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Women's Initiatives

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Guest Editorial

This number of Samyukta is an eclectic collection of papers covering the intersectionality of gendered spaces. In keeping with our interest in popular fiction, we have included a different reading of Harry Potter Series that looks into rewriting desire into canon in Harry Potter Slash Fanfiction and Women's Writing. It examines slash fanfiction based on the Harry Potter series as a form of women's writing. As stated by Lakshmi Menon in the abstract, "In doing so, it seeks to explore the ways in which slash fanfiction as a genre, with its queering of canonical content and often explicitly sexual narratives, represents an avenue for women to explore ideas of desire and sexuality while separating it from the female body". This issue is rich in the scholarship of gender politics as we have included papers on the female body as a site of power and resistance, and gender incongruity and trans-identity.

To complement the study of resistance and inclusivity in the narratives of those kept away from the mainstream, we have a very sensitive reading of *Pulayathara* by Paul Chirakkarode. Published in the year 1962, *Pulayathara* was the first novel in Malayalam to give a graphic description of the Dalit Christian condition. Set in the Kuttanad region of Alappuzha in the 1930s, it unveils the unfinished agenda of the social reform movement that was ripping apart the fortifications of caste system in the state, when the momentum of the whirlwind of changes was delayed by the rise and spread of the Communist movement. The novel was largely ignored by the reading public and critical establishments. S Devika maintains in her paper an exposition of the dialectics of proselytization foregrounded in *Pulayathara* as a strategy of resistance against the enslavement, ill treatment and exploitation of the Dalits. It discusses the futility of the strategy of conversion to Christianity used by the Dalits to extricate themselves from the morass of casteism and to upgrade their social status, It brings to light the disjuncture between the promised sense of equality and the lived experience of discrimination that conversion to Christianity had in store for the downtrodden people.

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Nature, the Cathedral of the Future: An Eco-Womanist Reading of Alice Walker

Asha Krishnan.

Abstract: Alice Walker's perception of divinity in living and non-living beings underpins her ideology of eco-spirituality, which poses faith in the existence of a Universal Spirit that protects, sustains and nourishes all the animate and inanimate beings on earth. She extends the range of her celebrated notion of 'womanism' to encompass an all-inclusive balance of living as well as non-living beings, which is precisely what makes womanism different from other theoretical and ideological viewpoints. This paper expatiates on the theme of ecowomanism in Alice Walker's writings to substantiate that the destiny of the woman of colour as well as the Earth has been the same, both neglected and degraded by the patriarchal values of society.

Keywords: Womanism, Ecofeminism, Ecowomanism, Universal Spirit

Certainly, I don't believe there is a God beyond nature. The world is God, Man is God. So is a leaf or a snake
-Alice Walker

Alice Walker positions herself as a writer who deeply reveres nature and all its manifestations. Her belief in the ideology of eco-spirituality is evident in her perception of divinity in living and non-living beings. Walker trusts in the existence of a Universal Spirit which protects, sustains and nourishes all the animate and inanimate beings in the earth. For her, there is no religion beyond Nature. Walker stresses her belief in the immanent spirit in these words:

If there is one thing African Americans and Native Americans have retained of their African and Ancient American heritage, it is probably the belief that everything is inhabited

by spirit. This belief encourages knowledge perceived intuitively. It does not surprise me, personally, that scientists are now discovering that trees, plants, flowers have feelings…emotions, that they shrink when yelled at; that they faint when an evil person is about to hurt them. (cited in Lauret 11)

Walker who has coined the word, 'womanism,' defines womanist as "A black feminist or feminist of color…. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength… " In the next part of the definition, Walker explains that a womanist "…Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the Folk. Loves herself. Regardless" (*In Search*xi-xii). In the four-part-definition of womanism Walker attempts to extend the range of womanism to include all those who strive for the well-being of humanity. Though she makes reference to Black women at the beginning of the definition, the range is expanded as to include many who work for the welfare of humankind.

According to Layli Phillips, Walker's concept of community covers not only humanity but also all the living and non-living beings inhabiting the earth. The blanket term community covers the 'inanimate' components of Earth, the universe(s) beyond Earth, the spiritual world(s) and transcendental realm(s) encompassing the universe(s), and, ultimately, all of creation (xxvi). Womanism seeks to have a balance with all living as well as non-living things on earth. It recognizes the existence of a spiritual/ transcendental realm. In Layli Phillips' words, "it is spiritualized" (xxv). Though the spiritual/transcendental world is perceived by different people in different ways, womanism concedes this diversity of perceptions. It is the acknowledgement of the interrelation between the human and spiritual world that makes womanism different from other theoretical and ideological viewpoints.

It was Pamela A. Smith who described Walker as an eco-womanist writer: "Just as the term 'ecofeminist' expresses the perception that the degradation of the Earth is of a piece with the subordinating and bullying of women, racial minorities, the poor, and the marginalized, the term 'ecowomanist' expresses the burden of his perception on a woman of colour (476). By addressing Walker as an ecowomanist, Smith maintains that she is a writer who is concerned about the devastation of environment in the same manner as she is worried of the degradation of women of colour. Ecofeminism and ecowomanism are almost the same, but ecowomanism has an additional dimension, the issue of colour.

It was in the 1970s that Ecofeminism, described as feminist environmental philosophy, materialized. The influential movements that were responsible for the birth of Ecofeminism were Second Wave Feminism and the Green Movement. The term 'ecofeminism' gained currency with the publication of '*Feminism or Death'* in 1974 by Francoise d'Eaubonne, the French feminist writer. Eaubonne accuses androcentrism as the core cause for the destruction of ecological balance. Ecofeminism addresses the apprehensions taken up by feminists as well as ecologists. Maria Mies explains the ecofeminist perspective thus: "An ecofeminist perspective propounds the need for a new cosmology and a new anthropology which recognizes that life in nature (which includes human beings) is maintained by means of co-operation and mutual care and love. Only in this way can we be enabled to respect and preserve the diversity of all life forms, including their cultural expressions as true sources of our wellbeing and happiness" (*Ecofeminism* 6).

Ecofeminists view that the oppression of woman and environment are interrelated. They criticize the androcentric values perpetuated by the patriarchal society to be the root cause of degradation of both women and the Earth. Janis Birkeland in "Ecofeminism: Linking Theory and Practice" defines ecofeminism as "a value system, a social movement and a practice, but it also offers a political analysis that explores the links between androcentrism and the environmental destruction" (19). Ecofeminists strive to end the discrimination based on patriarchal norms so that earth becomes a better place to live in. Man treated nature as his servant that ought to obey his commands. He plundered the resources of nature with a vengeance so as to satisfy his greed and lust for material comforts. Maria Mies warns that now nature retaliates against the transgressions of man: "As White Man has for centuries treaded nature like an enemy it seems that now nature is hostile to us" (*Ecofeminism* 93).

Some ecologists are of the view that earth and its inhabitants are interconnected. Fritjof Capra observes that the whole universe is interrelated as within a web, "a complex interweaving of living and non-living systems within a single web" (*The Web of Life* 209). A curious fact is that there are no hierarchies in nature. Nature follows a nonlinear pattern of organization as it has the ability to normalize itself and establish itself. Capra is of the view that the pattern of the organization among all creatures of nature evolves from nonlinear or cyclical progresses in ecology (290). Capra advises humans to follow the principles of ecology – "interdependence, recycling, partnership, flexibility and diversity" (295) – for a better life on earth. For a peaceful co-existence in this universe, there should be a better liaison between humans and nature. People must recognize the importance of

harmonious existence among humans, nature and earth. This view point is eco-centric rather than anthropocentric, which stresses the importance of spirituality.

Spretnak points out that "ecofeminism will address not only the interlinked dynamics in patriarchal culture of terror of nature and the terror of elemental power of the female, but also the ways of the mesmerizing conditioning that keeps women and men so cut off from our grounding in the natural world, so alienated from our larger sense of self" (6). But ecofeminists have never thought about relating environmental issues along with that of gender. But ecowomanists attempt to find out a correlating factor that connects ecological issues with gender. Melanie L. Harris comments that "ecowomanist approaches can be described as the reflective and contemplative study of the ecowisdom that is theorized, constructed, and practised by women of African descent. The discourse validates their lives, spiritual values and activism as important epistemologies in eco-womanism" (14).

Walker's novel *Now is the Time to Open Your Heart* focuses on the healing aspect of Nature, which is the guiding philosophy of eco-spirituality. Kate Nelson, the protagonist, renounces all material comforts and embarks on a journey to apprehend the connection between Nature and spirituality. She changes her name to Kate Talkingtree as an acknowledgement of her feeling of oneness with nature. The commencement of Kate's spiritual journey is because of a recurring dream in which she finds a dry river in the middle of an ancient forest. The dream of the river-that-is-no-more alarms Kate and this leads to a decision to find out a real river. Walker comments that "…only women, these days, dreamed of rivers, and were alarmed that they were dry" *(Now is the Time* 16).

In addition to the discriminations faced by the Black Americans in the US, it has been noted that Black Americans have been victims of environmental racism as well. The study made by the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice reveals that "race is a major factor in the location of hazardous waste in the United States" (Warren 11). The study by Karen J. Warren shows that the greatest concentration of hazardous waste sites in the United States is on the African American and Hispanic south side of Chicago. Another report reveals that two million tons of radioactive uranium has been dumped on Native American lands. The site for the municipal furnaces and waste yards are situated near Black American localities. As a result, majority of the Black population is facing health hazards. Serious diseases like cancer affect a lot of people living in this area. Children become victims of congenital defects as their mothers live in poisoned surroundings. This situation forces Black women to struggle against the calamitous injustice meted out to them. Black

women fight for environmental justice which cannot be negated because they belong to a marginalized group. Dorceta E. Taylor notes in "Women of Color, Environmental Justice, and Ecofeminism" that these are the reasons that prompted the Black American woman to be "at the forefront of the struggle to draw attention to hazardous waste disposal, exposure to toxins, pollution and environmental contamination" (cited in Warren 39).

Walker, in her collection of essays, *Living by the Word*, points out how race, gender and environment are indissolubly related. She states, "Some of us have been used to thinking that woman is the nigger of the world, that a person of colour is the nigger of world, that a poor person is the nigger of the world, but in truth, Earth itself has become the nigger of the world" (*Living* 147). Her words reveal the ecowomanist stand of the writer that the destiny of the woman of colour as well as the Earth has been the same - both neglected and degraded by the patriarchal values of society. Walker thinks that the only way to heal the earth is through love. In one of her famous poems "These Days" in the collection, *Horses Make a Landscape Look More Beautiful*, Walker states that love should not be limited to loving human beings only, but it should be fluid enough to include the animate and the inanimate nonhuman world. The message that love can transform the earth and lead to a balanced ecosystem is evident in these lines:

Surely the world can be saved
by all the people
who insist
on love. (*Collected Poems* 406)

In *Now is the Time to Open Your Heart*, Walker through the character Kate, criticizes the attitude of countries like America that involve in violence rather than love. Kate censures the American action of bombing eight different places in the world. Kate views this as an act of cowardice: "It did not seem possible people would bomb one another rather than talk. What fear was this, that kept silent until announced by the loudest sound on earth, the sound of worlds being destroyed? Was it the fear that one's own terror would be glimpsed, one's own childhood of terror guessed?" (*Now is the Time* 182). Kate muses of the things she and her friends would drop instead of bombs: "Food, blankets, matches, tents, music. And she felt certain if enough of this were dropped, and all of it was cheap compared to the price of bombs, that people who received the goods would, in response sell them, at a reasonable price, all the oil or whatever they required" (182). Kate's indictment of the government which has lost all human values is evident in these lines. The government is oblivious of the common lot who strive for their basic necessities of life, in their rat-race to reach echelons of power. She pronounces that the pleasure of sharing and helping one

another is almost on the verge of extinction. Her concept is that, a better world is possible only if people join together and share everything. Kate's words vindicate this concept: "The world was almost at the point of forgetting what a fine time people can have helping one another. That people like to work together and to kick back after work and share their expansiveness. What would happen if our foreign policy centered on the cultivation of joy rather than pain? she thought" (*Now is the Time* 183).

Walker's concept is that in order to improve our life, we must recognize the presence of a Universal Spirit that pervades everything. In her essays in *Anything We Love Can be Saved*, Walker states that her concept of God is not restricted to any particular form or figure. Her spirituality made her recognize God in "ocean or drifting clouds," or within "melons, mangoes, or any other kind of attractive, seductive fruit" (xii). This concept is similar to the Indian concept of Spirituality expounded in *TheBhagavad Gita*. In the seventh chapter of *TheBhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna explains to Arjuna about the immanence of God. God can be found in different manifestations on earth "…I am the sweetness flavor in water and the radiant lustre of sun and moon, (*Sreemad Bhagavad Gita* 7.8)…I am the original fragrance in the Earth, the heat in the fire and vitality in all beings…(*Sreemad Bhagavad Gita* 7. 9).

Kate in *Now is the Time to Open Your Heart*, after consuming Grandmother Medicine, undergoes a physical as well as spiritual cleansing. She experiences a kind of feeling of oneness with the Universal Spirit. The ecowomanist ideology of Walker is reflected through Kate's musings. The feeling of communion with the Spirit leads Kate to hear the voice of Mother Earth:

FIRST OF ALL, ABANDON ALL NOTION THAT ANYTHING you humans do will ultimately destroy me. That is because I am your mother. It is impossible to kill one's mother. You may shoot her a hundred times, but alas, she has already given birth to you. She is yours forever. What you are destroying is your own happiness. Your comfort, which I put so much playful effort into creating. Your peace of mind. Your joy. (77)

The words indicate the voice of Mother Earth who is ever-forgiving and ever- consoling. The life of man will improve only if he extends his care and concern towards Earth. Rosemary Radford Ruether, in *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* states that "a healed relation to each other and to the earth then calls for a new consciousness, a new symbolic culture and spirituality"(40). Walker articulates her reverence for her pagan-ancestors who understood the importance of respecting Mother Earth: "I maintain that we are empty, lonely, without our pagan-heathen ancestors; that we

must live them up within ourselves, and begin to see them as whole and necessary and correct: their Earth-centered, female-reverencing religions, like their architecture, agriculture, and music, suited perfectly to the lives they led" (*Anything* 25).

Walker's pagan outlook made her empathize with animals as well. She recognizes that animals are not separate from the humans, but she maintains a dialectical relation with animals and other entities in nature. In *Living by the Word*, she talks about the sad expression in the eyes of a horse named Blue. Walker indulges in self-criticism because she has failed to see the monotony and loneliness in the face of the horse. Even if Walker and her companion give apples to Blue, his eyes reflect sadness. When a mare, Brown is brought as a companion, Walker discerns the look of happiness and peace in Blue's eyes. When she gives apples to both the horses, Walker happily detects the expression of contentment in Blue's eyes. But this contentment does not last long as Brown is taken away from Blue. Walker empathizes with Blue's sorrow and draws an outstanding comparison: "If I had been born into slavery, and my partner had been sold or killed, my eyes would have looked like that" (7). Walker nurtures a feeling of kinship with the mute animals, as she feels they are also helpless as the slaves were during the time of slavery. She expresses her love for animals in the following words:

We are connected to them [animals] at least as intimately as we are connected to trees. Without plant life human beings could not breathe…. Without free animal life I believe we will lose the spiritual equivalent of oxygen. 'Magic,' intuition, sheer astonishment at the forms the Universe devises in which to express life itself-will no longer be able to breathe in us. *(Living* 191-192)

In *The Temple of My Familiar*, in a sequence of dream memory, Lissie narrates how she lived a life of harmony with nature, trees and animals during her life as a pygmy. She lived a much peaceful life with her mother and aunts in forest; whereas her father and uncles were only occasional visitors. She describes:

The trees were like cathedrals, and each one was an apartment building at night. During the day we played under the trees as urban children today play on the streets. Our aunts and mothers foraged for food, sometimes taking us with them and sometimes leaving us in care of the big trees. When you know every branch, every hollow and every crevice of a tree there was nothing safer; you could quickly hide from whatever might be pursuing you. Besides, we shared the tree with other creatures, who, in a raucous or stealthy fashion-there was a python, for instance looked out for us. (*The Temple* 83)

She explains how the children were sometimes sent to their cousins' place when their mothers and aunts were engaged in their work. The cousins she refer to are none other than the apes, who are "black and hairy, with big teeth, flat black faces and piercingly intelligent and gentle eyes" (83). The mutual love and concern of the animal cousins are expressed in these words: "They seemed nearly unable to comprehend separateness; they lived and breathed as a family, then as a clan, then as a forest and, so on. If I hurt myself and cried, they cried with me, as if my pain was magically transposed to their bodies" (85). Lissie draws an analogy from her present life to describe the happiness she experienced while being with her cousins. The joy and contentment she felt while being with the animals was comparable to that of little children who were sent to their Grandmother's house during summer (83). Walker here envisages the joy and satisfaction humans would have if they lived a harmonious life with nature and animals.

This ideology is expressed in Walker's essays as well. To her, the Universe is a big family consisting of animals, birds, reptiles and fishes. "Our primary connection is to the earth, our mother and father regardless of who 'owns' pieces and parts, we are sister and brother beings to 'four-leggeds (and the fishes) and the wings of the air' share the whole" (*Living*148).

Peter J. Paris opines that African cosmology shapes the moral, ethical worldview of many African people and communities. In a symbiotic web of life in African cosmology Spirit, nature and humanity are interconnected:

… any ethical or unethical behaviour conducted by human impacts the other aspects of cosmological order positively or negatively. According to this framework, one could argue that since ancestors are believed to reside in many aspects of nature, any human behaviour that diminishes and dishonours nature or the world can have a devastating impact on the relationship between the human and the ancestor. In the case of water pollution, for example, the act of humans misusing, damaging, wasting, or abusing water is understood to be an immoral act against nature which disrupts the ancestors. (15)

Walker's eco-spirituality is best expressed in the poem, *We have a Beautiful Mother*. For her, Mother Earth is a place of solace and security. Just as a child yearns for its mother's lap, Walker yearns for the green lap of Mother Earth.

We have a beautiful/ mother/ Her hills/are buffaloes
Her buffaloes / hills. We have a beautiful/mother/
Her oceans/are wombs
Her wombs/ oceans.

We have a beautiful/mother/Her teeth/the white stones
at the edge/of the water/the summer grasses/her plentiful hair.
We have a beautiful/mother/Her green lap/immense/
Her brown embrace/eternal/Her blue body/Everything
We know. (*Collected Poems* 459-60)

Walker, in her poem, *Torture*, talks about the healing power of Nature. The poem suggests that instead of retribution, communion with nature eradicates pain and humiliation:
When they torture your mother/ plant a tree
When they torture your father/ plant a tree
When they torture your brother/ and your sister
plant a tree/ When they assassinate/your leaders
and lovers/plant a tree/When they torture you/
too bad/to talk/plant a tree. (*Collected Poems* 389)

In this poem, planting a tree becomes symbolic of attaining redemption through communion with nature. In the opinion of noted critic Ikenna Dieke, this poem is one example of Walker's "earthling consciousness," which reflects "the sympathetic symbiosis between her creative intellect and the natural environment" (200). Dieke recognizes that "the natural environment is not perceived as 'other,' but instead as an essential part in the expression of one's individuality" (200). The older generations of Black Americans, who were subjected to all kinds of violence, had realized the fact that the link with nature alleviated their troubles and miseries. This wisdom of having a harmonious relationship with Nature was carried over to writers like Walker.

Walker explains in *The Color Purple*, how the roof leaf that the native African tribal group, the Olinkans, worshipped as God was wiped off from the Olinkan habitat by the White colonizers. According to the Olinkan belief, the roof leaf symbolized God. One of the Olinkan legends states that when a greedy Olinkan chief destroyed the land on which the roof leaf grew, the heavens punished the whole tribe by creating storms and flood. It was only when the people prayed to God for appeasement, the wrath of the Gods stopped. Then onwards the Olinkans worshipped the roof leaf as God. The Whites annihilated "every last stalk of roof leaf" (205) from the Olinkan village which was a tactic to forcefully obliterate their tradition and culture. As Ngugi WaThiong' O suggests "To control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others" (153). The sabotage of native culture was the scheme chosen by the imperialists to dethrone the Olinkan culture.

Ecomemory, that refers to the collective as well as individual memory related with the earth, of the Olinkans was strategically destroyed by the colonizers.

In *The Color Purple*, the spiritual transformation of Celie is complete towards the end of the novel where we find Celie, a confidant, capitalist entrepreneur addressing the final letter thus:
Dear God. Dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples. Dear Everything. Dear God. (259)". Celie has internalized the principles of Shug and is able to view the spirit of animism in all human and non-human beings. Daniel. E. Ross comments on the transformation of Celie that "Shug's version of God deconstructs the fountainhead of patriarchy, the Lacanian Name-of-the-Father who is the source of law and power. (82)

Eco womanists give emphasis to a spirituality that stresses the interrelation between women and nature. They emphasize on the Goddess worship, which once prevailed, but became redundant when patriarchal norms dominated the society. Mother Goddess was worshipped as nurturer, healer and the one capable of fighting against all the evils. In Europe, Africa, Asia there were evidences of Goddess worship in the past. Female worship was connected with the mystery of the womb. The capability of the female to conceive and give birth was looked upon with awe and admiration. Many of the ancient religions that worshipped Mother Goddess were destroyed as time progressed. The divinity once given to women folk was erased forever. Rosemary Ruether analyses how matriarchy was systematically replaced by the circulation of stories that assert male-domination. Even the Hebrew Creation story, according to Ruether, stresses the authority of a male-God.
While the text leaves open the equality of male and female 'in the image of God,' the maleness of the pronouns for God and for Adam already suggests that males are the appropriate collective representatives of this God, females sharing in the benefits of corporate "human" sovereignty, but also falling under the rule of the male head of family. (*Gaia and God* 21)

Women are excluded from the divine-human relationship. Women are not addressed directly by God; but only through men, who are the mediators. Leonard Shlain points out the difference between masculine outlook and feminine outlook in the perception of religious outlook. In his work, *The Alphabet Versus the Goddess: The Conflict between Word and Image,* Shlain considers that there is a gendered difference in the religious experience of women. Holistic, simultaneous, synthetic, and concrete views of the world are the essential characteristics of a feminine outlook. Whereas the masculine outlook is linear, sequential, reductionist, and more abstract (Shlain 43). Worshipping Goddess will

be a measure towards recognizing the female power, female reproductive capacity, the ability to nurture and heal.

In a dialogue between Fanny and Nzingha in the novel, *The Temple of My Familiar,* Walker presents how Westerners destroyed the African Goddess concept. The tendency of the Whites to annihilate everything which is found more powerful than them is criticized by Walker. Nzingha who was sent to Paris for her higher studies found it difficult to continue there; as she found even the academic intelligentsia talk degradingly of Africans. In the History classroom, the slide showing the picture of Perseus with the severed head of Medusa, leads Nzingha compare the severed head of Medusa to the head of Africa (270). She compares Medusa to Isis, Goddess of Egypt. "The Goddess, who, long before she became Isis, was known all over Africa as simply the Great Mother, Creator of All, Protector of All, the Keeper of the Earth, The Goddess"(268). Medusa, the African Goddess is described as an ugly figure with locks of snakes instead of hair, and who possesses the capacity to turn men to stone. The killing of Medusa by Perseus, is metaphorical of the White man's strategy of conquering everything that hinders his way to accomplishment. Nzingha opines that ". . . if you are from Africa, you recognize Medusa's wings as the wings of Egypt, and you recognize the head of Medusa as the head of Africa" (270). Her stringent criticism of the Whites continues "… and what you realize you are seeing is the Western world's memorialization of that period in prehistory when the White male world of Greece decapitated and destroyed the black female Goddess/Mother tradition and culture of Africa" (270).

The witch burnings that took place in Europe during the Middle Ages were also a strategy to demolish Mother Worship. Women with exceptional healing power and those who exhibited extraordinary talents were labelled as witches and were annihilated. Lissie, in one of her dream memories, narrates how she was burned alive by the Europeans in the novel, *The Temple of My Familiar.*

We were witches; our word for healers. We brought their children into the world; we cured their sick; we washed and laid out the bodies of their dead. We were far from evil. We helped life and they did not like this at all. Whenever they saw our power it made them feel they had none. They themselves felt moon to our sun. And yet as every woman knows, the moon also has great power. We are connected to all three planes-present, past and future-of life, so is man, but he will not let himself see it. He has let himself be taught that his own mother is evil and has joined religions in which her only role, after nurturing and rearing him with her blood, is to shut up. (*The Temple* 196)

Carolyn Merchant comments that witchcraft was a natural religion, grounded on fertility and sexuality. The Christians were against witches because, for them, witches "symbolized wild and uncontrolled nature and witch trials persecuted women as the causes of natural disasters and of evil" (105). At the present day, some feminists try to revive witchcraft as an independent religion with its foundation on rituals, Goddess worship and folk wisdom. Wicca, the religion of witchcraft, believes that everything in nature possesses a spirit which must be worshipped. Wicca promotes Goddess worship as well as Earth worship which is lacking in the religions built on patriarchy. Many feminists and eco feminists find Wicca as a refuge as it is against prescriptive rules of the conventional religion which tend to suppress individuality of thought and action.

Walker stresses that everything in Nature is interconnected. Walker's spirituality includes not only Mother Earth, Nature and its manifestations, but also her ancestors as well. She declares in *Anything We Love Can be Saved:*

A year or so after being there I reconnected with the world of animals and spirits- in trees, old abandoned orchards, undisturbed riverbanks-I had known and loved as a child. I became aware that there is a very thin membrane, human-adult-made, that separates us from this seemingly vanished world, where plants and animals still speak a language, we humans understand, and I began to write about the exhilarating experience of regaining my childhood empathy. I discovered that not only is there an adult-made membrane separating us from animals, rocks, rivers and trees, ocean and sky, there is one separating us from our remote ancestors, who are actually so near that they are us. (128)

In *Now is the Time to Open Your Heart*, after consuming the Grandmother Medicine, Kate experiences a sequence of dreams. In one of the dreams, Kate dreams of Remus, a Black slave, one of her ancestors who teaches her the importance of exoneration and healing in one's lives. In the dream, Remus gives an account of his death by the White master. The Whites took pleasure in torturing and killing the Black slaves which provided them much of an entertainment. When one among the Whites shot him, the other man started to fight because killing the slave instantly robbed him off the opportunity to torture him. But Remus' message to Kate is not to take revenge on the Whites as he says: "Our job is to remind you of the ways you do not want to be…Sometimes I think this message is the hardest to get across because it flies in the face of our need to revenge"(97). Remus also makes a suggestion to Kate that "We feel the need to avenge, to make right. To heal by settling a score. Healing cannot be done by settling a score" (97).

Remus teaches the need for ecological conservation as well. Kate feels depressed to see the northern region of California, once lush with trees, is now bare as a result of clear-cutting. The young trees that were growing up lacked the shade and protection of their parent and grandparent trees. Walker here cautions that just like these young unprotected, brittle plants, those who have severed the ties with their ancestors will suffer an insecure, unshielded life. Ancestors serve as a huge refuge that provides security and strength to future generations. Remus educates Kate about the importance of conservation of trees:

> Do you think when a tree dies all its work is finished? Of course not. It then has the work of decomposing, of becoming soil in which other trees grow. It is very careful to do this, left to itself, and hauled off to a lumberyard. If is hauled off to a lumberyard and if nothing is left to decompose and nurture the young trees coming up…Disaster. (96)

Walker's own principle of ecological conservation is reflected in the words of her ancestor, Remus. For Walker, there is no separation between her self and Mother Earth. The influence of Native American spirituality upon Walker is notable; as she acknowledges the reciprocity of Nature and Earth with human beings.

Walker addresses through her narratives, a spirituality which is eco centric; to be more specific, eco womanistic. Her spirituality envisions a future where oppression and subjugation of Black women and Nature would be wiped out. Walker believes that people would shed their greed for material possessions and would find comfort in Nature's green lap. This optimism is reflected in these words: "The cathedral of the future will be nature….In the end people will be driven back to trees. To streams. To rocks that do not have anything built on them" (*By the Light* 193).

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Harry Potter Slash Fanfiction and Women's Writing: (Re)Writing Desire into Canon

Lakshmi Menon

Abstract: This paper examines slash fanfiction based on the Harry Potter series as a form of women's writing. In doing so, it seeks to explore the ways in which slash fanfiction as a genre, with its queering of canonical content and often explicitly sexual narratives, represents an avenue for women to explore ideas of desire and sexuality while separating it from the female body. Considering the readership is also largely female, it also looks at whether slash fanfiction constitutes a form of pornography for women, by women, and therefore whether it holds any potential to be examined as feminist texts.

Keywords: slashfanfiction, 'Pottermania,' queerness, female sexuality, fandom,

The standard definition of fanfiction is that it is a body of writing created by fans based on a pre-existing media or literary text. The definition of the word fan is one that has been debated over time and gone over various permutations. Henry Jenkins suggests that rather than being "cultural dupes, social misfits, and mindless consumers," media fans can be understood as "active producers and manipulators of meaning" (Jenkins 23). The community of these fans, in which this work of production and consumption takes place, is referred to as 'fandom.' The work of Jenkins significantly emphasises that fans are not just consumers but producers of meaning, and through this act of "poaching" their favourite texts, they create new creative material, most commonly in the form of fanfiction.

Throughout literary history there have been unofficial versions of existing texts. In the early part of the twentieth century, for instance, fans of *Sherlock Holmes* formed a group called the Baker Street Irregulars, who wrote original stories and articles analysing his life and work, all taken from the perspective that Holmes and the events in Arthur Conan Doyle's stories were real. It was the Irregulars who gave the name *canon* to the officially recognized body of work from which they inspired themselves, a term with theological

origins that remains in fanfiction parlance to the present day[1]. The scope of what falls under the term fanfiction has been debated over time. Before the advent of copyright laws, characters and plots from one text were free to be borrowed by other writers. Many of Shakespeare's plays, for instance, would fall under this category, as would works such as Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which is an unofficial prequel to Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, or James Joyce's *Ulysses*, which sets Homer's *Odyssey* in Dublin.

It was, however, in the 1960s that modern fanfiction took hold, adjacent to the widespread advent of television that made available to the public a significant number of popular cultural texts, for instance the science fiction series *Star Trek*. The 60s saw the growth of amateur magazines referred to as 'fanzines,' which proved to be suitable vehicles for the creative expression of the followers of cult television series such as the aforementioned *Star Trek* and *The Man from U.N.C.L.E*, among others. These 'fanzines' were created by fans for fans and operated on a purely non-professional and non-profit basis, and therefore because of high production and shipping costs, were generally read by middle-class women who had the free time and monetary resources to devote to reading and writing fanfiction. Many genres of fanfiction owe their origins to these early fanzines, and it needs to be remembered that by operating outside the institutional paradigms laid down by publication and distribution laws, fanfiction writers have been free to operate on their own terms. It is within this context that the emergence of the genre known as *slash* can be examined.

Slash fiction refers to narratives of romantic and/or erotic of relationships between two men. The name has his origins in the earliest stories of this kind, from the pairing of James T Kirk and Spock from Gene Roddenberry's *Star Trek: The Original Series*, written as 'Kirk/Spock' or 'K/S', the '/' being used to differentiate it from stories that had 'Kirk & Spock' which implied a friendship rather than a romance. We can trace the first Kirk/Spock fan fiction to a 1974 fanzine called Grup #3. The first slash fan fiction was titled "A Fragment Out of Time", written by Diane Marchant, and it was not sexually explicit when compared to stories that followed it. Slash remained not only limited to stories but extended to comics and pieces of art as well, all produced as part of the fannish process.

Slash fan fiction continued to proliferate in the form of fanzines and other underground fan publications until modern technology allowed for an inexpensive and vastly more accessible means for fan writers to spread their work - the world wide web. The advent of the internet and its endless possibility for the hosting and sharing of data brought about the single largest revolution in the world of fan made works. Blogs and online archives of fan fiction and art from a variety of genres were created for and made available to a worldwide

audience. These internet archives became spaces where users could upload content in fandoms of their choice. Multi-fandom archives gave users the ability to self-publish fan fiction in an easily accessible common space that did not require insider knowledge to join, and at the same time allowed them to review works posted on the site. Another development is the fact that with the arrival of a free, open-access space for writers to inhabit on the internet, the fan fiction community became not just a space for adults with the resources to participate in fandom, but also for adolescents and teenagers who could write with unprecedented license and without the necessity for adult approval. This freedom meant that writers could write stories that contain explicit contents without the fear of censure.

While there is a significant amount of fan fiction based on a number of television, film and literary fandoms, this paper is going to focus on those based on J.K Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. 'Pottermania' has led to fan sites, magazines, documentaries, a genre of music called 'Wizard Rock' and the single largest body of fan fiction dedicated to a single body of work found on the internet.

Fan fiction gives its writers the freedom to experiment with alternative modes of sexual discourse. A large portion of fan works are concerned with romance and sexuality, and a good percentage of them deal with homosexual relationships between the characters they portray. Slash is therefore one of the most popular genres of *Harry Potter* fan fiction, with numerous stories being published that contemplate on the possibility of homosexual love between characters in the series. On popular fanfiction sites fanfiction.net and archiveofourown, the most popular pairing in this regard is Harry Potter and his 'archnemesis' Draco Malfoy.

Henry Jenkins, author of *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, examines fan fiction as a form of deconstructive criticism. Fan fiction is, in essence, a reinterpretation of and commentary on the canon in question. It engages with the text just as literary criticism does; instead of critical essays that use text to respond to text, fan stories use fiction to respond to fiction. It is not hard to find all kinds of argumentation about interpretation woven through most fan produced stories. A good fan story is one that references key events or bits of dialogue within the original text to support its particular interpretation of the character's motives and actions. An example from the *Harry Potter* fandom would be stories based on a particular event from the books. The relationship between Harry and Draco Malfoy begins on a sour note when Harry judges the latter to be far too judgemental and classist to befriend, so when Malfoy holds out a hand of friendship

to Harry, he refuses. In the seventh book, Harry, in rescuing Malfoy from a room filled with Fiendfyre, reaches his hand out to him and Malfoy takes it. This, fans interpret, is the coming to full circle of their relationship, and leads the way to much more. The theme recurs in several stories to varying degrees, and is considered one of the significant moments in the progression of the pairing.

Jenkins sees slash fiction as not so much about sex as about creating complex emotional identities for beloved characters. It is the direct product of women consuming male-centric texts and consequently rewriting them to suit their own interests, "appropriating them into feminine paradigms of emotional realism" (Neville). Expanding this idea, and drawing on Michel de Certeau's idea of Brownian Motion, Constance Penley says that in fanwork, particularly slash, which she views as a utopian genre, fans rewrite mainstream media through 'guerrilla action,' reconfiguring it in order to see the relationships that they want to see in the media. Slash, much like pornography that is made explicitly for women, can then be seen as "cracks … [which] offer … a space from which we can view women's resistances and appropriation, where we can view women rewriting the narrative of the public and private and asserting their identity and agency in virtual spaces" (DeVoss 90). We can then see the act of creating pornographic texts, such as slash, by women, as both a kind of resistance and a kind of transgression, where women rewrite the narrative in a manner that is oppositional to the original modes of the text.

This brings us to the natural question of whether slash can be considered feminist, in that it is (predominantly) women's writing that relies heavily on the ideas of resistance. In addressing this, the first thing to keep in mind is that if it has feminist elements, they must be latent, as fan writers rarely set out with a feminist agenda of resistance, rather the resistance occurs as they participate in the act of writing. In engaging with and questioning popular notions of sex, sexuality, pornography and romance, one can trace the feminist thought in the agenda of slash fiction.

Adrienne Rich, in her 1980 essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," points out that female sexuality is regulated by socio-legal punishment and sexist ideologies discouraging autonomous assertions of desire. Also, male concepts of sexuality are forced upon women through the idealization of heterosexual romance in art, literature and the media (Rich 638-639). Fantexts destabilize this social narrative by emphasizing homoerotic potential. Through questioning and reconceptualising ideas of sexuality, sex and romance, slash writers end up fulfilling what can be defined as a feminist agenda in their work. Furthermore, there is the idea of the community as a safe space – one that, as

we have established, is supportive and accepting of most of its members. This feeling of community is important to women when dealing with sexually explicit material. “Asides from the fact that such a community offers writers an invaluable opportunity to receive constructive feedback on their writing, it also serves to help all members explore their own feelings about sex and sexuality in a safe and supportive environment.” (Neville 110) Open discussions about sexuality in fan spaces have often been conducive to young people who are trying to understand it and lack opportunities to discuss it openly outside of the internet. A fan community becomes a “dynamic space allows women to participate in issues of female sexuality and identity such as bisexuality, homosociality and other modes that contest the hierarchised heterosexual paradigm.” (Nagaike 99) The fan ‘sisterhood’ that writes and encourages others to write is a space for women to take their own libidos into their own hands without fear of being outcasts or misfits. They are free from the guilt that they would otherwise face as a result of the reactions of society in general, and their own psychologies in particular. Slash is a space for the exploration of the “inexhaustible female imaginary”, as Cixous would put it. The encouragement to write that members of the fan community give each other are similar to what Cixous says in “The Laugh of the Medusa" when she exhorts women to write, even if it is to “take the edge off”, paralleling writing with the act of masturbation, implying that women writing feel a similar sort of guilt. “Write, let no one hold you back, let nothing stop you: not man... and not yourself.” (Cixous 426) This, Rosi Braidotti theorises, is what the feminist project and feminist theory should really be about.

> What the feminism of sexual difference wants to free in women is ... their desire for freedom, justice, self-accomplishment and wellbeing: the subversive laughter of Dionysus as opposed to the seriousness of the Apollonian spirit. This political process ... does not aim at the glorification of the feminine, but rather its actualisation or empowerment as a political project aimed at alternative female subjectivities. (306)

It is therefore possible to say that a great part of the appeal of slash fanfiction lies in the ability for women to take charge over the right to express their own sexuality without any lingering Freudian guilt, to play with texts and worlds that were thus far closed to them by virtue of they being within the domain of male domination and due to an inaccessible erotics, and subvert societal expectations of innocence.

Female sexuality has been expressed in the form of fiction outside of slash as well, in mainstream romances published for female consumption under the label of erotica, famously exemplified by the existence of Mills & Boon and Harlequin Romances. These heterosexual narratives that emphasise the virtues of marriage and monogamy were for

many years considered to be the only kind of erotica that was appropriate for women to write or consume, although the explicit sexuality of these stories is a recent development. While there are many theories behind the popularity of romance novels among women, one of the most widespread ones is that they represent women's "insatiable appetite for love in all its guises" (Camp, 1997) Ann Snitow, in her analysis of mass market romances, delineates their dark aspects. She shows that the heroine is not allowed by social mores to acknowledge sexual desire honestly and has to do "a lot of social lying to save face, pretending to be unaffected by the hero's presence while her body melts or shivers" because she has to save her virginity for marriage (125). Distance between the sexes is glorified and the sexual inexperience of the heroine adds to excitement (426).

…What is the Harlequin romance formula? ...All tensions and problems arise from the fact that the Harlequin world is inhabited by two species incapable of communicating with each other, male and female. It is pleasing to think that appearances are deceptive, that male coldness, absence, boredom, are not what they seem.…In spite of his coldness or preoccupation, the hero really loves the heroine and wants to marry her. (Snitow 424, 426)

In wanting to repair the broken hero and see beyond his façade of masculine coldness, the romances seem to be teaching women readers the feminine values of "of nurturing, of aspiring, of following your heart, and of finding success or rewards" (Camp 47). The study of the popularity of slash would require a different set of parameters.

Salmon and Symons in *Warrior Lovers* suggest that while in Harlequin style heterosexual romance stories, the protagonists are drawn closer through their sexual attraction and it is through their sexual encounter that a bond is established between them, in slash stories it is often the inverse – the bond between the characters is already in place before the sex happens. Therefore in the case of many heterosexual romances, sex is what leads to love, and the development of a strong bond between the hero and the heroine, while in the case of slash, it is love (or perhaps the begrudging respect of a rival) that leads to sex. "Slash protagonists put their hands in the fire for each other long before romantic love or sex were on the horizon" (Salmon and Symons3). Slash is thus grounded on an intense M/M relationship, whether between friends or rivals. More importantly, a slash relationship is between men, and as such it is a relationship between *equals*: neither party is required to – as women traditionally are – compromise or drastically change their lifestyle or personality without negotiation. In the case of a couple such as Harry and Draco, who begin as rivals or enemies, the allure is even stronger, as part of the pleasure is seeing their negotiation of expectations of male aggression (rather than friendship) in terms of desire, a dynamic that is rarely seen outside of fanfiction. In pornography, according to Catherine Driscoll, "Not

only is characterization not the point of most pornography, it is even an obstacle to the efficiency of pornography…." (91). In contrast to the denial of the emotional consequences of sex in most porn, in slash sex always has direct and dramatic emotional ramifications. (Kustritz 377-378)

Is slash ultimately pornographic? In *The Other Victorians*, Stephen Marcus talks about how one of pornography's most defining features is the construction of porntopias. which are essentially backgrounds for what is referred to in fandom as Porn Without Plot: they are set in locations that are nowhere in particular, "no place" that, if named, is irrelevant; time is only important to indicate how long the sex act or series of sex acts last; characters are only defined as participants in sex and the only climax present is the sexual one. Sex, therefore, is all that is significant in narratives of this kind.

All men in it are always and infinitely potent: all women fecundate with lust and flow inexhaustibly with sap or juice or both. Everyone is always ready for anything, and everyone is infinitely generous with his substance. It is always summertime in pornotopia, and it is a summertime of the emotions as well – no one is ever jealous, possessive, or really angry. (Marcus, cited in Pagliasotti 76)

According to Marcus, then, pornography is a utopian genre, a perfect world in which everything is eternal – from the weather to the virility of the participants in the act of sex. If this is the definition of pornography that we are to accept – with its lack of characterisation and lack of context – then slash is decidedly not pornographic. Even Porn Without Plot stories are still rooted in the fact that the readers go into these stories knowing everything there is to know about the characters, their personalities, and the context from their exposure to them in canon. Readers require there to be some form of a story to make the experience 'worthwhile.' As a result, in most fanfiction there is a privileging of romance and emotions over raw sex. It "wraps sex in the emotionalism of romance" as Snitow says. Her view on pornography is that there is a total sensory immersion in the experience and a desire for "complete, immediate gratification" If we are to accept a combination of both Snitow's and Marcus' views, then the worlds of even the most plotless PWP slash fic are porntopias where random, but intense, sexual encounters take place but they do not stand on their own, they are mostly supplemented with elements of story and character development to make them more appealing.

Slash fic foregrounds the female act of viewing a male homoerotic display, shifting the position of the woman from being the gazed upon object to the gazing subject while men become the object of the gaze. It is a representation of female desire from a scoptophilic

perspective, making the women the viewers and voyeurs and therefore the ones who derive pleasure from the act of viewing. While this is subversive in the act of making the women the viewers rather than the viewed, introducing the female gaze and giving women the power to make men the objects of desire, it cannot be concluded that slash is an all pervasive solution to challenging the male gaze. This is because of the element of guilt that women experience when they take on this position of viewer.

Women have traditionally been separated from the realm of the erotic which was always a very phallo-centric space. There are also the psychological complexities associated with a sense of guilt. In "A Child is Being Beaten", Freud defines the concept of female sexuality in terms of their inevitable feelings of guilt due to their unconscious (incestuous) desires. The guilt need not be uniformly due to incestuous desires, however. It can be theorised that women feel guilt and shame about identifying with female characters in pornography, who express pleasure and achieve sexual satisfaction by means of male penetration. To escape the guilt associated with the consumption of heterosexual pornographic material, women create slash stories with their narratives of male homosexual eroticism "in which female readers needn't consider the disadvantages of exposing their eroticism, since the mystified female sexual identity that fetters women in other forms of society is excluded from the male homosexual narratives." (Nagaike 84) In identifying with male characters rather than female characters and projecting their own sexuality onto them, female readers are capable of obtaining the "ambivalent and balanced status" of simultaneously identifying with and dissociating from the protagonists in a scene. This sentiment is echoed by Gunn, who said that it is because of the absence of women in m/m pornography that she doesn't "feel bound into an ideological discourse about the misrepresentation of my likeness." (336)

Women use slash to express their own gendered or sexual experiences and desires, and slash transgresses the norm just by existing because fans, through writing and reading, critique and respond to cultural norms within canon through their own, often marginalized and neglected experiences. Through the medium of slash fic, women have been able to express their innate sexual desires and their 'kinks' in narratives that are suitably distanced from themselves through the absence of the female body. Unlike the readers of the romances Janice Radway interviewed in her seminal text, the readers of slash are less reluctant to reveal their kinks and their propensity for reading highly sexual works of fiction. In fandom spaces, it is as common for readers to compliment writers for well written pornographic scenes as it is for a piece of plot exposition. Fandom participants also speak openly about how it is through exposure to smutty fan fiction that they have been able to understand various forms of sexuality, especially with regard to homosexuality. For

many, it is through slash that they overcome internalised homophobia. "Fan fiction as a means of communication and a fictional framework has clearly demonstrated that traditional romance literature does not reflect sensual experiences of women in modern western societies. It does not reflect either their degree of sexual awareness, or their need for sexually-oriented texts." (Samutina, 19) The popularity of a series like EL James's *50 Shades of Grey* is testament to the fact that women readers are increasingly gravitating towards romances with explicit sexual content.

The appeal of slash does not stem from the sexual content alone, but more from the romantic, emotional content. There is a sense of monogamy between the characters in most stories, and the appeal of this is heightened with the 'pure love' underlying the relationships. "Establishing an ideal harmony between the sensual and the emotional, achieving wholesomeness of sexual and spiritual communication is a desirable outcome of an emerging relationship and a popular convention of fan fiction – in this notion of love Utopia, fan fiction fully concurs with basic forms of melodrama." (Samutina 20) Joanna Russ points out the role that fanfiction plays in helping women in figuring out their sexualities. In adding tropes like hurt/comfort to the erotica, it is the emotional bond that is exemplified, love prevailing over other issues. Taking off from her examination of Star Trek Kirk/Spock fanfiction, it is possible to say that writing and reading fanfiction, regardless of how explicit, is not necessarily a *guilty* pleasure but one of the self: an acceptable, valid interest.

The problem with an essentializing statement such as saying that all slash writers are women, or even white women, is that a) it is nearly impossible to confirm as surveys can never cover the entirety of a fan space and people may lie, and b) it is equally impossible that there are no slash readers or writers who do not identify as female. In fact, many studies have shown that slash is created and consumed by people who belong to a multiplicity of races and gender/sexual identities, and that there is a great number of openly queer women creating slash. It is also true that the very idea of creating sexually explicit material – regardless of the queer content of said material – for other women can be considered a queer enterprise in itself. Darlene Hampton theorises that the production, reading and discussion of fanworks –under the anonymity of internet pseudonyms and personas – can be considered to be performing queerness as well, through the directing of bodies and desire in ways that are contrary to the legitimate, 'canonical' interpretations of the original text.

Therefore, as a space of women's writing, the act of creating fan fiction allows for erotic exploration and an engagement with desire that would otherwise not be accessible to them. As slashers continue to take stories and bend them to their own wills, exploring and widening the gaps in the text and creating works that reflect multiple possibilities of identity, they find erotic pleasure and a sense of empowerment in the act of subversion. Harry and Draco may therefore be doomed to be forever locked in mortal combat or in a passionate embrace – the possibilities are, as far as slash writers are concerned, endless.

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In a 1911 essay 'Studies in the Literature of Sherlock Holmes,' Ronald Knox jokingly compares the Sherlock Holmes stories to the Bible. Early fandom took to referring to the collected works as 'Canon,' implying sacred writings.

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'Being a New Christian:' Dalit Resistance in Paul Chirakkarode's*Pulayathara*

S. Devika

Abstract: In India, as Christian converts are reckoned to have moved out of the ambit of the caste system, untouchable Hindu castes – the Dalits – converted to Christianity to reap the fruits of a higher social status within the Christian fold. Paul Chirakkarode's novel *Pulayathara* exposes the futility of the strategy of conversion to Christianity used by the Dalits to extricate themselves from the morass of casteism and to upgrade their social status, as the power structures of caste continue to operate within the church to discriminate against the neo-converts. It brings to light the disjuncture between the promised sense of equality and the lived experience of discrimination that conversion to Christianity had in store for the downtrodden people. This paper attempts an exposition of the dialectics of proselytization foregrounded in *Pulayathara* as a strategy of resistance against the enslavement, ill treatment and exploitation of the Dalits, a motif that recurs in Chirakkarode's oeuvre.

Key words: Proselytization, Dalit Christians, Evangelisation, Casteism, Communism

The meeting was about to begin. The new generation had decided to speak.
(Chirakkarode, *Pulayathara* 197)

During the feudal times, the lower castes, whose chief functionality in the extant social spectrum was to provide menial labour in the agricultural fields, were kept depressed in a constant state of enslavement and exploitation by the centuries-old practice of caste division within the Hindu fold. To escape the ostracism of caste, the oppressed lot sought refuge in a religion that remained outside the spectrum of caste – Christianity. The missionaries adopted the two-pronged expedient of educating and proselytizing the degraded classes in order to uplift and endow them with dignity and a respectable place in

society. Paul Chirakkarode in his novel *Pulayathara* (literally, 'Pulaya Hutment'; published in 1962 and translated into English in 2019 by Catherine Thankamma) depicts proselytization as a strategy of resistance against the enslavement, ill treatment and exploitation of the Dalits. Even as the power structures of caste continue to operate within the Church to discriminate against the neo-converts, early echoes of resistance lend a history-making significance to the narrative, making it a radical departure for the times.

Paul Chirakkarode is a prolific writer of novels, short stories, biographies and numerous critical and political tracts in Malayalam. Some of his significant works include *Pulayathara* and the trilogy *Mathil* (Walls), *Nizhal* (Shadows) and *Velicham* (Light). An orator and human rights activist, he is one of the pioneers of Dalit Literary Movement in India, who used the power of the pen to raise consciousness about the subhuman life of the Dalits in Kerala. In a review of *Pulayathara*, noted Malayalam novelist K. R. Meera hints at the empathy with which Chirakkarode writes of the downtrodden people: "Born to a converted Christian preacher, Paul Chirakkarode in his books provides not just the peripheral view most readers are accustomed to, but also an intense engaging experience of bleeding with the people who have been brutally exploited for generations " (1). *Pulayathara* brings to light the disjuncture between the promised sense of equality and the lived experience of discrimination that conversion to Christianity had in store for Dalits. This paper attempts, with reference to the novel, an exposition of the dialectics of proselytization and Dalit resistance, a motif that recurs in Chirakkarode's oeuvre.

With the arrival of the Christian missionaries along with the imperialists in India and the advent of proselytization in the 18th century, a good number of people from the depressed Hindu castes converted to Christianity for uplift in social status, as people moved out of the ambit of the oppressive caste system upon conversion to Christianity: "Conversion appealed as at least an apparent escape from the caste system for those who despaired of achieving improvement of their lot within the system" (Forrester 114). But the reality was vastly different in Kerala because of the presence of a privileged Christian group, the Syrian Christians. The Syrian Christians of Kerala, believed to be descendants of high caste (Brahmin) converts of the Apostle St. Thomas in the first century A.D., were people of consequence, commanding the respect and esteem of the upper caste Hindus. By the time the Portuguese arrived in the 15th century, the Syrian Christians had, for centuries, "been encapsulated within caste society, regarded by Hindus as a caste, occupying a recognized (and high) place within the caste hierarchy" (Forrester 14). The Portuguese carried on zealous missionary efforts to convert the masses to Roman Catholicism, but mostly from the fishing communities: "The new converts accordingly became unambiguously separate

Latin Christians and no attempt was made to integrate them with the Syrian Church" (Forrester 104). The British missionaries who arrived with the imperialists were appalled by the social inequities among the various classes, in particular the degraded state of the slaves belonging to the low castes (Dempsey 22). It was resolved in the conference of 1857 that "the slaves are to be introduced into our Churches and to partake of the ordinances of the religion and stand on the same footing as other members of the Church" (cited in Dempsey 22). "Attracted by this novel idea, the slaves flocked into the Christian Church," writes Demsey (166). Evangelization was extremely successful among the Dalits. As Forrester notes, "by the 1880s there were some 16,000 CMS Christians, of whom more than half were of Pulaya stock and roughly a quarter were Syrians" (108). The missionaries strove to claim for the converts the status and privileges enjoyed by the Syrian Christians. Ironically, while fighting for the rights of the neo-converts, the missionaries held separate congregations for Syrians and lower caste converts as a temporary expedient, though they "kept up pressure on the Syrians to admit converts to their congregations" (ibid).

The high-caste Christians treated the neo-converts as low-caste Christians and discriminated against them, though they initially enticed them to Christianity with promises of dignity and deliverance from the injustices of the caste system, notes Srinivasan (22). Ninan Koshy writes in Caste *in the Kerala Churches that* "the exclusiveness of the Syrian Christians as a distinct caste and their apparent determination to perpetuate this" has contributed to inter-caste tensions in the Kerala Church (cited in Forrester 110). The status quo of class distinctions was strictly maintained within the Christian church in Kerala in the post-independence era too.

As translator Catherine Thankamma notes in her "Introduction" to the novel, Chirakkarode's*Pulayathara* "is the earliest literary narrative that records the debilitating complexities of Dalit Christian experience and the hollowness of religious conversion in Kerala's caste-ridden society. It is undocumented history, history from the margins" (x). It primarily depicts the exploitation and marginalization of the converts from lower castes and illustrates how the power structures in place quelled the early voices of revolt using any expedient available. However, the novel culminates with the portrayal of their "tentative steps towards self-articulation and affirmation of identity" (xii).

The Church in Kerala saw in its acutest form "the problems arising from having Christians of widely different caste backgrounds and social status within one church," notes Forrester (97). In *Pulayathara*, though the Hilltop Church is established with the aim of "the spiritual and material growth of the downtrodden people of that land," the mission fails as "the

upper-caste Christians could never view the Pulaya Christians as their brothers" (Chirakkarode85). Custodian Thomas' words encapsulate the notions of superiority that Syrian Christians harbour and the resultant disdainful attitude towards the low-caste converts: "We are the old Christians aren't we? The ones with ancestry. We baptised some Parayar and Pulayar, sprinkled holy water on their foreheads, drew the sign of the Cross, and made them Christians …. We, the early Christians, did not like it. But the missionaries insisted on it" (84). These words are indicative of the general superior attitude of the upper caste Syrian Christians in Kerala, the social prejudices that marginalized the new Christians and the contempt in which the neo-converts were held on grounds of class and caste inferiority in the hegemonic feudal social order.

Historically, though lured into Christianity with a promise of erasure of the stigma of untouchability from their lives, the converts were soon made to realize that this promise of social equality was not to be honoured. Converts from labourer and artisan castes were seldom accorded equal status with their Syrian patrons. Bitter disappointment awaited the low caste Hindus, who converted to Christianity to shed the stigma of their inferiority in the eyes of other Hindus, as "the Syrians reacted, on the whole, precisely in the manner of a Hindu caste," notes Forrester (114). The Syrian Christians, who considered themselves a class apart, despised the neo-converts, and asserted their distinction and power in the caste framework.

The power structures in the traditional Syrian Christian community worked against the newly converted Christians to reinforce caste and class divisions. This is amply illustrated in *Pulayathara*. Caste bigotry surfaces in its monstrous form when the name of Preacher Pathros is suggested for speaker at the monthly special meeting to be held in the Hilltop Church at Pallithara. He is one among the low caste people who joined the Church in order to eke out a living working in the fields owned by the Church, and cherished the hope that "when he died his body would be buried in the Mission-owned cemetery…The dream of a grave for the corpse—what other dream could the Pulayan have, he who worked himself to exhaustion every day?" (Chirakkarode187). Pathros, who lives in "a low-roofed thatched shack on the southern side of the Church" and does "bone breaking labour" in the fields, is a "devout believer" (36) and an eloquent speaker with extraordinary powers, whose "voice was enough for waves of repentance to surge in the congregation of the Hilltop Church" (39). But, the machinations of Custodian Thomas - a descendent of "an ancient family" whose beginning could be "traced to one of the ancient Brahmin families" converted by St. Thomas and a "representative of the upper castes" – were directed at rescuing the prestige of his clan and saving his friends from the fate of having to listen to a "Pelayan preacher"

speak (39-41). A youngster like Paulos interrogates why an excellent orator among them is denied the opportunity to preach, "Why didn't they call our Preacher Pathros? Why bring an unknown preacher from somewhere?" (62). However, "the inclination to question grew cold and died" (ibid) as the acquiescence of his fellow beings nullifies the possibility of any meaningful resistance: "Heated thoughts filled the minds of those poor men, rushing into their hearts – thoughts that they could not articulate" (61).

The neo-convert metamorphoses into "a new being" when he becomes a Christian. The new Christian participates whole heartedly in all the activities of the Church. A devout believer like OuthaPulayan has no qualms about giving up the ancestral way of life he had known until then: "From the time he had joined the Church, OuthaPulayan had lived like a true Christian. Drinking, drum-beating, performing black magic, it had all come to an end. He had never walked that path again" (65). The Church instils into him the inviolability and sacrosanctity of its decrees: "There are certain rules to be followed by the Parayan and Pulayan who join the true religion. That set of rules keeps his life tightly bound. They are not something anyone can break. Even if one had the strength to do it, one should not. Religion forbids it" (66). Veiled threats of eviction and excommunication follow when it is brought to the attention of the Church that, "People of another faith were staying in the true Christian Pathros's home" (95). As a tenant in the mission-owned land, Pathros has "the good fortune of being able to grow some ten shoots of tapioca and make a meal of it" during the lean season (64). His sense of gratitude is so intense that it virtually blinds him to the fact that he is a victim caught in the web of exploitation spun by the Church: "He should be more loyal than other members of the Church" (67), Pathros tells himself.

The Dalit labourers, who live in the property of the Church and do back-breaking work – women join the menfolk too – in the paddy fields all day till nightfall, have no rights to any of the produce they strive so hard to cultivate and harvest. Chirakkarode attributes this to the "greed of the class in power," "eager to get hold of the Church's wealth" (133). Pathros, one of the non-beneficiaries, "had no complaints. He did not even think that they were denying him his right" (50). "Complaints arise only when there is awareness, isn't that so?" (50), asks Chirakkarode, who takes strong exception to the superstructure of exploitation that the Church has imposed on the Dalit labour class and bewails the lack of awareness that has kept the labour class in a state of virtual enslavement for centuries.

Chirakkarodecriticises the caste and class discrimination that lies deeply entrenched in all areas of the operational structure of the Church. Christianity belied the expectations of the

neo-converts in the matter of erasing caste distinctions and in according to them the dignity that was denied within the Hindu fold. The semblance of equality that the Church brought with proselytization, for all intents and purposes, is a mere farce, as caste feelings remain as strong as ever below the surface. *Pulayathara* exposes the social bigotry inscribed in the practices of the Church. For instance, the funeral services foreground the social disparity and hierarchy among the congregation that the Church keeps buoyant for its own self-serving interests. The passing of wealthy Syrian Christians is observed with pomp: "When a rich man died even his death became an event" (Chirakkarode74). The stark differences in the physical structure of the tombs of the Syrian Christians and the graves of the neo-converts is another case in point: The "sandy mounds were the graves of new Christians and poverty-stricken Syrian Christians. Those graves would erode over a period of time... there were no memorials for them" (74). The positioning of the laity during mass also reinforces the inferior status of the neo-converts:

The new Christians in front, behind them the ones with ancient Christian lineages… at the back of the church there were benches with backrests. The upper-caste Christians heard the true Gospel leaning back against these comfortably…However, right in front, woven mats were laid for the low-caste Christians. Their fate was to sit on the floor. But they had no complaints about it. That was because they had never considered this a grievance at all." (55)

Kandankoran, who joins the Church and assumes a new name Thoma in order to marry a new Christian's daughter, has a rude awakening regarding the true status of the Dalit convert: "So what if the Pulayan receives the Christian faith, if the holy of holies baptism water falls on his forehead, if a cross is drawn on his forehead, if he gets a new name? All that does not change his *pula*, his untouchable status" (115). He laments the fact that, as a new Christian, he does not have "an identity of his own" and that he, as a "cursed creature" (ibid), "would never know peace again" (116). Kandankoran feels orphaned in that Church and its surroundings. This was not his world. His world of labour lay far away. Those fields called out to him. He could hear it with the ears of his soul. But he couldn't answer because he had become the slave of a new religion" (150). His becomes the representative Dalit Christian voice of regret at the loss of inheritance from forefathers: "Why did this name 'ThomaPulayan' happen?" he bemoans (172).

Chirakkarode's narrative echoes the waves of change that were sweeping across the land under the influence of macro-movements like social reformation, communist consciousness, efforts at educating the depressed classes that were taken up with vigour by the Christian missionaries, and so on. If speaking against the feudal lord was a sacrilege

inconceivable to the dependant labourers in times of yore, *Pulayathara*envisions the movement towards a social change in the stray voices that question the Church's exploitation of the Dalit Christians, a significant first step towards gaining the agency to resist exclusion: "'Did you make us join the Church to make us slaves?'" (47); "'If all of us share the same heaven, why don't we all sit on the same mat in Church?'" (134); "Why was all this done if caste superiority existed within the Church? Was it not better that the Pulayar and Parayar did not join the Church?" (101); "But if slavery continued even after conversion, wasn't that bad?" (101). Chirakkarode comments that, "In the storm raised by that question the foundation of the Hilltop Church was shaking" (47). However, he adds: "No one could find an acceptable answer…Their selfhood had not grown that much" (ibid); "what the solution was and how to find it was something they did not know—not possessing the knowledge for that" (191). Thus, lack of sufficient awareness to find answers and to initiate suitable action deters the translation of words of resistance into deeds for a long time.

In *Pulayathara*, Chirakkarode indicates the role played by communists in infusing this much-needed awareness and a spirit of rebellion among those mired in the morass of casteism and discrimination. In a context where Christianity failed to deliver the promises of equality and brotherhood, Communism, touting notions of classlessness and equal rights, captured the imagination of Kerala in the first half of the 20th century. The origins of Communism, Robin Jeffrey comments in his article "Peasant Movements and the Communist Party," were situated in the context of the collapse of "social and religious structures" and the rise of a situation in which communism provided the answers that gods and ceremonies did not (cited in Menon 192-193). Following the formation of the Communist Party of India in 1924, Communism made its presence felt in large cities and industrial centres like Bombay and Calcutta at a time when "the workers were sunk in mass poverty, ignorant of their rights and deprived of leadership" (Balakrishnan 35). In Kerala, a unit of the party was secretly established only in 1939, notes Nossiter in *Communism in Kerala* (65). Led by a concern for the working class and peasantry, the communists organized the peasants and workers, spreading the doctrine that "Gandhian techniques were ineffective and the way of the red flag was the only way for the liberation of the toiling people" (Balakrishnan 115). Leaders like A. K. Gopalan worked among the masses and fought for people's causes, which gained great popularity for the party. They were looked upon as champions of the have-nots and the upholders of the rights of the peasants, students, factory workers, labourers, etcetera (Nair 76). The Communists prioritized crucial issues like land reform, debt relief, labour problems in the agitations, which helped increase the electoral base and took them to victory in the 1957 assembly elections (Balakrishnan

12). Kerala became the first state in the world, "apart from the miniscule Italian principality of San Marino, to form a democratically elected communist government" (Menon 1). However, its attempts to subvert vested interests of the bourgeoisie in land and education triggered powerful opposition which culminated in the Liberation Struggle of 1959, leading to the dismissal of the ministry on 31 July 1959.

Regarding communists' attitude to the issue of caste in Kerala, there are differing views. If Dilip M. Menon underscores the "reshaping of communism into a doctrine of caste equality" (2), Balakrishnan denounces the early communists for refraining from the work of eradicating "the inhuman practice of untouchability and related miseries" on the grounds that untouchability being "a religious affair of the Hindus," the socialists, "opposed to all religions," could not "support a measure aimed at religious reformism" (50). M. G. S. Narayanan points out that "Seldom did a member of the *Paraya* or *Pulaya* community climb to the top leadership of the Communist party in spite of their claim that they stood for the depressed classes" (xix). The compromising stance of the communists as regards the caste issue is hinted at by Selig Harrison who writes in *India: The Most Dangerous Decades* that the communist success is largely due to their ability to identify themselves with "the chauvinism of region and caste" and their "rootedness in the communal fabric of society" (cited in Menon 193).

Nossiter, discussing the effects of the communist government's much-famed Agrarian Relations Bill in *Marxist State Governments in India* (60), holds that it had a limited impact on the social structure of Kerala. Though landlordism was virtually eliminated by it, the long-drawn-out process of legislation allowed landowning families to spread the surplus above the land ceiling among their extended kin. The transfer of proprietary rights undoubtedly benefited all classes of tenants but most of them belonged to the favoured castes and communities. Those untouchable castes who toiled in the fields as labourers gained the right to their hut and a few cents of land surrounding it, but this did not fundamentally alter their place at the bottom of the social and economic hierarchy.

In Kerala, the landlord class of Syrian Christians and the communists have always had a troubled relationship. Christians were anti-communists primarily because the Church of Kerala was conservative and also because the communist government made attempts to wrest control of education from the Church **(**Nossiter, *Marxist State Governments in India* 71). As for the communists, the early Christian penetration of the lowest Hindu castes circumscribed the progress of their movement, especially in Travancore and Cochin (Nossiter, *Communism in Kerala* 78).

In *Pulayathara,*Chirakkarode outlines the impact of Communism in awakening awareness, provoking resistance and unifying the labourers to fight for their rights. The Church takes precautionary measures to pre-empt any subversion of the authority of its power. Nevertheless, Communism plays a significant part in creating awareness among the Dalit Christians about their degraded state and the need to question the manipulative institutions and power structures that have been in place for centuries. Kochumolumbram, the area where converted Christians live, is nicknamed 'Moscow' by the locals, as "most of the new Christians in that area had communist sympathies" (Chirakkarode47). When the Church warns the congregation, "Particularly in these times, there is a Satan. Its name is Communism" (148), Thoma readily commiserates with the communists, "Were they not trying to bring justice and equality in the society?" (149). When Daniel Master explains the patterns of discrimination and exploitation to them, "the frustration that was frothing within each one of them acquired a distinct shape. The awareness they gained was precious" (192). Chirakkarode captures the awakening among the Dalit Christians thus:
The new Christians were forming a union of agricultural labourers… They knew many things they had known before. They asked questions boldly. Class sense had awakened in them. When they hear that they have been exploited for centuries, when they realise that the fruits of their labour were enjoyed by rich farmers and landowners, won't they be furious? The instinct to resist is innate. It cannot be stopped. (47)

The recovery of the agency of the Dalit Christian is embodied in the youngster Paulos who "brimmed with the zeal of rebellion. It had happened when he realized for the first time that he was marginalized. There sprouted within him the confidence to resist anything and anybody, the feeling that he could sweep aside whatever resistance might rise against him" (166). Conducting a meeting on the mission grounds without the permission of the Church is the "first enactment of that great resistance" (ibid). Even OuthaPulayan musters the courage to question the committee decision to invite a speaker "without the knowledge of the dark-skinned committee members, without their consent" (160): "The thing is, our people have been cheated by Achan and Custodian Thomas. Their songs and prayers are meaningless, utterly meaningless; they have enslaved us in the name of the Church" (164). The realisation that the upper-caste Christians control and enjoy the fruits of the wealth of the Christian congregation, while the "poor Parayan and Pulayan had no right to it" (163), gives rise to the question, "Where did the huge income from all that wealth go?" (ibid). The novel celebrates the rise of the subaltern voices of dissent that demand a separate congregation for Dalit Christians, with their own bishop.

Chirakkarode also alludes to another tool that has contributed to the denting of the power structures of caste and class – education. Along with the communist movement, the spread of English education marked the beginning of a social awakening in Kerala, which derailed the values that safeguarded the interests of the upper castes. As Eapen writes, the Church Missionary Society missionaries converted the depressed classes, and used education as an instrument for their social uplift (166-167). In the agrarian setup, the exploited agricultural workers resigned themselves to their plight, as their peasant masters supported them in times of distress (23). Also, it was believed among the lower castes that God created the difference in the social and economic status of people, and if they reconciled to their fate of subjection and subordination without a murmur they would be rewarded by God with a higher caste in their subsequent births (Bhai 103). But the impact of education shook up such beliefs. As Menon writes, education was seen as the panacea for poverty and inequality, and the communists fuelled the desire for education, which was met by the increasing opportunities provided by a hierarchy of elementary, secondary and high schools (144-145). The rise in literacy found expression in the number of reading rooms that were established both in the countryside and in towns. *Prabhatham*, launched in 1936 with E. M. S. Namboodiripad, as its editor, catered mainly to workers and peasants (146). There followed an awakening that brought with it a desire for material prosperity and better living conditions among the poor and the underprivileged lot.

Pulayathara denounces the strategy of subjugation by which the lower classes were kept in a state of ignorance for long. Even in the era of change and social reform, governmental efforts at encouraging the education of lower castes come to naught, as "the heads of schools, blinded by caste norms, would not permit it," as indicated in the novel (Chirakkarode 81). Pathros, attributes his lack of education to the exploitative social norms:

> If only he had learned to read…The need for education had never stuck him so hard before. But had the Pulayar deliberately decided not to study? No! Society—controlled by a set of norms that the upper castes had created in the name of God-would not permit it. Those norms were like iron, they could not be challenged or overcome. (80)

Education instils attitudes favourable for social advancement among the Dalit Christians: "Of late some of their children had started to attend the English school" (191), of whom, it is hoped, at least a few would pass the examination and find employment. Chirakkarode lauds Kandankoran/Thoma's act of resistance in naming his son "Thiruvanchan Pulayan" after his father: "He would not allow another new Christian to be offered to the Church. Let his son at least be free" (197). Kandankoran dreams of a better life for his son through

education: "I will send my son to school, educate him. I will not let him become some landlord's slave. You wait and see" (ibid).

It is true that religious conversion promoted by the agency of the missionaries, the communist crusade and the tool of education offered means to resist the power grid of caste and class in the society of Kerala. Mass religious conversion was one of the earliest strategies at the macro-level that attempted to dent the power structures of caste in the society of Kerala. It was a bid made by the lower castes to escape the power politics of caste in Hinduism. But it failed to pay off, as the Syrian Christians, who claimed an upper-caste position by virtue of both their avowed Brahmin ancestry and their exalted status as wealthy landlords, followed all the ostracism practices of high-caste Hindus against the lower castes. Chirakkarode, in *Pulayathara* illustrates that conversion to Christianity has not made a real difference to the social status of the lower castes. The stigma of caste is not eradicated from the lives of the Dalit Christians in Pallithara, for the neo-converts are seen to be subjected to caste prejudice and the same sort of ostracism they faced from Hindu upper castes. The new converts are treated with contempt by the aristocratic Syrian Christian community, who consider themselves a class apart. Chirakkarode points to the general awakening among the exploited classes which was triggered by the communist movement that underscored equality and opportunity for all; but whether it has translated into any meaningful erasure of social margins from a caste perspective, he leaves largely unstated. He, undoubtedly, reposes faith in education as a tool for social change. Chirakkarode's assertion, "The new Christian would come awake. What would the result be?" (135), reflects this hope for a better future for the Dalits.

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Female Body as a Site of Power and Resistance: The Sexual Politics of Eating in Fay Weldon's *The Fat Woman's Joke* and Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman*.

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Abstract: Patriarchy insists that the hallmark of an ideal woman is slenderness and a beautiful physique. Women often try to conform to the patriarchal standards, by deliberate undereating and also by undergoing various cosmetic surgeries. Women resort to various eating habits in order to be a part of the media and film industry. Both Fay Weldon and Margaret Atwood endeavour to examine the 'sexual politics' associated with gender images and how women imprison their bodies into an ideal image trap. The heroines of Weldon and Atwood, in the novels,*The Fat Woman's Joke* and*The Edible Woman*, resist the commodification of the female body, in their own ways- one by excessive eating and the other by restricted intake of food. For them, the body becomes a means by which they can assert their individuality and not a manipulated identity, as defined by the phallocratic culture.

Key words: commodification, anorexia, bulimia, fetishized, emotional cannibalism.

One of the least sentimental and highly imaginative of writers, Fay Weldon is one of Britain's most admired and translated writers. She renders with humour and high drama, the self deception and pain, which men and women inflict upon themselves and upon each other. She does not portray women as despicable creatures of dependence, passivity and indecision, with a propensity for excessive self-sacrifice. She lays stress on the positive value of feminine qualities, which include sensitivity, gentleness and an ability to co-operate and nurture. Weldon feels that women are not just 'decorative'; a major share of the world's work is imposed on them.

In world literature, the 'commodification' and humiliation of women have become favourite fictional themes. Fay Weldon leaves no stone unturned in holding upto ridicule the oppressive effects of the model of femininity popularized by the fashion industry. Her novel, *The Fat Woman's Joke*, reveals Weldon's strong disapproval of the prescriptions and prohibitions for femininity prevailing in and promoted by the phallocratic culture, which insists that women should be petite, demure, receptive and above all attractive. To put it otherwise, to be unattractive is to be unwomanly. It is no wonder that many a woman, in order to pander to the sexist views of men, finds herself under compulsion to re-model herself along petite lines. This tendency on the part of women to rise to patriarchal expectations of feminine behaviour and appearance is what comes in for Weldon's sharp castigation in the novel, *The Fat Woman's Joke*.

Naomi Wolfe, a major figure in post-feminist criticism, in her monumental work, *The Beauty Myth*, focuses attention on the false positions that women are constrained to take, in order to conform to standards of beauty laid down by the fashion and cosmetic industry. She points out that anorexia (starving oneself to become slim, as a result of distorted perception of weight) and bulimia (overeating followed by inappropriate methods of weight control) are offshoots of such standards. The insatiable appetite of bulimia is often interspersed with bouts of anorexia. Deliberate undereating enables a woman to obtain male approval and gain control over her body. But in doing so, she may lose grip on her mental faculties. This amounts to an exchange of one kind of bondage for another and this idea finds expression in Weldon's *The Fat Woman's Joke*.

Margaret Atwood, the celebrated Canadian writer, known for her feminist perspective in her debut novel, *The Edible Woman*, focuses on consumer culture and the stifling social conventions of the mid-sixties. The novel explores the theme of identity crisis along with restrictive expectations placed on young women of the time. Gender stereotypes and consumerism are dexterously woven into the fabric of the novel, and the heroine Marian MacAlpin is beset with a sense of 'emotional cannibalism.' Just like Esther Sussman of *The Fat Woman's Joke*, Marian MacAlpin, also attempts to resist the patriarchally encoded female body. Both the novels examine the various aspects of female appetite, relating them to power and identity, and at the same time foregrounding the cultural meaning of eating disorders.

Fay Weldon's *The Fat Woman's Joke* centres around two women, Phyllis Frazer and Esther Sussman, who form an "antithetical pair" (Palmer 32). They provide a striking contrast in

their attitudes to the prevailing concepts of femininity advocated by the patriarchal society. It is Alan, Esther's husband, who suggests that the best way to fight middle-age flab is to go on a diet. But Esther disapproves of the idea, and her attitude is different from that of Phyllis. In a bid to satisfy her husband, Gerry, who wants her to be slim and slender, Phyllis "finely boned, neat, sexy and rich, invincibly lively and invincibly stupid" (Weldon 10), undergoes cosmetic surgery, notwithstanding frugal food habits, and she mutilates her body by surgery. Phyllis finds pleasure in dancing to the tune of her husband in all matters and conforming fully to his cherished notions. But Esther is made of sterner stuff and she is a striking foil to Phyllis. She deliberately eats without any restraint, to her heart's content: She ate frozen chips and peas and hamburgers, and sliced bread and bought jam and fish paste, and baked beans and instant pudding and cakes and biscuits from packets. She drank sweet coffee, sweet tea, sweet cocoa and sweet sherry. (Weldon 9)

Esther defies her husband and rebels against the concept of slenderness as the criterion for feminine attractiveness. Her ravenous appetite coupled with her substantial figure symbolizes an exhortation for women to be self-reliant, active and assertive, instead of being weak-willed, meek and submissive. She thus becomes a spokesperson for what Chernin would call, "a unified condition of the self" (Palmer 32) as opposed to the fragmented image of the female body. Weldon here seems to chastise a society that considers the female body to be a conglomeration of fetishized parts, as the media would have it to be.

It is worthwhile recalling here Susan's pertinent question to Peter, "You don't think women are things, do you? You believe they are people, don't you" (Weldon 43)? It seems strange that the slim and willow-like Susan, secretary to Esther's husband Alan, "fresh from a charm school, with a light in her eye and life in her loins" (Weldon 24), who even plans to snatch him for herself, is in agreement with Esther's views about what man expects a woman to be – a silent sufferer of all indignities, a creature of flesh created for his pleasure, devoid of independent judgment, reason or a capacity to protest. She is at a loss to understand why man is being honoured for physical and mental strength, whereas the very same qualities are taboo for women. She wonders why petite women are objects of men's approval, and attributes their deliberate attempts at slimming to a sort of self-negation, which alone seems to enhance her charm in man's estimate. She says: "A woman has all too much substance in a man's eyes at the best of times. That is why men like women to be slim. Her lack of flesh negates her" (Weldon 49).

Thus Esther Sussman, the fat woman in *The Fat Woman's Joke* refutes her husband's proposition to reduce her intake of food in order to make her slim and appear attractive. In fact, she "ate and ate, and drank and ate" (Weldon 9), posing a challenge to the concept of femininity popularized by the fashion and cosmetic industry. Esther defies not only her husband, but the prevailing notion of slenderness as a criterion for feminine charm. Weldon satirizes here the attitude of certain women to forgo their physical and psychological power in order to cater to the interests of those who hail feminine passivity as a laudable virtue. Esther's defiance is a manifestation of her protest against those, who, motivated by a sense of misogyny, seek to reduce women to "a piece of docile flesh" (Weldon 105) and treat the female body as the site of women's oppression.

The appearance of the novel in the 'swinging sixties,' had almost created a sensation in the fashionably free society of the era. The period witnessed the emergence of many fashion models like Twiggy whose newly acquired prominence and fame gave rise to the widespread belief that extreme slenderness is the hallmark of a woman's beauty. In the inordinately sexist atmosphere of the times, strife between the slender maid and the fat, wedded lady was taken for granted and approved of widely.

In *The Edible Woman*, we find Marian deliberately restricting the intake of food in order to prevent herself from being pressured into a prescribed feminine role. By not eating, she rebels against those who insist on the female body to be reconstructed to suit their concepts of domesticity. She endeavours constantly to empower her mind by a total negligence of her essential body. This is to say that the erasure of the body results in mental strength for women to free themselves from the shackles of patriarchal control. In this way, she is trying to liberate herself from the femininity that stifles and suffocates her. Whenever food items are served before her, she starts viewing them as living entities. She finds it difficult to eat carrots which remind her of the terrible pain they suffered when pulled out from the ground. "It's a root, she thought…Then they come along and dig it up, maybe it even makes a sound, a scream too low for us to hear, but it doesn't die right away, it keeps on living, right now it's still alive…" (Atwood 220).

When she looks into a boiled egg, what she sees is a yellow eye staring back at her. At a psychological level, her relationship with Duncan induces in her a strange feeling that he is slowly consuming her just as he consumes food. Finally she comes to a stage when she starts taking vitamin pills as a substitute for food. Later when she awaits marriage, she is tormented by an inner rebellion and "marriage à la mode, Marian discovers, is something she literally can't stomach" (Cover copy) and she finds it difficult to conform to the societal

and patriarchal norms of an ideal wife. One fine day, she bakes a cake and gives it the shape of a woman, the 'edible woman'. The cake, in fact, symbolizes the concept of an ideal woman that Peter wants her to be. She requests Peter to eat the cake, but quite unexpectedly, he spurns the request and leaves the room in a fit of fury, on account of her strange behavior. As soon as Peter leaves, Marian regains her lost appetite and devours the cake, part by part, in triumphant joy. "So Peter hadn't devoured it after all…It looked up at her with its silvery eyes, enigmatic, mocking, succulent. Suddenly she was hungry. Extremely hungry" (Atwood 344).

Marian's consumption of the cake is a powerful act of defiance against a system that defines women as commodities and devours them. The insistence on over-decoration and ornamentation associated with the system of marriage is also thrown to the winds by her act of devouring the cake. By eating the cake she proclaims to the world her refusal to fit into the patriarchal standards of femininity. She seems to be convinced that she had better consume herself than let others consume her. Marian is extremely pleased with herself and a feeling of contentment descends on her. Marian's eating the cake, to borrow a term from Maggie Humm "is a cannibalism of the female stereotype" (68). Here Atwood is exhorting women not to shun their bodies but to eat to their heart's content so that they may assert their individuality and re-inhabit their own bodies.

Esther Sussman in *The Fat Woman's Joke* is defiant to the core. Extreme slenderness is often hailed as a mark of feminine charm and this makes a woman sacrifice physical strength to appear attractive to men, and thereby obtain indirect access to social and material power. But Esther rebels against the concept of slenderness and resorts to deliberate overeating. Her gluttonous appetite and uncontrollable eating habits represent a protest against the tendency of women to make themselves slim by eating less than what they need.

There is an obvious contrast between Atwood's heroine Marian and Weldon's Esther Sussman. Esther musters the courage to defy her husband and his idea of slenderness as a mark of feminine beauty. But the truth about the power of the female body dawns upon Marian only much later. We find in her in the beginning, a tendency to abide by the wishes of her lover. But in due course, she realizes her folly and starts regaining her lost appetite for food. At the same time, both Sussman and Marian transform themselves from their state of being preys to the level of predators.

Food signifies gender power and social control. There is sexual politics involved in eating disorders and produce Foucault's 'docile bodies' mainly through invisible forces of power. But in Fay Weldon, the same forces are used to resist the conventional stereotypes of 'docile bodies.' Weldon's 'fat woman' and Atwood's 'edible woman' renounce professional help and resort to self-therapy as a means of protest. Both Weldon and Atwood employ a corporeal language of resistance and view the female body from a new perspective, depicting it as a site of power and resistance.

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Roots and Routes: Home and Belonging in Embodied Performativity

Dr. Sangeetha Varma

Abstract: This paper aims at examining the expressive potential of poetry in the spoken word and the 'performative turn' in the world of poetry, which blurs the lines between a poem and its performance, thus expanding the field of poesis and poetics. It analyses "Homeward", the performance poetry of Bassey Ikpi, a spoken word artist, who brings alive the picture of her childhood in her grandmother's home in Nigeria fusing together both the narrative and the visual through the spoken word.

Keywords: Performance poetry, poesis, poetics, performing memory

Performance poetry is a type of verse specifically composed for oral delivery on a live platform, stage, or a community hall. Unconventional and open to improvisation, its live dynamics appeals to a large audience, and since its inception has in its affective ability helped to constitute a vibrant community.The *raison d'être* of this paper is to explore the expressive potential of poetry in the spoken word. This paper explores the 'performative turn' in the world of poetry, which blurs the lines between a poem and its performance thus expanding the field of poesis and poetics.

Roots

The change in nomenclature and stylistics of the oral poetry of the past to the spoken word poems of the present is of a relatively recent origin. Spoken word poem, as part of the larger structure of performance poetry, is only a few decades old, a toddler who has begun to take confident steps. In America it had its roots in the blues, hip-hop, jazz, and Beat culture of the 1960s and 70s.

Spoken word poems differ from the early oral literature in one significant way. If oral literatures acted as the archival memory of its culture before the discovery of writing,

spoken word poems are first written and then performed. Here writing precedes action/performance, but again for many artists the text is merely the script for performance. This elision of the morphic or the phonic, the word or the sound, in the oral and written traditions respectively is of paramount importance in the study of their different structures. Another significant difference is the spatial arena of performance. A mode of entertainment for the commons in large open spaces has given place to the contemporary stage or a raised platform within doors lending intimacy to the performance spectacle. This spatial change from open to enclosed areas has also led to changes in the nature of the audience. Earlier, the crowds in wayside performances would comprise largely of the peasant folk of the area who would gather to see the pageantry. The uninitiated loiterer, the *flaneur,* would also make it a point to assemble for the sake of enjoying the spectacle. But, when the performances were restricted to stages/platforms within community halls, the *flaneur* gave place to the connoisseur, the rebel, and the activist.

Routes

Today, many spoken word artists write poems in the confessional style, narrate anecdotes and personal memories, emphasise cultural markers, and deliberately use their mother tongue *in medias res*to address social issues such as gender inequality, race hate and immigration, assimilation and abrogation, loss of ethnic identity, and class struggle representative of the specific political enquiry and liberal ideals of performance without censorship. These performing artists use various nuances of language like tone, incantatory speech, repetition, staccato rhythm, and broken or fragmented phrases to simulate the dramatics of performance. This method of rendition of poetry reflects our age, where short-form communication is something people find easier to connect with. It is this selectivity of both content and form of performance poetry that is responsible for its mass popularity and its presence and following in the fabric of digital media like YouTube, Instagram and Twitter. The selection of subject and poetic style varies from artist to artist but the combinatory strategies of performing word-poem result in the exposition of a plethora of social injustices, human rights violation, genocide, and issues of corruption and environmental debilitation.

Performing Memory

This paper will analyse “Homeward”, the performance poetry of Bassey Ikpi, a spoken word artist who was a part of HBO’S DEF poetry for more than a decade in the United States. Her poem ‘Homeward’ brings alive the picture of her childhood in her

grandmother's home in Nigeria fusing together both the narrative and the visual through the spoken word. Emotions are intertwined with communication. Ikpi uses voice, meter, and rhyme to express emotions as varied as nostalgia, love, regret, loss, pain, and rootlessness, by introducing three generations of women in her family – her grandmother, her mother, and herself. She expresses her matrilineal roots, "She has my mother's face etched with time" (7). The poem is the spoken 'text' which she creates out of her experiences.

Growing up in Nigeria with her grandmother till the age of five, Ikpi was taken by her parents to Oklahoma, USA uprooting her from her family, her grandmother, and her country. She gives a very verbal and evocative description of her first visit home a few years later in the poem. Her use of rhetorical ploys through enunciation, rhythm, gestures, voice, and antics prove beyond doubt that both the imagination and the body are of central importance in evoking an emotional response for an aesthetic experience. A poem is crafted with emotional crests and troughs, and the audience engage with it completely, when poetry, like music, is heard.

The poet-performer's body is also highly political because of its historic, cultural and ethnic markers which are of course in the front or centre stage. In fact, the artist through her performativity does not conceal her genealogy, but choose to accentuate her ethnic identity, her colonised racial self. Ikpi expresses her anguish at the loss of language of her ancestors, after she has stayed in America for a few years. This loss of mother tongue created a schism in her psyche. Judith Butler ruminates,

Could language injure us, if we were not, in some sense, linguistic beings? Beings which require language in order to be? Is our vulnerability to language a consequence of our being constituted within its terms? If we are formed in language, then that formative power precedes and conditions any decision we might make about it, insulting us from the start, as it were by its prior power.

Ikpi found that she couldn't converse with her grandmother who knew only their native dialect. Her tongue had lost the ability to express the love she had for her grandmother in a language that she would understand. She laments,

It breaks my heart to realize that
I can only love her clearly in English
But tears do not replace the words
love will not make it easier

make it less heavy
desire will not help me remember (29-34)

The accompanying guilt was made worse with the realisation that by forgetting her language she had betrayed her country and her people, committed the greatest treachery of all. Remorse and regret at disconnection from home is an oft recurring theme in her platform literature which describes the cultural effects of colonialism on the black diaspora in the metropolis. This anguish of loss of identity is concomitant with loss of language.

How a person identifies herself is intricately connected to place and language which gives birth to a specific culture. Ikpi's valid sense of self and identity was fractured by her dislocation from her native Africa and by mnemonic loss of her mother tongue. Nigeria urges her to remember and reconnect with her people.
It's for my future
it is for my children
and it is for you, grandmother
that I must
always
always
remember (80-87)

"Homeward", as part of the tradition of performing art, is a site where memories coalesce to give a sense of being and belonging. Spoken Poetry is powerful. It can teach us about love, it can serve as a moral parable, and it can also mobilise a nation's people to protest. Thus postcolonial performativity may accomplish to reinvent and reinscribe ideas of home and belonging.

The liminality of the performer, the performance, and the stage allows for selection and combination of various social and personal issues stemming from race and ethnic differences to contest dominant colonial narratives. Informed by the personal, Ikpi delivers a performance which is highly political. The poet seeks to circumvent and counter the predominantly patriarchal institutions and canons of print publishing to deliver a poignant poem which performs memory.

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"I Believe that Women have No Country:" Portrayal of the Displaced Self inTaslima Nasreen's Exilic Autobiography *My Girlhood*

Dr. Praseedha G.

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to analyse Taslima Nasreen's first autobiography, *My Girlhood* as an author–in–exile. The analysis focuses on the way in which she recapitulates her memories as a girl who questioned the dominant discourse on religious and gendered lines. While the narration centres around her family members, the choice that the autobiographer makes to speak out against all and the impact it generated aid in the sculpting of her individual autobiographical identity.

Keywords: autobiographical identity, exile, voicelessness, displacement, nationhood.

Taslima Nasreen's writings have generated huge controversy across South Asia, mainly because of her radical views on women's freedom and religion. She had published a few books before a *fatwa* was issued against her in 1993 by religious leaders in Bangladesh for her controversial book *Lajja*. She was forced to leave Bangladesh, and since August 1994, has been living in exile. Born in 1962, in the small town of Mymensing in former East Pakistan, which later became independent Bangladesh in 1971, she studied medicine and became a doctor in 1984. When she was working as a doctor in public hospitals, she started writing columns in newspapers and magazines. She has received numerous prestigious literary awards for her works.

My Girlhood, the first in her series of autobiographies, was published as *Amar Meyebela* in Bengali. It was later translated into English, and still later into French and German languages. Besides this, she has written six other autobiographies titled, *UtalHawa* (*Wild Wind*), *Ka* (*Speak up*), *Sei Sob Ondhokar* (*Those Dark Days*), "*Ami bhaloneitumibhalothekopriyodesh*" (Keep well, my dear country), " *Neikichunei*" (There is Nothing) "*Nirbashito*" (Exiled). She has also written thirty books in Bengali, and her books

have been translated into at least 30 different languages. Five of her books are banned in Bangladesh and her autobiography *My Girlhood* is one of them.

Taslima Nasreen's *My Girlhood* portrays the girlhood phase of her life in the backdrop of a nation in turmoil. In this moving autobiography, Nasreen writes hauntingly of a childhood of confusion and pain. During the violent 1971 war that created Bangladesh, her family fled from the city to the countryside. As a young girl in a Muslim family, she narrates of how her freedom was curtailed and how she was subjected to rape and molestation by her two uncles at a very young age. The individual experience is juxtaposed with the experiences of several women characters within her own family, including her mother and aunts who were forced into loveless marriages. Nasreen who had initially thought that her exile was temporary, realised that she was missing her family and country. Her writing had begun as a means to reconnect to her life at home.

Marie Claassen, a theoretician on exilic writings, in her *Displaced Persons: The Literature of Exile: from Cicero to Boethius*, proposes a definition for this condition faced by Nasreen in the following manner:
Exile is a condition in which the protagonist is no longer living, or able to live, in the land of his birth. It may be either voluntary, a deliberate decision to stay in a foreign country, or involuntary.... However, exile may be enforced. This last occurrence frequently results from a major difference of political disagreement between the authorities of a state and the person being exiled. Often such exiles are helpless victims of circumstances beyond their sphere of influence; sometimes, however, the exiles are themselves prominent political figures, exiled because of the potential threat to the well-being of their rivals. (9)

There are numerous possibilities of reading writers in exile and their fictional or nonfictional works. 'Exile' was employed to indicate more than simply the change in space of the creation of the literary work. Michael Seidel defines an exile as "someone who inhabits one place and remembers or projects the reality of another" (7). This paper focuses on how *My Girlhood*, a non- fictional autobiographical work written during the writer's period of exile captures the love/hate dichotomy for her homeland and its cultural practises, while paralleling a yearning/revulsion for these practices back 'home.'

The choice of events, its presentation, the language and the location of the writer-in -exile are all features to be taken into account while analyzing an exiled writer's autobiography. The book was originally written in her mother tongue- Bengali, and later translated to English. The choice of her native tongue in representing her 'self' is once again a political

stance adopted, to reconnect with her own land and her own people and also to explain and clarify her stance. The first volume of autobiography entitled *Amar Meyebela* (1999) when literally translated means "My Girlhood." While "amar" translates as "my" in English, the word "*meyebela*" which is not a term in Bengali, was coined by Nasreen to denote 'girlhood.' According to Barat, the coinage of this new term is an act of defiance and assertion on Nasreen's part, because "Bengali language does not have any gender-neutral terms for childhood, child or people: the accepted words are *chhelebelal* for 'boyhood'; *chhelemanushi* for 'little boy' and the term *chhelepilel* for 'boys' and children and *manushi* for 'man,' 'humanity.' There are absolutely no words for girlhood. The term for woman / women is *meyemanush* - the prefix *meye* i.e. 'girl' is attached to the non-native *manush*, clearly underlining the irrevocable Otherness of women" (218). By coining a new word as for her non fictional work, Nasreen thus re-configures the linguistic discourse to suit her needs, which in turn opens up a new vista of re-configuring feminine experience to the Bengali reader.

The accusations made against Nasreen by her fiercest critics have been the after effect of her candid presentation of issues that exposed the patriarchal dictum imposed on women in the domestic, religious, and social realms. In her first autobiography *My Girlhood*, she carefully documents the atrocities faced by the womenfolk of her family starting from the point of being born a girl child, which was equated with ill-luck, to teaching children to grow up in order to become someone's good wife, to being forced into child marriages, to forgo education, to bear children at a young age, to witnessing infidelities by the husband, and to live constantly in the fear of separation in case the man decide to separate from her – the female characters that undergo the trauma of inhuman magnitude. What makes it more pronounced is that all these characters who undergo trauma and the perpetrators of trauma are both her own intimate kith and kin, but of different genders.

While describing her own family and the circumstances in which she was born, Taslima writes that her mother had two sons before she was born. She adds, "Thank goodness for that, or who would have carried the family name forward? A girl wasn't any good for that. What she *was* good for was to add a touch of grace to a home, help her mother with household chores, and keep the men happy. After two sons, Baba wanted a daughter" (*My Girlhood* 23). Her own family structure and the matrix of domination within it are all brought out well in her delineation of her parents. She describes her mother as a person with a dark and plain complexion. She had studied up to the seventh standard, and had married her father at the age of twelve. When her first child began going to school, she

demanded that she be allowed to go too. Her father agreed to this suggestion initially, but her Grandpa had strong objections and said,

Your job is to raise your children and stay at home," he told Ma in no uncertain terms, "and take care of your husband. There's no need for a girl to think of education". That was the end of it. Ma did not dare disobey her father. Baba rose higher and higher in life but Ma remained where she was, in the same dark corner, stuck at the seventh standard, in knowledge and intelligence. All she could do was open Baba's fat medical books and leaf through them before dusting and putting them away, fully aware that, compared to her husband, she was wholly insignificant. One day, he just might leave her. It was this thought that made her turn blue with fear and prompted her to powder her dark face white, and line her small eyes with kohl to make them appear larger, so that she would not look entirely ugly. (*My Girlhood* 29)

The representation of her mother is in many ways the representation of women from the South Asian ethos. In describing her family, especially the representation of her father and his impact on the family is of great importance. His rank, his profession, his capacity to take care of his family is of utmost importance in a conventional South Asian family. It is the image of her father which also haunts her memories. Her father was extremely authoritarian, the rigid patriarch whom she describes as violent and hateful: "All I had seen in my life was his arrogance; all I had heard was his roars" (*My Girlhood* 281). Her family is a dysfunctional one: her father, a doctor, who had achieved wealth and respect through hard work, is depicted as a womanizer, who had sexual relationships with other women and was physically abusive and violent towards his wife and children alike. Her mother accepted her status and dedicated her life to religion and the teachings of Allah, religion that she tried to instil in her children as well. The paternalistic oppression 'dismembered' the family and the young Nasreen had to learn to live in a divided house, on the one hand confined by her father's explosive character and witness to his affairs, on the other hand an astonished spectator to her mother's submission, resentment and religious zeal.

Other women within the family had to experience similar treatment from the men in their lives. She narrates the metamorphosis of her aunt Fajli from a carefree, vivacious young girl into a veiled, submissive, dutiful wife, which she had to accept meekly, as she was indoctrinated completely into the Bangladeshi Muslim society after her marriage. Nasreen recalls how her own mother had also changed greatly after her marriage. These she recalls as narrated accounts from her mother's close relatives such as her grandmother and her brothers. The change that came in her was mainly because of her father's flirtatious nature.

His interest in other women and his frequent visits to them evoked rage and fear in her mother. Nasreen could see the transformation of her mother, who turned a religious fanatic.

The fear of infidelity of the male in the family, fear of being divorced, and fear of being marginalized in her husband's life, all play a major role in deciding the psyche of her mother. Her Grandpa had sent only his eldest son Siddique to a 'madrasa,' the religious school. Everyone else went to ordinary schools and colleges. Grandpa was a strict disciplinarian in the matter of education. Knowledge is invaluable wealth, there must be absolutely no lapses on her part when it comes to studies, he said frequently and sternly. But, of course, he said that only to his sons. To his daughters, he said, girls need not bother with higher studies.

In spite of all this, Nasreen recalls how her Aunt Runu went to college, and did her Bachelor's degree. Her Grandpa kept trying to get her married. Every now and then, he would invite prospective grooms and their families to come and inspect Aunt Runu. Aunt Runu, in turn, would smear her face with mud and grime, and deliberately make her hair look dishevelled, so that no one might find her suitable for marriage. The act of smearing the face with grime and mud was a strategy devised to protect her own interest at the individualist level. The experiences and after effects of the life evading marriage for Aunt Runu and another 'caged' within the realms of marriage - Aunt Fajli can also be seen as cases in comparison. Through the layers of women's perceived and experienced reality, Nasreen weaves in her *My Girlhood,* the potential impact these layers have on women's consciousness and on the construction of women's subjectivity.

Nasreen narrates about her devastating brush with sexuality, at a tender age of seven. The readers are exposed to the murky side of patriarchal tyranny- child abuse and molestation by members of the family. In fact, this experience of being sexually abused is shrouded in a veil of mystery to the young Nasreen,

... (who) had no idea what this game was called, this business of stripping me naked. Nor could I guess why Uncle Sharaf and Uncle Aman wanted to climb over me. Uncle Aman had told me not to tell anyone else. I started to think he was right. It was not something one talked about. At the age of seven, suddenly a new awareness rose in my mind. It told me that whatever had happened was shameful, it would not be right to talk about it, it had to be kept a secret. (*My Girlhood* 91)

Even though her innocence/ignorance prevents her from knowing that her uncles' designs upon her are sexual and demeaning, her instinct tells her that she has been abused at a

physical level. She dared not speak of this to any of her family members for fear of being misunderstood, disrespected or looked down with disrespect and contempt. She began questioning if the deed had really happened or if it was a figment of her imagination. She tried to convince herself that they could possibly not be her own uncles, but that she had mistaken them, when in fact they were two other men in the guise of her two uncles. She writes,

Was I afraid that, if I did talk about it, no one would believe me, they would dismiss my allegations, say that I was possessed by some evil spirit, or that I was either a liar or totally mad, a trouble-maker? No one would then hold me close and kiss me, but slap me and hit me hard instead? Or could it be that no one seemed to be my own, no one was close enough to whom I could go and cry my heart out, tell them everything without holding anything back, show them my wounds? Even Ma was not that close, although she was my whole world. I lived under her protection, she was like a tree, I sat in its shade when I was tired; she was like a deep, clear pond, I drank its water when I was thirsty. She had given me life, she nurtured it. If I could not turn even to her at a moment like this, who else could help me? (*My Girlhood* 92-93)

The lines echo the mental scars and the battle that she wages to redeem herself from the threshold of familial child abuse. This also throws light on the internal dimension of Bangladeshi life. In many ways we realise that the irony lies in knowledge of the fact that her wounds were not visible and that they were never addressed while her mother continued to think that she was shielding her from the aggressive male world which she had confronted. The guilt, shame and fear signal the loss of female agency – her voice, her capacity to articulate the pent-up emotions. This loss of agency she expresses in the following manner:

After that incident, I felt myself split into two. One half went out with all the other children, played games and ran around. The other half sat alone and depressed, by the pond, or the railroads, or the steps by our door. Alone, even in the middle of a crowd. Thousands of miles began to place themselves between this lonely girl and all the others. Even when she stretched her arm, she could not touch anyone across all those miles, not even her mother. If she tried, all her hands could ever grasp was emptiness. (*My Girlhood* 93)

Interestingly, the autobiographer makes a distinction here of her 'self' being split into two with one half 'acting' normal while the other half feeling vulnerable and lonely. The lonely inner self looks for refuge but fails to find one. The sense of displacement that the autobiographer feels at a foreign land in- exile and the sense of displacement that she feels in her own country, her home, as a young girl, amidst her family members whom she

realises she cannot place her complete trust on makes her distance herself from them. This split in two finds its place in the delineation of all the characters, whom she looks at as an outsider, an observer.

Nasreen as the autobiographical narrator, (now in Europe as an author-in–exile) is plagued by a sense of displacement, homelessness and identity issues. It is this turmoil that provokes her to construct an identity that is rooted deeply within her homeland and its culture. Her homeland, Bangladesh, the culture and the political backdrop that she had resisted and rebelled against, and that which had forced her to flee to a foreign land, ironically, becomes the site of her autobiography narrative. From her location far away from home, she negotiates multiple identities through the re-construction of the girlhood phase of her life - as a Bangladeshi, Muslim woman who is a doctor by profession, she crafts her own 'personal' history. The writing of this 'personal' history from a displaced author-in–exile point of view, re-confronts and questions certain practices at the social, cultural, economic and religious levels. Nasreen in the "Preface" to the book *No Country for Women*, published in 2013, where she puts together 46 autobiographical essays writes: I believe that women have no country. If country means security, if country means freedom, then women obviously do not have any country. Women do not get freedom, then women obviously do not have any country. Women do not get freedom anywhere in the world. They are not safe- this is realized when one reads the daily newspapers. Many of the articles in this book are reactions on everyday stories of women's unsecured life. (*No Country* xiii)

These words sum up the individual plight of the writer while also throwing light on how gender, a biological construct; can be used to limit women's agency. The idea of a 'country' for men and their dominant discourses alone, excludes the whole of female agency making one half of the population of Bangladesh mute spectators. Bangladesh thus stands as a stereotype for other cultures that are male dominant, excluding the women's agency. "The binary opposition between absolute freedom and total silence, a by-product of the affair, redefined Nasrin as a writer as well as Bangladesh as a nation-state" (417), writes Manmay Zafar in the article titled "Under the Gaze of the State: Policing Literature and the Case of Taslima Nasrin." These words by Zafar also remind women in general that the need for stability and security, and the need to belong, make women think that absolute silence brings about absolute freedom, and they begin to internalise patriarchal norms as normative practices within the society. On completing 25 years of exile, in 2019, braving death threats, repeated shifting and relocating between cities, and countries, Nasreen continues to use her fictional and non-fictional space to voice her pain and anger against

unjust practices for a fairer society and country while simultaneously understanding that she is "the one who is homeless everywhere" (*Sarai Reader* 462).

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Debunking Patriarchy: Gender Ideology in Select Fiction of Mahasweta Devi and PunyakanteWijenaike

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Abstract: Mahasweta Devi and PunyakanteWijenaike, who articulate the anxieties and anguishes of the voiceless and marginalised, offer in their works a space to represent them. They expose and denounce notions of male superiority, the institution of marriage that is responsible for female subservience, domestic violence and gendered homelessness, all of which serve to tyrannise and victimise women. This paper attempts an analysis of select works of Mahasweta Devi and PunyakanteWijenaike where certain notions of womanhood, marriage and widowhood within the patriarchal social order are interrogated and contested.

Keywords: Mahasweta Devi, PunyakanteWijenaike, patriarchal ideology, widowhood, marital discord, gender discrimination

MahaswetaDevi, fiction writer, diplomat, socio-political activist, and winner of numerous honours and awards including Jnanpith Award, Sahitya Akademi Award, and Ramon Magsaysay Award, has authored more than one hundred novels and over twenty collections of short stories, known for the biting indictment of social inequalities, primarily written in Bengali and often translated into other languages. As a journalist and creative writer who spent several years studying oppressed tribal communities, their customs and traditions, their folksongs and myths, Devi affirms that her stories are the stories of the people of her country and not her creations.She is a writer who brings challenging stories of the unheard groups into her fictional world. Her celebrated story "Breast Giver" represents a feminist literary appropriation:

The text portrays Jashoda as a strong, empowered woman who has overcome obstacles and oppression in her life to do something important for others as well as her own family…Being a woman in a patriarchal society can present challenges, but Jashoda takes them in stride and makes something of herself without being dependent on men or others to provide for her. (cited in Devika 8)

Punyakante Wijenaike, a Sri Lankan writer who began writing fiction in the early 1960s and has published eleven novels and several volumes of short stories is, perhaps, "one of the most underestimated fiction writers currently at work in the English language" (Niven 58). In her writing is found some of the "most powerful registers of the relationship between identity and place, belonging and homelessness in Sri Lankan Literature in English" (56). With regard to the themes in Wijenaike's writing, Harishchandra writes:

The plight of the woman within the institution of marriage is a feature Wijenaike focuses on. In this writer's fiction, marriage often poses a barrier to the development of a woman's individuality. The status of the married woman, the dowry system, the emphasis on virginity before marriage and fertility afterwards, and domestic violence within the marital institution, are some of the themes she explores. (101)

Both Mahasweta Devi and PunyakanteWijenaike, straddling many roles as feminists, realists and humanists, have always lent a voice to the voiceless and the marginalised, and a space to represent them, in their fictional works. They have exposed the gender bigotry, class discrimination and caste hierarchy that lie entrenched in the hegemonic structures of their respective societies and the debilitating effect of these on the underprivileged lot, particularly women. They denounce notions of male superiority, the institution of marriage that is responsible for female subservience, domestic violence, gendered homelessness, all of which serve to tyrannise and victimise women. This paper attempts an analysis of Mahasweta Devi's *Breast Stories, Old Women* and *Mother of 1084* and Punyakante Wijenaike's*The Waiting Earth,Amulet* and *Coming to Terms* to interrogate patriarchy and contest certain notions of womanhood, marriage and widowhood within the patriarchal social order.

Devi delineates the three-pronged oppression of downtrodden women - firstly due to patriarchy, secondly due to poverty, illiteracy, lack of awareness etc., and thirdly, due to ostracism from their own community. Nandini Sen notes that several women characters portrayed by Devi belong to the oppressed sections of the society who are forced to fight for their basic sustenance. Caught in the grim battle of class, caste and poverty, her women protagonists chart out their own paths of self-realization. More often than not, the attempt is not merely limited to debunking patriarchy, but redefining the women's role in the severest of adverse situations (15). As Sadhana Sharma writes, "She [Devi] "penned [her] stories to render and reveal to our [readers] gaze the charade and duplicity of the democratic set-up in […] [a] country and to give a picture of the fates of the marginalized women

experiencing and undergoing untold miseries within and without their own communities" (454). Debasish Chattopadhyay affirms that, in her stories,

… Devi actually envisages a three-tier hierarchical structure in the Indian social order composed of the rungs of the non-marginalized or the mainstream, the marginalized or the subordinated, and finally the outcast or the marginalized by the marginalized. It is Devi's intention to excavate and exhibit the gendered causes lying underneath the socio-political and economic exploitation of these women belonging to a backward minority. The writer reveals the virtual slave trade that festers under the facade of the democratic society of India, and clearly indicates the plight of these women . . . women who are regarded as sub-human and treated as commodities both without and within their own communities. (105)

Wijenaike's novels too depict the traditional Sri Lankan women of the 1960s subjected to oppression caused by familial and social issues such as poverty, dowry system, denial of education, sexual exploitation, alcoholism and extramarital affairs of the husband leading to marital discord, and so on. Her novels reflect the bitter truth that, in tandem with their victimization and subjugation in the hands of patriarchs, their situation is made worse by class oppression steered by the matriarchs of the family.

In a scenario where women are financially helpless and reliant on their male partners, survival of women as widows or spinsters poses a challenge and contributes to the oppression of women. In the traditional, patriarchal custom-bound Indian society, the death of the husband forewarns his widow not only of personal grief, but also of an unaccustomed life, loaded with extraordinary hardship, poverty, insecurity, powerlessness and abuse. Corbacho and Barrera declare that widows in India become "de-sexed" creatures when they lose their husbands and go from being called "she" to "it" (1). As Uma Chakravarti asserts in her article "Gender, Caste and Labour: Ideological and Material Structure of Widowhood,"

The widow's social death stems from her alienation from reproduction and sexuality, following the loss of her husband and her exclusion from the functioning social unit of the family. Once a woman ceases to be wife (especially a childless wife) she ceases to be a person – she is neither daughter nor daughter-in-law. (2248)

Dipti Sahoo in "An Analysis of Widowhood in India: A Global Perspective" discusses the branding of widows as "husband eaters," which stems from the victimized status of widowhood in Indian perception (45). According to Mohini Giri, widowed women, whether young or old, leave behind their "ornamental chain given during the marriage ceremonies (that proclaims her status as a wife), bangles, flowers, the *sindoor,* (the

vermilion mark on the forehead), turmeric etc. The dress code aims to 'desex' the widow and the final humiliation is the tonsure of her head" (26). "She was 'uglified' to deprive her of the core of her femininity" (36-37).

In India, a country with strict gender norms and traditional kinship systems, widowhood is a dreaded phase of life for women. It is a very tenuous period of life, constrained by utter poverty, lack of social support, inability to remarry and with greater risk of mortality due to sexual abuse. Mahasweta Devi, in "The Old Woman," portrays the misfortune of early widowhood that befalls Dulali, who is married at the age of four only to become a widow at six. She dwells on the social norms of widowhood that fence Dulali from the joys of life and stand in the way of even simple amusements. Dulali cannot revel in the wedding celebrations of her friend Kusum. Her aunt's deceitfully gentle advice is aimed at putting her in place: "You're not to see a wedding, dear, you're not to join in the wife-rites" (*Old Women* 30).

In *Outcast*, a collection of short stories, Devi exposes the societal norms which drive widows into demanding and demeaning circumstances through the portrayal of two widows – Dhouli and Chinta – who find themselves in an economically vulnerable state and entangled in rigid societal norms. She observes, "Widows are often evicted from their homes and physically abused – some even killed – even by members of their own family. In many countries, a woman's social status is inextricably linked to her husband's, so that when her husband dies, a woman no longer has a place in society" (*Outcast* 45). In *"*Dhouli," Devi illustrates the mournful plight of young widows who are aggrieved more by their insecurity than by their bereavement. It is a common belief that a married girl is a property of the husband's family, which give them the authority to decide the girl's fate. Most widows are married off to their brothers-in-law without their consent. This is symbolised in the young widow Dhouli, a low caste widow who is compelled to go back to her natal home on the death of her husband, to escape from the lecherous grasp of her brother-in-law. Dhouli's life exposes the precariousness of young widows in an unscrupulous, patriarchal community. She is forced to rebuff the *dusad* men to preserve her 'visual chastity' after her return to Taharr. Apprehensive of burdening herself with child, Dhouli says, "The same poverty and hunger. The same back-breaking labour. On top of that, a child too? No, she didn't want such a life" (8).

Many of the widows fall prey to "rape by deception" as the perpetrator uses emotional coercion or manipulation to seduce the victim into consensual sex, as it transpires in the life of Dhouli, who is deceived by Misrilal, the Brahmin. Misrilal makes Dhouli aware of

her beauty and youthfulness, and assures her of a blissful marital life, as opposed to her early widowhood bereft of even trivial joys. Reeling under the ill-effects of widowhood that cast her into a state that forced her to abstain from gaieties like singing marriage songs and admiring herself, she gives in to the desires of her flesh. Forgetting her disciplined widowhood, she succumbs to his sexual advances: "And yet, a sense of triumph. She, Dhouli, a *dusad* girl, had driven a Brahmin's son crazy" (5). However, her emotional state of triumph is constantly deflated by her memories of the past, of being battered by her overbearing husband, of toiling in the fields, of feeding on leftovers only after the male members had finished their meals and being eyed by her brother-in-law day and night. These instances substantiate that in an organized patriarchal society, a woman is just "a beast of burden with a human face; the master exercised tyrannical authority, which exalted his pride … Everything he gained he gained against her," as Simone de Beauvoir would put it (110).

Ironically, the villagers, while ostracising Dhouli for her relationship with Misrilal, happily accept the good lot of "illegitimate Misra children growing up in the *dusad-ganju-dhobi* quarters" (*Outcast* 14). According to the villagers, Dhouli been raped by Misrilal, she would have been protected. But to their dismay, she had fallen in love with a Brahmin and conceived his child, which is an "unforgivable offence" (14). They insist, "It's always the fault of a woman. For not considering a Brahman's honour, she's even more to blame" (13). If the seduced women are taken care of by the Misras, the villagers would forgive and forget the episode. If not, they would see to it that the seduced woman is "forced into prostitution" (14). The villagers would rather kowtow than earn the wrath of the upper class, even at the cost of the women of their own clan getting sexually abused by the powerful upper class community.

Devi describes the horrible widowhood of the eponymous character in the story "Chinta." Devi acquaints the readers with the people of Danton and Contai region in Medinipur from where they had migrated to Calcutta to take up part-time jobs as maids in large joint families. In her characteristic style, Devi paints the unromantic picture of Chinta thus:

She washed huge piles of dishes and ground vast quantities of spices. Late afternoon I would see her returning home with the girl in her arms. As she walked back slowly, her damp clothes attracting the leering glance of the paanwalla, one could make out that she was soon to bring forth another child as playmate to the already malnourished one in her arms. (*Outcast*85)

Dipti Sahoo's states that, "Once widowed, women in many countries often confront a denial of inheritance and land rights, degrading and life-threatening mourning and burial rites and other forms of widow abuse" (46). Chinta, widowed at an early age, finds herself in the predicament of working as a maidservant in spite of possessing four *bighas* of land, a couple of goats and a cow. As her son Gopal is the sole heir to his father's property, Chinta's in-laws take custody of the property till Gopal is old enough to inherit it. In other words, the woman becomes a non-person when her husband dies, as implied in this practice. It is at the time of Chinta's susceptible widowhood that Utsab turns up, and despite resistance, weaves his way into Chinta's life, forcing her to elope with him. Gopal and his father's property are retained by his paternal guardians, adding to Chinta's impoverishment. Utsab's final desertion of Chinta is the plight of most widows: "He ruined me and then left me. Didn't marry me, didn't give me any ornaments. He would beat me up, take all my money, and after giving me these two daughters, he absconded" (89). Devi seems to caution widows to be shrewd and judicious before rushing into new relationships, as is justified in the case of Dhouli and Chinta.

Dipti Sahoo asserts that the children of the unfortunate widows are affected emotionally and economically: "Moreover, the daughters of widows may suffer multiple deprivations, increasing their vulnerability to abuse" (46). The story of Chinta and Dhouli, in addition to expressing Devi's concern for the lives of the underprivileged, details how the societal structures have been biased against women. Devi never fails to raise her voice for helpless women like Chinta, who is forced to sell her daughters for ten and eight rupees each. Devi underscores remarriage and inter-caste marriage as solutions to rescue the victims of early widowhood, mandatory for the smooth transition from an elitist to an egalitarian society.

In sharp contrast to Devi, Wijenaike presents the happy life of widows after their remarriage to war heroes. Her portrayal of war widows in *Missing in Action* and short stories, "Home Coming" and "A Message of Love. . ." is vastly different from Devi's depiction of widowhood. In "The Home Coming," Wijenaike represents the life of a Sri Lankan war widow who strives hard to improve the condition of life of her children by working in Oman. Like Devi, Wijenaike also highlights the insecurity and abuse encountered by widows who work overseas: "Apart from keeping his house clean, his food prepared, I had even taken the place of his dead wife whenever he felt the need of a woman" (62). The widow recollects how her husband, "the battle weary soldier" had remarried her to relieve her of her tortuous life under a drunken husband and "fought for his country, facing death" (64). "Missing in Action" is about an anonymous narrator, who is ill-treated by her mother, cheated by her boyfriend, oppressed and deserted by her husband and finally

loved by a war hero. Like Utsab of Devi's *Outcast*, who works his way into Chinta's life using her little son Gopal, Kapila gets close to the widowed narrator through little Danushke. While Devi condemns Utsab for sexual exploitation of Chinta, Wijenaike extols the kindness of Kapila who loves his stepson, until he is found 'missing in action.' The war widows of Wijenaike are initially abused by violent husbands, but they are finally liberated by the war heroes, their knights in shining armour. While Devi intends to portray the sufferings endured by widows in an orthodox, tradition-bound, patriarchal society, Wijenaike uses her war widows to emphasize the brutalities of war and the patriotism of war heroes. Her stories on war widows are actually meant to honour the war heroes through their widows.

If widowhood is a misfortune to be feared, all is not well within marriage either. Both Devi and Wijenaike deal with marital conflict and its consequences, though the grounds for marital disagreement and domestic violence seem different in their respective cultural contexts. In Devi, marital conflict arises from ego on the part of the patriarch who can neither appreciate nor accept the economic stability of the wife. Extramarital affairs too pose a problem to marital harmony.

In *Mother of 1084* Devi exemplifies the pathetic plight of a woman, struck down by the infidelity of her husband and the waywardness of the children. She presents a typical example of a failed marriage in the marital conflict between Sujata and Dibyanath, which is the result of a series of events that have been poorly handled, so as to deeply impair their marital relationship. In the thirty four years of their marriage, Sujata has never shied away from her duty as a wife and as a loving and caring mother. Sujata, despite her financial empowerment, had meekly and passively accepted the domestic violence inflicted on her, to avoid heated arguments. Dibyanath insists that "a wife had to love, respect and obey her husband. A husband was not required to do anything to win his wife's respect, love and loyalty" (45). Through Sujata, the author underscores the vulnerability of the victims of domestic violence.

Wijenaike's fiction too focuses on marital conflict and the sufferings of women in marital and cohabitation relationships. However, there is a strange metamorphosis in the author's perception of marriage. While some of Wijenaike's early heroines like Sellohamy in *The Waiting Earth* solve marital problems though love, tolerance and devotion to their husbands, in her later novels like *Coming to Terms,*Wijenaike seems to preach the advantages of staying alone: "Why did my heart fill with panic at the thought of settling down? Like becoming part of the social structure that she represented, burdened with

children, working hard to make ends meet until old age and death came. Was that all there was to life?" (5).

In *The Waiting Earth,* Wijenaike exemplifies the heroine's fondness for a harmonious family life, in which the marital discord between the couple could be solved by patience and submissiveness from the side of the woman. With her strong belief in the institution of marriage, Sellohamy draws her husband and children towards her through her selfless love and sacrifice. Sellohamy, as a custom-bound wife, considers marriage as a dissoluble bond that is made strong by the wife's love, and her love for her husband even takes the form of tolerance and passive acceptance of domestic violence. The marital relationship of Sellohamy and Singho is threatened by financial crisis. Just as a bad workman blames his tools, Singho, to cover up his inability to make both ends meet, casts the blame on Sellohamy. But Sellohamynot only remains passive to his acrimony but also discharges her duty promptly. Thus, in this early work, Wijenaike reposes faith in the success of a marriage in spite of appalling situations like a husband's allegations of infidelity on his spouse. But in *Coming to Terms* written in her seventies, she appreciates the empowerment of women through economic independence. She also justifies the freedom-loving attitude of women who stay single: "Once a man gets control of a woman she is no longer an individual but a shadow of him" (23).

In *Coming to Terms,*Wijenaike's modern women denounce the institution of marriage as a quagmire that curbs their freedom. Revathi's friend Fathima shuns marriage, to soar high as an empowered woman. Born in a community which restricts women's mobility and freedom to interact and participate socially, Fathima's decision to remain single is a daring one indeed. Fathima motivates her friend Revathi to attain financial stability: "I will have money then and we need not listen to anyone" (25). Wijenaike clearly implies that financially secure women are empowered to be free of patriarchal bondages.

According to Simone de Beauvoir, "women have never set up female values in opposition to male values; it is man who has invented that divergence. Men have presumed to create a feminine domain – the kingdom of life, of immanence – only in order to lock up women therein" (96). From her weak-willed, hopelessly-dependent and non-assertive moral position, Sujata in *Mother of 1084* is reconstructed to a morally assertive, politically enlightened and socially defiant individual, which again intensifies the marital conflict. Sujata is sick and tired of her promiscuous husband who is "desirous of maintaining masculine prerogatives," (96): "Refusing to leave her job was Sujata's second act of rebellion. Her first act of rebellion was when Brati was two. She refused to be a mother for

a fifth time" (5). Manisha in *Amulet*, who is characterised to "represent the new breed of womanhood that is emerging today" (121), lives out her life to feminist expectations. She clarifies, "Mine will be a marriage of mind as well as body, of two people, not horoscopes and property. We will be two people who need each other for support through life" (84). Wijenaike too portrays the problems that afflict the marital life of her female protagonists. Dibyanath Chaterjee of *Mother of 1084* and Senani of *Amulet* exemplify the extremes of male chauvinism in controlling the likes and dislikes of their spouses. Although money is not everything in a relationship, money could make or mar a relationship.In*The Waiting Earth,*Wijenaike portrays how PodiSingho'sgreed to possess a land of his own triggers marital discord.

Both Devi and Wijenaikehighlight the patriarchal norms that are predominant in their respective societies - of India and Sri Lanka. Devi reiterates the ill-effects of child marriage and widowhood in *Old Women*. She illustrates the most distressing plight of young widows who are grieved more by sexual threat from other males than by the loss of their loved ones. Wijenaike records the emotional trauma of Sri Lankan Civil War widows in *An Enemy Within*. Both the authors decry the sexual subordination of females to patriarchs, be it their spouse or their oppressor. Wijenaikelaments that in a male-centred society, women's awareness of the fact that they no longer have any right to their parental house or property after their marriage, forces them to accept all sorts of insults heaped on them by patriarchs.

Both the writers expose the myriad manifestations of women's oppression**.** They **decry the fact that women are constantly dehumanized and reduced to objects to be groped, harassed and catcalled.**Wijenaike depicts the institution of marriage as an oppressive system against women and denounces the patrilineal nature of the society, which sectionalizes men and women. While Devi records the exploitation of women in the tribal societies of India, Wijenaike's portrayal of women's oppression in Sinhala society ranges over different kinds of cultural issues that demean the status of women. Both these authors delve deep into the world of subordinated women and unveil how these women redefine their role, by shattering the chains of constricting customs. While many feminist writers expose gender oppression of women, Devi and Wijenaikedeal with the issue of gender subjugation sheathed within class or caste oppression, making their call for women emancipation and empowerment truly exceptional.

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Complementarity of Gendered Spaces in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*

Arya B.

Gendered concepts arise out of reflections on the experiences, prejudices or orientations of one sex over the other. There are stereotyped gender roles in every society for both male and female, which could differ according to societal norms. However, regarding gender aspects, there is no commonality among cultures. It is said that women were always considered inferior to men from days of yore. This generalisation may hold good for Western patriarchal societies where women were restricted to private spheres, but it does not essentially apply to women in Native American communities. Laguna Pueblo, a Native American community, for instance, is a matrilineal society whose cultural and religious traditions are strongly influenced by female figures and deities. Leslie Marmon Silko, one of the distinguished Native American writers instrumental in the revival of Native American literature, writes with a strong sense of affiliation with and allegiance to her native land and culture. Her novel *Ceremony* illustrates how native ideologies seek to balance a more nuanced relationship or complementarity of genders. There is even a persistent impulse to romanticize the feminine in opposition to the masculine. This paper explores the gendered spaces in the matrilineal society of Laguna as depicted in Silko's *Ceremony*.

In *Ceremony*, Silko seeks to create a cultural space in which Native Americans changing realities are rearticulated against hegemonic discourses. She presents the lives and histories of Native American culture and the intercultural relationship between Native Americans and other American ethnicities, highlighting the binary opposition of Native American's traditional nature-oriented existence and the objectifying western way of life. Tayo, the protagonist, is trapped between the contrasting ideas of the racial/ethnic binary thrust upon him as a mixed-blood Native man in Anglo/Western society. Mixed-blood serves more as

a motif than a biological or bicultural marker in the novel. Silko explores the male-female balance in Laguna culture and the gendered spaces generated by the gender roles in Native American communities.

The difference between Anglo-American and Native constructions of gender revolves around the physical embodiments, performances, and applications or uses of gender. Betty Bell explains that:

Even though gender is central to the organization of Indigenous nations as distinct social and cultural systems, it is often not closely related to power or biology…There is, however, no universal or necessary correlation between male and female descent and gendered positions of power and authority. Nor are gender and sex defined, necessarily, as culturally equivalent categories (308).

In Laguna culture, the women exert considerable authority in society and are accorded due recognition. Silko's *Ceremony* introduces a female narrator at the beginning through a poem even before the introduction of the central character, Tayo. It tells of how the universe was created by Ts'its'tsi'nako, the Thought Woman, the spider who is a feminine entity. Thought Woman is the supreme goddess of the Laguna people and the belief is that she created everything. According to the poem the Thought Woman is sitting in her room and "whatever she thinks about appears" (Silko 1). As a community that treasured women, Laguna Pueblo community has deep regard for its female deities such as Thought Woman, Spider Woman and Yellow Woman, who are brave and have command over creation and nature. In contrast to the version of the creation presented in the Genesis in Christian mythology where creation is a process attributed to masculine figures, the novel *Ceremony* introduces a female as the creator which shows the importance given to women in Native American tradition.

The gendering of roles in Laguna culture does not mirror the pattern in Euro-American culture. In Laguna culture, the aunt's duty is to sustain the family honour. Tayo's aunt bears this burden in a family disintegrating from a variety of insidious social forces. Western culture that does not understand this concept may be quick to brand her as an unkind woman in condemnation of her cruelty to Tayo. Grandma, Tayo's grandmother, as head of the family, asserts her decisions. Grandma calls the medicine man Ku'oosh to perform the scalp ceremony in order to cure Tayo, when he comes back from the Veterans' Hospital. These characters are the ones through whom the matrilineal aspect of Laguna society is emphasised in *Ceremony*.

Disregarding Native American traditions and choosing Anglo-American ideals results in the doom of the feminine characters, Tayo's mother and Helen Jean. Tayo's mother emulates western ways and falls prey to prostitution and alcoholism. As Rebecca Tsosie notes,

> Tayo's mother seeks to establish her identity and importance through men; but eventually falls into a path of prostitution and alcoholism. She grows to feel marginal and inadequate both with the Indian people who feel disgraced for her promiscuity and alcoholism, and with the white men who feel contempt for her, and finally dies a lonely, alcoholic death (29).

Helen Jean, a girl Tayo's friends pick up in a bar, also shows deterioration of character on adopting Western American ideals. These two characters show how disregard of the Native American traditions causes them the loss of their power within the community and also results in objectification not only by white men but also by Native American men.

There is a constant urge to romanticize the feminine in opposition to the masculine in *Ceremony*. Many critics assume Ts'eh to be the incarnation of the Spider woman. The deep bond between the woman and the land is further manifested in the account of Tayo's physical intimacy with her. In *Ceremony*, Tayo's identification of the woman with the land is crucial. Silko also personifies Mother Earth and the Spider woman. The female character, Ts'eh makes love with Tayo, and escorts him to a new appreciation of the land, "she enables him to discover a new/renewed self through oneness with her, with Mother Earth, and with the stories," observes Robert M. Nelson (128). Further, "she opens her heart, body and spirit to help Tayo heal," just as Mother Earth nurtures and rejuvenates (129). Through her curative love, Tayo is given the powers to overcome witchery.

Corn Mother represented in *Ceremony* is a prominent deity in Pueblo mythology. She is identical with Mother Earth and is symbolic of life, growth, and the feminine aspects of the world. A ritual corn dance is performed for one or more of the following reasons: to bring rain, to increase fertility, or to assure an abundance of crops. In smaller corn dances, all of the participants are males, but in larger dances, both men and women participate. When women are involved they wear tablitas. This marking symbolizes the special connection that women have with Corn Mother because of their shared feminine attributes. Thus the significance of women is further reinforced through the character of the Corn Mother in *Ceremony*.

Sun Father, who stands in relation to Corn Mother, is symbolic of masculinity and light, and is represented in white which is regarded as the most sacred colour. Cornmeal, associated with Corn Mother, is offered to Sun Father which demonstrates the interdependent relationship between men and women, like between Tayo and Ts'eh. Corn Father is also connected with Thought Woman, as can be seen in another myth narrated in *Ceremony.* In this myth, Ck'o'yo, the magician takes storm clouds as prisoners with his magic. As the clouds are unable to release rain over the earth, the land begins to dry up, and the people and animals starve: "Sun Father took blue and yellow pollen,..to Thought Woman, asking for her help. She gave Sun Father a magic medicine that allowed him to trick the magician and free the clouds" (Silko 11). This myth shows the essence of Laguna culture that values women since even the Sun Father bows to the Thought Woman for help.

Laguna society treats women as the axis of all things, and nothing is considered holy without her blessing. She is the true Creatix from which everything else takes birth. She is the necessary precondition for material creation which is hence fundamentally female. This feminine spirit and her power of intelligence appear on the plains, in the forests, in the great canyons, on the mesas, beneath the seas, and her variety and multiplicity testify to her complexity. Two characters that represent the strong nature of women in the novel are Ts'eh, the sacred woman who helps Tayo with the recovery of his uncle's cattle and Night Swan who is Josiah's lover. Ts'eh Montano is a surreal, semi-divine life force and consort of Mountain Lion Man, who becomes the creative force at the centre of the novel and the source of spiritual rejuvenation. Paula Gunn Allen, exploring the role of feminine principle in the novel comments that "while *Ceremony* is ostensibly a tale about a man, Tayo, it is as much and more a tale of two forces: the feminine life force of the universe and the mechanistic death force of witchery" (118-19). The story is generated by a woman, narrated by a woman, and is already known by another woman, that is, Tayo's grandmother, whose words conclude the story.

Night Swan is a strong, spiritual woman who questions established categories of culture, spirituality and gender. The episodes involving Tayo with the Night Swan are interpreted as divine interventions. Night Swan's vital role in Tayo's ceremony and her relation with the colour blue align her with the figure Ts'eh, who is the universal feminine principle in the formation of Laguna Keres theology. She is also associated with Ts'its'tsi'nako, Thought Woman or Grandmother Spider. Scholars have interpreted Night Swan as one of Spider Grandmother's daughters, who calls upon Tayo to repair Laguna community and even the broader world outside. Night Swan's sexuality is interpreted as symbolic of the cosmic female force.

Masculinity in Native American cultural concept stresses on kindness or benevolence, which is contrary to the image of masculinity in Euro-American culture. Uncle Josiah, who appears too calm and gentle for a man, is a father figure. According to Edith Swan "For a young Laguna boy, the most important adult male model within his social domain is his mother's brother" (40). Not only does the uncle provide stability, but is a guide who is able to influence the behaviour of the young and thus helps to perpetuate the values of Laguna culture. Kristin Herzog remarks that "Tayo has been shown by his uncle Josiah - another male figure, who is gentle and caring - that violence is senseless" (29).

Tayo and Rocky are two men demolished by war, the former spiritually and latter physically. Robert plays a passive role, and his motion and space are curtailed. Even though he takes care of the ranch and the animals, he is not the one who takes important decisions, which is a facet of the matrilineal society. His place in the family is even more restricted. For instance, "Tayo realized then that as long as Josiah and Rocky had been alive, he had never known Rocky except as a quiet man in the house that belonged to old Grandma and Auntie" (32). Rocky does not believe in Native American science unlike Tayo who trusts in Native American science, which can be witnessed through the cattle raising episodes done by Tayo and Josiah. Critic Paula Gunn Allen compares Rocky with other (male) characters such as Emo, Pinkie, and Harley who "are not of the earth but of human mechanism; they live to [destroy the earth] spirit, to enclose and enwrap with machinations, condemning all to a living death" (118). Here Allen does not present Rocky as an innocent man, tragically destroyed by the war, but as an active force of destruction itself. Tayo is essentially different from Rocky.

Ku'oosh is another important male character: "…but the old man would not have believed white warfare killing across great distances without knowing who or how many had died" (123). Ku'oosh has the minimal number of dialogues among all the male characters. Alexandra Ganser remarks that "Ku'oosh is much more traditional and conservative; he fails to transform his rituals to meet the demands of contemporary ethnic identity construction" (152). Betonie is the most important male figure that Tayo would come across in his journey to become whole. Betonie's character also emphasizes the concept of change as a form of flexibility which is a relevant step for all Laguna men. According to Karem, "Betonie emphasizes to Tayo that the old ceremonies themselves must be revised, that change itself is a critical tool in his quest" (27). Unlike Ku'oosh, Betonie adapts himself to the changes and hence was able to survive. Emo represents the complete contrast of a

Laguna male. His world is distorted by the trauma of war along with belief in non-Laguna ideals.

Native women give a helping hand and guide Native men through the ideologically constructed gender maze. Similar to the Sun Father who sought the help of Thought Woman in search of the lost rain clouds, Tayo relies on Ts'eh, who instructs him how to get his cattle back. Tayo's journey begins with his visit to Night Swan. Unknowing to Tayo, she embodies the mountain spirit Ts'eh and when Tayo sleeps with her, his life becomes a retelling of an older story. Tayo's union with her hints at the ceremonial nature of man and woman, and embodies the meaning of the relation between the characters and the Thought Woman, which is the basis of Laguna life. Tayo embraces the feminine attributes that seek to nurture him and his community. In Silko's skillfully gendered narrative, the sexuality of native Laguna women releases and directs power in a manner that replicates the dynamism of the female deity, Spider Woman.

In Western ideologies, aspects such as nature and human, and male and female are categorized as binaries. Silko's protagonist, Tayo, represents the cross-cultural male identity trapped by Western ideologies. Tayo also encapsulates the internalized struggle against the pressures of conflicting social constructions. In Tayo's case, Anglo-American patriarchal and racist ideologies are further complicated by the binaries between gender and race.

Most Native ideologies try to maintain a symmetry regarding the complementarity of genders according to the changing requirements of communities and society. Healing amalgamates the binary concepts of femininity with masculinity through native feminist principles of complementarity and reciprocity. Due to the internalized conflict regarding opposing identities or ideologies imposed by colonial patriarchy, Tayo represents the degradation of a Laguna male. Tayo's illness occurs as a result of the Western constructions of masculinity in contrast to the Laguna ideologies. Tayo's illness stems from a history of colonial conflict and harmful neocolonial performances. While at war, he cannot disconnect himself and his community from the world around him, even when he is told that his sanity depends on maintaining separation.

Silko uses the medium of stories to bring Tayo back to health by reestablishing his gender-balanced role within his community. Through the traditional stories, Tayo is made to realise how gender roles function and are perceived based on the changing needs of Laguna people. In this manner, both the novel and Tayo maintain complementary and reciprocal

relationships as a form of curing ideological illness. The novel intends to balance relationships through storytelling while also asserting a sovereign communal identity for Laguna Pueblo people. Balanced relationships can be assessed through the gender and racial dynamics displayed in the novel. Tayo learns to accept and personify both genders as essential for individual and communal sovereignty. In fact, Tayo becomes a hero because of his complementary and reciprocal association with Ts'eh/Yellow Woman and the land culminating with the strength and courage necessary to overcome the witchery for both himself and his community. Tayo reconciles with conventional stories and his culture, and grasps the importance of non-violence and a more gender-balanced understanding of his communal role. By creating such balance between masculine and feminine powers, he transcends the dual pronged and hierarchical gender/racial binary imposed by colonial hierarchies at the core of his illness.

Silko frames colonial history's effect on both individuals and communities, and strives to resolve institutionalized neocolonial gender oppression in *Ceremony*. Without the fear of fragmentation or illness derived from differences, individuals and communities in an open system can sustain balanced relationships. Also gender is the conduit through which Tayoreorients his entire race and understands the neocolonial struggles he and his community face. In comparison with Western culture, the gendered spaces in Native American communities are different. Women are not dominated by men in Native American communities. While taking into account the historical impact of colonial dominance on Native male bodies, the gender and racial dynamics in the Laguna community become significant. Silko's male protagonist embraces the concept of both genders being vital for individual and communal sovereignty. The formal narration of the story blends binary opposites of both male and female voices and Western and Laguna literary traditions as necessary for understanding the complete story. Tayo must experience a blend of Laguna gender roles in order to understand the value and importance of complementarity and reciprocity regarding gender aspects.

Silko's *Ceremony* suggests that each gender should contribute to the welfare of the other for a strong foundational basis of society, as illustrated with the Laguna Native American community. Though certain common attributes regarding gender emerge in all societies in the modern era, basically due to the mixing of cultures, a close look at the Native cultures around the world reveals that each culture is unique and the gender aspects are different in each culture. As opposed to the mainstream patriarchal societies, in many marginalised Native communities, women enjoy great prominence. Women's steadiness combined with men's mobility allows for the Laguna folk to flourish. Silko proposes a new

masculine concept which embraces both feminine and masculine expressions and experiences. Thus, Silko's *Ceremony* underscores the need for a fine balance between men and women for the accomplishment of communal requirements: "No job was a man's job or a woman's job; the most able person did the work" (66).

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Gender Incongruity and Trans-identity: A Reading of Leslie Fienberg's *Stone Butch Blues*

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Abstract: The word Transgender is often used as an aggregate term for those who transgressconventional binary gender boundaries. Based on Simon de Beauvoir's pronouncement in *The Second Sex*, "one is not born but rather becomes a woman" (283), Judith Butler affirms that gender is fluid. Butler, by deconstructing the binary of male-female, demonstrates that the boundary implied inside this pair is 'inalienably flimsy.' The perspectives of the queer community are often unheard in an atmosphere where heterosexual hegemony is active. The hostile surroundings in which the trans-people live and the traumatic experiences they undergo fill them with constant fear and anxiety in confronting their real selves and asserting their identities. People who are marginalised because of their sexuality have always had to seek mainstream acceptance to get the rights and freedoms they need for a dignified life. The purpose of this study is to explore the resistance strategies that trans-genders adopt when met with adversity and the ways in which they see their trans-identity as providing them with a form of strength and resilience. Leslie Feinberg, an American author, in *Stone Butch Blues*, carves out the entire existence of Jess Goldberg, a butch lesbian who undergoes physical and mental transformation.

Key words: Queer, heterosexual, hegemony, mainstream acceptance

A conventional society has always believed that humankind comprises only two genders - male and female. Post-structural postulations try to deconstruct this binary opposition by showing that, "the distinction between paired opposites is not absolute since each term in the pairing can only be understood and defined in terms of the other" (Barry 143). Physicality is not the only way to identify one's sexual orientation. Sometimes a man's spirit is entrapped inside a female body and vice-versa. Thus, there is a third gender, which is often disdained, rejected, and marginalised, named the transgender. The antagonistic

vibe towards the gender deviants in a conventional society comes out as 'transphobia.'This paper attempts to scrutinize gender incongruity and the formation of trans-identity through a study of Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues*.

*Stone Butch Blues*is a queer narrative, which portrays the life of Jess Goldberg, a butch lesbian in the 1970s America. As a biological woman, Goldberg is expected to perform the roles assigned by society's conventional notion of what it means to be a woman. Challenging the binary gender stereotypes, she identifies herself neither as a woman nor as a man, but as a "he-she," the very encapsulation of gender incongruity. She is forced to endure abuse from the society which cannot accept gender nonconformity. As Jess avers:

I didn't want to be different. I longed to be everything grownups wanted, so they would love me. I followed all their rules, tried my best to please. But there was something else about me that made them knit their eyebrows and frown. No one ever offered me a name for what was wrong with me. That's what made me afraid it was really bad. I only came to recognize its melody through its constant refrain: "Is that a boy or a girl?" (13)

Jess experiences from her early childhood the repercussions of not conforming to the ruling social order. The manliness in the female body excludes her from the gender community of her birth. The clash between normative and non-normative/transgressive influences becomes part of her daily catastrophes, which conditions her struggle for survival.

The very title *Stone Butch Blues* offers deep insights. The term butch refers to females with masculine expressions, who generally pair up sexually with femmes. They cannot live up to the expectations of conventional society's 'ideals of womanhood.' Their transgressive masculinity turns them into daily targets of abuse and attack. At one point in her life, Jess realises that she is a 'stone butch' and what it is to be one. This persona sheds light on how sexual assault can affect one's sexual subjectivity. Jess's disorder emerges after her first sexual experience with Angie, who assures Jess that she is 'stone already.' The word 'blues' refersto songs with a note of lamentation. Such songs reflect a psychological mindset of low spirits and melancholy in highly personalised interpretations. The melancholy of the blues quoted several times in this narrative highlights the painful yet transforming journey of the protagonist Jess Goldberg. The 'stone butch' indicates both the physical state of her indeterminate masculinity and the texture of her emotional experience. A stone hardens her mind so that she cannot spew her emotions, her 'blues'.

Jess's physical transformation can only cover up her gender identity at the surface level, She no longer sees "me looking back at me" in the mirror. What Jess perceives is the image

of a man, who scarcely represents the nuances of her transgendered identity. When she struggles to relate her inner self as a 'man', she quits taking testosterone infusions. Jess recounts in another mirror scene:

I drew one cc of hormones into a syringe, lifted it above my naked thigh and then paused. My arm felt restrained by an unseen hand. No matter how I tried I could not sink that needle into my quadriceps as I'd done hundreds of times before. I stood up and looked in the bathroom mirror. The depth of sadness in my eyes frightened me. I lathered my morning beard stubble, scraped it clean with a razor, and splashed cold water on my face. The stubble still felt rough. As much as I loved my beard as part of my body, I felt trapped behind it. What I saw reflected in the mirror was not a man, but I couldn't recognize the he-she. My face no longer revealed the contrasts of my gender. [..] But who was I now-woman or man? [....] That question could never be answered as long as those were the only choices; it could never be answered if it had to be asked. (221-222)

This is a critical moment for Jess's identity. She feels that a 'transformation' might make her feel at home with her body. Still, this incarnation, which is, acclimatizing as a man, does not grant her paradise. One can see that Jess doesn't see any femininity in herself, nor does she feel like a man. She successfully correlates her identity to the memory of a masculine woman she has seen in the bars and factories, which makes it clear that Jess is not transsexual. She is someone in whom his/her biological gender is at odds with his/her psychological gender.

Jess moves to New York, where she meets Ruth whose open, confident nature, as well as her apparent ease of living in an ambiguous body, fascinates her. She asks Ruth:

"Do you know if I'm man or a woman?" "No", Ruth said. That's why I know so much about you. "I sighed. "Did you think I was a man when you first met me? "She nodded. "Yes, I first thought you were a straight man. Then I thought you were gay. It's been a shock for me to realize that even I make assumptions about sex and gender that aren't true. I thought I was liberated from all of that. I smiled. "I didn't want you to think I was a man. I wanted you to see how much more complicated I am. I wanted you to like what you saw." (254)

Ruth tells Jess that the solution to their questionable gender identity and the ensuing crisis lies outside the so-called binary norms. Later Jess concedes to Ruth:

I sighed. When I was growing up, I believed I was gonna do something really important with my life, like explore the universe or cure diseases. I never thought I'd spend so much time of my life fighting over which bathroom I could use. (254-255)

These words are powerful enough to expose the cruelty of the mechanism of dehumanisation and abjection that has taken place. Her transgressive gender identity has limited her choices; also, her fundamental civil rights and biological needs are in jeopardy.

Fienberg in *Stone Butch Blues* marksJess's conspicuous transitional phases of reticence, pauperism, and emotional turmoil to utterance, buoyancy and distinctiveness. Her first phase is an epoch of laconism. She moves in a world where only silence embraces her. No one is there to envisage her as a mortal being. Once a group of youngsters brutally assault her in the subway and she is hospitalized for a couple of days. Her mangled jaw prevents her from talking for several days. This metaphorical representation is an embodiment of her aphonic life. The second phase is an epoch of acerbity where Jess and Ruth start a journey together. Ruth goes to see the family she abandoned and demands that Jess visit her place Buffalo where she started her life as a butch. They switch on their time machine to their history to recall the animosity all around. One can assume that they need this ride to cast out all those dark memories to dream about new ratifications. The third phase is an epoch of accomplishment. Jess's attention is caught by a group of people from the queer community on the public stage near the subway. They are chatting to potential crowds. Unlike Jess', their thoughts and desires are not muted. Their loud and brave testimonials shake off the fear in her. At this juncture she has the confidence to articulate her traumatic path as well as to name her identity:

And suddenly I felt so sick to death of my own silence that I needed to speak too […] my legs could hardly get me up on stage. I looked at the hundreds of faces staring at me. "I'm not a gay man." My own amplified voice startled me. "I'm a butch, a he-she. I don't know if the people who hate our guts call us that anymore. But that single epithet shaped my teenage years." (296)

This electrifying episode brings robust optimism in her. Unlike the queer feminism of the 1970s, this queer community strives to implement civic space for trans-people. For Jess, for the first time, life promises a bright future. Jess acknowledges: "I know about getting hurt," I said. "But I don't have much experience talking about it. And I know about fighting back, but I mostly know how to do it alone. That's a tough way to fight, because I'm usually outnumbered and I usually lose" (296). Jess realizes that she is not alone, or at least she does not have to continue her struggle alone. She understands that a strong, organized community can be an alternative to abject identities like her own, "I don't know what it would take to really change the world. But couldn't we get together and try to figure that out? Couldn't we be bigger? Isn't there a way we could help fight each other's battles so

that we are not always alone?" (297).

The closing notes of *Stone Butch Blues* indicate that Jess ends up passing as neither man nor woman, and being read as both. She makes the fantastic transformation to the intermediate space of crossing, her lived reality. The novel envisages gender and sexual borderlands with inhabitants who "queer" the gendered heterosexual norms. It exposes not only its constructed nature of heterosexual structures but also the system's means of disciplining and restraining its subjects into gender and sexual conformity.

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Women, Cultural History, Memory and Myth:A Lakshadweep Chronicle

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Abstract: The cultural history, memory and myth of Lakshadweep are closely related to the lives of the island women. But the matrilineal patriarchy at work in the society acts as a shackle that tames the thoughts and experiences of women. This article looks into the ways in which this powerful system of matriliny serves as a tool to dictate the norms of patriarchy and has prevented women from gaining visibility and voice across the ages. It traces the trajectory of women's oppression as a colonial and post-colonial subject, using select pieces from Lakshadweep oral literature.

Keywords: matrilineal patriarchy, Lakshadweep literature, post-colonial subject

Patriarchy alludes to male domination in both public and private spheres. A patriarchal society bestows absolute superiority to men and, to some extent, limits women's human rights also. Feminists use the term 'patriarchy' to describe the power relationship between men and women as well as to find out the root cause of women's subordination. At the core of all feminist theories lies a critique of patriarchy as a system that discriminated against women as well as an advocacy that women should receive equal opportunity and rights as men in social, economic and political fronts. Such equality became a functional principle in Indian society after independence in 1947, with the adoption of a Constitution that promised equality, freedom, protection from discriminations based on gender or religion. It is significant that with Indian Independence, Lakshadweep was declared as a Union Territory, which was a turning point in the lives of Lakshadweep and its women. As a region which had been in the clutches of the colonial masters, the island has a great story of resistance and survival as well.

Literature often reflects the cultural assumptions and attitudes, including attitude towards women, their status, roles and expectations, across different periods in a society. Though Lakshadweep is a matrilineal society, the role of women and their lived experiences are

influenced by patriarchal ideas. Hence, this article will touch on the power politics of gender and related issues of discrimination, stereotyping, objectification, social stigmatization and oppression.

Preserving Memories through Folk narratives

Almost all societies across the world perpetuate their traditional customs, culture, history, rituals, beliefs, stories and songs through their cultural memories. Memories were once preserved and transferred to successive generations through an oral tradition and now, through print and digital media. Lakshadweep too has a very rich oral tradition, especially of Mappila songs and folk songs. The distinct style of this folk tradition reflects the very soul of the island. There were specialised groups of women who performed Mappila Mylanchi songs during *Oppana* (a dance performed by women during wedding ceremonies) at Muslim weddings. Their performances were inevitable at marriage gatherings, *Sunnaths* (male circumcision ceremony) and any other special occasions. These groups travelled from island to island for performances and lived like nomads. This resulted in the widespread dissemination and popularity of folk songs. Certain families, as custodians or retainers of these songs, have always enjoyed a considerable stature in the cultural life of the island.

Many folk songs depicted life experiences and routines of the islanders in a simple language. The launching ceremony of new *Odams* (small fishing boats), journey through the sea, *Padaari* (the period of delay for boats to return to the islands due to heavy rainfall), sharecropping – are all conveyed through songs, along with dreams, romance, rivalry and revenge. For instance, one of the songs included in *Lakshadweepile Nadanpattukal* (Folksongs of Lakshadweep) compiled by Dr.M. Mullakkoya, captures the grief of a wife who is afraid of *Padaari*or any kind of mishap to her husband:

Kalam EdavanjarAhirmasath
Cherayumkalppattuadangiya kalam
Chokkiyumkoodupanitha kalam
Koya ante barishampettenkil
Vedanayentethadiyilkudungum
Eriyalokarkadalilumchadum. (40)

The woman in the song is forced to bid farewell to her husband who goes sailing in the sea during the beginning of a heavy rainy season. Usually rainy season is a time for navigators

to stay back at their homes with their family and enjoy their private life. But, here, the man has decided to go to work, and so, has to separate from his wife. The separation haunts her mind and the pain and mental agony born out of this kind of a separation from the mate, weakens her body. The song captures the feelings of women who stay back at home. The women are depicted as obedient and submissive, soft-hearted and emotional. They do not have an identity of their own and are not strong enough to handle adverse situations. The song gives an insight into the gender roles practised in the island – women were supposed to engage in the household chores while men went out to work and dominated the public spheres.

"Abhilashangal" (Dreams)is a folk song in which the central character, Beevi is asked about her wishes in life after her first menstruation. She replies that she wishes to wear new dresses and ornaments and to go out with her friends to see the seashore. Then she would like to go shopping at Sufi Bazaar. Soon after the fulfilment of each desire, she is asked by her lover, what next? She replies that she wants to get married, make love and have a child. Clearly, patriarchal conditioning is so deeply etched in her mind that she cannot think of a goal beyond marriage and children. Having a family life is mandatory for an ideal girl; she cannot have dreams and aspirations beyond that. Evidently in these songs, women are represented as weak and vulnerable, easily manipulated or put into danger. Women are stereotyped virtually as "damsels in distress" who are physically beautiful yet weak – these female characters are icons of beauty and often introduced as "eye candies" – unable to withstand temptations or persuasions and cry in each and every forlorn situation.

"Omanappoovi" is another folk song, in which the girl is requesting her father not to sell their Odam. She asks him to sell her instead of the Odam (boat) and find a remedy for their poverty. This indicates the low self-esteem of girls brought up in conservative patriarchal families. She sacrifices her life in order to provide a life for her family members. It is considered to be the duty of an "ideal woman" to sacrifice herself for the well-being of her family. Such women easily fit into the mould of "Kulasthree" (a woman who upholds the prestige of her family). They were confined to the house and their discussions were mostly related to domestic affairs. The ideas of spirituality and religious practices were exclusively the power products of men, and women were not allowed to engage in discussions regarding them or performances. All the public spheres were the monopoly of men. Women had no public space to discuss their matters.

The myth of chastity and Lakshadweep women.

Kattuvili is an art form performed by island women in connection with the journey and the *Padaar Of odams*. This was performed as an offering to the winds by chaste women for the safe return of *odams* back to the islands. Women assemble near any *dargas* (shrines of saints) or *makbaras* (cemetery of saints where people usually come to pray) and distribute *dharmakkanji* (porridge-like food item usually served to people) among the natives. After that, women gather to sing and dance, addressing the wind.

AkkattumKattilla
IkkattumKattilla
Keelavadakkepoyi
Veeshiadikatte
Allah kollookatte. (44)

Women usually bend and sway their bodies along with the beat of the song and act as if they float with the wind and sea waves. This performance is meant to propitiate the winds and the waves, to safeguard their kith and kin from probable sea accidents. Women observe this performance as a kind of ritual or a prayer for the well-being of their fathers, sons and husbands. It is considered the duty of a woman to participate in this performance in order to show her care and concern for her menfolk. She is supposed to preserve her modesty and suppress her desires and sexual urges for the sake of her husband.

The myth that the chaste behaviour of a woman on land decides her man's fate at sea is prevalent in the island. As R. Bhagyalakshmi states in her article "Myth of Chastity as a Patri-centric Clutch on Women" sums up, these myths have often led to the oppression and subjugation of women:

The lives of women are governed and ruled by the frames and norms of morality that are being created by the patriarchal society. Chastity is one such norm created by andro-centric society and it always remains the yardstick or a tool to measure the femininity of women. (1)

This very idea of chastity is a modus operandi of any androcentric society and is mainly executed with the staunch support from elderly women in families. Upholding chastity along with service to the husband as an ideal wife and perpetual giver is commended by the patriarchal system. Such myths indicate the power politics in a manipulative patriarchal society. These myths and related rituals are used as a tool of oppression and subjugation by patriarchy. The essence of this myth is seen with culture specific modifications in many other parts of the country and the world.

Early records of the chronicles of culture

The cultural history of Lakshadweep points to very brave women who tried to assert what they wanted to do with their life and acted to fulfil their choices. They had clear-cut notions about their religious faith, beliefs and choices. Hameedath Beevi, for instance, was a person who believed in Hazrath Ubaidulla, a religious preacher and accepted Islamic belief for the first time in the island. Later, she married Ubaidulla and settled in Amini Island. Also, in the local history of Lakshadweep, the first resident of the Bitra Island is believed to be a woman. Though her whereabouts remain untraced, she is lauded for her courage to live in an island all by herself. These stories are transferred from generation to generation through oral tradition and songs.

With the establishment of an ideological state apparatus like family, the fundamental unit of a patriarchal society, women automatically became subordinate. Despite the matrilineal system, the socio-cultural obstacles faced by women hinder the empowerment of women. Matrilineal families basically transmit the property through the female lineage. That does not mean that property is transferred from one female member to another; but it is done through a male descendant. Apparently, the ownership and power do not necessarily remain in the hands of these women. Regarding the family system in practice in Lakshadweep and Minicoy, William Logan in his *Malabar Manual* quotes H.M Winderbotham and says:

As for the children which their wives bear to them, if they be girls they abide with the mothers; but if they be boys, mothers bring them up till they are fourteen, and then send them to the fathers. Such is the custom of these two islands. The wives do nothing but nurse their children and gather such fruits as their island produce: for her husband does furnish them with all necessaries. (1004)

Historically, women have held both active and passive roles in Lakshadweep. In some stories, they are the cause for certain actions, in some they are the victims and in yet other stories, they are the game-changers and king-makers. There is a story of a princess of Chiraikkal family being saved from drowning in the river by a Muslim youth, at a time of strict caste related untouchability and excommunication. He gave her his *mundu* (sarong-like attire wrap around the waist, usually used by men) to cover her body with. The princess got polluted as she was touched by a Muslim man and also received *mundu* from him, the latter of which echoes a marriage ceremony. The king who came to know of it asked his daughter to convert to Islam and marry the man. She was given Lakshadweep islands and

some parts of Kannur as her wedding gift. She established the Araikkal dynasty and became the first AraikkalBeevi who ruled over Kannur and Lakshadweep regions.

In this version of the story, the princess was not given the opportunity to explain her side of the story and the king was not willing to listen to her point of view. He simply gave a judgement that would erase the shame incurred by his family. The opinion of women was neither asked nor welcomed. Even a princess did not have the freedom to decide her own life. Later, Araikkal Beevi tries to establish a rule that is completely under her will and decisions. She could not sustain the matriarchal power for long and power was transferred to male members. Out of the forty three rulers of Araikkal, just fourteen are female.

The matrilineal families have a huge role in naturalizing the ideology of patriarchy. Thus the society accepts the acculturation process of women as inferior and submissive, while men as powerful and dominant. From early childhood onwards children imbibe this kind of a gendered matrix and this idea is transmitted from generation to generation. The concept of gender is no longer binary. Gender is multiple and liberal. But, Lakshadweep is a hetero-normative or hetero-fascist society. No other genders are recognized by this society.

Women as Subalterns and Subordinate Subjects

During the Portuguese rule, several girls and women were taken away by Portuguese men to use them as sex slaves. In the short story "Arthanadam" by P.I.Kalpeni, a girl named Sainaba was kidnapped by the Portuguese navigators. On a fine morning, Hassan Kakka heard a big hue and cry. People were running for their lives as they saw the arrival of the Portuguese ship towards their island. People called out that "*Bellakkara Sayibina Kappal Bayinde, Ellarum foyi maranjo.. Ella fennikalummaranjo, Farankikappalbaintafolo*.." (Here comes the ship of White men, everybody run and save your life. Hide all our girls, here comes the Portuguese ship). The patriarchal society sees women as inferior and insignificant in comparison with men. Thus, she cannot even protest or escape from the hands of white men and is taken away as a sex slave. In short, the women were doubly oppressed both by the colonizers and the patriarchal hegemony. This double marginalization made them subalterns and their voices were silenced. We cannot find any female freedom fighter or a warrior from the islands during the colonial rule under Portuguese, Dutch or British. No narratives are available regarding the contributions of women towards their country.

In "*Can the Subaltern Speak?*" of Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak, the writer manifests the Indian woman's subaltern position, her inaccessibility to 'voice' and her 'silenced difficult space of abjection.' Since women are twice colonized, the most oppressed of these women can be seen to be in the position of the subaltern. Spivak observes that there is no space from where the subaltern subject can speak. In the case of Lakshadweep, the women's voices were at first heard only through the writings of men. But, these voices were not the testimonials of the experiences of real women. The female characters in the novel *Kolodam* by Ismath Hussain have traditional gender roles and their identities were subsumed within the households. These women are forced to marry from their own castes to ensure the purity of upper caste. As women are considered to be the "torch-bearers of culture", these women were kept under strict rules of patriarchy.

After the Independence of India in 1947**,** improvement in the health care facilities, spread of education, job assistance from different employment schemes, and associations enhanced the all-round development of women, all leading to the transformation in the lives of women. The autobiography of the first lady doctor from Lakshadweep Padmasree Dr. S. Rahmath Beegum titled *Avismaraneeyam*indicates the radical changes that happened in Lakshadweep after the independence of India. Rebellions against child marriage, discrimination in the name of caste and denial of educational rights were many. The inclusion of island women in almost all the spheres and sectors revealed their inner potential. The provisions for divorce and remarriage, the introduction of banking facilities, ship and aircraft connectivity, and communication facilities, all had a positive impact on the lives of women as well.

Spivak proposes the use of a "strategic essentialism" by including the subaltern voice of the marginalized and silenced, as a strategic and necessary position to speak and to be heard. Women of Lakshadweep, being in a marginal position, began to speak of their lives, dreams and aspirations at first through silence and later, through their own words and works. The emergence of female writers to voice their thoughts and ideas is a proof of that. They resisted the false representations and began to redefine their gender roles in a new way. The ethos of resistance is reflected in the narratives of the 21st century. The change in perspectives happened through the rapid globalization and technological boom. A Neo-colonial situation generated a never ending reference to the colonizer's lifestyle and women began to adapt to this standardized, yet monopolized environment. Even then, the women are complacent with their limited freedom granted by the patriarchal religious system. The novel by Sunidha Ismail titled *Rains in the Island* portrays strong female characters and presents a cross section of present-day Lakshadweep society.

Conclusion

Matrilineal societies are often mistakenly connected with female empowerment. In the development orbit, many presume that women in these societies have more rights and access to property. The property may be transferred to women, but the ownership is transferred from the mother's brother to the nephew and by no means to women themselves. The intervention of patriarchy here results in the loss of power and subjugation of women. Matrilineal family system of Lakshadweep facilitates naturalization of patriarchy and acculturation of women as inferior. The role of women in preserving cultural memories and myth-making along with their position in the cultural history of Lakshadweep is significant. The ruthless manipulation of matrilineal patriarchy along with colonialism created doubly marginalized women. The spread of education after Independence enabled women to enter into the public domain, which was previously dominated by caste and gender power politics. The emergence of female writers is a positive sign of those changes happening in the Lakshadweep society, even though religious-bound matrilineal patriarchy still prevails in the island as an obsolete machinery to impede equal opportunities for women.

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The Apparent Lead and the Real Lead: An Analysis of Female Co-leads in Police Procedural Drama Series

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Abstract: Crime thrillers or police procedural drama series are considered one of the most popular genres in visual media, but the presence of women in those is one of contention. The female protagonists of Police procedural series have become less and less stereotypical, and yet they are not completely rid of the patriarchal overtures. The women detectives partnered with male leads in contemporary police procedural dramas are in reality camouflaged as non-stereotypical protagonists, whereas their real status in the series is that of a side-kick or second fiddle. This deceptive semblance makes the audience think that it has a woman in the lead role, while they are just another dispensable character in the life of the male protagonist. This kind of ruse is incorporated to increase the TRP rating, by spiking the interests of both female and male viewers. Redundant shows like "Lucifer," "The Mentalist" and "Castle" have female co-leads moulded in this misleading manner.

Keywords: Police procedural drama series, Female detectives, sidekicks, female co-leads, stereotypes, self-sufficient female sleuths

The detective figure is a largely Western representation; a figure of authority featuring a "white male" figure, observant, aloof, superior in strength and intellect who is burdened with unravelling the mysteries of the human mind and actions. Historically, in American and British literature and films, such a figure is aided by another "white male" figure who is usually called the "sidekick." The relationship between the central white male figure and the sidekick has been defined and redefined in various lights in various dimensions throughout literary history. Ron Buchanan says,

…the sidekick, while a lesser figure in the story, is crucial to the story's development, being present to assist the central character and to act as a surrogate for the audience. As a

narrator or as a quasi-audience, the sidekick supplies information necessary for the reader, viewer, or listener to understand fully the character and plot nuances. In other situations, the sidekick marks a passage of time or a shift in setting and simultaneously provides unity by recounting these shifts. As a character, the sidekick sometimes is static, not changing in personality or function. On other occasions, the sidekick evolves into an essential figure, assuming a higher degree of relevance but still maintaining a subordinate position to the hero(ine). (15)

Through a harsher light of criticism, one can say that the sidekick still plays the role of an appendage, i.e., a person who stays in the side-line, one who can be killed, one who cannot act, one who almost always need saving, one who is slapped for comic effect, one who can be teased, this list goes on. These attributes of the sidekicks have never changed and by definition, such a character is expendable or replaceable. Due to various reasons, we can no longer expect the sidekick to be the usual 'another white male figure' who is the thread that connects the central figure to the rest of the society. Nowadays, prime time television shows and on-demand content in America and Britain have diverse characters aiding the hero, including women. With the rise of "On-Demand-Content" and OTT platforms, common people have more access to a wide range of contents from which they can choose their type of entertainment or their genus of characters. As a result of this rise of demand for diverse characters, even the detective genre too has undergone certain changes including the characteristic conception of the protagonist and the sidekick. Now more and more shows are being produced where the partner detective cannot be side-lined as a mere sidekick. Shows like "True Detective" had a woman and an Afro-American man as leads, in two different seasons. All the detectives in "True Detective" have been portrayed by famous Hollywood actors like Woodey Harrelson, Mathew McConaughey (First Season), Colin Farrell, Rachael McAdams (Second Season), and Mahershala Ali (Third Season) and the plot gives the spectator no option to perceive one or the other as a side-kick. Still, it felt unfair to see that Racheal McAdams had less screen time than her co-lead Colin Farrell in the second season, bracketing the notion that a person of the margin cannot have all of it still. Women still struggle to be in the central light, and are side-lined easily even in this 21st century. In American and British series and television shows, women are more abundantly seen as central figures in dramas, soaps, and comedies. Whereas, when it comes to popular crime thrillers, women are still represented within the accepted cultural representational limits only, especially where she is a co-lead with a male partner.

There are many series where females are detectives in the lead role. If we consider the history of female detectives in series or television shows, some amazing characters have

stood the test of time, and yet are not as popular or as economically supported (production-wise) as their male counterparts. Some of the major women detective leads in shows are Detective Chief Inspector Jane Tennison played by **the effeminate Helen Mirren** in the show **"Prime Suspect," which ran for 7 seasons from 1991 to 2006, "Cagney and Lacey" where** for the first time, two women were featured in the lead roles and were presented as equals, the 1930 rendition of Agatha Christie's "Miss Marple", "Stella Gibson" in the recently successful show titled "The Fall," and so on. Unlike the contemporary superhero genre which does not have much to say about or to women, crime thriller shows are successful in creating early distinctive representations of women leads as detectives.

In many of the American and British crime thriller series, recent trends show a move towards female leads. Smart women are "taking over" and abandoning their former ancillary roles and as a result, the demographics of females on Western prime time television or on-demand content have transformed from mostly men to quite a few women in leading roles. Yet, male detective shows vastly outnumber the female detective shows, and it remains not-so-usual for a female detective to be the central character in one of these shows. Like Wonder Woman or Captain Marvel who broke this non-representation streak in superhero movies, there are only a very few female detective shows where they stand tall and equal to their male counterparts, by both popularity and characterisation. What is peculiar about these women detective portrayals is that they are not completely stereotypical and that they are representations culminating from the necessity of producing a deliberate image which deviates away from the common limited notions available in the society. Stella Gibson in the series "The Fall," a character who understands the patriarchal world around her and protests against it using her intelligence, wants to bring justice to the families of the deceased women by finding the serial killer, is the most non-stereotypical of the detective characters. What makes her character distinct is her way of making each woman's death a personal matter, and yet never placing her own personal baggage on the pedestal.

There are also shows with two female detective characters termed as co-leads. Unlike the white male sidekick, who serves a subservient position to the central character, female detectives portrayed as co-leads together are shown as much more equal. In "Cagney and Lacey", Cagney's attention was completely on her career, with Lacey balancing work and personal life as a working mother. The partners leaned on each other for support. In the obituary for the show's co-creator **Barbara Avedon**, *The Independent* wrote, "The feminist and peace campaigner helped to break the mould of small-screen American police

series. For the first time, two women were featured in the lead roles and presented as equals" (Hayward). The extremely popular "Rizzoli and Isles" where the detective Rizzoli is aided by Medical Examiner Maura Isles, again features two equals who support each other in both personal and professional matters. The series creator Janet Tamaro described the detective partners as a "power couple." The recent miniseries "Unbelievable," a dramatization of the 2008–2011 Washington and Colorado Rape cases, follow Marie, a teenager who was charged with lying about having been raped, and then how two "women" detectives bring her the justice she deserves. The series has two focal points, one being Marie's life after the rape incident, and how it is easy for the system (especially the men in it) to declare that the victim is lying and the other being two very dissimilar detectives joining forces to find a serial rapist. The show features Detective Karen Duvall and Detective Grace Rasmussen, who after a strained start decides to work their cases together, for the sake of rendering justice to the victims. The show emphasizes the necessity of having more women in police and intelligent forces, more than ever.

In shows like these the hegemony of deciding who the central character relies upon the cultural image and representation of that image and how each of these representations are welcomed or rejected by a specific national audience. One cannot say that these portrayals have encompassed only the non-stereotypical aspects of characterisation. For example, in "Cagney and Lacey", one detective is portrayed within the stock characteristics of a feminist, and the other as a homemaker. This tendency repeats in most women "buddy dramas", where the cultural image of these two accepted extremes are foregrounded, and the women in between are omitted for the sake of easy representation of women. But even within these stereotypical representations, one is relieved to see a shift in the narrative with the depiction of more women and women-centred shows. Even with the overbearing silhouette of the "accepted extremes," one has to agree that Glenwood Irons comment, "Women detectives created in the past thirty years are outgoing, aggressive, and self-sufficient sleuths who have transcended generic codes and virtually rewritten the archetypal male detective from a female perspective" (Feminism in Women's Detective Fiction, 1995) is still valid.

Maxine Kersten in her research paper "Women in Crime" analysed the portrayal of female leads in American dramas. In it, she categorises female detective leads according to these accepted cultural representations. According to her, women leads in crime thrillers can be categorised according to their love relationship, appearance, action and setting. She says,
The relationships in the American series illustrate two different portrayals of the female lead. The first is a more modern perspective, depicting women as independent and

successful in their own right, rather than according to stereotypes in which females are married and oriented towards communal goals. (18)

Kersten analyzed one of the most successful crime thrillers in American history, television history, "Bones" and identified the co-lead character Temperance 'Bones' Brennan as the typical homemaker stereotype. Temperance Brennan is involved in a romantic relationship with Sealy Booth, the detective, and later gets married to him. Temperance Brennan's character is independent and intelligent, and yet, the show's creators made it obvious that a woman and a man partnered together, even in crime thrillers that are destined together as if in a fairy tale. The "culturally significant" relationship status of the woman lead must change from independent to mutually dependant status, by the end of a season. The Pilot episode was more focused on Brennan's character and the anthropological side of the investigation with more screen time for Emily Deschanel than Sealy Booth (played by David Boreanaz), the FBI partner who is in need of her intelligence. However, by the second episode, the balance started shifting with equal or less screen time for Brennan's character, along with the romantic gradient overwhelming the "thrill" in the crime thriller. Kersten's second category pertains to the actions of these characters, where she detected that the female main characters are used for more delicate and less aggressive jobs within the police force. Many female leads in crime thrillers are more inclined to do analysis, forensic activities, laboratory work and reviews than actually participate in a live encounter. The third category is related to the female detective's appearance. Usually, the female leading characters are consistently portrayed as very feminine by means of their appearance, notes Kersten. The fourth pattern Kersten identified was the setting. In crime thrillers, when it comes to a female lead's setting, it is shown that "within the settings that mimic the environment of detectives or specialists, small details can be identified that add to the character of the female lead and evoke a certain image. These types of details in the setting consist of photographs, artwork, furniture, and media props," which reiterates the homemaker image of the female lead (Kersten 24).

If one takes the above-said single lead women detective shows or co-female lead shows, it is apparent that those shows don't include most of these patterns mentioned by Kersten. Helen Mirren's portrayal of Jane Tennison was revolutionary in making with an unflinching female lead who was "refreshingly uninterested in male approval," and didn't much adhere to the patterns of the communal figure as listed out by Kersten. She was single and her relationship status never overpowered the essence of a crime thriller, she wore formal clothes almost all the time, and she was seen investigating war crimes and were out in the field without a second thought. Stelle Gibson of "The Call ", though joins the

investigation as a reviewer, she soon demands her chief to make her the detective of the case and is out in the field doing her work, even when it was clear that she has been identified by the killer as the lead officer. Amy Sullivan of *The Atlantic* calls “The Fall”, "The Most Feminist Show on Television", and writes: "Refreshingly, none of the tropes we've been trained to expect in a story about a powerful woman play out. Nobody resents Gibson's appearance on the scene or questions her authority. Her gender is a non-issue; subordinates hop to when she enters a room and they follow her commands without question. Gibson doesn't try to submerge her femininity and stomp around barking out orders. In Anderson's restrained yet compelling performance, Gibson is cool, calm, and always chic, with the most fabulous coat in detectivedom. In “unbelievable” Detective Karen Duvall is a working mother and yet, her personal life rarely comes into the frame. This is the shift that the representation of women’s image underwent due to the standardization of the new mediums like “On-Demand Content " and more and more voices demanding diverse and non-stock characters.

One would expect that the contemporary show creators would be inclined to make more “Stella Gibson” or “Karen Duvall” kind of characters, due to this rising demand. If you search in google or any movie/television online database like IMDB or Rotten Tomatoes, with the parameters “Female detective as lead”, you will get a barrage of suggestions and lists. These lists and suggestions are usually tentative as they change according to contemporary popularity and votes by both critics and audience. In IMDB, or Rotten Tomatoes we may set the filter to “Female Detective” and currently the most popular movie with a female lead is “Enola Holmes,” a character developed as Sherlock Holmes’ 14-year-old sister, yet who doesn’t rely on Sherlock to find her true path as a detective. The top results according to popularity, features these shows with female detectives as leads, some of which have already been mentioned here. The next ten popular shows are these: 1. *Lucifer*, 2. *The Fall*, 3. *The Mentalist*, 4. *Person of Interest*, 5. *Murder, She Wrote*, 6. *Castle* 7. *Unbelievable*, 8. *Rizzoli and Isles* 9. *Orphan Black* 10. *Veronica Mars*. The question here is if the parameters of the female-oriented crime thrillers discussed earlier could be applied to the popular shows where a female detective is partnered with a male lead and if the female leads are indeed “leading” or mere side-kicks. Of the popular shows mentioned above, only three have male co-leads or protagonists - *Lucifer*, *The Mentalist* and *Castle*. Even though “The Fall” features second in the list, the vote disparity between the three shows mentioned here and “The Fall” is humungous. It simply means, “The Fall” though seen by only a few, has been rated high by almost all who have seen it, whereas the most popular show *Lucifer* with its redundant content and style has been viewed by more people.

This study is based on a qualitative analysis, with the corpus consisting of the three series within the genre of police procedural drama series with both female and male characters appearing as co-leads or protagonists. For the analysis, the characters of Detective Chloe Decker from "Lucifer", Detective Kate Beckett from "Castle" and Theresa Lisbon of "The Mentalist" will be considered and analysed. The common facets of the female co-leads in these three shows are that they all are detectives, who at the start of the show is shown as somebody who is as independent as "Stella Gibson" or "Det. Grace Rasmussen". They all are hailed as good detectives, they wear official clothes, follows all rules and regulations, and as the "white male" detective of the usual crime thrillers, they are "observant, aloof, superior in strength and intellect who is burdened with unravelling the mysteries of the human mind and actions." But unlike the other detective female co-leads like Rizzoli, Isles, Duvall or Rasmussen, they are not the real protagonists of the story, or not even given the equal status. Why these shows have more viewers than "The Fall" is due to its boosting of the patriarchal image, through its primary advertisement features such as title, posters and description, where it clearly omits or side-lines the female detective characters. The title of each of these three shows are either eponymous or directly points to the detective's partner, thus Lucifer Morningstar in "Lucifer", Patrick Jane in "The Mentalist" and Richard Castle in "Castle" are promoted as the real heroes, even though none of them are the detectives in these supposedly "crime thriller" series.

The female detectives in the show, though presented as integral to the show, are replaceable, as is evidenced by the show descriptions. In IMDB, the basic description of "Lucifer" is given as "Lucifer Morningstar has decided he's had enough of being the dutiful servant in Hell and decides to spend some time on Earth to better understand humanity. He settles in Los Angeles - the City of Angels." The entire plot description of "The Mentalist " in its Wikipedia page features its detective lead Theresa Lisbon only once along with the other detectives in the team. The IMDB description of "Castle" goes like this, "After a serial killer imitates the plots of his novels, successful mystery novelist Richard "Rick" Castle receives permission from the Mayor of New York City to tag along with an NYPD homicide investigation team for research purposes." Crime thriller shows are still considered more in tune with the male audience, and it is natural for the advertisers to give descriptions omitting the female lead altogether, for increasing the TRP rating. The description of "Bones" in IMDB will help one understand the dereliction shown towards the female leads in these three shows. The description of "Bones" reads, "Forensic anthropologist Dr Temperance "Bones" Brennan and cocky F.B.I. Special Agent Seeley Booth build a team to investigate murders…" where both leads are given the subject position, never making the audience question the position of the female lead or the

detective. It becomes apparent, with this description that neither Dr Brennan nor Sealy Booth are considered dispensable.

Like Dr Brennan, the male co-leads help the female detectives close the homicide cases with their special skills, positioning themselves as consultants. Unlike Brennan, their skills are not based on scientific data though. Each of these protagonists tag along with these very independent and intelligent women, for their own requirements. Richard Castle needs a muse, Jane, the mentalist needs to find a serial killer who murdered his family and Lucifer is merely fascinated by the disapproval and rejection of his charm by Chloe Decker, the detective. All three show's detectives object vehemently, at first, to having these people tagging along in the crime scenes, fearing probably distraction and interference in their work. But they are forced to tolerate them due to orders from higher authorities, or some other work pressure. The posters of these shows also signal the same confusions regarding the image of the female detective. In two of these shows, the detectives don't even feature in the posters, whereas in "Castle," Detective Kate Beckett stands side by side with the consultant in the first season, and is seen way back in the shot in the second season poster, definitely emphasising the side-kick relevance of the character. Sophia Mcdougall, in her article "I Hate Strong Female Character", talks about this deliberate confusion created by show creators through posters. Mcdougall says, "On the posters, they're posed way in the back of the shot behind the men, in the trailers they may pout or smile or kick things, but they remain silent. Their strength lets them, briefly, dominate bystanders but never dominate the plot. It's an anodyne, a sop, a Trojan Horse - it's there to distract and confuse you, so you forget to ask for more" (2013).

As Mcdougall says, the female characters are there to stop people from asking for more female leads. All three shows are repetitive in style and the central plot remains the adventure of the male protagonist into the world of crimes. But the series characters are disguised by inversion of characteristics in such a way that nobody would ask for more representation of female leads. These three female detectives have the characteristics of the protagonist and yet, they are not the protagonists of the show. Like Sherlock in "Sherlock" or Detective Alec Hardy in "Broadchurch," the three detectives are presented as brooding, lacking in social skills, aloof, intelligent and so on, whereas the protagonists are presented as Peter Pan-like, with their socially immature outlook which often hinders the detective in her investigation. The three detectives often seem to roll their eyes or scold these protagonists for their juvenile behaviour, frequently, and still find solace from their companionship. The detectives wear professional clothes and are presented as least bothered about their style sense, while the protagonists take immense pride in their choice

of clothes and accessories. All three female detectives never back-out from live and dangerous encounters, whereas the civilian protagonists are asked to stay back. These characteristics apparently implicate the inversion of protagonist-sidekick features to confuse the common spectator, especially the demanding voices for diverse characters.

Though these shows continue to be focused on finding the culprit, a good share of the shows' time is taken for developing the romantic slant between the protagonist and the detective. Eventually, the detectives do fall in love with the protagonists, and gets married or are romantically involved openly. For Peter Pan-like protagonists, the detectives are like a blend of Tinkerbell and Wendy. These characters become less effective as time goes by, and becomes less complex and more stereotypical by the end of the story. Their co-lead position becomes ostensible when the character is found very much dispensable. They are a sham, involving deceptive subversion and makes the audience think that it has a woman in the lead role, whereas the actuality is they are mere sidekicks. Shows like these showcase women as leads, but in reality, they are there only to help the protagonists ascend the throne of the hero, thus ensuring the survival of the patriarchal image.

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