli* (Kadakampalli) denote the existence of an educational centre in a particular area. Those place names ending with *chungam* is connected with the check posts of the earlier period. Similarly, the small geographical units in Kerala were given separate names based on the nature of fauna and flora, presence of rivers, tanks, palaces, forts that is closely interwoven with the memory.

Name and place are the two sides of the same coin. This is because they are the key to memories and experiences. The etymological evolution of the name is something which is considered at a secondary level. The place is pivotal in embodying the experiences amalgamated with the memory of the societies. It stores, reproduces, represents and reminds. It is the knowledge of the bygone days and the warehouse of this same knowledge. Social and cultural memories can be disentangled from the name of a place. These memories sandwiched between different memories that we possess can be unearthed by recalling. Thus the memory that the place holds is transferred to an individual and the place, in turn, become part of his/her memory.

Memory refers in its literal meaning to “the faculty by which the mind stores and remembers information; the mind regarded as a store of things remembered; or something remembered from the past” (Oxford Dictionary).

Eliminating a name that perches on memory gradually makes the autobiographical or the collective memory insecure. Memory relations with the place are very essential in assembling the collective memory. A place from its end to end has strong roots to its

memory. Thereby, the city in itself forms the part of collective memory. These forms that a particular place holds as memories are those that belong to the whole society.

The most organic way of naming a place was largely colloquial. Urban relocation, commemorative attribution, and in some cases even international negotiation paved the way to name a place. The names which are conceived as a result of these aspects stimulate and ignite the autobiographical memory (the facts or experiences related to the self). This autobiographical memory of individuals or the society, formed as a ramification of such constituents is closely knit with the toponyms. These very well mirror their emergence over the years and their characteristic existence as something societal, although it is a construct. They are never permanent but immutable.

Keith H. Basso highlights the qualities of place names in the following way:

Because of their inseparable connection to specific localities, place names may be used to summon forth an enormous range of mental and emotional associations – associations of time and space, of history and events, of persons and social activities, of oneself and stages in one's life. (Basso 1990, 144).

A place name as mentioned earlier, never stands alone. It is a combination of anthropology, history, folklore, culture, myths, invasions, oral traditions, religion, architecture, geography, personalities, and the list goes on with the connections that humans attribute to. Along with these, the influence of other languages both in terms of oral tradition as well as written shreds of evidence adds to these existing combinations. The oral or recorded forms are thus catered to either by phonetic transfer, by oral translation or by folk etymology that was in existence once. These would have formed a part of their identity upon being passed down through generations. Historical information, that includes settlement history, religious changes, population dispersal and heritage traces the lineage of these toponyms. All these aspects constitute the naming of the places of Thiruvananthapuram.

Though it's early history, the extent of its territory and other particulars are mostly buried in obscurity, the toponymy of the places in Thiruvananthapuram takes us back to the by-lanes of antiquity. In the *Heritage of Kerala-Thiruvananthapuram*, it is mentioned that the city became a town in as early as 1049 AD as per the Almanac of 1881. The growth of the town and that of the Sree Padmanabha Swami Temple were complementary. The temple is surrounded by forts. The presence of these forts reminds us of how the city was the seat of power of the erstwhile kings. The Fort area has witnessed the growth of this city from

its rural setup to a glorious provinceto a sprawling metropolis. Today, Eastfort is an artery that connects the city to its heart.

Similarly, *Attakulangara* may have been on the embankment of a pond infested by millipedes. However, it has a larger spiritual history. The oral stories that depicted *AshtaMoorthy* or Attamoorthy (a colloquialism) which was a pilgrim spot beside the bank of the pond (*Kulangara*) could most likely have later evolved into *Attakulangara*. Similarly, the central part of the city, *Thampanoor* got its name as it was the home or *ooru* of Kunjunni Thamban who used to get a grant from the then Maharaja of Travancore as a retainer forthe use of his palanquin and the slaves who were to carry it. It was *Thampante Ooru* that evolved. This name,harkens back to a time when slavery was an accepted practice.

*Nemom* seems to have evolved from the word 'Niyamam'. In all probability, it would have been a trading spot located close to the *Chalai* market which was a University (Shalai), back then. To the opposite side of *Chalai* was *Pazhaya Angadi* or the old market which later came to be known as *Pazhavangadi*. The exhibition ground that we refer to as *Putharikandam* today takes us back to the agrarian lifestyle that the people here were involved in. The name underwent alterations from *Puthan Ari Kandam* orally. This was the place associated with the Sree Padmanabha Swamy temple as it was the harvest from this farm that was presented to the deity as part of the custom.

The Government Secretariat, which is the administrative center of the state, was known to those who lived here some 120 years ago as *Huzur Kacheri*. The building was designed as a *darbar* with a huge entrance called the *Aana Kavaadam* which is still preserved as such. The building was designed by Walthew Clarence Barton, who was the first chief engineer of the then Trivandrum. In his commemoration, the place where he resided and his bungalow is located was named Barton Hill. This place was also known as *Peppatti Kunnu* and *Gundu kaadu* as it housed a centre to treat rabies and because gunshots were fired from this place to mark the time respectively.

In the words of the historian V.V.K. Valiyathu, *Vanchiyoor* had a greater significance than Travancore. *Vanchinagaram*was the capital of *Aadi CheraKulam* which had been the seat of power during the Sangham era. It is said that the present-day Kodungalloor was the capital of the Chera dynasty. It was *Chera* that supposedly became *Kerala* after the roots of Tamil language disappeared to give way to Malayalam. The people at that time, followed Buddhist and Jainist traditions and it is said that Ilango Adikal composed

*Silappathikaram* while staying to the north of *Vanchinagaram*. As the Vaishnava sects gained prominence, the focus shifted to areas around the Sree Padmanabha Swamy temple. The name Ananthapuri and later Thiruvananthapuram evolved from the association with this temple. Thus, the old Vanchiyoor of Venad got immersed in history (Venad was the old name of Tiruvitamkur upto the time of King Marthanda Varma. Venad if split into Vezham and Nadu can be interpreted as ‘the country abounding in elephants’).

Vanchiyoor was called so, as the *ooru* was connected to the *vanchidesam* or village. The names ending with *puram* evolved again giving rise to *Kesavadasapuram*, *Keraladityapuram*, *Mangalapuram*, *Kaniyapuram* and the like, but the *ooru* still prevails in places. There is also an assumption that Thiruvananthapuram might be a literal imitation of the name Mahodayapuram which was once the capital of the Chera kingdom.

The earlier name assigned to *Tiruvitamkur* was *Kalkulangara* which was later changed to *Padmanabhapuram*, probably because the Travancore kings considered Lord Padmanabha as their tutelary deity and underwent the ceremony of *Trippadidanam* through which they designated themselves as *Padmanabhadasans* (servants of Lord Padmanabha).

Coming down to *Chackai*, it is said to be a place given as a gift to *Chackyars* who perform the *Chakiyar-koothu* art form which was also known as *Chackaikoothu* in Tamil Nadu. Pettah which is close to it was originally Thiru-madhura-pettah that gradually shrank to Pettah. The place was then known for its flourishing cloth industry and was the centre of the province. But today, it just exists as a name.

Kannammoola has a very interesting past that is linked with one of the rebellions that broke out against the British. It is said that the most daring rebellions against British, especially towards the tyrannical interference of Macaulay, in the administration of Travancore was led by Velu Thampi who was the then *Dalawa* (Diwan) of Travancore. Later, he committed suicide in the sanctum sanctorum of Mannadi temple. It is said that his body was brought to Kannammoola and was hanged on a gibbet. His brother Padmanabhan Thampi was also hanged.

The Kannammoola hills and stories associated with it that are related to Velu Thampi are clearly mentioned in *Travancore- A Guide Book For The Visitor* (1937) by Emily Gilchrist. A drive through Cannamoolay, a suburb of the city, leads past Cannamoolay hill, a place connected with the exposure of Velu Thampi’s body. There are many stories told of a headless ghost dragging his chains, haunting the hilltop.

In Achuth S. Shankar's words, he is quite unsure about why Velu Thampi's body was desecrated at Kannammoola.

Why Kannammoola was chosen is not known. If they came by road, then the Kannammoola-Ulloor road may have been in use and they chose the first hilly spot inside the town and also overlooking a flat valley of Petta (many people of European origin were living in nearby Petta) and Vanchiyoor. If they came by boat also, Kannammoola is the first hilly terrain, from Chakka.

Similarly, Medical College and Vazhuthacaud with their skyscrapers and busy intersections that we see today, used to be thick forests. The former was some ninety years ago, known as *Kuzhiyathumukku* and the latter got its name from a plant called *Vithazha chedi* which was abundantly found in the forest. *Ulloorkunnu* (the present-day Ulloor) adjacent to *Kuzhiyathumukku* was the place where death sentences were executed. It is assumed that Velu Thampi was hanged at Kannammoola because it would have been difficult to reach Ulloorkunnu.

*Kesavadasapuram*, which is yet another major place that connects the city to its suburbs and other districts, has its older version referring to it as *Kattachakonam*. It is *KalThacha Konam* referring to the group of workers who were the residents of this place and practiced their traditional form of masonry. Later, the name was altered as Kesavadasapuram in memory of Raja Kesavadas who was the Diwan of Travancore in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. He was the master brain behind the main central road connecting Thiruvananthapuram to other districts and also in designing the Alappuzha town that we see today.

Similarly, *Peroorkada* was a place where toddy was available in plenty. One of the hypotheses is that it might have been a *Kada* (trading place) run by the Peroor family. *Peroor Makkal* based on the usage in the ancient text means 'sons of the thriving city'. It is a known fact that Peroorkada comprises areas which were directly owned and controlled by the Maharaja.

*Poojapura* might have acquired its name from the famous Navarathri festival that centred on the place. *Cotton hill* gained its name from the mansion where GWD Cotton (Cotton Sayyipp in colloquial terms) resided. He was the resident of the then British governor. *Maruthamkuzhy* is referred to as a marshy land. 'Marutham' meant marshy. The place acquired its name from this geographical peculiarity. Likewise, *Palayam* is said to be the place where soldiers camped. The grounds where they marched are stadiums now. In a way, each place has a story to tell. Though the city that we see today is much different from

the thoughts that evolve from the images depicted in the history of the place names, the new light to the land where we stand is a strong form connecting us to our culture, beliefs, history and identity. We are the result of all these though we come and leave alone.

Though just a few places are studied here, each of them has a strong association with the present time. Though the current generation is quite unsure about the way these names evolved, oral transmissions and phonetic transfers connect these names to their roots.

Names and memory have a very significant connection with each other. When the place names undergo an alteration, it is not just the name that changes. For instance, when the names shifted from Bombay to Mumbai or Madras to Chennai, it was the history that was being invoked when we look at it through a post colonial angle. Reclaiming of the city is thus a reclaiming of the tradition. It is the rejection of the foreign and the adoption of the native. Thus, the renaming of streets names or an area that happens through cultural, political or regional ways is an invocation of different histories.

The politics of nationhood and language hegemony conjoin to rewrite history to suit the temperament of the current times. For instance, in October 2018, Allahabad was renamed as Prayagraj. This change evoked the accounts of the Mughal reign where it was called Ilahabad by the emperor Akbar. Allahabad was the name attributed by his grandson Emperor Shajahan. The place also reminds us of the story of the first *yagna* (the ritual sacrifice) conducted by Lord Brahma. Thus this place is entrenched in traditions and myths where we could also find the Indic, Islamic and a strong European presence as well. Not to forget the ethnic incursions of the Greeks, Scythians, and Huns. Changing the name from Allahabad would be a forced migration for many who were rooted there.. It is not just Allahabad but also Benares, Kashi or Varanasi that are also as affected as Prayagraj is the meeting point of the rivers Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati.

Recently, the VJT (Victoria Jubilee Memorial) hall in Thiruvananthapuram, which epitomizes the Victorian gothic model of architecture was similarly changed to Ayyankali Hall paying respects to his contributions. But such changes that happened before were not recorded properly which deletes the major part of the histories of our ancestors and questions the reality of how we see ourselves. Sometimes this face of the places that we reside in makes us realise that we are in a mythical world of realities.

The elements of constructed memory bear a great resemblance to fiction. Fiction takes us to different places, to different lifetimes and makes us travel through different histories. In

Malayalam literature, we can see these remembered histories portrayed very effectively. Through the depiction of a particular place the readers are made to travel through its due course of historic events, be it pre-colonial memory or post colonial memory. Starting from *Indulekha*, the journey of Malayalam Literature takes us through *Naalukettu*, *Verukal*, *Agnisakshi*, *Khasakkinte Ithihasam*, *Aadujeevitham*, *Aaracharand* so on, and the histories suited to the settings and characters. Here we can see the literal history in alignment with a place's history.

To this *Oru Deshathinte Kadha* and *Mayyazhipuzhayude Theernagalil* which dealt with the history of people of Athiranippadam and the colonial Mahi heading towards decolonisation respectively give us a different picture of this remembered history. This takes us to Pierre Nora who spoke about the 'Sites of memory' mostly known as the 'lieu de mémoire'. It refers to the importance and experience that a place holds in terms of material or non material things, be it monuments, events and the like.

In Nora's words, earlier there were many particular memories and one national history. But today its one national memory that stems from a divided patrimonial demand. Thus they become 'invented traditions'.

Thus, history and memory become contentious categories. Transmission of history thereby represses memory because it is sectioned according to an individual's interest. This further injects the agenda of forgetting into all discourses of a place's memory. This continuous play reveals to us that even the history of modernity is a construct. Modernity can be temporal or textualised. History of modernity is the history of forgetting as modernity seems to be a desire to wipe out and the definition of modernity holds to be different at different points of time. It is a transition and rupture from what has existed. It is the desire to know with wilful forgetfulness that takes us to the memory that we have today.

History and memory that conjoin to form identities of a community rely on the toponyms. Exclusion and inclusion of places directly influence their emotions. Oral names entitle the natives to a land. The meaning associated with a place is created by their experience. This experience further carves the names. They are memorised in distinct ways through markers such as monuments, architecture, inscription and the like. Places thus memorised have been the result of a constant battle between those included and excluded from society. Communities thereby use toponyms to remind themselves and others of these events or monuments from the past and the present, thus promoting the collective identity.

The place names depicted here, though of a land, is a story about us. This was the past that we were unaware of; the story that was never written. They managed to survive the sands of time. And would sometimes, make their presence felt as stories or anecdotes. A man without a memory is equal to a man without a life. It is in these stories or events that we exist; our identities exist. They are the roots that bind us to the place we claim as ours. ‘Who are we?’ ‘Where do we belong?’

Salman Rushdie, in his essay *Imaginary Homelands*, talks about the protagonist of his much-debated work *Midnight’s Children* as one who “is cutting up history to suit himself”. All versions that we see around us of place names are also a similar dissection into the history that may change in accordance with the different perspectives of the general public. Over here, memory acts as the modus operandi. Thus, the act of remembering becomes a personal experience parallel to a nation’s or a place’s history.

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