

**Contemporary Women's Writing in India**

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## **Contemporary Women's Writing in India**

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*Dedicated to all the silenced voices*

*-Editors*

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# **Contemporary Women's Writing in India**

## **PREFACE**

Arising from a fertile milieu that fortifies social and political consciousness, Indian women writers have added a new dimension to Indian English literature exploring significant themes of their age, leaving behind the burden of centuries. Shedding off the shackles of placid stoicism, growing conscious of their role in society, many have gathered the power to redefine themselves beyond the threshold of patriarchy, emerging as bold and

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valiant voices with revolutionary zeal, surpassing all anticipations and beliefs. Availing themselves of the literary strategies of subversion, deconstruction and reconstruction, Indian women writers are marching ahead breaking their silence, retelling tales and recounting their perspectives. These women have drawn on multiple themes and literary modes to help us capture what is at stake in the practices of self and agency and of narrative that emerge at the contested margins of patriarchy and nation. This book is an attempt to unravel the critical dimensions of contemporary Indian women writers' reflections, by focusing on the female aesthetics of literary production in the twentieth and twenty first century.



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### **Blurring the Borders: *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* as a Transversal Political Epic**

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*Assistant Professor*  
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*Kozhikode.*

For Arundhati Roy, twenty years of silence in fiction, has not been a period of hibernation. The activist in her was relentlessly at work intervening in immediate socio-political upheavals around the globe via both her writings and on-the street activism. A featured speaker in meetings, forums, at Universities and resistance platforms, in the words of David Jefferess, she has been, “[C]onstructed as the “Third-World” voice of the global justice movement, due to her style of writing and argumentation, as well as her gendered, raced, and “Third-Worlded” subjectivity” (Jefferess 158). Unlike Naipaul or Rushdie, Roy chooses to stay in India and centre her writings in India because she says, “If I go away, everything and everyone – every friend, every tree, every home, every dog, squirrel and bird that I have known and loved – is incinerated, how shall I live on? And who will love me back? (Roy “Shall We”, 298).

This all-inclusive politics of hybridity strikes the key note of all her writings beginning with the screen play, *In Which Annie Gives it Those Ones* followed by the two feminist interventions, “The Great Indian Rape Trick” (Parts I and II) and extended till date to *The*

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*Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (hereafter *TMOUH*). A prolific writer with a voluminous oeuvre to her credit, still for many, Roy is a one-work wonder who shot into fame overnight with her Booker winning *The God of Small Things* (hereafter *TGST*). Nevertheless, to an enthusiastic reader or a critical researcher, she is a political literati who has established her political continuum in all that she has written. Because she believed “keeping quiet, saying nothing, becomes as political an act as speaking out” (193), India’s nuclear tests at Pokharan in 1998 that followed her Booker success, elicited an instantaneous response as the essay, “The End of Imagination”. Soon followed her professed support for the NBA (Narmada Bachao Andolan) – “The Greater Common Good”. With these began her open defiance against the Indian State and as Siddhartha Deb puts it, “the glamorous Indian icon turned glamorous Indian dissenter” (Deb). *The Algebra of Infinite Justice, An Ordinary Person’s Guide to Empire, Broken Republic, Listening to Grasshoppers* and other anthologies, in no time established her as the mouthpiece of the Anti-globalization crusade drawing in on all its overlapping trajectories -- anti-capitalism, anti-corporatism, anti-imperialism and anti-state critique, with India as the focus and Empire as the target.

It is in this background that we read her recent release, *TMOUH*, launched after much media hype on June 6, 2017. In its own right as a political novel, in modern Indian history as a political documentation-from-below, and in the novelist’s career as the second novel to take over the glorious *TGST*, *TMOUH* plays an epoch-making role. On all these counts, as the epithet exposes,

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the novel breathes politics. In the first place, it has uniquely condensed twenty years of political non-fictional writings in a fictional framework. True to her claims made in an interview with David Barsamian, here as in *TGST*, the attempt is “to create links, to join the dots, to tell politics like a story, to communicate it, to make it real” (Roy “Colonization of Knowledge”, 36. Emphasis mine). And the work emerges blurring the borders between the known and the unknown worlds.

Secondly, as a kind of “Situated Knowledge”, the novel contributes by documenting history from the perspective of the minorities, the victimized and the marginalized, all of whom still remain invisible in mainstream discourses. It becomes an epistemic necessity for an all-inclusive vision because as Sandra Harding points out,

the activities of those at the bottom of ... social hierarchies can provide starting points for thought – for *everyone's* research and scholarship – from which humans' relations with each other and the natural world can become visible... [T]he experience and lives of marginalized peoples,...have been devalued or ignored as a source of objectivity --maximizing questions -- the answers to which are not necessarily to be found in those experiences or lives but elsewhere in the beliefs and activities of people at the center to make policies and engage in social practices to shape marginal lives. (Harding 54)

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Thirdly, because of the iconic status of *TGST* in the whole pantheon of World Literature, *TMOUH* invites comparisons as fiction delivered by the same creative brain. It then emerges as a far cry from the former by foregrounding politics and back grounding aesthetics, nonetheless pointing out how over a span of twenty years, the insidious times have changed literary demands politically. Both root themselves in the socio-political function of literature blurring the borders between fiction and non-fiction, reconciling the two constantly warring voices within Roy: “one that wants me to dive underground and work on another book, another that refuses to let me look away, that drags me deep into the heart of what’s going on around me” (Roy “Scimitars”, 25).

As Roy’s politics unfurls along diverse locales, characters and story lines, *TMOUH* balances itself beautifully on the slippery grounds between known binaries to reconstruct an egalitarian democratic terrain for the humans and the planet alike – the graveyard turned utopia in the Jannat Guest House. Border lines between gender, caste, religion and states melt into unidentified spaces shared between the needy among both humans and non-humans. The single-page prologue to the novel becomes an elegy for the missing sparrows and the old white-backed vultures, whose silence remains unnoticed by many because, “*There was so much else to look forward to*” (Roy *TMOUH*, 1. Italics original). As the speaking voice laments the slow-poisoning of vultures that feed on diclofenac-administered cow carcasses, it becomes both at once, an environmentalist warning and an anti-

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globalization outcry against the current carefree consumerist tendencies.

*As cattle turned into better dairy machines, as the city ate more ice cream, butterscotch-crunch, nutty-buddy and chocolate-chip, as it drank more mango milkshake, vultures' necks began to droop as though they were tired and simply couldn't stay awake. Silver beards of saliva dripped from their beaks, and one by one they tumbled off their branches, dead (1).*

The prologue in effect reflects the nature of Roy's anti-globalization cause and what is unique about it is her intersectional approach to the global systems of exploitation. This polyphonic politics in Roy that surveys the multiple axes of power operating along caste, class, gender and environment variables, exposes a panoptical critical eye.

Seen in this light, the sweeping vision of the novel seems to be packed in the very opening sentence very much like Chapter one in *TGST* condensing all its thematic strands in one. *TMOUH* begins thus, "She lived in the graveyard like a tree" (3). The elusively poetic line is calculated to combine Roy's ecofeminist perception with her alter-globalization ideals. The interesting fact here is that the exclusively feminine pronoun 'she' expands to be inclusive of all genders. The 'she' is Anjum, the transsexual protagonist floating between the extremes of the gender spectrum thus deconstructing its established binaries. By the time we get close to Anjum's life, the macabre noun 'graveyard' too transcends its traditional sense to mean an ideal abode for the living and

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the dead thus blurring again the divide between life and death. It evolves as a utopian alternative to the global graveyard of consumerism, capitalism and corporatocracy by envisioning an environmentally poised assembly of Hijras, Dalits, Sufis, trees, animals, birds and the dead who are more than alive. As the Keeper of this Jannat Guest House, Anjum lives like a tree, exercising her right to be “un-tree like” (5) at times.

The non-linear narrative line first unravels the Old Delhi part of the novel, before engaging itself with the graver setting of the “living-dead” – Kashmir. Through the chiaroscuro corridors of Shajahanabad that smack of its past imperial majesty, Anjum, formerly Aftab, comes alive. She/he trails along with her/him, three worlds, each counterthrusting the others' trespass, but nevertheless acceding into the others. One is the so-called normal world where language sets reality in dyadic pairs of opposites. So Urdu teaches Jahanara Beegum that, “Everything was either masculine or feminine, man or woman” (8). Naturally, when she “unswaddles” her little Aftab, she discovers that ‘he’ is both ‘he’ and ‘she’ at once. Beegum “fell through a crack between the world she knew and worlds she did not know existed” (8).

The other world unfolds itself in the Khwabgah, the House of Dreams, where a new language recreates another reality in terms of fluid multiplicity. Khwabgah shelters and transgenders Aftab into Anjum who thereafter members a world differently oriented from the ‘normal’ world, along with people like her -- Bulbul, Razia, Heera, Nimmo, Mary and Gudiya overseered by

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Ustad Kulsoom Bi. Drawing lines between the two worlds Nimmo educates Aftab,

what are the things you normal people get unhappy about? ...Price-rise, children's school-admissions, husband's beatings, wives' cheatings, Hindu-Muslim riots, Indo-Pak war – *outside* things that settle down eventually. But for us the price-rise and school-admissions and beating-husbands and cheating-wives are all *inside* us. The riot is *inside* us. (23)

In a way, the latter parallels the former in the emotional paradigms of their conflicts, one *inside* and the other *outside*, nonetheless, each blurring into the other in the traumatic proportions of their conflicts.

With her/his birth Anjum/Aftab scrambles her/his mother's sense of the world and around her/him the novel's narrative world scrambles itself into the Old Delhi and Kashmir worlds that finally merge to form the classless, casteless, animal-human Jannat Guest House. In addition to these cultural worlds, the material worlds of the old and the new also make their appearance. Floating on an almost Rushdian magical carpet, the old world meets the new in Shahjahanabad. The declining prospects of the summer drink, Rooh Afza is traced along the lines of partition history and "eventually, the Elixir of the Soul [English for Rooh Afza] that had survived wars and the bloody birth of three new countries, was, like most things in the world, *trumped* by Coco-Cola" (13. emphasis mine).

Along such seemingly unintentional twists and turns of phrases, Roy's anti-globalization discourse makes a subtly nuanced entry into the narrative very much

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like the following instances from *TGST* and “The Greater Common Good”:

At the police station, Inspector Thomas Mathew sent for two coco-colas. With straws. A servile constable served them on a plastic tray...Sometimes Things went worse with Coco-Cola. (Roy *TGST*, 313)

Perhaps, right now, this very minute, there's a small god up in heaven readying herself for us. Could it be?...It sounds *finger-licking good* to me. (Roy “Greater Common”, 53. emphasis mine)

The tongue-in-cheek epithet, “*finger-licking good*” (an oblique reference to Kentucky Fried Chicken and its popular slogan) and the references to Coco-Cola expose the nexus between Empire, Multi-National Corporations and capitalist forces.

In addition to such covert expressions direct references also further the cause of the crusade against global capital. Dr. Azad Bhartiya, who is on an indefinite hunger strike at Jantar Mantar in *TMOUH*, writes, “Capitalism is like poisoned honey. People swarm to it like bees” (129). In fact, the first reference to India proclaims the country's unquestionable status in Empire, as a foil to her old exotic image: “the image of New India – a nuclear power and an emerging destination for international finance” (38). Stretching this matter-of-fact visual further, in a later chapter (“The Nativity”) New Delhi emerges as a thousand year old sorceress resurrected out of parched skin and aching feet from a rumble of poor streets thronged with homeless people. Today she is a heavily made up fashionable whore



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stepping out to please her new global masters (96-97). This Delhi is the modern democracy described in her essay, "Instant-mix Imperial Democracy", as "the Free World's whore, willing to dress up, dress down, willing to satisfy a whole range of taste, available to be used and abused at will." (Roy "Instant-mix", 153). In all these the borders of the old world disappear and the two mix up unrecognizably leaving it to history to mark the evolution.

The old and the new fuse again in another of the globalization paradigms – commodification of culture. "...[T]he standing up sign that said *Kerala Tourism Development Corporation Welcomes You* with a Kathakali dancer doing a Namaste" (Roy *TGST*, 139) in *TGST*, becomes Gayatri mantra, another cultural commodity for sale advertising British Airways and being hailed by the People of the World who bowed low and said, "Namaste" in *TMOUH*. Roy says, "And with that, in the advertisement at least, history was turned upside down" (*TMOUH* 97). Thus in the globalized world, colonial and post-colonial worlds change sides.

Meandering in and out of the Khwabgah, collaborating with people –both friendly and hostile – inside and outside, mothering abandoned Zainab and finally unnerved by her sojourn to Gujarath, Anjum dissociates her human ties. A border dweller that she is between her Muslim and Hijra identities, she is caught in the communal pogrom because she is a Muslim and she escapes the same because she is a Hijra. Shattered, she enters the graveyard, a world more alive than the other two worldly worlds. This brave new world thrives amidst

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multiple histories of the dead. The graveyards of generations of Anjum's family – her father Mulaqat Ali, his sister Beegum Zeenath Kauser, Anjum's sister Bibi Aysha; those of the village midwife Ahlam Baji; of Begam Renata, a belly dancer from Romania; and those of the anonymous inmates who weave myriad life-stories, people the graveyard when Anjum begins a new life there. Taking her and all who came after her, it celebrates diversity and difference ushering in a postmodern universe where the dead and the alive cohabit with ghosts, djinns, stray dogs and other known and unknown animals. It heals Anjum, becomes the hub of the homeless, the wounded and the wrecked. With Saddam, a Dalit turned Muslim, Anjum sets up a funeral parlour for the poor among the dead. "The rules for the dead" were "same as [those] for the living" (79) in the Jannat Guest House. The utopian graveyard prospers with more dead bodies, alive inmates, better infrastructure and establishes its right to exist.

From here the locale shifts to Jantar Mantar to set the platform ready for a greater leap to the graver landscapes of Kashmir – Roy's prime thematic concern:

I do not think of Kashmir as a subject. It's much more than that. For a writer, it's really a place which gives you an understanding of power, powerlessness, brutality, bravery and the dilemmas of the human condition. I would not want to write a book 'about' Kashmir, I hope Kashmir will be in all books I write (Roy "I Hope Kashmir", 203).

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At Jantar Mantar the novel paints another sub-world of dissent and differences, a potpourri of protesting communities from all over India, all of whom have been denied justice on one count or another – the victims of Bhopal Gas Tragedy who have been denied compensation, the Delhi Kabaadi wallahs (waste recyclers) who have lost their working spaces, the Mothers of the Disappeared whose sons had gone missing in Kashmir and many others. When a documentary film maker asks Anjum to repeat the film's recurring theme "Another World is Possible" she says, "Hum doosri Duniya se aaye hain" which meant: "We've come from there...from the other world" (*TMOUH* 110). Interestingly enough, Roy shows how possible other worlds have already co-existed in all their diversities on this planet, but it is that we are blind to see, observe, understand and accept them.

The narrative loses itself among the diverse tales of injustices only to come to a standstill with an abandoned baby on the platform who soon disappears. She emerges at a later point in the arms of Tilo, the game changer of the plot. The baby is the novel's link with Roy's essay, "Walking with the Comrades", that narrates her adventurous journalistic escapade into the Dandakaranya forest. The baby's face takes after any or all of those female fighters Roy associates herself with, at Dandakaranya – Comrades Narmada, Masse, Roopi, Rinki, Sumitra...

With Tilo, *TMOUH* somersaults its locale, characters, tone and plot line. In its horizons now,

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Kashmir looms larger than Old Delhi. The Military occupation of Kashmir, the Militant operations for freedom, the State atrocities and the civilian misery leave Anjum and her folk behind for a time. Tilo, another border creature with her lineage in Kerala, born out of wedlock to a Syrian Christian mother and a Dalit father makes the episodes biographical and a sequel to *TGST*. Ammu and Velutha flash across in Tilo whose real import, however is to weave the missing strands of Kashmir together into a three-dimensional pattern through three of her college friends. Roy chooses them unmistakably for an aerial view of Kashmir from the angles of an idealistic militant, Musa; of a higher official in Kashmir Intelligence Bureau, Garson Hobart (Biplab Dasgupta) and a high brow journalist who can go between the warring factions, Naga.

Fictional aesthetics recedes to blur into factual reportage and documentary footages because the live tale of Kashmir requires both fiction and non-fiction to hold its grounds before a State where, as Roy says in "An Unfinished Diary of Nowadays", "In better days that [views at variance with those of the ruling establishment] used to be known as a critical perspective or an alternative worldview. These days in India, it's called sedition (49). Roy treads this slippery ground in both her real and fictional worlds and has been target of sedition charges more than once. The bloodshed, brutality and violence inching across the terrains of Kashmir, but still unable to curb its spirits, take hold of the narrative. Nevertheless it remains alert to the soothing colours and smells of Kashmir. The Musa-Tilo duo, in between their Kashmiri

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underground operations, brings alive the Jhelum river, her floating shikaras, the Chinar trees and the Kashmiri autumn.

Blood freezing accounts of the routine war life in Kashmir accompanied by interim 'relief' periods of 'normalcy' for tourists bring out the paradox in India's "Paradise on Earth". The latter brief episodes are short-lived soon to be over taken either by the Military or by the Militant insurrections. Then, "Tourists flew out. Journalists flew in. Honeymooners flew out. Soldiers flew in. Women flocked around police stations holding up a forest of thumbed, dog-eared, passport-sized photographs grown soft with tears..."(*TMOUH* 314). Broken lives in broken lines and rhetoric, in a style only Roy can, provide a live relay of contemporary Kashmiri survival condensed in a handful of living-in-death/death-in-living characters. They hold up a reality fabulistic to people on the other side.

Having had her say, the fury of the activist fuses into the sympathies of the novelist once again making it obvious that in her case, the border lines are hardly visible. When both the Military and the Militants receive her stringent criticisms, Roy's sympathies, as usual, go with the common folk whose daily lives have become an unending fight for survival, for no fault of theirs. The post-pogrom trauma that unsettles Anjum is poignantly detailed to represent thousands of hapless victims still lurking unnerved in the dark lanes of Gujarat: "She tried to un-know what they had done to all the others – how they had folded the men and unfolded the women....But

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she knew very well that she knew" (61-62). The same concern traverses borders to embrace the Afghans fleeing the US war planes: "nobody really understood exactly what those poor people had to do with the tall buildings in America" (41). It further floats down to slums and squatter settlements from where India's poor have been wiped out along with "their ration cards, their marriage certificates,...their lifetime's work, the expression in their eyes" (98-99).

The pain of those who have been erased out of history, never allowed to reclaim their footsteps get revealed in Ustad Kulsoom Bi's conviction: "To be present in history, even as nothing more than a chuckle, was a universe away from being absent from it, from being written out of it altogether" (51). When Mughal history marked the Hijras' presence in a chuckle, the epic *Ramayana* marked them as waiting faithfully at the end of the forest for Rama to return. Ustad Kulsoom Bi knows, "we are remembered as the forgotten ones?" (51). And it is this forgotten history and those people's subjugated knowledge that *TMOUH* attempts to recover. And in Kashmir Roy fails not to see the common folk torn between the Strict Ones and the Less Strict ones, the two factions of the militancy based on their fundamentalist and secular religious leanings. "People loved the Less Strict ones, but they feared and respected the Strict Ones. In the battle of attrition that took place between the two, hundreds lost their lives" (322). Marginalised lives, centre the narrative one by one, affording an alternate view of history shared with the knowledge she acknowledges in "Walking with the Comrades", "For

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sure, it's a partisan's version. But then, what history isn't?" (Roy "Walking with", 43).

Undoubtedly, this all-embracing vision turns ecocentric along and between the lines. She knows, Kashmir really belonged to those creatures – its birds, fishes, mountains, deers and leopards. "That none of us who were fighting over it – Kashmiris, Indians, Pakistanis...have the right to claim the truly heavenly beauty of that place for ourselves" (167-168). The politics remains the same for the big and the small, for "the column of brown ants carrying ...sugar crystals to the anthill to feed their queen" (325) and for the "whole column of juicy ants ... on their way to church" (*TGST* 185) in Ayemenem.

In a hasty resolution that spirals down to the Jannat Guest House, *TMOUH* realises a poetic conclusion upholding this futuristic vision. The baby rescued from Jantar Mantar is named after Musa's daughter, Miss Jebeen. Leaving behind all past chaos but for their memories, Tilo returns with Jebeen to Jannat House. And for her, as for Anjum, Saddam, Zainab, and for others, for the birds, animals and trees, "things were going well in the old Graveyard" (400). This Jannat Guest House consolidates Roy's vision of a world without borders, a world without hierarchies, a world which hosts the Multitude, who in Hardt and Negri's terms, is "the living alternative that grows within Empire" (xiii). And, *TMOUH* translates Roy's activism into words blurring the writer into the activist, her fiction into her non-fiction

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and literature into politics which becomes the most pressing need in these trouble-torn times.

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### **When she Hit him: Representation of Women in *Ms Militancy and When I Hit You***

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A poet is born of struggle. Meena Kandasamy has become a voice of women and Dalits in India through struggle. She is a writer, poet, translator and activist. One of her first poetry collections, *Touch* (2006) was published with a foreword by Kamala Das. Her second anthology *Ms Militancy* was published in 2007. Retelling myths and history, along with honest rendering of her own experiences, Meena Kandasamy needed no time to win over hearts of millions of readers. I still remember listening to her at CMS College, Kottayam on 4<sup>th</sup> January 2013 while she shared the stage with another noted women writer in India, during a panel discussion. It was then that I knew how great a difference is for the words of a poet who spoke with sharp insight and straightforwardness which many of the mainstream feminists lack in India. She was ready to admit in public about her abusive marital life, and the woe which she had to face as a wife. Her tangled emotions and bruises were recollected in conflict and tranquility, over the pages in *When you Hit Me* (2016).

The present paper tries to look at the poet narrates her life in her *When you Hit Me* (2017) and how the poems in *Ms Militancy* have been shaped by her traumatic experiences as a woman. *Ms Militancy* was criticised for “disastrous, if not worse” language by *The New Indian Express*. For those who are voracious critics of any slight error in grammar and spelling, I can say Meena Kandasamy will repel you, and correct you at the same time. For her, language is not innocent, but a multi faceted

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plethora of culture, politics and gender. The only way to subvert the mainstream, patriarchal language is to write like a madwoman playing with fire in the dark attic. On reading her poems which are born of her own experiences with patriarchy, we understand that only through writers like Kandasamy the worst and disastrous politics of a highly misogynist land can be revealed. A reading of her poems followed by a discussion of *When you Hit Me* where she documents her sufferings, can show us how a poet represents women in India, their angst and pleasures.

In her "Preface" to *Ms Militancy*, Kandasamy says, "Your myths put me in place. Therefore, I take perverse pleasure in such deliberate paraphrase" (8). And about her language, she is very clear: My language is not man-made; it is beyond the white-hot rules of your seminal texts (8). This is true if we just flip through the text. Many of the poems do not look poem-like, be the style or the content. For instance, the lines in "Things to remember while looting the burial ground" is in the form of a check list, carefully bulleted. So is another poem "Moksha", which has just six words or phrases in total, arranged one after the other in two lines. The deliberate way in which Kandasamy has flouted the nuances of language points out how frustrated the educated women in India are with the proper semantics and stylistics to be followed in poetry. Myth is largely man built and the poet tries to untie its tyranny beginning at the very way in which it is structured. And she makes her stand very clear at the beginning: Call me names if it comforts you. I no longer care. The scarlet letter is my monogram" (9). If every woman in India feels that she has to flout grammar

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to express herself, then we will have many militants combating the patriarchy of our land.

The revulsion at patriarchy christening her language and body is made clear in the first poem "A cunning stunt". In the poem we find a man bury his face between the thighs and christen it *yoni*. Slowly the vagina is fused with terminology like "origin, spring, fountain... abode, home, nest, stable" and finally the persona says,

I am torn apart to contain the meanings of  
family, race, stock and caste  
and form of existence  
and station fixed by birth... (11).

The lines cleverly point out to how the so called 'glorious' womanhood, celebrated especially with the mother-myth, is in reality a container to hold the existence of a very much patriarchal society. It is the vagina which is the "receptacle to his erection" before turning itself into a "station fixed by birth" (9). It is patriarchy which paints the stereotypical images of a woman and slowly let the images predominate the reality. In "Celestial Celebrities" she makes it clear how,

the river here bear the names  
of fallen women exiled to earth  
when the heavens found them  
too bloody hot to handle. (16).

A woman when she followed "the jagged, moody course they chose for themselves", threw "tantrums and triggered wars", and established a "reputation for being wild and unrestrained and indiscriminate/when it came to men" (16). She made a space for herself which was well

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outside that with which the normal, hallowed women were blessed. Or in other words, when a woman steps out of the stereotypical roles she is supposed to play without any deviation she is stepping into a hot pan welcoming social castration. And for Kandasamy, that is never a problem : I strive to be a slut in a world where all sex is sinful (9). In *When I Hit You* she says, “Slut is not only a woman who wants sex, as in English. In this part of India, it is the dirty woman, but also the disrespectful one, the fight-loving woman, the quarrel-monger” (172).

In “Backstreet girls” she addresses the moral police. “This woman, she is the slut./ And that girl over there she is the glutton. And I am/ a bitch with tattoos on my lusty thighs” (14). These words are not randomly chosen, but deliberately used so as to shake the consciousness of the moral police who drag women to trial addressing them as sluts and bitches. The persona rightly concludes that just as you blame us of not becoming better wives for our future husbands, “we are not the ones you will choose for wives/ we are not the ones you can sentence for life” (14). This is not a conclusion arrived out of mere revulsion at the institutionalised marital ties with which women are tied down to specific roles. But it is also an expression of how many are scared about the very bonds which become bondage at the end. This is the core argument in “Dead woman walking”:

once I was a wife: beautiful,  
married to a merchant shifty-eyed...  
his mathematics could never explain  
the magic of my multiplying love...

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this discrepancy drove him away (17)

into the arms of another woman with a new job in another city. For a while the persona joined the spiritual cults singing praises to gods: "I shed my beauty, I sacrificed my six senses" (17). The ones who called me 'mother' and the ones who said that she was mad led her to asylum, "the land of the living dead" (17). The poem resonates the dreaded state of Bertha Mason who was later christened as that 'madwoman in the attic' by patriarchy. Such mad women resurface in the identity of even stable wives. Such mad women are suppressed or sacrificed at the altar of happy families.

These portraits are quite different from those of the usual, victimised Indian women who become survivors in the process of healing. *Ms Militancy* celebrates freedom, passion and sex. But a reading of her *When I Hit You*, with its subtitle "A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife" reveals as to how her poetry was born in struggle. She has taken courage to document how she had to suffer under her husband, who was a well educated Professor, but quite illiterate when it came to gender equality in practice. It also points out why Kandasamy deliberately flouts the usual language and straight grammar in her poems. She was done with the normative ways of being the goody goody wife and the beloved woman of the land. This is revealed in her poems.

The trouble of getting accustomed with being housewife is in the very first lines of the first chapter of Kandasamy's autobiographical fiction *When I Hit You*. She says, "There are many things a woman can become

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when she is a housewife in a strange town that does not speak any of her mother-tongues” (13). She recounts how she had to recreate herself to look how he wants her to be: I begin by wearing my hair the way he wants it: gathered and tamed into a ponytail, oiled, sleek, with no sign of disobedience. I skip the kohl around my eyes because he believes that it is worn only screen-sirens and seductresses. I wear a dull t-shirt and pajama-bottoms because he approves of dowdiness” (15). This effect gives the wife the “appearance of a woman who has given up” (16). But she has to do it so as to “play the part of the good housewife” (16). And she puts in the predicament very bluntly: I should look like a woman whom no one wants to look at or, more accurately, whom no one even sees” (16).

In “Women, Violence and Male Power”, Mary Maynard and Jan Winn opine that violence against women is not the pathological behaviour of a few ‘sick’ men; rather it was “... the extension of a system of practices and laws which sanctioned men’s rights to regard women as their property and therefore to keep them under control” (175). In *When I Hit You* we get a glimpse of what made the poet as she is. Kandasamy gives voice to the dilemma faced by typical Indian housewives: to please oneself or to please one’s husband. The patriarchal society somehow ties woman down to an object for husband’s pleasure, as said above- his property. It is too common even among educated, employed women of Kerala to comment that they gave up wearing their best loved clothes only for the pleasure of their husbands. It is decreed that after marriage a woman’s

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pleasure is subsumed under the husband's rule. Karla Bookman writes in "Hello, I'm wife of" about how she was addressed as the "wife of so and so", followed by a list of his accomplishments, totally eliding her professional accomplishments. She was to take part in a panel discussion highlighting women's achievements. At the end of the article she sums up neatly, "I hold two Ivy League degrees and have co-authored an academic book. I had a ten year legal career, during which I had managed a team of 500 lawyers, more than 50% of whom were women...and I left that career to start a business with the specific objective of helping other women". The identity of an Indian woman after marriage is fearfully tied to her husband's. She becomes ultimately the subject of his rule, emotionally, intellectually and physically.

Meena Kandasamy pens down in *When I Hit You* how she had to deactivate her facebook account solely because her husband thought it to be "narcissism, exhibitionism and waste of time" (50). She writes how he makes her do it after threateningly burning his left hand against many lighted match sticks (51). This she realises is a form of threat, far worse than abusing her. The recent reports by National Family and Health Survey published in January 2018 says that almost 69% of women in Kerala agree that a husband is justified in hitting his for any one of the reasons like going out without his permission, for not taking care of children, for not cooking properly etc. Though the report which was published in a leading daily may have its loopholes as being one sided, a literate state like Kerala is not free of women who approve of any kind of violence on part of their husband.



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In India, sexuality of a woman and her sexual experiences are largely tied with men around her. Till married off, a girl has to keep her sexual identity a mystery in many places including Kerala. She is banned from speaking out aloud of having a period. It is often a taboo for her to take part in religious rituals for the fear of polluting objects and people. After marriage women suit their sexual needs to the patterns of moods of their husbands. Table 93 of National Family Health Survey reports (2015-16) points out that there is a 13.7% of women in Kerala who agree that a husband can be justified in beating his wife for refusing to have sexual intercourse with him. Meena Kandasamy's "Jouissance" speaks of a 'philosopher' husband who teaches the whole world the paths of sexual ecstasy through a power point project in which his own statue-like form of his wife is the model. The "philandering" wife was frozen into a statue by the angry husband. And through stony gaze, all that she could see were other women who agreed saying "yes yes yes oh yes" as if they understand from the statue the "moment of arrival of ecstasy" (26). And the poet concludes,

"They knew that no man would ever  
Let them be, ever set them free" (26).

Kandasamy pens down her experience of marital rape. She says, "The man who rapes me is not a stranger who runs away... he is someone who wakes up next to me. He is the husband for whom I have to make coffee the following morning" (167). Wimm and Maynard quote Anne Campbell that men in fact hold an "instrumental

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view of violence, whereby violence does indeed have its own social/material rewards which include social control, normative approval and the management of (masculine) identity” (177). The following lines can unveil the mental harassment she had to go through which is reflected in a few poems of her. “I begin to learn that there are no screams that are loud enough to make a husband stop. There are no screams that cannot be silenced by the shock of a tight slap. There is no organic defence that can protect against penetration” (167). She slowly learnt that his masculine identity and approval was largely tied to her being perfectly controlled by his manliness.

Adrienne Rich defined patriarchy in *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* as “a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men-by force, direct pressure or through ritual, law and language...determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is subsumed under the male everywhere” (57). Here Kandasamy's sexual role is defined by her husband, subsumed under him. She expresses the sense of defeat she feels after each sexual intercourse. “As much as it resists rape, my body also has learnt how to surrender. It learns to shut eyes, it learns to look away. I know to kneel on all fours and await its own humiliation” (169). The fear of violence trains women to behave or not behave in certain ways. Kandasamy says that in Tamil culture menstruation pollutes the body for three days, after childbirth for eleven days and for the death of a blood relative for sixteen days (170). For sex with another man before marriage, a husband considers his wife polluted for a lifetime. “A body that is considered

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polluted can be punished as a man pleases. That is the philosophy of caste, that is the philosophy of my rape” (170).

Kalpana Sharma quotes Priya Nanda, group director of Social and Economic Development for International Centre for Research on Women that the reason why men do not allow to criminalise marital rape is because they do not want women to say no. Sharma concludes the report asking a poignant question, “Can there be two yardsticks to define rape? - rape of an unmarried woman and that of a married woman? Is it acceptable to discriminate woman just because she is married to the man who has raped here?” Taslima Nasrin was quite taken back during an interactive session at DC Books Kottayam in February 2018, when someone pointed out that in India marital rape has not been criminalised. Winn and Maynard opine that much of the domestic violence is hidden because women seldom define their experiences, in many cases because they do not acknowledge abuses of power (180). They say that it can include verbal abuse, emotional abuse, economic abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse (180). There is often the societal tag for such men who abuse women in their household. They are called “sick” or “former victims of child abuse”. But such definitions or tags need not solve the problem, rather worsens it. There maybe a few cases where the man had had an abusive history. But in majority of the cases it is the deeply laid down patriarchal principles which are partial and vehemently anti-humanist that instigate domestic violence. As Winn and Maynard say, “Such an approach is gender blind; it does

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not explain why it is primarily men who are violent to women (at home)" (183). Man as an oppressor is not born and so is not biological in its reasoning. The social sanction of men to behave violently in certain situations help them be rude towards the women. And that is where Kandasamy's poetry jerk you. That is where her personal testimony hits you on face. How can a country progress when a vast majority of its population is hit, burnt, tortured, violated and harassed each day. And why does not the nation rise up to take up its arms against marital rape?

A country which has supported euthanasia on the grounds of one's right to die peacefully, must also look into the rights of a wife to live decently in her own house. It is the system which needs a change- the system which believes that man is the ruler and the final word. Kandasamy's testimony and poetry run parallel- one showing the plight of an Indian woman who had to redefine herself for the pleasure of her husband and from which she runs away finally, and the other celebrating her body and spirit. Let us hope that soon in India, we can dream about women who walk and breathe easily, rather than be the victims of patriarchal abuses.

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### **Catering To the Strategies: A Game Theory Based Approach to Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things***

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Literature accommodates in itself the vicissitudes and values of life along with culture and creativity. In a world of chaos and displacement, the popularity of the scheduled ventures and game plans hail towards more authenticity in determining the multifarious denominations of the facets of life. The manipulations that often hurl above as a mammoth, determines the

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psychological pillars construed within an individual's psyche. This article is an attempt to break the fundamentals of Game Theory with the aid of the characters from the most celebrated work of Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*. The challenge here is not to conduct a linear study, but rather to plummet deep into the character delineations to explore their perceptions thereby tapering it to a Behavioural Approach of human race as a whole. Though scholars have plumbed to the depths of the art of Roy's fiction from multiple perspectives, no serious attempt seems to have been made in exploring the game strategies the writer has deftly woven into her art. **Keywords:** *Game Theory, Strategic characterisations, Game plans, psychological manipulations*

Science, as well as technology, will in the near and in the farther future increasingly turn from problems of intensity, substance, and energy, to problems of structure, organisation, information and control.

(Neumann 78)

Peppered with both sanguinity and skepticism, twentieth century globe has witnessed the unfolding of many literary theories. Theories shoot up in a scenario of profound scrutiny and in Literature they act as a device to gauge the spectrum of life beyond the entire milieu. Among these, Game Theory hangs about as a touchstone never mossed over by time. Though the seeds of Game Theory had been planted right from the epoch of Plato, it sprouted only during the 1940s. Game Theory, in a more evocative way is an interactive Decision Theory. The Theory had its breakthrough with John Vom Neumann's

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book in 1944 "The Theory of Games and Economic Behaviour". The theoretical facets were later developed extensively by John Forbes Nash and Robert Aumann.

As Freud suggests, human mind is mishmash of two forces- the life force and the death force and in a world of Polarities, these forces crash with each other in establishing their supremacy. Eventually, the Game Theory can in no way stand discretely off from Literature since Game becomes pretty extraneous without characters of flesh and blood. Game Theory provides both intuitive and counter intuitive results, but it furnishes astounding insights of human nature. Since Human nature outlines the hub of Literature and Literature forms the pedestal of human life, Game strategies are rather inevitable to any typical human being. The explicit name of the logic used by everyone was not named until it flourished as Game Theory in the 1940s. In a deteriorating world of games and tricks, the Theory of Games can in no way demystify the vision of the whole of human race. A miniature study of the novel in the light of Game Theory provides us with a superior revelation to read the national and the international associations in a diverse beam.

The world history in itself has determined Game Theory with its own statistics in varied perspectives. The economic collapse of Soviet Union had in it a Game Theory behind the scenes executed skilfully by the U.S. The "divide and rule" Policy of the British too acknowledge a string of Games in marauding India completely. Even Hitler's Holocaust and Concentration Camps had in it a well planned Game attribute. Choices made by Kennedy White House during Cuban missile

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crisis yet again brings to light a decisive selection. Game Theory often quantifies its outcomes either in the form of payoffs or utility. Game Theory can either slot in co-operation or competition and in most cases the second alternative takes reign over the first and it is succinct that Game Theory validates its emerging role all through the sphere. Roy's novel "The God of Small Things" has been explored at different angles since its publication. However, this article indeed is an innovative way of analyzing Roy's characters and one of the first of its kind with Game Theory.

Arundhati Roy, the winner of the Man Booker Prize, is indisputably a Mistress of Games in the aura of her novel *The God of Small Things*. Human subsistence in its true complexities and colours is precisely a Game and it is through a mysterious tactical perception from end to end that we contour and redesign our day by day existence with set goals. Game Theory indicates the intuition and penetration that an ordinary individual utilises in his premeditated thinking through which he/she envisages the estimated up-shoot of the reactions of the people around them. Roy brings out her story through the subtle changes that her varied characters employ in meeting their individual targets. Game Theory is not about winning a game of chess or structuring a role playing scenario. It is a study of the agents or the players which can be either individuals, groups or nations who formulate plans systematically and strategically. Uncertainty, Risk and Sequential Equilibrium take toll here in stabilizing the concepts of the Theory. The endeavour of this article is to embark on a reflective study



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of the Game Play which has been executed so dextrously by Roy all the way through her characters.

Roy's story, set in the background of Ayemenem swirls multiple characterisations to the realm of analysis for its readers. The story cuts through three generations tracking down the assumptions and beliefs each character takes hold of. Being unaware of the fabrications shuffled out by the other characters, the dilemma they fall into and the mechanisms they conspire with, forms the crux of the plot. Each character can be determined in terms of Game Theory through which a new reading of the work stands with chance.

The first generation of the Ayemenem family including Pappachi, Mammachi and Baby Kochamma traces the initial development of the story along with the game plans they cater which ultimately leads to the upcoming generations to a sphere of trauma. Pappachi, being an entomologist has his own subtle negotiations about everything that he meets in his life. His patterns of game is well crafted in his behaviour and his approach to his wife Mammachi. His approach towards his children are totally methodical. His arch importance is retained through the brutality that he metes out towards them. It is this scheme of Game theory that devises his superiority over his family until his son Chacko, starts weaving his own Game plans finally putting an end to his atrocities.

He worked hard on his public profile as a sophisticated, generous, moral man. But alone with his wife and children he turned into a monstrous, suspicious bully, with a streak of vicious cunning. They were beaten,

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humiliated and then made to suffer the envy of friends and relations. (Roy 180)

Pappachi's age difference of seventeen years with his wife Mammachi, which places him in a pedestal of inferiority complex is overcome by the way in which he restricts her personal freedom. The ignominy she suffers becomes a tool for him to exercise his masculine authority all through his life. He even determines to sew buttons of his shirt sitting in the verandah to showcase that his wife never cares and eventually stops talking to her completely. If it is to analyse his strategies, they work in a cyclic pattern where all images merge with his ego and inflated ideals.

Mammachi, on the other hand, neutralises her disillusionment by lashing it out at others, including her daughter Ammu. Even her scheme is patterned as she never infiltrates her hatred towards the menfolk but only towards Ammu and her children. She treats her son Chacko, his wife, Margaret, and his daughter Sophie Mol in a much better light compared to that of Ammu, Estha and Rahel. Her manipulations are worked out in a different way from Pappachi and she struggles in her own way by targeting just the women around her.

Mammachi, however, becomes a target of playfulness when she is utilised by more superiors with a wider game plan enriching a better magnitude. She is manipulated and redeemed in a manner as per the frontiers decided by Baby Kochamma in ousting Velutha and breaking the ties between Velutha and Ammu.

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Baby Kochamma, who portrays the most noxious character within the structure of the novel has cast her own malicious magic that roots out to each and everyone around her. The only character who enjoys sadism in all aspects throughout the novel is Baby Kochamma. She is never regressive in her methods and works hard to create havoc in everyone's life. She is the most structured and planned villain of the piece and carries out her strategies in the most subtle ways. Her past which speaks volumes about her life at the nunnery and her unreciprocated love with Father Mullighan creates a basis to foreground her malice that keep spurting out throughout. However, the capriciousness with which she carries it out looms larger than her character sketch. She is the one who plots against Velutha and who triggers the locking up of Ammu which becomes instrumental in the death of Sophie Mol. She becomes the real murderer behind Velutha's physical death and Ammu's mental death. She succeeds even in her master game plan where she makes Estha give his alibi against Velutha at the Police Station. The dark tragedies and the secret mysteries that boom around the Ayemenem home is in a way switched on with her malevolence and wretchedness. Despite her larger presence within the novel, the dynamic strategies that she employs kicks off even years later when Estha and Rahel meets after a span of amorphous years.

Although Game Theory began in the field of Economics, it has since steadfastly established its footprints in a range of disciplines like Psychology, Mathematics, Politics, Sociology, Biology, Humanities, Anthropology, Literature etc. Arundhati Roy is

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conclusively a Chief of Games when she employed an array of characters influencing, interacting, conflicting and competing with each other to furnish their individual motives. Portrayed as a mouthpiece of the twentieth century, her chief subject matter swivels around the psychological mechanism behind a human mind, thereby pointing out its connotation in a world of cyber crime and psychoanalysis.

Chacko, the son of Pappachi and Mammachi and the brother of Ammu is another interesting character within the play who is a master in games. He plays with his gender supremacy and wields a space for himself within the same Ayemenem house where he engages a number of factory girls in the name of "Man's needs" in his mysterious bedroom. Mammachi, being a silent hand in all his deeds allows and agrees to his norms whereas she rejects all advances made by her daughter Ammu. Chacko, despite being a neo-colonialist and an Oxford scholar, makes his mother a sleeping partner in the pickle factory that the family owns. He tells Ammu, "What is mine is mine and what is yours is also mine" (136). His track where he swiftly encroaches into the family property and tries to oust his sister Ammu is a plan he devises gently, though it looks rather surprising for an average reader.

His tampered relationship with his ex-wife Margaret and his selfish nature within the family makes him a prototype of Pappachi, his father. In spite of the selfishness that lurks in his mind, he becomes a hero in the mind of the twins, Estha and Rahel.

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An individual mind even in its simpler outline is for all time multifarious and this complexity has been set open by many great psychologists although not completely. The heroine of the novel, Ammu is also a manipulator in her own ways though her intention is not to harm anyone else. Being a tragic victim, she struggles against the tyrannical orb around her and fights in her own ways.

The novel portrays a detail picture of the lady's childhood to adolescence, to the experience of marriage to a sympathetic and affectionate mother, to a rebel wife who challenges the age long hypocritical moral stand of a patriarchal family. (Prasad 194)

When she goes to stay with her aunt in Calcutta, her meeting with Baba, the tea-planter and the consequent marriage that result from the relationship is nothing more than a marriage of convenience. She thinks of a plan to escape from her family and she knew that her family will not have enough dowry to get her married off. She invents her own strategical plan of marrying someone from another community. Game Theory is fundamentally a mathematical arrangement since the moves and counter moves of the characters surrounding us need to be planned systematically and advantageously. It is in accordance with such a schedule that most of the characters within the novel slide on.

Just as an economic man makes his attempts to maximise his share of goods, a participant in a game tries to maximise his winnings systematically. This triumph can be applied to human life further where every day of a

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human being's life is moulded by plans and strategies and these methods systematically turn towards accomplishments. These accomplishments can range from trivial settlements to more psychological skirmishes where the untold stories are being told and the unheard mysteries are being revealed.

K.N.M. Pillai too becomes a part of this Game plan as he is the most refined manipulator of the novel and stands as a solid accomplice for Baby Kochamma in murdering Velutha and disintegrating Ammu psychologically. Being a part of the Communist Party, he keeps himself away from aiding Velutha and seals his trust with the Police Inspectors in murdering Velutha. "In addition to being used to describe, predict, and explain behaviour, game theory has also been used to develop theories of ethical or normative behaviour to prescribe such behaviour" (Camerer 6).

The character roles get inherently connected with the schema of games such as the Prisoner's Dilemma, the Snow Drift, the Payoff Matrix and the Battle of Sexes. Thus the resonance of Game Theory is vibrant in all current realms of disciplines and it re-establishes the link between how sociological aspects come into conflict with the psychological facets.

Apart from character delineation, the structure of game theory contours the underlying tensions in gender differences, cultural clashes, communal binaries and even individual psychological discords. In a nation where everything stands in a diverse platform with co-operation and conflict at the same time, nothing serves better than

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the study of Game Theory. Nevertheless, Roy's "The God of Small Things", the novel set in the backdrop of India with Male chauvinism and Politics, Game Theory finds an unsoiled natural ground to nurture and bloom. Though the novel extensively lavishes in stereotyped themes, Game Theory is associated with Roy's novel for the primary instance. In a land where Sino-Indian borders gear up conflicts and barbaric attacks of Maoists terrorize the populace along with 'behind the back games' of IPL, Game Theory undoubtedly has cast its indelible space.

Roy as the mistress of Games had definitely built in a new future in determining ourselves and the people around us. The Faustian Bargain which is quite often held in our unconscious finds an unusual twirl here. The novel, "The God of Small Things" has definitely replicated one's self image and showcased how one assumes and operates strategically and often unwittingly. The schemes employed unintentionally and the study that cater us towards those strategies are also amplified within the article. Moreover, a clear vision to enhance the contemplation of others where one can articulate life in a better and more soothing way is also acknowledged with. The application of this classical and evolutionary Theory has indeed convinced the readers of the tremendous and constantly expanding utility of this literary tool.

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### **Spectrum of Gender and Society in Neelam Saxena Chandra's *The Flickering of an Eye***

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Society proves to be a spectrum of rules and regulations for all the habitants and all are bound to follow them for their continuous union of social assistance. Society which is developed for the enhancement of human race sometimes results into the social disobedience and the same is considered as non-acceptable. Among contemporary women writers, Neelam Saxena Chandra has made critical satire on social class system of Indian society. All the pleas related to humanity and personal choices are declined in this novel. The society of village called Dhanoi is very particular about all the rituals and formalities of obedience of the

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people living there. Vinay and Manju are willing to marry but they are not allowed because they belong to the same gotras. Chandra has beautifully explained the rural ambiance with her skilled pen to describe the penetrated atmosphere of the village where two persons are not allowed to receive their consignments. Modern sensibility is not provided the space in the milieu of social fabrics. Love dominates the stance of human bodies. Pattern of Panchayat allows the semantics of rules and fabrics of society but does not permit the young couple to receive their hearts as per their wishes. Rituals and customs are not logical. They stand out to revolt to the rules and regulations under the patriarchal set up. The present research along with the sensual understanding of genders explores the substantial values of human wishes, social patterns and patriarchal dominance.

Writing of Indian women writers has been noticed growing heavily and it is well appreciated by the general readers, academicians, critics and scholars around the world. Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Anita Nair, Jhumpa Lahiri and others have explored the social picture of Indian society. The universal approach of the female writers towards different human, aesthetic, spiritual and ideal fronts at global stage through Literature in English has been accepted at both academic and social fronts. Indian women writers have marked a great impact in the domain of literature and advocated consistently for the general and human rights of women. Their writing exhibit that the restricted representation of women have enlarged the opportunities of annihilation of women at familial, social, economic, academic and all other fronts. Among

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them, Neelam Saxena Chandra has written an important novel about the social milieu of an Indian village called Dhanoi. She has made sharp satire on social class system in *In The Flickering of an Eye*. Society teaches the social fabrics of human class followed by the generations of human world. Society annihilates the human wishes and calls for serious attention towards the acceptance of all patterns. Chandra has explored the socio-cultural values and individualistic semantics of humanities around the habitants of the rural part of India.

Society brings humans at collective platform to help, assist, nourish and suggest the habitants to decide and collect their feelings to formulate the negotiations of rules at par with the accumulation of different approaches. Many aspects are noticed with the advent of psychological triumph and social acceptance of the same. Neelam Saxena Chandra *In the Flickering of an Eye* has made critical satire on social class system of Indian society. Society frames the social fabrics of human life followed by the different regulations. This novel exhibits that the society which is developed for the betterment of human race sometimes results into the social disobedience and the same is considered as non-acceptable. This happens with both Vinay and Manju. They love each other and wish to marry but they are not allowed because they have same gotras and traditional beliefs of society do not allow the them to go ahead. All the pleas related to their love affair are declined. The personal favours of individual are rejected.

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Neelam Saxena Chandra through her female protagonist, Manju, explores that all the Patriarchal norms, created by the different social and religious fronts have mainly subordinated her existence to the entire aura of the society. The supremacy of social values in the patriarchal environment has been one of the biggest findings of Neelam Saxena Chandra's *The Flickering of an Eye*. The famous scholar, Bill Aschroft in his famous book *Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literatures* details the social scenario of patriarchal society towards women. It has also been observed that the patriarchal environment mainly forces family to become the central point to determine the credibility of the pursuance of all norms. The social patterns do not allow both the families to support Manju and Vinay. The families are bound to follow the norms of society. The families are expected to train their children to regard the social beliefs and traditional values. Friedrich Engels in *The Origin of The Family, Private Property, and the State* views that family becomes the prominent institution to enforce the formidable substance of the male hegemonic values which guides the female members of the family to accept the male dominance both within home and outside. In fact, all the basics of familial, physical, educational, intellectual, social and psychological growth of Mnaju. She proves to be the central impact for the oppression, marginalization, violence and exploitation of a female child. The familial and social atmosphere proves to be central point for the gender differences created out of socio-cultural substances, inhuman practices and old traditions.

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The substantial firmness of both the individuals comes out to be a source of explaining the social definition to women and traditional faiths are questioned and introspected in the light of existential values of individuals. David Bouchier in *The Feminist Challenge* shows that feminine writing emerges as a social weapon for the overall development of women. Simone de Beauvoir says, "He is the Subject, he is the Absolute — she is the Other" (44). The approach of all socially concerned people like family members, society, colleagues is patriarchal based. During the panchayat, the decision of a woman is taken without the consent or involvement of a Manju. Right from the first part of the novel, 'The Unsatisfied Story' to the last 'The Promises' the dominance and supremacy of society exist which directly affects the psychological progress of individuals. Society is peculiar about the dominance of men in the lives of women. Men are developed such a manner that they feel committed to the social values. The feminists always seek to "abolish all differences in dress and demeanor, personal adornment, sexual initiative and the allocation of homemaking and parental duties" (Gurevitch 27). Females are taught to do the way they are taught and trained in their lives right from their births. Manju has the sensible commitment towards the societal norms. Vinay, the love of Manju has sensible feelings for her. Chandra shows:

Suddenly, she started crying. I have never really understood girls. They laugh in a minute as if the whole world is theirs and then cry as if they belong to nowhere. I did not know how to comfort her. I put my hand on her

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head and said, "Tears are precious. Don't waste them on silly things. (46)

Neelam Saxena Chandra presents a liberated form of women at various substances of life. She tells the response of Manju, "Do you think I am silly? Without even asking me why I am crying, you are giving suggestion" (Chandra, 46). The senses of sensibilities among women are higher. Greer rightly says, "To be emancipated from the helplessness and need and walk freely upon the earth that is your birth right, they have to fight for it" (330). However, the developing stance of female characters right from the submissive stance to the new heights of values around the society has been noticed in Manju.

Chandra has explained the rural ambiance with her skilled pen to describe the penetrated atmosphere of the village where two persons are not allowed to receive their consignments. They are expected to sacrifice their willing decisions. Social belief challenges the human hearts. Pattern of Panchayat allows the semantics of rules and fabrics of society but does not permit the young couple to receive their hearts as per their wishes. Panchayat announces, "As far as Manju and Vinu are concerned, it is assumed that their relationship was rather that of a brother and sister and the panchayat asks Manju to tie a rakhi to Vinu tomorrow in front of everyone" (97). However, both Manju and Vinay are forced to stay apart but these rituals and customs being not logical do not make them move ahead. They stand out to revolt silently to the rules and regulations under the patriarchal set up. Betty Friedan in her famous book *The Feminine Mystique*

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shows that women can equally participate in decision making process.

Modern sensibility is not provided the space in the milieu of social fabrics. In the present times, when education has made its place in the society, Vinay is not able to make a place for himself among the society that he can be allowed to go ahead and marry the one he wishes to. He asserts his love, "We should not have fallen in love, nor can we marry. But do either of us believe in these outdated customs and traditions?... We complement each other and we were made to unite, some day or the other" (Chandra 54). However, love dominates the stance of human bodies. Manju who is very confident and brave girl deliberately loses a volley ball match. She is much concerned about the reputation of Vinay. The tenderness of hearts and divine ignorance of Manju and Vinay do not have any values associated with the regulations of society.

Religion, Caste and Gotras have been provided a prominent place in the society. The people in the society are bound to follow the norms and regulations around. On the disapproval of these norms, people are bound to face the consequences. Vinay thinks, "I could not listen any more. What the hell was this? Neither was the girl called nor was the boy summoned and these elderly people had already jumped to a conclusion?" (97). Throughout the novel, there remains a sense of suspense because Vinay decides to do something courageous. Chandra writes the psychological movement of Vinay at that moment, "I smiled to myself and murmured, 'by tomorrow, we would both have run away and you all would no longer witness anything else'. I had thought of beginning a new life without a single soul knowing who were and by cutting

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off all connections with the people of the village” (97). However, it explores the thrill, touches the emotions, exhibits the romance, presents the casteism and gotra system and the position of women in society.

The critical introspection developed by Nancy Chodorow and Elizabeth Gould Davis highlight in the characteristic feature of Manju and her struggle with the society. The novel discusses the new perspectives which have been added with refreshing and insightful ventures on different female issues as social conflicts, marriage, female conundrum, feminine dichotomy, androgynous woman character like Manju. Chandra explains, “In fact, as far as I remember, I always had a fight with Manju. She would keep challenging me for games in which I thought I had a stronghold and could always win. However, it would always be otherwise” (24). It shows her feminine capabilities. Gornick and Moran explore the psychological substance of female. They view, “Woman is the division of the hero” (146). So, woman is nowhere less committed to her words and actions. Manju's efforts can't be underestimated. She emerges as one of the powerful characters of post modern literature.

Feminist theories show the problematic relationship between women and social aspects. Chandra underscores the influence of patriarchy on family. The society of village called Dhanoi is very particular about all the rituals and formalities of obedience of the people living there. Chandra's words exhibit, “there were arguments and counter arguments. Finally, the panchayat passed its verdict, “The panchayat comes to a conclusion that there was really nothing between Manju and Vinu. They are just good friends” (97). The social acceptance of



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their relations is just to become friends. They are socially not allowed to go further than this. Manju is shown as she is about to begin a new life marrying someone. Though, nobody tries to understand what Manju wants.

Chandra has presented how Manju emerges as one of the strong characters of modern literature. Manju bears all the social tyranny strongly. Adrienne Rich's words show that patriarchal set up does not allow women the sense of equality. Manju and other women of the society face the same consequences. Chandra shows that how Manju spends her important days of her life without the assistance of male which is required for a sustainable and liberal life for a woman. Manju does not make any compromise on the level of her individual existence and she shows that woman is capable enough to sustain and develop her individuality in the society. She meets Vinay after 25 years. She says, "existence is not in the physical presence only" (Chandra 53). She understands the virtual reason of one's existence, it is in endurance of tolerance, patience and commitments. The sensual phenomenon of Manju's existence is endured with her passion and understanding.

Thus, Neelam Saxena Chandra has explored the social fabrics of Dhanoi village. She has delicately explained the panchayat system in the villages where human emotions do not have social acceptance. The norms of panchayats are prioritized at all situations. Women do not have much substance in the patriarchal structure. This novel shows that women are considered 'second' in middle class or lower middle classes of the society. They are not even provided the opportunities to participate in decision making of the social issues. The

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caste prejudice increases the complexities of human world. Throughout the long journey of twenty five years, Manju emerges as a strong character in Indian writing in English. Vinay's sense of making commitment, understanding life and respecting familial values is a recognizing stance in literature.

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### **Life as Lifeless: A Vision through the Delineating Desert in Malathi Ramachandran's *The Legend of Kuldhara: A Historical Novel Set in Rajasthan***

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Symbolically, the study of desert in the perspective of literature offers a profusion of opportunities to pursue an exploration of the various elements for finding truths in deserted minds. It is an unimaginable quench for analyzing mysterious realities behind the deserts. Its range spans from the ancient stories such as *Aladdin's Lamb* and moral fables to some kind of most modern fictional works that lead the characters into deep and unpredicted desert in a mythical and analytical way of most appreciating and figurative languages. This paper, focusing on the desert and its symbolization of the environment for human minds in a broad sense, that celebrated the most decorative and colourful dream landscape and at the same time, as lifeless place by treating the basic challenge for characters in this setting was to survive. In short, desert literature brings a powerful reality in the inexperienced world but still undefined and unfinished. The truth is that it brings into its spectrum, by

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several books and articles that talk about desert directly or indirectly, plainly as well as in the glow and colourful imagination. So, this paper focuses on the depiction of desert as the representation of faces that appealed as a metaphor through Malathi Ramachandran's *The Legend of Kuldhara: A Historical Novel Set in Rajasthan*. Therefore it offers the very best opportunity for interpreting the desert in a different way.

**Keywords:** desert literature, mysticism, spiritualism, and psychoanalysis

Desert literature is a literary genre which has been skillfully used and separated by many writers. Desert in fact, appeared in many forms in the writings of many as background, symbol, metaphor and even a character. Even before the origin and growth of literary writings, desert played a major role in religious and spiritual writings too, especially, Christianity and Islam in their holy books desert have used desert as a metaphor and symbol. The language of desert literature is also remarkably different from other literary forms.

*The Legend of Kuldhara: A Historical Novel Set in Rajasthan* by Malathi Ramachandran is an attempt to explore the writings of famous Indian women novelists, whose fictional works reflect heavily with the desert motif. Malathi Ramachandran, is an Indian prolific writer, an avid traveller and fiction writer and the author of *The Legend of Kuldhara*, *Wheel Turned a Novel* and *Edge of All Light*. The lovers of environmental studies will be pleased to know Malathi Ramachandran and she and well known literary celebrity during this period.

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The constant exploration of the desert was its extremes in the novel *The Legend of Kuldhara: A Historical Novel Set in Rajasthan*, and it is realized that this novel depicted the desert in its total complexities. It was matchlessly interesting. Kuldhara, a village in the Rajasthan desert, suddenly abandoned, cursed, nearly two hundred years ago, to remain a heap of rubble and stone. Orange dunes spreaded everywhere in the depiction of the desert's solitude and integrity.

There is so much that happened there one night in the early nineteenth century, and yet, it is condensed into just a few prosaic lines of history. We read of *Diwan* of Jaisalmer coveting the village chieftain's daughter. We know that rather than send her to him, the whole Paliwal community abandoned their eighty-four villages overnight, leaving behind a curse. We hear of the *Diwans* long-standing hatred for the *Rawals* and the hand of the British in running the state. Nothing more (Ramachandran 69).

Compared to the fertile valley of their memories, it is presently a waste land. The story was set in the background of deserted village in the Jaisalmer district of Rajasthan, India, established around the thirteenth century, it was once a prosperous village inhabited by Paliwal Brahmins and abandoned overnight in the early nineteenth century along with eighty-three other villages. The author narrates the story brilliantly delineating the life in a desert, village and in Jaisalmer in vivid colours as well as in a sombre mood.

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Here the author's concept about the life in the desert is very interesting and could be considered as against the one expressed in the novel. She believed that in the desert, there was life. But it was hard and difficult to stay in the deserts, even though she says that the desert always brought surprises. Sometimes it is its rigidity and emptiness, sometimes it awakens from the dream and tender, pale-green grass suddenly stands where even yesterday there was nothing but sand and splintery pebbles. About this, in an interview, Malathi commented as; "Weaving a story out of meager information sounds very difficult and challenging. But it is actually a boon for a fiction writer because it is then possible to create a fresh world complete with its own characters and events and stories." (Ramachandran).

Along with this concept, the author describes the ways to the desert or pathways were with fewer crowds, limited number of vehicles and distant street lights etc. They represent the strangeness and the loneliness one experiences the desert. Here, Malathi introduces them as the ones that bear witness to the unforgettable and unimaginable experiences in the desert in future. There was no hope of even running away from it. "The First time I walked through the village of Kuldhara near Jaisalmer, the sand was deep under my feet, and brick and stone skeletons stood sentinel on both sides" (65). It was an extra-large open area. There was no hope of light except natural light of the wilderness. Thirst was the biggest problem for all of them. Throughout the life and the journey in the desert they suffered from it. And felt

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like people being inside a furnace. And the men there get a clear realization of the impossibility of life in the desert.

Desert has an ability to merge the people into it. Metaphorically, desert symbolizes the extreme level of cruelty by providing intolerable heat, day after day. The novel's main focus is the living situation of the deserted people. No one can help him from the sufferings in the desert. It makes him thirstier and thirstier, in such unquenchable measures. "I saw fragmented homes, broken dreams; I heard voices and laughter and songs of the desert people" (69). It lies dreaming of its vibrant past when the streets echoed with laughter and the fields swayed green and gold by day.

They say the desert is ageless, timeless. That it was never born and will never die. They say it has no form either... its shifting sands take one shape today and another tomorrow. Constantly covering its own secrets, its mysteries, its stories of countless generations that lived and loved and lost, and fought and bled and fled. So much lies buried under the silken, restless dust, glittering gold in the sun and gleaming silver at night that one wonders, did history actually happen here, or was it all the dream of a traveler lost and parched and trampled by the sudden onset of a swirling hot too? (85).

In the same sense, according to Benjamin once pointed out in his *Goat Days*,

The previous day might be very hot, but the next day might dawn chilly; it might be shivering cold one day and burning hot the next. One moment,



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the sky would be pure without a speck of dust, but the next second a dust storm would churn that purity away. This storm too appeared in a similar fashion. The whole day had been fiery hot and all of a sudden a host of black clouds appeared in one corner in the sky. Within seconds the darkness flowed across the whole sky and blanketed the earth. A cold wind blew, slicing through the mind and the body (Benyamin 113).

But by providing the rain, the desert once again proves that it was too strong and too capable of inflicting severe pain. No one can struggle against its prowess and might. The people who live in the desert believe that, the rain is a curse for them. They feared it. They thought it was “genie”, an evil spirit! So from this view, desert appeared quite non-benevolent, unlike God. During the rainy time, the changing climates represent the changing mentality of the desert. Especially the foggy and cold mornings, the disappearance of whiteness and again fog shaded evenings once again prove that the desert has no particular character. It always brings changes. But none of these changes can a human being tolerate.

The novel shows the sharpness in the nature of the desert. It offers an uncomfortable journey and the life in the desert. It also shows how dangerous it was. It was clear that such terrible experiences changed the present condition of them like any other organisms. So, they were aware of such natural dangers which suddenly occurred in the desert. So they took all the protection to prevent them by awakening from the sleepy mood.

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As the central character in the book, desert is personified and deified. It is assigned agency, feelings and intentions and autonomy from humans. Compared to descriptions of humans, the hyperbolic descriptions of nature are dramatic and theatrical. All that is spiritual, supernatural, and divine is reflected or contained in it. Accordingly, nature is supreme and has higher purposes independent of humans.

The story flows smoothly. It has elements of the mystical – an old man who doesn't talk, only sings and predicts future in mysterious stanzas, the smell of the earth and the chirping of birds assumes a very musical mood in a lot of places. "Like the desert, the man was ageless too" (90). The way to reach it was very risky. The actual desert behavior was visible there. Especially the journeys through the reddish sand desert, in the highlands of Rajasthan were difficult. In this novel,, Malathi said that there was no track and no path; instead only it was a part of a tremendous wasteland. The desert wind removed even the footprints of the humans on the sand which were helpful for the followers. The dunes changing so quickly, from one form to another, new hill dotted with dry, lifeless grass etc. give bitter experience for the travelers. They cannot trust their path, except for the natives. The description of a sandstorm is a most important thing. It gives a clear picture of the dangers of the desert. A new hope arises for their smooth journey,

She would look down at the town with its thin paths spidering between mud houses, camels meandering along by the lanes, lines of colourful clothes strung along the walls and the balconies like daubs of paint on a drab brown canvas.

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Sometimes, the whole scene would shimmer and shake like a mirage in the desert, the pale yellow stone blocks turning into a molten gold (107).

Songs were very common in the desert. But it doesn't mean that their songs had proper meanings. Each and every caravan used to sing its songs. And it was common that the camel-riders could hear songs in every part of desert. Their animals were trained to keep their songs regular, for they do not feel sleepy themselves- chants of deserts men were accustomed to, spaces that knew neither limits nor echoes but always keep them in one tone. They were loose and somewhat husky, coming high up in the throat, tenderly fading in the dry air. No one who travelled through the desert ever forgets those voices. They were able to control the earth, therefore the natives used this tool for their comfort.

Written in third person narrative voice, poetically and in a relaxed manner, with carefully chosen words by the author to fit the scenery. The plot changes its pace in between but overall is smooth. The detailed characterization is the piece that binds this novel and makes it interesting for the reader. The details such as their Havelis, food, dresses and the overall background. The theme of the contrasting lifestyle of Rich against Poor is clearly shown through their emotions of anger, despair, and love which a reader can feel and observe the same. Fulfillment of dreams is one of the major themes in desert novels by travelling through the desert. However, voices had an unimaginable place in the deserts. It reduced the long silence and loneliness of the people in one way.

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The middle of the desert was very interesting. During the odd journeys, when they met the camel-riders between the cars, gave him more happiness. It causes a short interval in the lonely and the endless desert. The ending was bittersweet for the readers. Because, the fate of some characters will come to a halt in to the reader's expectation like desert always did. Foresee of what happens to Pari at the end is a bit heartbreaking as if she has no control over her destiny. This book has enough twists to engross a reader who is interested in reading historical fiction based in India and explores the nitty-gritty of a regional community along.

Malathi touches upon themes like greed, love, depression, patriarchy, politics and passion and weaves an engrossing narrative. The language is lucid. The wars in the desert were another evil thing that happened there and disturbed its tranquility. Anyhow, it was clear that he survived the dangers of the desert and fulfilled his dreams and finally he realized the meaning of the love and care of the desert.

It is an extra-large open area and a place of wilderness with the light of no hope. The desert is how you live it, for many, the desert is its presence or absence is power, but this power takes different forms. For others, the desert is a living presence, a place for establishing community. It is a place of alienation as well as loss and they are 'unsheltered solidarity' individuals. The long and short of the story is that the desert is highly influential theme but it combines the world as a majestically powerful one even capable of controlling human mind.

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From these one gets an idea about the people who choose that place for living. The fact is that desert has such a power to hold them into it. But when looked into it deeply, it is found to be a place where most wars occur in the world

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### Redefining Gender Roles:

#### Preeti Shenoy's *It Happens for a Reason*

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Contemporary Indian women's writing tends to reflect upon the different dimensions associated with being a woman within the socio-cultural landscape of present day India. This has also led to the emergence of a wide range of themes and issues that represent the significance of the cultural roles and identities of women. Through their works, women writers have tried to enrich the domain of Indian English literature by probing the multiple dimensions of female subjectivity and by trying to awaken a new consciousness that would define womanhood going beyond the strictures of a male-dominated society. In the recent years, there has been a surge of a new kind of writing by women that endeavours to imbibe the post-feminist ideals about gender and culturality and seeks to give new meanings and expressions about feminism. Such a development has occurred in tandem with the emergence of popular cultural forms that redefine existing conceptions about female independence. A new genre of popular women's writing has been seen to take shape, aiming to provide more than just a momentary relief, offering pictures of feisty, independent women who attempt to uncover the different layers of meaning that characterise female existence.

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The new breed of women writers, who have now begun to command a sizeable proportion of the market share, are seen to delve deep into the anxieties, dilemmas and tribulations that women in modern India face in terms of their daily encounters with the existing social set up. Such concerns also tend to go beyond the principles of liberal feminism and critically engage with cultural notions of acceptability and respectability and the meaning and significance of female autonomy. Preeti Shenoy is one such writer who attempts to examine the Indian woman's role and identity by foregrounding the woman's voice, rights and choices. There appears to be a conscious effort on her part to represent female protagonists who organise their lives by upholding the values of personal independence and free-thinking. Concomitantly, their thoughts, deeds and perspectives consciously or unconsciously undermine values and ideologies viewed as sacrosanct, particularly with regard to gender. What deserves special mention is the fact that more than overtly challenging established patriarchal values and concerns, Shenoy is more oriented towards prioritising the female self and the capability of exercising individual agency.

Moreover, there can also be seen a definite understanding of the new dimensions of female independence that arise in accordance with the changing conditions of contemporary Indian society. As a result, the formalised notions regulated by society are subjected to a radical re-visioning of sorts in an attempt to record voices of subversion that sometimes negate the dominant codes. Accordingly, ideas about marriage, fidelity,

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motherhood, marriage, family and the like get re-invented, creating new spaces and discourses of empowerment and emancipation. This kind of a stance adopted by Shenoy is intended to offer fresh insights into the ways in which we approach gender relations and also imbibe post-feminist values, revealing the dynamism inherent within female individualities.

Shenoy's works constitute an integral part of current popular literature and popular culture by encompassing a whole range of ideas and concerns that re-affirm the strength, ingenuity, progress and growth of the woman. Each work of Shenoy thus manifests a clear feminist outlook by providing emphatic and powerful statements about the female condition. In this regard, she is able to position herself firmly along with a host of other contemporary Indian women writers such as Advaita Kala, Swati Kaushal, Anuja Chauhan, to name a few, who appear to be keen on exploring the different facets associated with the existence of the woman in the twenty first century. They are equally concerned with understanding the pivotal roles that women can play in re-negotiating gendered notions and conceptions.

This paper intends to examine one such strand of thought that has been considered as an ideal of femininity that is inextricably woven into the definitions of the woman, namely motherhood. The significations of motherhood represent an integral part that constitutes the ideological construction of womanhood and have also been instrumental in formulating and consolidating ideas about sexual difference. Therefore, a number of feminists have been very vocal about the need to critique such ideas



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about biological functioning that appear to objectify women in particular ways. For instance, Simone de Beauvoir in her monumental work *The Second Sex* points out how motherhood is idealised to the point of making it appear as an exclusive privilege that the woman holds. This is done by conditioning her right from her infancy to internalise eulogised conceptions of motherhood. She says: "From infancy woman is told over and over that she is made for childbearing, and the splendors of maternity are forever being sung to her". (491). The cultural formulations of motherhood thus also result in silencing the voice of women and therefore are socially manipulative in nature.

However, within popular cultural texts attempts are also made to signal resistance to dominant discursive practices and beliefs about motherhood. Indeed, such attempts of cultural reformulation can certainly enhance the creation of new images of women that are transformatory and non-conformist in nature. While analysing the works of the new age women writers it can be found that political meanings that transcend established precepts are given precedence over dominant values and codes of conduct. As their female protagonists encounter circumstances, characters and happenings that may not always adhere to their expectations, they undergo a process of awakening whereby certain accepted givens of society are perused from an alternate point of view, thereby giving rise to voices and concerns that are indicative of self-realisation and independence.

Shenoy's novel *It Happens for a Reason* also presents such attempts for a cultural redefinition of the

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attributes of femininity by enabling the woman to assert herself beyond known hierarchies and their assorted accompaniments. The novel presents a strikingly different image of a young mother who assertively exercises her choices in life, braving all odds and proves herself to be an unconventional and confident young woman. The novel brings in issues like pregnancy out of wedlock, single parenting, and infertility and even probes the effects of being a mother. These ideas are expressed through the thinking patterns and beliefs of three important female characters in the novel. They include the protagonist Vipasha Mishra, her mother and her best friend Suchi.

The chief character Vipasha is depicted as a feisty, enthusiastic young girl who falls for a wealthy and good-looking young man whom she meets during the school vacation. She gets pregnant, quite unexpectedly, when she is just eighteen and how this forms a turning point in her life is one of the major focal points in the story. She takes the biggest decision in her life, that of having her baby, against the wishes of her family as well as her man. The novel tries to consciously break free of the stereotypical image of an unwed mother as hopeless and weak and instead projects the woman as one who is determined to move on with life all-willing to accept the challenges that life has in store for her. She says: "I was sure hopeful of tomorrow. I did not know whether I had lived well or not, but I knew that I was doing exactly what I wanted to do. For now, that was enough" (114). She is aware of the consequences of being an unwed mother but is firm about having her baby despite being at the pinnacle of her career in modelling. The societal voice finds

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expression in the apprehensions of her parents who urge her to reconsider her decision. The same applies to Ankush Bhargav, her lover who is uncomfortable with her decision and wants her to abort the child. What is of relevance in this context is the fortitude displayed by the young woman in the face of strong opposition from those close to her. On several occasions Vipasha is seen expressing her joy and excitement on becoming a mother, as for her it is a pleasurable experience that is outside societal binaries such as good/bad and normal/deviant. At a later point in her life when she looks back at the experiences she has had so far it is the experience of giving birth that she finds as the most fulfilling. She expresses her feelings in the following words: "I would say that the moment of giving birth to my son is undoubtedly the happiest moment of my life. It was the most awe-inspiring, humbling and the single most powerful experience I have ever gone through" (121). It is this maternal affection that acts as a spur and drives her along the path of success. It is thus not just a pleasurable experience but also something that gives her a sense of autonomy. She says: "It was as though the baby was one stable thing that was exclusively mine-something that nobody could take away from me, something of my very own, where I was in charge. Something to cherish, to love and to adore" (47). The idea that the author tries to communicate is the need for women to move out of the pressures of conformity and to listen to their inner voice, much like Vipasha. Her unconventional life as an unmarried single mother is not a reason for her to feel let down and hopeless, but an opportunity for her to understand and express herself fully. She is presented as

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one with decision-making power and a sense of agency and not as one who meekly submits to societal demands. The intimacy between Vipasha and her child is not described in terms of what society expects her to do as a mother but rather as something that is natural and intensely unique.

Such a conception of motherhood as something positive, as pleasurable and empowering for women can be found in the work of the feminist writer Adrienne Rich. Her *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* is regarded as one of the best feminist books exploring the different dimensions of mothering and motherhood. Andrea O'Reilly offers an analysis of this work, examining its rich legacy and the enduring influence it has on feminist scholarship about motherhood. In her introduction to her work *From Motherhood to Mothering* O'Reilly states that one of the principal concerns of her book is to explore how "key theoretical insights" made by Rich in *Of Woman Born* provided the "analytical tools" for studying the "meaning and experience of motherhood" (1-2). She notes in particular the distinction Rich made between two meanings of motherhood, namely "the *potential* relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction-and to children; and the *institution*-which aims at ensuring that that potential-and all women-shall remain under male control" (original emphasis) (qtd. in O'Reilly 2). Rich believes in the experience of motherhood as liberating for woman when it is defined and controlled by the woman herself. Motherhood becomes oppressive when it is institutionalised in terms of a set of rules and expectations

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cultivated by patriarchy. Andrea O'Reilly elaborates on this difference by talking about motherhood and mothering. She says:

The term "motherhood" refers to the patriarchal institution of motherhood that is male-defined and controlled and is deeply oppressive to women, while the word "mothering" refers to women's experiences of mothering that are female-defined and centered and potentially empowering to women. The reality of patriarchal motherhood thus must be distinguished from the possibility or potentiality of gynocentric or feminist mothering. In other words, while motherhood, as an institution, is a male-defined site of oppression, women's own experiences of mothering can nonetheless be a source of power. (2)

She however adds that most women experience motherhood as an institution, especially in accordance with the patriarchal ideology of 'natural-intensive mothering' and this has become the official and only meaning of motherhood (7). In Preeti Shenoy's novel *It Happens for a Reason*, however there can be found an attempt to offer an alternate picture of motherhood that is, to a certain extent, dissociated from the cultural meanings of motherhood. The protagonist Vipasha's relationship with her own mother is in sharp contrast to the deeply personal relationship that she shares with her own son. She laments that her mother is always inconsiderate towards her and is devoid of any love or affection that one usually expects in a mother. These expectations are in fact those which culture has laid down for motherhood and having imbibed these beliefs Vipasha feels that she is

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denied of something that she naturally deserves. Therefore she observes that her mother is indifferent and emotionless and considers her as a major inconvenience, never there for her even in times of need. She expresses her anguish thus: "What kind of a mother was she? I could not understand how a mother could be so selfish. None of my friends had mothers like mine" (117). Though she is unable to comprehend her mother's strange behavior, she is later given an explanation by her father that her mother actually loved her and cared for her, though she did not express it openly. She had already lost six babies before Vipasha and did not even have the courage to hope when Vipasha was born. She prevented herself from expressing her motherly feelings as she could not bear the thought of losing her child. She continued doing so putting up a harsh exterior that concealed her real feelings. Though this revelation does not affect Vipasha much, its importance lies in the image of the mother that is represented. It is in fact a totally unglorified rendition of maternal love which contradicts the cultural image of the mother as all-understanding, emotional and sacrificing in nature, and therefore unconventional.

For Vipasha's mother, the stance she adopts is a reflection of her personal feelings and wishes and there is no urgency felt on her part to adapt herself into the conventional framework of motherhood. A similar notion is evident in the representation of Vipasha's friend Suchi who is shown as childless and longing for motherhood. Shenoy chooses to depict her situation as something that is personal and concerned with individual attitudes rather than as something that has to be read alongside societal

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meanings and expectations. Such representational strategies certainly help in the re-working of gendered beliefs and patterns of behaviour that are normalised in society. Therefore, these images stand out for their implicit suggestions of transformation and rethinking with regard to gender roles. This is especially significant because very often it is the institutionalised conception of mothering that finds expression through dominant cultural images.

Such altered conceptions about motherhood resonate well with the conscious processes of cultural redefinition initiated by popular women writers like Preeti Shenoy. What is even more pertinent is the fact that stereotypical categorisations of femininity, in terms of a glorification and idealisation of certain values, become thwarted and new implications and suggestions are hinted at about women's self-realisation. Popular cultural texts thus become sites of contestation where dominant cultural and counter-cultural forces meet. In fact, the intersections of post feminism with popular culture came to provide a solid ground for "investigating representational politics and issues of identity" (162). Such endeavours initiated in the course of the evolution of post feminist re-evaluations of popular culture, highlighted the need for a redefinition of popular cultural fields as areas of "political and representational contestation" (162). New expressions and positions that emphasised aspects of resistance and struggle within popular cultural forms emerged facilitating a more nuanced understanding of the conflictual patterns of social experience.

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*It Happens for a Reason* shows how the woman's relation with her own body and sexuality can be controlled by societal strictures with a view to contain women's free expression of their own selves. However, it is significant that the text tries to interweave positive connotations about the female self, transforming itself into a space where gendered inscriptions are re-written. Such representations of women voicing their opinions contradicting culturally sanctioned ideas indicate bold efforts made by popular cultural texts towards inculcating a renewed understanding of the woman image. The attempt to incorporate qualities of self-sacrifice, nurturing and endurance into descriptions of femininity has always been a cultural ploy meant to depict women as selfless creatures whose bodies are by nature shaped not just to give birth but also to become chief instruments for life-long caring. But Shenoy, through her work manoeuvres the discursive assumptions about mothering in a way that enables the woman to derive fulfillment and satisfaction, rather than becoming oppressed.

The protagonist of the novel presents an alternate identity that is not formulated by society, but by her own self as she organises herself as a mother not in terms of accepted dictates of the 'family' but in terms of what she considers as acceptable and proper. Though such standpoints that are intensely personal and subversive may be discerned within the text, such instances may have to be seen in a larger context of cultural resistance that derives significance in relation to the changing equations about gender in society. It is noteworthy that women writers have tried to attach new viewpoints and



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observations to a rich tradition of feminist literary content immortalised in the works of Indian women authors, since the past. The works produced by these young popular women writers, having already attained the status of best-sellers, have a far greater role in furthering those feminist motives and aspirations that have been the driving force of the women's movement across cultures.

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**Reality vs. Virtual reality in  
Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest***

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Drama and theatre as cultural artifact appropriate an ambivalent position in the history of post colonial women's writing. Theatre and performative requirements of the period necessitate the breaching of the female arcane world. Most women writers try to initiate an exposition of the Arcanum of female private life. Then, themes become vibrant; experimentation takes place and dramatic performance becomes disquisitions of contemporary reality. Being the site of interaction with the audience through performance, the act of writing plays and the performing theatre seem to be more progressive. Hence, abstract ideas along with factual data find a place in theatrical performance. *Harvest* by Manjula Padmanabhan is a case in point, where we find the metathesis of reality: the meum and tuum of experience, both subjective and objective.

Drama and theatre as cultural products hold different place in the history of post colonial women's writing. Theatre and performative requirements necessitate the breaching of the 'private- public divide that most women writers seem reluctant to initiate. Theatre adds up the possibility of experimentation and is obviously caught up in a complex interweave of history, representation and convention. Being the site of interaction with the audience through performance the act of writing plays and the theatre world seem to be more progressive than the other areas of subjective experience

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and re-assert the general picture of inadequate, unsatisfactory and even incorrect representation of women in the social sphere.

However, in India women writers have generally preferred to write other forms of literature than writing plays. But the later decades of the twentieth century showed an apparent departure from this and women had begun to write plays in greater numbers. These plays are reflexive, honest, often violent and disturbing. Manjula Padmanabhan shot into fame as a playwright when *Harvest* (2000) won the 1997 Onassis International Cultural Competitions Prize for Theatrical Plays. The immensely significant and dynamic play presents a dystopia where the rich of the developed world purchase healthy organs from the poor of the post colonial world.

Manjula Padmanabhan's disturbing play *Harvest* deals with the increasing trend of organ harvesting in India. Wealthy individuals from privileged countries are turning to the developing world in order to procure spare parts – a form of resource extraction that takes exploitation to a whole new level. Unlike the conventional modes of exploitation, organs are harvested like a natural resource. The body becomes an object that can be bought and sold, devoid of agency.

Controlled by technology, the contact between the two segments of the world is not physical but of the virtual kind, the only way that the developed world can remain distant from the developing world squalor. With pervasive black humour Padmanabhan emphasizes the

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business of 'organ harvesting' or the way human body becomes commodified – a tradable, saleable thing, and how it can be controlled, and literally owned by means of technology, and exploited. The powerful play inspired Govind Nihalani's film *Deham* in 2001.

The play is set in a Mumbai chawl in the year 2010. The cramped one-room tenement is occupied by a typical four member family: Om Prakash, the tense and jobless clerk, who is desperately trying to support his entire family; his wife Jaya, who has succumbed to the tense life of privatization and insecurity, and looks much older than she really is; his old mother, instead of being a benevolent and encouraging influence, is frustrated, ill-natured and sarcastic; his younger brother Jeetu, who has given up all hopes of getting a decent employment, works surreptitiously as a male prostitute.

Om Prakash agrees to sell unspecified organs through InterPlanta Services, to a rich person in first-world for a small fortune. InterPlanta and the recipient's are obsessed with maintaining Om's health and invasively control the lives of Om, his mother Ma, and wife Jaya in their one-room apartment. The recipient, Ginni, periodically looks in on them via a videophone and treats them contemptuously. Om's diseased brother Jeetu is taken to give organs instead of Om, and the recipient, Ginni, ultimately turns out to not be what she initially seems.

Though Om's agreement with Interplanta provides him financial respite, soon his family finds that

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their lives are completely taken over by Interplanta. New wealth and gloss changes their dingy apartment, but it is also accompanied by disquiet as the organ recipients and Interplanta get increasingly insistent in controlling the lives of Om and his family. Soon their mother becomes a virtual zombie as she becomes addicted to television provided by Interplanta, and leads them to a world of virtual reality. Thus the real world becomes the hyper real world.

Padmanabhan divides her cast into two groups. Donors and receivers, a poor Indian family and a rich North American couple. The former live in a single room of a crowded Bombay apartment building; the latter only appear as images on a video screen. There are also anonymous guards and agents who facilitate the transplant operation and deliver high-tech goods. The division of roles in the play happens at real and virtual world

In reality, Manjula Padmanabhan is aware of the Organ Transplant Act 1994, which prohibits the sale of human organs. But in spite of this, human kidneys removed in a clandestine manner are being transplanted in rich patients in India and abroad, who are being charged about £ 30,000 by private medical institutions. Professional blood sellers invariably become organ donors in view of the high monetary temptation. Donors of both blood and organs are in the high risk group and invariably transmit Aids, hepatitis and other infections.

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In many cases donors detect their missing kidney only when they notice an ugly abdominal scar and get themselves re-examined. As the entire process is conducted by quacks and in a subterranean manner, a majority of the transplants end in fatal failure. Padmanabhan has, through a dystopian satire full of a psycho-economic aberration, challenges the social conscience of the western predator and the indifferent Indian bureaucrat who has as yet shown no interest in intervening.

The play situates medical science in the futuristic world where the traffic in organs is handled by transnational conglomerate that take over and maintain the donor body prior to the operation. *Harvest* extends the idea of the body commodity to absurd lengths where transplant surgery, genetic engineering, prosthetics vitro fertilization, virtual reality and commodity culture have created the possibility of whole body replacements. In reality as post colonial allegory, the play seizes upon the mediascapes and technoscapes by which poor countries becomes the outsourcing centre for body parts and labour in the first world.

We also meet the commando-like guards who remind us of the SS (defense corps) of Nazi Germany, and who work for the rich western receivers, supervising the modern installations in the homes of the donors, as well as taking disciplinary action if they misuse any benefit. These guards closely control the enclosed, impenetrable world of Om, eliminating any gesture of rebellion or disagreement.

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Technical devices used in the play that one finds in Science fiction- technical wizardry, travels, contact module, video coach are all happening at the level of hyper reality. The contact module is installed by interplnata on Om's home, which help the western receivers to communicate with the donor's family. Thus the organ purchaser Ginnie is never physically present but visible on the screen suspended from the ceiling. Contact module thus enables Ginnie to intervene in donor world without having to set foot in the geographical location that the donor inhabits.

Another scientific gadget used in the play is Ma's videocoach. By the end of the play we find ma, locked herself up in a videocoach a capsule into which she can plug herself, watch one of 750 channels, the unit is self sufficient it provide customer with nourishment panel, hydration filter, and pangrometer Thus man is surrendered completely to the joys of technologically induced hyper reality.

Sometimes receivers deceive donors by appearing as angels, for example in the play Jeetu is not able to resist the phony allurements offered by the screen image of Ginnie, who is later described as nothing but a 'computer animated wet dream'. Actually receiver was an old man, Virgil who had deliberately misled Om and family by projecting an animated image of the seductive and lovely, Ginni. Thus the existence of the character Ginnie itself is in virtual levels.

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There is a kind of hyper reality used in the play when Virgil offers Jaya that they can travel all over the world within Jaya's apartment itself. Women in western countries are infertile so westerners are in search of healthy bodies to sow their seeds. Virgil can make Jaya pregnant while he is in California and she is in India. Virgil says that he can have a child on her 'without risking the skin', without coming from his safe, disease free environment in the first world. A child is possible by sending a device or an implant.

The play shows us that the twofold dream of socialism and science is deliberately distorted by those who assume power in its name. Jaya and Jeetu are the only two characters who have nothing but contempt for those western hypocrites. Jaya as a spokesperson of the playwright herself threatens to take her own life rather than face a life of exploitation. She orders her controller to disengage from the world of virtual reality and appear in person before her – or else she will take her own life. Identity and agency become affixed with the visceral body and touch. Padmanabhan draws parallels between a society that is becoming increasingly technological but simultaneously disconnected. .

The ironic logic of totalitarian ideology sees the machine in consistent motion. Its aim is to eliminate the notion of historical becoming and its prerequisite is the existence of human beings whose only purpose is to conform to the rules of that hegemony. Ginni's super-ego, like the State, achieves absolute control over the family members, all of whom are forced to regress and stay at



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the level of eternal childhood obedience. Their house turns into a kind of torture chamber where the intellectual rebel has no place. Behind total domination lies the desire for a consistency which is independent of reality, and which tolerates no spontaneity of mutations or variables. The world of Ginni aims not only at the transformation of Om's outside world, but, as Hannah Arendt in her book *The Origins of Totalitarianism* writing on the working of ideology argues, "the transformation of human nature itself"(458).

But it is not the West only which must be held responsible. The Indian medical professionals have a clandestine link with the racketeers, and need to be exposed. Through the play Padmanabhan's purpose is to alert the readers to the crucial role that technology plays in both seducing and policing the developed world donors into submission. While Padmanabhan makes her points allusively and evocatively, making her critique of authoritarianism and exploitation powerful with the remarkable capacity to illuminate a social problem being faced by most of the post colonial world. Thus as a representative of the post colonial women writing, she tries to distort the whole notions of reality. That is why in the introduction to her work 'Kleptomania' Padmanabhan wrote:

What I like about theatre is that it offers a writer the opportunity to go directly to the heart of an ironical or thought provoking situation by setting up a theoretical world. It is a bit like writing a problem in Mathematics, reducing reality to a tangle of pipes and cisterns or a group of three

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people traveling at varying speeds up a mountain in order to reveal the relationship between matter, time and space.(4)

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## **Contemporary Women's Writing in India**

### **Abjection, Rejection and Subjectivization in Githa Hariharan's *When Dreams Travel***

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When does one become a subject? Or does anyone ever become a subject? Questions like these seem to be obsolete after postmodern revolution, but Alain Badiou, the French philosopher singlehandedly engages in a philosophical project of asking such questions and showing fidelity to the concept of subject. Alain Badiou's concept of a subject differs from conventional understanding of subject, where subject is understood to be "a mysterious autonomous" agent having a 'free will'. In Badiou, in other words, every human being is not a subject. To put it in Simon de Beauvoir's style, one is not born a subject, but becomes one. How does one become a subject? It is by showing fidelity to a particular event that one becomes a subject. The four key terms that we must give special attention in Badiou are 'subject', 'event', 'fidelity' and 'truth'.

For Badiou, the question of agency is not so much a question of how a subject can *initiate* an action in an autonomous manner but rather how a subject *emerge* through an autonomous chain of actions within a changing situation. That is, it is not everyday actions or decisions that provide evidence of agency for Badiou. It is rather those extraordinary decisions and actions which *isolate* an actor from their context, those actions which show that a human can actually be a free agent that supports *new* chains of actions and reactions. For this reason, not every human being is always a subject, yet some human beings *become* subjects; those who act in

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*fidelity* to a chance encounter with an *event* which disrupts the *situation* they find themselves in.

When one analyses the theory of Alain Badiou, it can be observed that in the case of women, every moment becomes an 'event'. Every role they play, every moment they confront have the potential to change their lives, and helps them emerge as 'subjects'. Shahrzad, like her own story, is a survivor. The travelling tale undergoes a change of costume, language and setting at each serai on its way. It adapts itself to local conditions, to this century or that, a permanent fugitive from its officious parent, legitimate history. And Shahrzad- she too has learnt the lessons of the tales she told. She is now a myth that must be sought in many places, fleshed in different bodies, before her dreams let go of Dunyazad or her descendants.

Githa Hariharan's *When Dreams Travel* rewrites the familiar 'Arabian Nights' from the perspective of Dunyazad, the younger sister of Shahrzad, the story teller. Shahrzad is compelled to tell stories each night after marriage till the 1001<sup>st</sup> night to survive and also to protect the virgins of the country. Githa Hariharan in her novel talks about the lives of the Sultan Shaharyar and Shahrzad after the 1001<sup>st</sup> night. And this imagined life is inexplicably related to the lives of Dunyazad, her sister, who marries Shahazaman, the brother of the sultan Shaharyar. In this retelling of the story, Hariharan thrusts the women to the forefront- the women in the palace who are not mere dolls but powerful thinking women who seek and tell stories. They are tired of the patriarchal structures and they find an identity through their stories and travels. After the 1001<sup>st</sup> night, when asked by the Sultan about the

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origin of those stories, Shahrzad answers that they are from her dreams, and they can be understood only by those 'whose necks are naked and at risk'. Then she stands up and goes to the palace to enjoy the luxuries which her success has brought.

In this novel, Dunyazad, the powerful protagonist of the story returns to Shahabad, to unravel the secret behind the death of her sister. Now aged and widowed, her journeys are through the past and dreams. In the palace she listens to various versions of the stories of the death of Shahrzad, and she herself weaves up stories from her own conjectures. She helps Shaharyar's son to capture the kingdom from his father. The story of the novel does not end, like the many stories it consists of.

The stories in the novel are told, retold and remolded as a way of survival and freedom. The different versions of the story of Satyasama symbolize the freedom and identity of the one who gives birth to them. Even the stories themselves provide the narrator/creator with a freedom just as the freedom of a mother to bring up the child according to her wishes (whether that would be truthful to the child is not relevant here, anyway). Hence, here women who are denied of freedom in the public space construct their freedom and identity through the commonplace art of storytelling.

In Githa Hariharan's novel under consideration, Shahrzad confronts a situation which can be called an event. That is the unconventionality of her marriage. And by being truthful to it, she saves her life and the life of the rest of the virgin girls in the country too. When she

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begins to speak- i.e. telling the stories of her dreams- it paves way for her freedom. She escapes not only from death but from silence too. Later Shahrzad's sister Daunyazad also does the same by engaging in story telling for seven days, along with the slave girl, Dilshad. The other female character Dilshad, being a slave, finds a way out of slavery through opening her mouth and telling stories. She tells the stories of the Harlem in the palace where the mad women are kept. The number of these women increases, she observes; and each has a story or stories to tell. She takes upon her the burden of these untold stories and she becomes their narrator. Most of these stories are about women. Some are craving for sex, some are ugly, some mutilated, and some are dutiful and obedient. These stories are all Badiouean events. They are all not manipulated, though some like Dilshad's story about Rupavathi's breasts question the authority of stories and story tellers. They challenge the existing notions of values in the cultural community. Through story telling they free themselves from the shackles of the memory and knowledge of other women.

Even when Shahrzad stopped telling stories, she was in a process of finding her unique identity which is a result of the stories of her past and those she would invent in the future. This is evident when it is hinted that she was murdered. Though she does not tell her stories, Dunyazad arrives to tell the readers about the stories of Shahrazad. Shahrazad herself becomes a story later after her death.

In the novel Gita Hariharan's women characters make the effort to be 'truthful' to the stage of abjection. The lives of all these characters are all connected together

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by their experiences and narratives. All of them find it difficult to separate their lives from the lives of the other women. The stories each one tells are not their stories, they are the stories of many other women. They try to do justice to the women of the past and and at the same time try to escape from the complex web of the life stories of those women. Dreams and mirrors serve as powerful imagery all through the novel. Both in the dreams and the mirrors, Dunyazad, Dilshad and Shahrzad find stories which burden them with the history of experiences. This abjection and rejection keeps the story moving forward like a river flowing with the timelessness and spacelessness of memories needed and not needed. Dunyazad returns to the palace carrying the troubles of this abjection.

The term abjection was developed by Julia Kristeva "to name the horror of being unable to distinguish between 'me and not-me.'" Though this was written from a psychological perspective, it has been appropriated by many. And this is particularly useful in the case of this novel where the distinction between narrators and characters, the women of the past, present and future and the story tellers are all subverted and mystified. Thus this simultaneous abjection and rejection is carried through the stories and dreams respectively.

After the 1001<sup>st</sup> night, Shahrzad is neither the young innocent Shahrazad before marriage; nor is she the person of the time of narrating stories. Shahrazad has transformed to become a part of the political power structure. It is something which she has yearned for as a young girl. But once confronted death and conquered it,



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once emptying her mind of the burden of the stories, she finds her identity. The mysterious death of Shahrzad and the suspicion of Dunyazad that the sister was killed by the sultan points to the fact that she had been continuously struggling to be free from the patriarchal notions of power and the extraordinary luxurious life of a queen. These fortunes did not satisfy her, instead they were weapons in her possession to exert her womanhood as something meaningful. Even when she grows old, she wants to talk-talk to the younger generation of the stories of the past. The juxtaposing of time and space in this novel in the form of a dream, like the title *When Dreams Travel* denotes.

Dunyazad is also familiar with the freedom that storytelling brings, and she liberates herself through the stories. She also passes through the process of 'becoming a subject' by being truthful to the 'events', especially the events of the marriage and death of her sister. Here, the woman is constructed through her stories and power of story telling. It is not the society, but her dreams, travels and experiences which constructs her individuality. As in Badiou, this is not according to her free will anyway. These women emerge as subjects, because they are truthful to the events they confront, and they show fidelity to the situations they find themselves in. yet, we have to extend the notions of Badiou a little further. In the case of women, who do not have a known history of freedom and identity, each moment they live are 'events', events which are capable of transforming them into subjects.

Many of the major male characters in the novel are unable to tell the stories which burden their minds

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and fails miserably in front of the women characters. The only thing they are able to do is to suppress the the stories using their power. But even this leads to more and more stories which ruin the peace of mind of the suppressor. For example, Dunyazad comes to know of the various versions of stories related to the death of Shahrzad when she sets about to know the truth behind her sister's death. Shahryar, her husband, the sultan, is not able to suppress these stories even though he could silence his wife forever.

In this novel, as in Badiou, a situation is a 'presented multiplicity'. It is this plurality of narratives, time and space that makes this work a complex one. But it is symbolic of the life of women, where the polyphony of situations, events and characters gives identity to their dreams. This work depoliticizes the issues in the lives of women. The many ways in which women find freedom and exert it are interesting, mysterious and at the same time controversial and disturbing in a patriarchal power structure. But Dunyazad and Shahrzad do it through storytelling, story seeking and sharing. These narratives, with their curious twists and turns define and explore the identity of the women and impart them a unique place in various cultural contexts.

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### **Voices from the margins: A Cultural Reading of Kamala Markandaya's *The Coffer Dams***

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In our times, nature has come to be considered as  
a 'resource' to be used instrumentally to fulfill human

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desires. The most extreme manifestation of this anthropocentric paradigm is reflected in popular culture and its dominant values. The obvious link of interdependence between nature and human beings are subjected to human assaults in order to maintain luxurious lifestyles. In a time of ecological crisis, ecocritics and eco feminists have become agents of history/ nature. They give voice to subversive politics, aware of its own situations. Ecocriticism strives for an earth democracy, across cultures and species. It reframes environment peace, gender, socialism and postcolonial concerns beyond the single- issue approach fostered by corporate right and its institutions. Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment.

The present paper is an attempt to trace out the earliest reflection of ecofeminist/ecocritical elements in Kamala Markandaya's *The Coffer Dams* (1969). Post-independent era was an epoch- making era in the history of Indian writing in English. Women writers of this era approached contemporary socio-political themes with fine aesthetic sense and deep political undertones. Kamala Markandaya is one among them who deliberately captures the cultural conflict between the east and west. Unlike Kipling, Markandaya infuses an eco-aesthetic touch and sensibility to this clichéd theme in her sixth novel, *The Coffer Dams* (1969).

The locale of this novel is set in a remote tribal village known as Malnad which is surrounded by daunting mountain ranges and the lush green forest. The central theme of the novel centres around, as observed by

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Parameswaran, “a situation common enough today in developing countries that once formed part of empires: the execution of projects – in this case the construction of dam-that would help the country progress”( 108) .The dwellers of this south Indian highland anxiously wait for the dam which is going to be constructed very soon. They are anxious because it may pose threat to their peaceful lives in the valleys. The conflict between mechanical prowess and moral anxieties subtly wraps the theme of this novel with an absorbing plot.

The British firm, Clinton Mackendrick &co. come with a formidable dam project in Malanad where the extreme tropical climate dictates everything. Clinton, the chief engineer wants to build the dam at any cost where as his wife Helen turns highly sensible towards the concerns of local tribal folk. When the first monsoon showers fall and the water level of the river rises, the challenging question arises whether to breach the coffer dams or allow them to stand which may lead to the submergence of dense forestland and the lives of tribes.

Markandaya skillfully raises the ethical question of losing the ethnical homelands of tribes when such ‘ambitious’ dam projects are constructed. The neglected sentiments of panic-stricken tribes remind us the famous plea written in 1959 by Baba Amte to Jawaharlal Nehru, “to intercede on behalf of Man and Nature, and reaffirm the national policy of protecting forest wealth and tribal culture”( Guha A.11). Focusing on an urban-industrial vision of a welfare state economy, the Nehruvian Model of Development invigorated a new trail of faith which instilled the idea of scientific progress and technological

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advancements. As an enthusiast of large dam projects like Bakra and DVC (Damodar Valley Corporation, on the lines of Tennessee Valley Corporation), Nehru famously proclaimed dams as the temples of modern India. Ironically, the major dam projects, mainly in the central and eastern India later lead to the displacement of many tribal groups.

The complex themes of development, race and marginality of this novel invite eco critical/ecofeminist discourses. As an ideological tool, eco feminism draws a parallel between the domination of man over women and the exploitation of nature in terms of dualism and hierarchical structure of patriarchy. Women are more sensible towards nature since both share their rhythms of cycles including different climates and menstruation. The contemporary sociological studies point out that women were the bread earners and agricultural cultivators in the matriarchal communities. Since women act as life-givers and life-preservers, they favour for renewable energy resources and sustainable development. The famous eco feminist Carolyn Merchant puts, "As woman's womb had symbolically yielded to the forceps, so nature's womb harboured secrets that through technology could be wrested from her grasp for use in the improvement of the human condition"(5).

The powerful men took the mantle of knowledge and women lost the ground during the transitional periods (16 and 17 centuries) which eventually led to the birth of early capitalism. The advancements in technology triggered by industrial revolution consolidated the supremacy of science/rationality over nature /depletion of

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ecological values. The colonial engineer Clinton represents both modernity and rationality. As an obsessed engineer, he executes his dam project by ruthlessly invading the virgin forest lands of Malnad. His callousness towards tribes makes Helen to raise powerful questions, "Don't human beings matter anything to you? .Do they have to be a special kind of flesh before they do?".(105)

This bossy engineer turns intolerant towards the dead bodies of tribes, even though Helen pleads him to respect the tribal customs and their sentiments. He adamantly tells Krishnan, "we have no time to bring up the bodies, The rains are due, the Dam is at risk"(178). Like Dr. Kelly in *Nectar in a Sieve*, the free-spirited Helen goes along with the local tribes and learns their language, which surprises the materialist Clinton. With a simple smile, she replies, "It is nothing to do with age. I just think of them as human beings that is all. You have got to get beyond their skies, darling. It is a bit of hurdle, but it is an essential one"(12).

This sensible English woman sends sweets and biscuits to the tribes when her husband decides to impose fine on them for the loss of oil from the site. Later, when she suggests him to slow down the pace of high risk work, the male chauvinistic Clinton asserts to establish his supremacy over his wife by raping her at the same night. The traumatic experience of marital rape tends Helen to develop an intimate relationship with Bashiam, the crane operator. Clinton's assertion of authoritative male power can be exercised through physical assaults over Malnad and Helen. The chauvinistic Clinton becomes a mere "builder" in front of this puissant lady. Her association

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with spiritualism prompts her to observe, "Our world, the one which I live. Things are battened down under concrete and mortar, all sorts of thing...The people who work in factories; they have forgotten what fresh air is like" (138).

The cultural ecofeminists assert that women are closer to nature than men and this close association helps women understand environmental issues with refined civic sense. The good-hearted Helen knows that rationality/technological advancements are devoid of spiritual values. The novel also makes a sharp comparison between the attitude old and young generation of tribes based on how they receive modernity and technological advancements. The conflict between old and new values of tribal ethos is intensified by the British engineering company's offer to job opportunities for young tribes who want to follow modern lifestyle. The old tribal chief scorns the young generation's taste for material life with contempt and expresses his concern through these words to Helen, "Useful you say. What for, I ask you: for that rubbish they buy from the camp shop? Tin cans and cardboard books, and scented pigs grease to plaster on their hair, for this they moan"(72) .

As a young representative of modern primitive life, Bashiam, the young crane operator likes to wear shoes and works with machines, though he is called "junglywallah" by Clinton and others, whereas Helen tries to break the man-made constructs of hierarchy, race and gender by telling Bashiam, "Look at me; I have never been a memsahib. You are not some kind of freak to me. We are alike; we are freaks only to the caste"(136) . Coated with racist prejudices, Clinton expressed his



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resentment to Helen's obsession with primitive culture and later on, warns her that they won't have a good relationship, if she continues friendship with "treemen"(79). The colonial engineers exploit young tribes for cheap labour and the old tribe chief futuristically predicts the life-threatening situation which is about to happen in a remorseful tone, "A score or more before they bend the river... the Great Dam will take them, the man eater will have its flesh"(73).

This underrated novel by Kamala is highly relevant in the contemporary socio-political scenario of our country where the question of 'development' is sharply contested by social activists. Recently, the Malayalam novel *Budhini* by Sarah Joseph discusses the plight of Budhini Mejhan, a santhal tribe girl who got excommunicated from her community for being labelled as Nehru's wife. During the inauguration of Panchet dam in 1959, she was presented by a garland as a token of welcome by Nehru and asked her to the switch-on function. The ostracised Budhini and her sufferings tell us how the old primitive culture tried to protect their ethos and values. These people got emotionally trapped or might be ambivalent when modern age was at their doorsteps. They become the victims of emotional estrangement and displacement which lead to the endless rural migration due to the technological advancements in our contemporary age. The handicapped Basham becomes a mere instrument for executing Clinton's inhumane deception at the end of this novel, whereas the hysteric Millie is saved from the flood by the tribes. The binary opposite of nature/culture and the virtue of nature are poignantly reflected by the author in these incidents.

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Despite the pressures from many sides, the breaching of cofferdams is refuted by Clinton by arguing its loss of 'structural beauty'. His firmness with regard to the breaching of cofferdams finally ends up with the forced displacement of the powerless tribes. Thus, the dam becomes the powerful metaphor of the growing divide between the powerful and powerless in a nascent nation state like India.

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### Subverting the 'She': Feminist Revisionist Fictions and Indian Myths

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“Myth is truth which is subjective, intuitive, cultural and grounded in faith” (1). Today's myth is one day's reality. It is the nature of literature to promote certain voices, view points and perspectives over others. In case of myths, this is probably even truer because we see the dichotomy between articulated and the submerged voices more clearly. The politics of feminism is more broadly engages with mythology. Neither feminism nor mythology is a modern context. But if feminism is going to survive in the coming decades, it has to be different. The question is, what exactly will the difference take?

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“Future of women depends on how we continue to redefine and implement feminist goals “.(7)

My interest in hearing the stories of Ramayana and Mahabharata carried me over to read fictions based on mythologies. After hearing few versions of the most prevailing myths of India, I realized the stories of Indian mythologies constantly favor men. The best stories have always been men's stories. Women, to a greater extent, have been ignored in Indian mythologies. Women's tales too have been told by men. They tell how a woman should be and more importantly, how not be. They focused indirectly on accusing women for breaking rules that are invariably man made. Some examples are Speaking out of turn (Amba), crossing the line (Sita), framed as witches (Sathiyavati and Kaikeyi), used as commodity (Madhavi), etc. But why is it always a woman? Women' stories are written in water and passed in silence. What would happen if women start to tell their own stories? Would they change the shape of the story? Would the truth become something else? (1)

**Keywords:** *Revisionism, Feminist Revisionist Mythologies, re-telling, subversion, post-feminism, re-visiting culture, identity crisis of feminine*

Nowadays, in India, there are many writers who write works based on Indian mythologies in the form of fictions, especially, concentrates on unspoken women of Indian mythologies. Chitra Banerjee Diwakaruni's bestselling novel, *The Palace of Illusions* portrays Draupadi as a powerful, strong, and independent woman, an equal to the men around her rather than subservient.

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She presents Panchali's life as a series of choice made by herself, and not people around her, giving her voice in the overwhelmingly patriarchal society. Diwakaruni's interpretations of the epic provides a complete narrative, sometimes missing from original epic, giving a stronger role to the women of the story, portraying them as equal in the society (1). The so called 'Pandavas' were named as The Kaunteyas by Madhavi S.Mahadevan in her novel 'Kaunteyas' which is named after their mother Kunti. Both authors were taking canonical and utterly patriarchal original texts and reworking them in an attempt to give readers feminist alternatives. Romanced by the female-centered community it portrays the stories of motherhood, womanhood and celebrated the divinity of feminine that filled its pages (2).

I began to consider those novels as a form of "Revisionist fiction" that was subverting the male voices and offering readers the re-imagined stories in female voices and experiences of the women largely ignored by the narratives. Revisionism is one of the techniques adapted by feminist writers to rediscover the old texts. It is to create a sense of history for seeking a public recognition to own and determine that history. Classics, Philosophy, Scriptures, early histories, myths were pronounced upon women in almost exclusively male voices. In early history women were portrayed as fragile things and weak creation and that may lightly be deceived.

In order to deconstruct the patriarchal order in the society the post feminist critics reused the theory of 'Revisionism' in Post-Modern world. They used the

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technique of 'Feminist Revisionist myth making' in the modern revisionism theory. It is better to Begin at the beginning rather changing in the end. So, the feminist Revisionist mythologists rediscover old texts, especially, in female perspectives.

According to Lisa Tuttle, Feminist revisionist mythology is asking new questions of old texts, developing and uncovering a female tradition of writing, interpreting symbolism of women writing so that it will not be lost or ignored by male point of view. The method followed for feminist revisionist myth making is re-telling the myth entirely from the point of view of female character, recreating the story and telling the story with a feminist narrator who stoically pokes fun at the flawed view of women in original texts.

According to Dale Spender in her *Man made language*, Myth was made a long time ago and for centuries it has been fostered by women and men so that it is deeply embedded in virtually every aspect of our existence. It is myth which may be attacked but not easy to eradicate because they still have a hold over us. In order to make human existence meaningful, they have created rules based on histories, culture and past information. We need to know what information to select, how to piece it together and what interpretation to impose upon it for setting the rules. As we use these rules we confirm their validity, we make them 'come true'. The interpretations and understanding of the rules which became myth were culturally imposed inside our society. These myth stands as the means of manipulating reality. Myth structures our behavior and classifies the limits of a woman's world.

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Many attempts were oppressed and subordinated. But it was in the patriarchal frame of reference.

Representations of female characters in Indian Mythologies are in masculine voices. Epic is perhaps narration at its most exalted and dignified form. Here the narrative structure is apparently complex. But it is a complexity that incorporates and conceals profound simplicity. The complexity emerges out of the myriad events, plots and sub-plots, tales of grandeur and greatness of great battles of the human spirit of the destiny of the man and of men in society (124). But why always man? What is the position of women's stories in Indian mythologies?

This interest made me to read Kavita Kane's novel who reconstructs a Gynocentric version of mythical stories which made those novels 'a radical departure from the historical text'. With the ancient epics Ramayana and Mahabharata as her source and voiceless heroines as her central motif, Kavita Kane pens a collection of five novels in which she made unsung female as her protagonists. Kane re-imagines the stories of those women she selected as her heroines who were merely a footnote in the tale of the mythical patriarchs. Her novels are a "radical departure from the historical text". Kane reconstructs a gynocentric version of the mythological stories and centres the female narrative. Kavith Kane has written a string of novels that are determinedly revisionist in nature. The author arises our memories towards the presence of woman who came from the significant lineage but lay forgotten. Her works becomes a bravely

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re-present one of the world's most famous stories by letting a woman tell it.

Kane Picks the most unusual characters (sometimes even create them) to tell her readers what may have been. Her debut novel is *Karna's wife: The Outcast's Queen*, which told the story of Karna through his wife, Uruvi. In Kane's re-imagined world Uruvi is Karna's second wife. Barring a few expectations, women find scant mention in both Mahabhatatha and Ramayana. Such woman who has been disregarded all along but worth knowing is Uruvi, Karna's Wife. The way in which Uruvi's story is blended with Mahabharatha is remarkable. The author has done a laudable job in bringing out the emotions of wife who, despite knowing the future of her husband is helpless.

Kane's next work was *Sita's Sister*, where she constructed the life and character of the little known wife of Lakshmana, Urmila. The Ramayana takes scant notice of her and when it does, consigns her to a fourteen years long coma. But here Kane imagines her as a living, breathing heroine who holds the fort where everything is crumbling and every one important has left. Sita's sister is a courageous re-creation of the mythology, which presents us with subaltern view point.

Kane then wrote *Menaka's Choice*, which was a tale about the apsara who was sent by Indra to stop great sages like Vishwamitra from achieving the spiritual goals. But Kane's take was unique in that she wrote about Menaka as a unique woman who chose to be a mother, depicting her anguish when she was required to leave her child behind and return to the celestial realm. Lanka's



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Princess speaks about 'Surpanaka', the hardly known woman of Ramayana who is considered to be the reason for the conflict between Ram and Ravan. The psychological conflict between Meenakshi and Surpanaka is shown clearly in this novel. Kane moves further to justify the character of Surpanaka for creating the conflict between Ram and Ravan. The Fisher Queen's Dynasty is about 'Sathyavati'. The journey from 'Matsyaganta' to 'Satyavati' is discussed broadly in the novel. Kane located the patriarchal idea of loyalty, explained the difference between righteousness and dharma, examined the role of duty Vs love, speaks about the socio-cultural ideas that move through the epics and discussed the psychological conflicts of the hidden women in the stories of the greatest Indian epics. The aim of the author is to give the real history to open up to different emotion, feeling and situation which even makes the audience dumbstruck on seeing the past society.

Riding on a revisionist boat Kane was taking canonical and utterly patriarchal original texts and reworking them in an attempt to give readers feminist alternatives. I began to consider those novels as a form of revisionist fiction that was subverting the male voice and perspectives responsible for the mythical narrative and offering readers the remained stories, voices, experiment of the women largely ignored by the narratives in past.

I also consider these novels as a gynocentric narrative that gave centre stage to those marginal mythical women. By giving voice to the silent female characters in Indian Mythology, the novels have struck a chord with women who may have felt left out of mythical

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history. These novels created a voice for neglected woman allowing them to tell their version of stories. I classified those novels as "Revisionist feminist history". Kane highlights the significance of female point of view on old stories. Her novels are considered as an exploration of female-centred myths. The gynocentric content of these novels made the readers to realize the issues sidelined by the male canon. The stories have broken the ideological boundaries set by the phallogentric and theocentric male canon to present women with in an imagined female communities, history, power and dignity.

Indians derive our theory and practice of canonicity from Indian epics. So, it is necessary to restructure the beliefs and values. The re-telling of those Indian epics with female narratives made the text liberating and empowering. Riswold, comments that such fiction introduces a "what if" element and facilitates "levels of discomfort" because it potentially challenges "what readers already believe". Simultaneously these fictions in Mythologies deconstruct the male cultural paradigms and reconstruct a female perspective and experience in an effort to change tradition.

A lot has been written on the Mahabharatha and the Ramayana from various perspectives. We remember Gauthama, Ravana, Shantanu, Bhima but are ignorant of Agalikai, Mandoodhari, Sathyavati, Hidimba who were vibrant, strong-willed and strong-character. There are authors like Mahasweta Devi, Kavitha Kane, Madhavi S.Mahadevan, Chitra Banerjee Diwakaruni,etc who speak of the lesser known women in their writings.

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The function of myth in literature is to provide a background and a familiar frame of reference so that the sensibilities of the reader and the author are oriented and brought together that establishes a profound communication between them. That is what we probably find in the works of these feminist revisionist fiction writers. They succeed in exposing the plight of the have-nots. The use of myth in their works makes it more vivid and striking. These mythological stories that bring the elements of Indian culture speak about life of women not only make educational reading but also make a good source of recreational reading. My effort is to discuss about the subversion of these female characters in this thesis. Objective of my paper became clearer that it is important to subvert the female characters to reverse the symbolic identification of woman, to uncover the female tradition that help us to recover mythic construction of feminine that are simply the product of male centered portrayal.

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### **Depiction of Death As a Torch Bearer to Self Realization in *Aarachar* by KR Meera**

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*"It is a woman-power and extraordinary book. Extraordinary skillful and ironic. The tone, the pitch of it is perfect".*

(Arundhathi Roy).

Aarachar penned by KR Meera, the female epic, is a pan Indian novel that has woven its threads over the contemporary India's politics and touched the angles of Indian society and history. The author has skillfully brought every conflict in to the battle life of Chetna, the protagonist who gives the world what she had been given by the world. As a glimpse to the history, Chetna the twenty-two year old girl becomes the first hanging woman in the history. Although the legacies of the

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hangmen were a stigma that made her to stick upon the new decision, she was ready to turn over a new leaf. The heritage of the family as well as the conflict betwixt love and hate earns the importance. It is important to note that Chetna was highly influenced by the tales of Grddha Mullick clan, a family of hangmen who trace their professional lineage back to 400 Center, witnessing the ups and downs of the history.

The magic of amalgamating love and demise can be seen throughout the novel. Even from childhood itself, demise was a common theme in grandmother's stories. Chetna become unique without an affair and she enters the world of media: CNC channel from where she hails as a epitome of strength and self respect. Being the representative of the woman folk, Chetna was highly haunted by the Injustice dancing around her. Amidst of all the troubles and sufferings, she never fails to keep justice towards her own identity . Taking the charge of her own life, Chetna was ready to turn over a new leaf. Highly haunted by the notion that the whole world has done Injustice to her, there comes even a time in her life where she thinks that only death can pay the cost of humiliation which she had faced being a member of the patriarchal Society. She was wounded by the conflict of love and demise which Penetrated her psyche, but her emotional ambiguity allows her to celebrate love and demise simultaneously. Shocking the reader, death reigns in each page. The faces and Phases of hanging, death and details of the dead are dealt majestically. As per grandmother Thakkuma, Chetna had inherited not only the bulging eyes of the Grddha Mallik clan but also the art of composing noose 'small but perfect'. The

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opportunity of hanging was knocking on the door after long years and 88 year old father was considered too old. Breaking the taboos of patriarchal society, Chetna was destined to become the first hanging woman. Although she was encircled by a number of male characters, her destiny took another turn by the two males: her father and her manipulative lover Sanjeev Kumar Mitra.

The magic of love change the heart of woman. Making trough and crest in the ocean of her heart, the conflict betwixt hate and love is born whenever she meets Sanjeev Kumar Mitra. Equating everything in terms of utilization and exploitation Chetna was mere a commercial property in the hands of Sanjeev. Pretending the innocence, Sanjeev was trying to get the stories of Grddha Mallik clan. Being a male chauvinist, he even threatens her identity. She even knows that no cells in her body yearns for his love, the last cell which longed for him was brutally raped by her. Of course, there were times where she succumbed to her emotions and passions although she was aware of the nature of her arrogant lover. But everything was silently leading Sanjeev Kumar Mitra towards his own demise. Chetna was a death knell to him which he hardly realized.

Chetna's family has been doing the executioner's job for many centuries. The history of her ancestors is the history of the Kolkata itself. Being the honor of first female executioner, the whole world was looking at her. Although the outside and manipulated world was entirely span new to her, Chetna faces the odds in life with high spirits of determination. "I want to fuck even if it is once" was the dirtiest comment she had ever heard by her tympanum. Entangling with violence, the complex

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relationship between Chetna and Sanjeev was a combination of love and lust. Being the puppet in the hands of Sanjeev, Chetna was silenced in the media show.

"I want to fuck you even if it is once" was reverberating throughout her life. Although she develops an interest in Sanjeev, she was not ready to sacrifice her self respect. Meera even encapsulate her love as the monsoon in Kolkata which doesn't wet the air. She becomes in a vicious circle of Mitra, whether to love him or not. Although she has inherited the power of her ancestors there are times where she reduces in to the equation of every woman. At the brim of passion she even offers herself to him where he cunningly neglects her intense longing for him. "My heart desired for him even when he hurt me more and more" (Meera,100).

Chetna's quest of revenge was burning after the denial of sexual pleasure. Tit for tat was a tactics employed by Chetna as a means of survival. "Marriage should be take place betwixt equals" was the most powerful statement Chetna had produced. She was well aware of the fact that, she and her lover were Poles apart and marriage was a tactic employed by Sanjeev. Rendering him more inferior to her, Chetna demonstrate the hanging where Sanjeev was forced to accept. Showering all her rage and revenge, she hangs him in her hands and minds equally. It was a leap to justice, justice towards humanity first and justice towards womanhood later. Chetna had given the world what she had been given by the world. Her performance trembles the whole phallogocentric notion of the society. For Chetna, hanging



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was a weapon against the Injustice that was dancing around her.

The novel revolves around the Chetna's creation of different relationship with her self and society where death wins the battle of her life. She had victoriously created a distance with power mechanism around her. She has brilliantly adapted death as the powerful weapon against all the power system existed around her. Thakkuma, her grandmother has influenced her for developing the views on the vigor and valour of death. Thakkuma, Chetna's only arm sized woman, is one who regains her glory by seeking shelter in traditions. As per her view woman has a great role in society as well as family. Women should never talk about their woes, should never smile was the age old beliefs Thakkuma hold. Thakkuma's soul stirring opinion " man can love only the woman who make him glad, but woman can love the man who even hurt her" (Meera, 2015.p.420) was the master key that opened her in to the world of new realizations. Thakkuma was even cool when her son Sukhdev was murderer by her another son. Neither the illegal life of her son nor the death of her grandson was not enough to break her. Chetna was highly influenced by Thakkuma's notion of death, a necessity as well as a truth. "What is this much to cry? Isn't every life alike... Isn't every death alike" (Meera, 2015,p.420) was the opinion of Thakkuma about life while everyone was lamenting on the death. Choosing a woman from a patriarchal society, putting her in the amidst of society, Meera puts forward her heroine who is resourceful to speak and act without considering the norms of society.

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Moving along with her ancestors, Chetna had hanging in her blood- she even came out of her mother's womb making a noose with umbilical cord. Playfully offering a demonstration of hanging, Chetna invites Sanjeev to be the imaginative culprit. For Chetna it was the moment that she had been waiting for a long time. "That night I imagined that he was standing on the top of the platform of death : that I had covered his face with the death mask: that I pulled the lever in 727 ways" (Meera, please. 193). Of course the novel has woven its threads over the themes of vigor of death, love and rage. Even the vicinity of house smells demise:

Just like the gallows, I burst out laughing. The grains of sands made a grating sound inside the silk cloth. I had it tight with hands slimy with death. Thus my name and my life became undying in Bharat and the world, in the name of love, soil, and death. I knew well that no one would stop me. Rain, soil, light and history stood waiting for me. (Meera, 552)

When the novel ends, Chetna is not the one who is encircled by the taboos of society, but one who is less affected by it. The transformation of the heroine in to a modern powerful woman is the highlight of the novel. Death has evolved as a powerful ordnance for Chetna. Demise was not a mere revenge against the man whom she loved the most at once but it was a ray of justice against the whole world, all the Injustice she has been enduring from society as well as family. Chetna was suppressed from her family itself where her father

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believed that woman is nothing without the assistance of man. All the masculine figures have tried to subjugate her, but she was not a cog in the machinations of the patriarchy. Meera picturises Trilokyadebi, Sanjeev's mother, as a prostitute. Phanibhushan has killed Chetna's Kaki Ma because he has seen her in Sonagachi Nagar in questionable situation. The typical Indian male always wants the females in her family as pure, while man has no scruples by indulging himself in whoring frequently at places like Sonagachi. India is a country where woman are considered as angel and it is in the same country where God's own dancers wails. Chetna's transformation from a submissive female to the embodiment of a powerful executioner scares all the masculine identities around her. Squeezing the vigor of Goddess Durga, Meera's heroine dares to declare "Men are like tortoises, with hard shells and soft bodies inside. When the shell breaks, the helpless creature inside trembles with fear", disgracing all the men around her. Longing to establish her own identity, Chetna never want to confine her identity behind the shadow of a 'hangman's daughter' rather a successful female executioner. Finally Chetna rises in to the status of the epitome of a strong woman and her 'hands' had done justice to the all womanhood. Demonstrating the hanging again, Chetna tactfully lead him to demise. Death was the master key that opened her to the gates of self realization. Breaking all the conventional limitations and the taboos of the patriarchal society, Chetna hails as the first successful female executioner in the world.

The narration is complex and profound with history of Grddha Mallik clan. Dancing of death in every page shocks, but it doesn't repel. Chetna's declaration stimulate

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the reader "some women's anger is such that it can't be satiated with the death of just one man" (Meera, 172). Meera could have ended her novel with the happy unity of her protagonist, but she had done justice to her protagonist by hailing her as an epitome of strength rather than fitting her in to the common formula of woman in literature. Of course the novel is a powerful female epic that narrates the story of India's first hanging woman. Indeed her journey towards self-realization was coloured by the hanging of her lover. Hanging was a necessity to her, only death was able to pay the cost of humiliation she faced from the nook and corner of her life.

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### ***Ooru Kaval: A Political Rereading***

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Myths can always be considered as the nurturer of Literature. Being a symbolic narrative that is usually of an unknown origin and traditional to an extent, that seemingly relates actual events and is especially associated with religious beliefs, myths had always given enormous contributions to literature. Myth is usually culture specific or regional. Every region and culture has its own myth. At times same myths are shared between adjacent geographical areas. Myths often act as a tool for social reformation. Most of the myths are believed to be true from within the associated faith system. Within any given culture there may be sacred and secular myths coexisting. Myths are reflective of social order or values within a culture. Characters are often non-human but heroic who mediate inherent, troubling dualities, reconcile us to our realities, or establish the patterns for

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life as we know it. Myths are usually set in a proto-world. Myths are always functional as it directs the society to live with assumptions, values, core meanings of individuals, families, communities. To conceptualize the emergent effect of rereading we should consider it with a wider perspective, looking beyond literary theory. Writers always prefer to interpret books that have content in it, to be analyzed. The main sources of reread texts are epics and other classical works including myths.

There are well founded myths in the Western Literature as well as in the Eastern Literature. In literature, epics like *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* are retold in various versions in various genres of literature. Of which, the Indian epic *Ramayana* which is one of the largest ancient epics in world literature is the one with most number of rereading within Indian literature. It portrays the duties of relationships, portraying ideal characters like the ideal father, the ideal husband, the ideal brother, the ideal servant and the ideal king. Like *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana* is not just a story rather it presents the teachings of ancient Hindu sages in narrative allegory, interspersing philosophical and ethical elements.

In this paper, the novel *Ooru Kaval* by Sarah Joseph is analyzed with reference to the popular version of the epic. Sarah Joseph's uniqueness lies in the way she chooses subjects and stories that are not seen in mainstream, and has employed a quaint narrative style and tone of language that are strange to the readers. In the case of *Ooru Kaval*, unlike all other re-readings which has interpreted *Ramayana* from the viewpoint of Sita, Ravana

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and Hanuman, Sarah Joseph has portrayed the epic form from the view point of Angadan, son of the slain king Vali. *Ooru Kaval* is a plethora of deviant interpretations rather than being simple rereading of a popular myth. Sarah Joseph had given political tinges to the story by bringing in the contrast between the victor and the vanquished, the dominant and the dominated, the man and the woman, the tribal and the urban.

*Ooru Kaval* , certainly not the first *Ramayana* rereading, can be considered as a break through to the ever made rereading of the epic on the fact that Sarah Joseph would not do a retelling without adding her scholarship and literary skill to it. Translated by well-established translator Vasanthi Sankaranarayanan, the English version is entitled *The Vigil. Ramayana*, being a long story with exciting events and idealistic characters, has plenty of matters to relay upon for rereading. There are major characters like Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana, who can be examined deeply. Thinking out of the box, Sarah Joseph has chosen 'Angadan' as the central protagonist, who is only a minor character in the *Ramayana*. He is from the monkey clan of Kishkintha, a prince, and the son of a slain king, as well as the nephew of the ruling one. Not only Angadan but also others characters who served very little roles in the epic are portrayed in the novel. There are characters whose names are not even heard before in the epic of *Ramayana*. And those characters are given considerable importance in the plot of the novel. Angadan is depicted in the epic as the symbol of diplomacy, especially in the crucial days of battle, but his story is not dwelled on at length. Sarah

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Joseph has emphasized on this part of the epic to manipulate her novel, *Ooru Kaval*. Most of the rereading of the epic was focused on the religious threads. Apart from that stereotypical imitation, Sarah Joseph has tried to figure out the politics in the work. Portrayal of the characters is as tribal and thus the author is analyzing the tribal issues on the context of the epic. The novel mainly dwells upon the internal matters of the Kishkintha kingdom and how King Vali's death affected the life of the people and the relation it has with the epic. Characters that were depicted as good ones in the epic are subjected to analysis in this novel. The image of Rama as an ideal man is questioned in this work. His concept of righteousness is questioned. In the novel, the narrative technique is that there is a violation of chronological order, the past and present events are narrated in a mixed way. The shift from present to past happens suddenly. Unlike other re-readings of *Ramayana*, *Ooru Kaval* is of a different structure. The novel is divided into three different parts and these parts have chapters and sub chapters to it. The story line is a mixture of past and present events despite of chapter division. The language seems to have an ethnic touch and at times is difficult to interpret.

In *Ooru Kaval*, in the first part, 'Ooru Kaval', author has detailed a different version of the story of Vali and Sugriva. Here Vali, Sugriva and the entire characters are depicted as members of a community. The novel starts with the soliloquy of Angadan on his memories of his childhood, his father and his death and the unknown force who rescued him. Angadan is the son of Vali and Thara.



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Sugriva was his father's brother and Ruma, his aunt. It was Vali who chose Ruma for Sugriva. But it was said that Vali tried to possess Ruma by banishing Sugriva. And it was for that charge Sugriva conspired against Vali. But Sugriva always had an eye on the throne and Thara. On the fight with Mayavi, Sugriva locked Vali in the cave, Mahabilam and made the people believe Vali is dead and thus he possessed both Thara and the throne. When Vali returned he banished Sugriva for cheating him. And not ready to leave Ruma with such an untruthful husband Vali accepted her responsibility. And after confusing Rama with his version, Sugriva made him kill Vali. But in the popular version of *Ramayana* Rama kills Vali to free Kishkintha from his demonic rule as per the information of Sugriva in return for promising to help for searching Sita. After killing Vali Sugriva ordered compulsory participation of every man in the search for Sita. Even the kid Angadan was not spared. Rejecting the pleas of his mother and grandfather Sugriva put him in the mission. Sarah Joseph had here introduced a new community of people, Muchli, who are generally salt makers. They live in the coastal region of Kishkintha. They were very weak in nature. When Sugriva proclaimed the compulsory participation of men in search for Sita, the guards had come here to take men to Kishkintha. They had only access to the outer world through the traders who came there for salt trade. The author has introduced another strange practice to show the tribal nature of the characters. It was a ritual that Thara practiced to ensure the safety of her son from the conspiracies. The concept behind the ritual was to take the son back to the womb. There was a pond named

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Pushkaram. Only women were allowed there. To practice the ritual Tara and the other mothers of Angadan went there at night. They dipped themselves in the pond and filled pots with the water of Pushkaram. They went to some distance away from Pushkaram. They made a large monkey figure with potbelly and made its interior smooth with lotus leaves. A lotus stem protruded out signifying the umbilical cord. They wore a mask so they could not be identified and it was night. They striped Angadan off his clothes and poured the water from each pot on him. Then they made him enter into the monkey figure through its mouth and exit through the tail end. After doing so they told him to run away. The ritual is not literally taking back the son to the womb. But the concept that the author tries to convey is that there is no safer place than mother's womb. Author by implementing this concept has added to the tribal elements in the characters. The second part of the novel is titled as "Vishudha Douthyam" which means sacred duty. This part details about the uncertainty that the people feel, when they left to search Sita. The people who were on the search mission were unaware of what they really were searching. Neither they had seen Sita before nor did they know how she looked like. They were not sure whether she existed or not. Yet they searched for her in every single place disregarding the dangers that they would face. Sugriva had ordered to kill all those who showed reluctance in carrying the order. Nonetheless they consider it as a sacred mission.

A ritual, Kandankett, is a tool employed by the author to strengthen the fact that the people of this clan are people who are having their own customs and

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traditions. Their life style is similar to the humans. But these rituals and practices in fact attributes to the tribal traditions. Throughout the novel we can find elements that reveal the tribal nature of the characters and this usage makes us distanced from the actual epic and its story. In popular version of *Ramayana* there is only minimal detail of the character of Vali and Sugriva and Angadan is of less relevance. As *Ooru Kaval* deals with the plot detailing the search for Sita and portrays Angadan as the central character so the more relevance is given to him and thus more characters that are related to him and who were not discussed in the epic can be seen in the novel. There are many small characters that are related to Angadan in the novel, characters like Athiyan, Iya, Maindhan, and Sharabhan. Through the idea of giving Rama less importance, Rama actually appears considerably a few times in the novel, author has broken the stereotypical rereading behavior that has been followed so far. The characters are depicted having a paradoxical double role. One side they are people belonging to a tribe and are a clan of monkeys. On the other side they are civilized and having a definite lifestyle, ritual practices and a system of administration. They worshiped "Vanaras". They share the traits of humans in the affairs of politics, family relations, cheating and in ruling.

But in the epic this clan is depicted as just faith full servants who admire Rama and help him to find his wife. They only carry out the orders. Maruthi is shown as a faithful follower of lord Rama but here Maruthi is a minister of Sugriva who fulfills the orders of the king,

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who never let the king down. Author has never followed a stereotype rather has redefined something to be a new standard to be held for analyzing.

Author has made Angadan express his views. He told about the pithy tricks Rama played by giving a flower necklace to Sugriva to distinguish from Vali. He questioned the righteousness of Rama. He expressed his interest was to wander among the woods, cotton fields and salt fields rather than governing the kingdom with Sugriva. He had enough of the conflicts happened so far. He remembered how Vali treated his brother. Even though there was information from the spies that Sugriva is getting ready for an attack with the support some exterior forces Vali didn't have the intention to kill him. The question author raises through Angadan is that Vali could easily find Sita for Rama but why did he selected Sugriva for the mission. Vali was powerful than Sugriva. He could do it for himself. Ravana had to be killed by Rama. A war should happen. Vali would not let his people start unwanted war. More than that Vali was an invincible king whereas Sugriva was banished by Vali. So he would stay dependent. Also Sugriva had the most powerful ministers of Kishkintha with him. They would do anything for him.

Another influential character mentioned in the novel is Imba, a woman from Muchli. Imba is lustful than anyone in Muchli. She remarked that she would seduce Angada. Once she had seduced him he would ask her who she was for that she would reply that she was a famine stricken village. Here, author has depicted Imba as a character who is immoral in nature but at the same time

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she is used as a tool to express that they are all human in nature. The mood of the story gets into a sudden change from Athiyan's description. Apart from a rereading, this novel serves to be a single whole which frames the story of another group of people, other than the royalty, who are neglected by Valmiki in the epic. Morality concept is problematized by the character of Imba. She has no way left other than being with Angadan to convey the pity plight of her community. At the same time the morality of the people of Muchli is questioned here. There is an indirect notion that the community is uncivilized through the description of Athiyan about the women of Muchli.

As the novel progresses the author introduces more and more communities of monkey clan and characters from those communities. Even though the clan is of monkeys they are referred to as "Vanaras". They are not portrayed different from humans. Dhanava is another community that is been introduced by the author. They were migrating from their place to another place leaving all their things fearing the attack of Kishkintha. Here Sarah Joseph has introduced another ritual that is human sacrifice. This is done by Dhanavas to please Amiya. If Amiya became hungry it would target pregnant ladies and eat the fetus. And that would lead the lineage to extinction. So every year they would find somebody to be sacrificed. But they hadn't sacrificed anybody from Kishkintha. It was because of the relation Vali had kept with them and they believed that the reason for this enmity is the aftermath of the change in rule.

Another contradictory factor author arises is elementary. As Sarah Joseph had depicted Maruthi as

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very much obligated and dedicated to Rama, in the popular versions of *Ramayana* Maruthi's is a diehard devotee of Rama. There are stories that Maruthi had ripped his chest open to show only Rama and Sita are there in his heart. Author in a more logical way founded the cause for Maruthi's devotion toward Rama in this work. Rama is highly criticized in the novel and Vali is praised. This is because the story is said from the viewpoint of Angadan and Rama was on Sugriva's side.

In the epic of *Ramayana* there are supernatural events and people. In *Ooru Kaval* too such incidents are depicted. The incident can be related to the phenomenon of time travel. On their way they went a long distance without food and water. All the men were tired and many of them had died. It was then they saw birds flying with wet wings and they realized there was a water source nearby. They followed the direction from which birds came. It led them to a cave. Going deeper into the cave they came to the other end. There they saw a woman figure. Many of them assumed that it was Sita. But she was a witch. She introduced herself as Swayamprabha. She showed them an illusionary luxurious place. Supernatural elements are considered to be an inevitable factor in the epics. It enriches the heroic portrayal of the hero. In the novel Sarah Joseph had used supernatural or magical incidents to enrich the plot. It gave the then desperate mood a level up to a more interesting level. The cave of Swayamprabha is represented as a symbol of hope. And the inclusion of sub stories to each incident can be considered as a feature of epic. An epic generally has sub stories so has this novel too; the story of Hema, the

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story behind the cursed land are some of those. This gives a detail about the scene and proves its logic. The presence of Gods is also seen here. Mayan, a character, was killed by lord Indra. As the novel progresses, nature of the situation changes into a more serious one. The disillusionment of the characters is replaced by hope and confidence.

Sarah Joseph had portrayed Rama a bit superior in defining his morality. But at the same time Angadan is also portrayed morally correct. Though Thara had found the most beautiful girls for him, Angadan went in search of Iya. In the popular version of *Ramayana* we can see the morality of Rama being highly glorified. He is portrayed as a gentleman in the epic. He has eyes only to one woman. He never lies. He never does anything breaking the law. He is very righteous. He never breaks promises. But here Rama is not depicted as the calm prince who can adjust to every situation. When Angadan played in the waterfall Rama lost his temper. Here also Rama had justification for killing Vali. For everyone Rama had done wrong against he had his own justification.

Another contradictory part in the novel is when the bridge is built to Lanka. When they were working on a solution for this, Vibhishana told them about the closer point from which Lanka is very near and there the depth will be low. One can only reach there when the sea is calm. That way is used by Rakshasas. One can walk through the seaway but is highly risky. They decided to construct bund under the leadership of Nalan. They went in search of that particular point under the leadership of Vibhishana. They came to that point walked through the

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slippery rocks until they came to a higher point from there they could only see the sea and hemisphere. Nalan proposed building the bund from there but wasn't sure to where they will build it. Rama was frustrated. Nalan meanwhile started putting large rocks into the sea and everyone followed it. The foundation was the part of Trikuda Mountains so building bund was not a tough thing to do. Depth was low one can see the base. Nalan ordered for more stones, soil, creepers, leaves and rocks.

In the popular version of *Ramayana* the bridge is built in a magical way. Hanuman writes Rama's name on the rocks and they floats in the water. That illogical depiction is broken by Sarah Joseph in this part. Nalan is an expert craftsman. Through him Sarah Joseph made way to build the bridge. His efficiency is detailed in the description of the machine he made. Through this she also portrayed the mindset of Angada. She once again strengthens the fact that people of Kishkintha are more advanced scientifically. And it is also revealed that there is reformation going to happen from Maruthi's explanation of new style of kingdom. Maruthi can be considered as a challenge to a civilization built on the very foundations of a life lived in close communion with nature, informed by indigenous intuition of nature's rhythms. Angadan is portrayed as one who have humanitarian instincts and one who is so close to nature.

The war started. Many people were killed including innocent souls. At last Ravana was killed by Rama. Angadan took iron for the first time. He thought of the new justice Maruthi had referred earlier. He felt ashamed to be a part of this massacre. He questioned the



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justice of Rama. It was better to leave her with Ravana than to insult her like this. People had gathered to see Sita. Many of them insulted her, teased her. Sugriva, Vibhishana and Maruthi were not at ease. She seemed very weak. That was a trial. Rama talked unemotionally. He clarified that it caused him insult that Ravana abducted Sita. It is to get rid of this insult that he rescued her. He expressed his disinterest in having her further. She can go anywhere she need, live with anyone. He doubted her chastity. Angadan haven't seen Maruthi this much nervous. Lakshmana stood ashamed. He clarified that he regained his reputation through the war. Sita told Rama that it's the word of a common man that he had just spoke. She clarified her purity of her mind. The body may go weak but mind was still strong. He criticized Rama for not being loyal to his reputation and for not giving respect to her clan. If Rama has informed this to her earlier through Maruthi she would have made her mind for that, demanded Sita. She suggested that this war which had caused the lives was now wasted. She expressed her desire to sacrifice herself in the fire. Lakshmana without mind carried out the order of Rama in making arrangements for the wish. They set fire to the crematorium. That night Angadan wandered through the palace. Vibhishana was happy; the same happiness that Sugriva felt on the day Vali was killed. Both were done by Rama. Both were done through fratricide. His anger toward Rama increased. No one in Lanka is really awake. He searched for a room guarded by Lakshmana but couldn't find one. But he could find a room guarded by Maruthi. As Maruthi was sleeping he gets into the room. There were no luxurious cots; Rama was lying on the

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floor. He prayed to his mothers and Ooru Kaval and gaining energy from them raised his sword. Someone called him. It was Sita. She said to him that it's bad to kill someone who is sleeping and requested to take her life to avenge his father's death. Angadan threw his sword away and walked away. Here once more the author had proved that Angadan has humanitarian feeling within him. Also it produces another dimension to the character of Sita. Here the plot is twisted further in end give a new chance of ending to the epic.

In the popular epic there is reference to such a message. Actually Ravana had sent some spies to Rama which was captured by Vibhishana. Sarah Joseph had twisted the plot a little in favor of Angadan to make let him avenge for his father's during the war many things happened. And they were not discussed in the novel. And in the case of Sita, Rama doesn't rejected Sita or it is not for securing his reputation he rescued Sita. Rama had intense love towards Sita. Being a noble ruler Rama had to give ear to the people. It's on their complaint he makes Sita take the fire test which Sita passes successfully. Then Sita is banished from the palace by Rama. And later own Rama realizes her importance and call her back but she rejects it and goes into the earth, to her mother. Sarah Joseph by altering the end of the novel had given another possibility that could happen. In the novel, the Rama we see is not the Rama we see in the epic. The character in the novel is rude and selfish. So from such a person this type of behavior can be expected. In the end author had left an uncertainty about Sita's death. Here what we can see is a swap in the character of Rama and Angadan.

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Angadan is portrayed as kindhearted brave and humane even though he is from a tribal community. But Rama is depicted as just ruler who doesn't have any obligations to relationships and morality. Usually Rama is often associated to morality but by depicting Rama in a very strange form author had redefined that concept. Angadan even getting chance to revenge his father's death doesn't do it. Here Angadan is becoming the hero and Rama is the antihero. We can clearly feel the decline of the sanctity of the characters in the epic while reading from the shoes of Angadan. Another archetype that the author has tried to break is the depiction tribal as uncivilized and savages. Here Kishkintha is far much advanced in every matter. The politics of the Ayodhyan kingdom and the greed for power is also present there.

*Ooru Kaval* cannot be considered just as a rereading but can also be as a work depicting the colonization process. While taking the work as a single piece of literature apart from the fact that it is a rereading we can get it into a new realm of interpretation. Ayodhya is considered as a most advanced and civilized kingdom. And the tribe of Angadan lives in the forest. What we see here is that. Through helping Sugriva to get the throne they are getting a way to fulfill their selfish needs. They make use of the people of Kishkintha to search Sita whom they have never seen before. Rama had influenced Maruthi a lot and the attempt to change the beliefs of the society is done by Maruthi in different parts of the novel. The Ayodhyans conquer lands and destroys the innate culture of that place. This fact is evident from the migration of Dhanavas when they came to know that

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Kishkintha is baked by Ayodhya. The Ayodhyan princes treated the people of Kishkintha as slaves. Made them built bridges and to fight for them. But what they get in return is nothing. It is simply the power asserted upon the weak by the powerful

Another reading is that of an eco-critical reading. Kishkintha is being a community which live close to the nature is being corrupted by an exterior force. Kishkintha upholds the eco centric philosophy of deep ecology that recognizes the inherent value of all living beings. In the beginning chapter of book Angadan is getting bathed in mud, this serves as a reference to the same. They worshiped Vanaras. They fed on fruits and grains their commercial items were cotton and salt. At the same time they were far advanced technologically. But they were made to interpret natural resources for the short term goals of power centers. For making the bridge they are destroying large amount of hills and trees. The bamboos in Kishkintha are all taken to make weapons. The fields are transformed to grounds for practicing warfare. The novel is replete with romantic descriptions of the pastoral woodlands of Kishkintha, planted, cultivated and nurtured by the conscious ecological foresight of her visionary King Vali.

Interpretation done through this paper has helped in gaining a wider perspective to look upon the repeated fantasies of the stories. Deconstructing the epic into a normal fiction and there by adding new meanings to the epic is what the author has done. It is worth mentioning that, out of the plethora of deviants present in the novel very few are presented in this paper. *Ooru Kaval* revealed

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the hidden agendas and the stories of betrayal and colonization hidden in the epic. Sarah Joseph has shown how Rama would be if he is in the modern world. This paper has tried to demythologize the Myth of *Ramayana* and to analyze the redefined myth in the stories. Though myths are narrations in themselves, here these myths serve the function of a structural element to enable the production of a redefined myth. Use of nature and myth through the techniques of dualism, equalization of women and nature, oral language, dominance of men over women and nature, etc. forms a completely new narrative structure in total.

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### **Social Realities Of Being A Dalit And Woman: A Study on Interwined Marginal Identity in Urmila Pawar's *Weave of My Life***

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Unlike a drop of water which loses its identity when it joins the ocean, man does not lose his being in the society in which he lives. Man's life is independent. He is born not for the development of the society alone, but for the development of his self -- Bhīm Rao Ambedkar

Activist and one of the foremost literary figures in Marathi, Urmila Pawar, through her frank description of her family life, skilfully takes the reader through rich annals of Dalit history. She tried to break the barriers of class structure with persistent efforts and strong determined mind. She was an ardent follower of Dr. BR. Ambedkar and Buddha and through conversion Pawar tried to shake away the strictly bounded casteism in and around her life. A distinguished writer of fiction and particularly well known for her short stories 'Sahava Bot' and 'ChauthiBhint'. Her short stories, though comparatively few in number, have caught the attention of present day readers. The author, as in Babusaheb Ambedkar quote, tried to chase her independence as an individual, endured a lot to realize the development of women in her community in particular and the whole women in general. Through this she ensured the

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development of herself.

*Aaydan*, her memoir, translated for the first time into English as *The Weave of My Life*, by a noted translator of Marathi literature named Maya Pandit. She describes the long journey from Konkan to Mumbai, bringing to fruition the struggle of three generations of Dalit modernity, about which readers have so far heard so little. Here the term 'Dalit modernity' represented as something that is located in the embedded self. In other words it argues for reflexive individualism. The source for this kind of individualism is the moral community based on equality, liberty, and fraternity. Dalit modernity even projects a different kind of communication based on the principle of social justice. The communitarian Dalit modernity attacks the conservative communitarianism of Brahmanism. However, Dalit modernity mediates both liberal and communitarian philosophies by showing their limitations and also appraising their strengths in a novel way. Urmila writes frankly of the 'private' and 'public' aspects of her life of falling in love with Harishchandran as a young teenager and marrying him in the teeth of family opposition, of her many sustaining friendships with women, of the young couple and their children moving to Mumbai and her work. Her open descriptions about familial and marital conflicts- of the grievous shocks that life gifted her- outraged even some of her admirers. As a whole, *Aaydan*, truly, is the life of the members of Pawar's family, family-in-law, classmates and neighbors which are woven together in a traumatic narration that gradually reveals different aspects of the everyday life of Dalits, and the manifold ways in which caste system asserts itself and grinds them into smaller



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pieces of hundred thousand features.

Why did the book raise a fierce controversy in Maharashtra? It began with Urmila's rejection of the Laxmibai Tilak Award offered by the Maharashtra Sahithya Parishad, Pune, for this autobiography. Secondly, there was criticism from the Ambedkarite Movement about her use of the term 'Dalit' and also for its 'feminist' approach to the critique of patriarchy as the frank and open discussion of women's sexuality. To understand these issues one has to turn to the complex interplay of various forces in the generative context of the post-1970s socio-cultural ethos.

The post-1970s period was characterized by various state welfare policies, which, on the face of it, proclaimed to have created more opportunities for the Dalits in the public domain. Through constitutional policies in reservation of jobs, promises of more educational and job opportunities and various welfare schemes, the state claimed to bring Dalits out of their ghettos and exclusion from various social domains. Some Dalits, indeed, benefited from these policies and some were even co-opted to positions of power. As a result of modernization, urbanization, and industrialization a new Dalit middle class came into existence, which found itself facing double alienation: alienation from their own castes as well as their new found social class. They did not want to show the upper caste-middle class people their caste origins, from which they had dissociated themselves. The upper caste-upper middle class communities, of which they tried to be a part, never really accepted them because of deep rooted caste

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biases. Thus they were in a state of Trishanku, hung between the two social strata. Urmila's account of 'Kobra' people-the name an abbreviation of 'Konkani Brahmins' that these Dalits claimed for themselves in a very good illustration of this.

As far as the working class Dalits were concerned, the majority of Dalits in poor urban slums and rural areas were left to fend for themselves. They had comparatively better access to education but this did not bring about a significant change in their social and economic status. The professions some of them had adopted during the colonial times, such as petty contractors, traders and peddlers, continued and many worked as landless agricultural wage labourers or small farmers with tiny arid land. In the wake of the green revolutions, their destitution increased. Some did get government jobs, but these tended to be low-prestige, low-earning jobs because they did not possess the technical and educational qualifications for anything higher. Strong caste prejudices would not allow them to have a real sense of equality freedom as well as citizenship rights. In the cities, they were employed mainly in low earning and low prestige menial jobs like scavenging, and lived in inhuman conditions in the countless slums in big cities like Mumbai. Modernity did not do away with the old prejudices, beliefs, traditions or the existing inequalities. Land reforms in Maharashtra benefited mainly the middle castes. The process of industrialization brought many developments in agriculture, such as mechanization, cash crop production, agro-industries, and so on. But the economic changes also meant that traditional Dalit occupations had almost disappeared. There were few

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opportunities for employment in the rural areas, and large scale migrations to big cities like Mumbai took place. The neo-liberal policies adopted by Indian, and subsequently Maharashtra, the government in the 1990s further curbed the possibilities of employment growth. Price rice, unemployment, decreasing support from the Maharashtra government for the Public Distribution System, the lack of healthcare, and so on, made life difficult for the poor regardless of their caste status. The existing reservation quotas were not enough to eradicate mass unemployment. Besides, as a result of the relative economic improvement that the middle castes experienced because of land reforms, the social contradiction intensified in both rural and urban Maharashtra. When the Dalits who had become politically more aware began to demand their rights, the middle castes resorted to various means of oppression: from social segregation to physical violence.

Dalit women faced increasingly difficult times. They were affected to the greatest extent by poverty, unemployment and caste violence in both the private and public domains. Many had participated in equal measure in the caste struggles earlier and they still formed a huge part of the masses mobilized in the Dalit struggles. Yet the lives that they lead were terribly harsh. In many villages they still could not fill water at public wells; even though they were elected to village panchayats, they were not allowed to function; gender violence had increased as part of the overall retaliatory politics of the dominant castes who tried to terrorize and punish their communities through these atrocities. If in rural areas they lived a subhuman existence in Maharwadass; in Mumbai they had to live in the slums on the banks of gutters and nallahs

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where rats chewed on their sweat soaked toes, as Urmila describes graphically in her memoirs. In these conditions, women were responsible for running their homes and taking care of children and old people. There was increasing feminization of labour and poverty in the era of neo-liberal policies of the market economy. Poor women in cities got some work doing piece-rate jobs, in the small scale and ancillary industries or in the home-based industries and there was no job security. Sexual violence was pervasive. They faced the high handedness of the caste panchayats, which wanted to protect the community identity, tried to enforce their archaic and unjust gender rules over them. They suffered more violence at the hands of the dominating castes when there were caste riots. In brief the patriarchal hold on women's lives had not changed. On the contrary, they had to face the double bind of exploitation as workers and housewives. Urmila Pawar describes the tough lives of these women both in her husband's house as well as in her childhood where:

The day began very early for women, at four o'clock in the morning ... [they] had to fetch water from the well for everybody in the house to bathe in drink ... then they cleaned the pots and plates used the previous night and cooked for the whole house. ... They planted paddy till their backs broke ... they began preparation for the evening meals ... the men arrived, bathed and sat smoking leisurely in the verandah; some of them drinking liquor. Women would again go to the well to fetch water, wash the muddied clothes ...

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light the lamps and serve food to the men first. ... After the children went to sleep, they sat down and massaged the heads and feet of their husbands with oil. By the time they lay down in bed, their backs would be bent like a bow ... This was not an isolated picture ... In addition, the woman had to behave as if she were a deaf and dumb creature.(Pawar 246)

Let us take the issue of Urmila Pawar's rejection of Laxmibai Tilak award, offered to her by the Maharashtra SahityaParishad, Pune, for her autobiography. Urmila rejected the award when she received the invitation letter with the programme of the award ceremony outlined on it. She was horrified to see that it would begin with 'sharadastawan' (a prayer to goddess Saraswati) because she thought these Brahminical practices went against the grain of the legacy of radical thinkers like Phule, Ambedkar and the Buddha. Her 'Letter to the Maharashtra Sahitya Parishad' is rather like Phule's debunking of the Brahminical mythology in his *Gulamgiri*(2002):

Even today, Marathi literature refuses to get out of the rigmarole of fantasies woven by concepts such as caste, varna, religion, god, destiny, heaven, hell, fate, sacredness and profanity. Even values like *Satyam*, *Shivam*, *Sundaram*(Truth, Goodness and Beauty) are understood erroneously. For instance, take the case of *Dnyaneshwari*. The famous '*Pasaydan*' in it, even while asking for the divine benediction of universal peace and brotherhood actually celebrates violence and casteism in the Gita behind the façade of beautiful words. Similarly, the

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humanism, rationalism in the Phule-Ambedkarite philosophy, and the new meaning they give to history has been ignored in Marathi literature.

The images and symbols in Marathi literature were born out of a very traditional, fundamentalist fantasy and even today the legacy continues. These values destroy the self-confidence of human beings and drag them towards some abstract, deceptive, imaginary power.

What does the symbol of Saraswati in the *Saraswati Stawan* signify? Is Saraswati a river like Ganga or Yamuna? Or is she the daughter of the god Brahmadev? How is she connected with literature? With creation? I am bothered with many such questions. I find that the reality in which I was born and brought up is closer to me. That is mine. This is what Phule and Ambedkar taught me; this is how they trained me to think. I feel that in Marathi literature these issues should be taken more seriously. (Carvallho and Kalsekar 191,192)

The translator of *Aaydan*, Maya Pandit says:

Urmila Pawar's memoir represents the struggle of a Dalit woman who has travelled on a long journey from a small town to a huge metropolis, and became one of its leading intellectuals and writers. She has tried to make values like justice, equality, freedom; rationality, citizenship, progress, and democracy an integral part her Dalit feminist utopia. This is what sets *The Weave of My Life* apart from all the other books written in the tradition of the feminist, radical and Dalit struggles (Pandit *xxix*)

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This autobiography of Urmila is acknowledged as a tribute to her mother Laxmibai and in the preface to this work she adds the following powerful acknowledgment of her link with her mother: "My mother used to weave aaydans. I find that her act of weaving and my act of writing are organically linked. The weave is similar. It is the weave of pain, suffering and agony that link us" (Pawar $\alpha$ ). Influence of strict casteism is portrayed with varied intensities in different stages of her life, as in childhood, teenage, married life, job field, social activity field. A series of traumatic elements are very beautifully interwoven in *Aaydan*, as in the way the black beads are arranged in her 'Mangalsutra'. Pawar was much bothered about her caste and their poverty stricken life style since her school days and her mind was completely filled with limitations which the people of her caste had to suffer in every sphere of their life. As she writes:

The upper caste girls always used words like 'Ladu', 'Modak', 'Karanjaya', 'Puranpolya'. They brought such novel items in their tiffin boxes as well as at times we went on excursions. However, I never asked myself the stupid questions, why we do not prepare such dishes at home? We were aware, without anybody telling us, that we were born in particular caste and in poverty and that we were born in poverty, and that we had to live accordingly. (93)

Another incident she quotes about the childhood takes the readers into a feeling of heavy heartedness. It was as follows. Her classmates decided to make meal in one of her friend's home when her parents were away. Everyone where assigned to bring something and Pawar

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asked them what she should bring, they replied her not to bring anything other than money. The notions of untouchability of the classmates are clearly visible in this context. "They didn't allow me to touch anything. However, we all ate together. I really enjoyed the meal. The next day I was horrified to hear that my eating had become the hottest topic for juicy gossip. Girls were whispering in groups about how much I had eaten" (102). Even the deepest feelings of lost and indignity were also described in a casual way which make the readers more rational rather than emotional, and that is the feeling which Pawar wanted to evoke in the readers, in order to get the actual spirit of the incidents she goes on narrating and moreover this quality of writing will stick the readers to think more logically about the condition through which Mahar or lower caste women gone through and most of them are going through behind the concealing curtains of social reformation. The incidents described by Urmila were not happened much before and there are still possibilities of its rays to radiant through the society. Vimal was the name which she bore before her marriage and it changed into Urmila Pawar in her marital life. Throughout the childhood, casteism hunted her and her community in multiple ways. They thought about converting from their religion into Buddhism. Even after the conversion they could not find complete solace from the marginalization and suppression they had suffered. She describes her one experience when she went to attend marriage function in a relation and when they asked for more rice, the cook got angry and shouted and finally when they were acknowledged as Arjun Master's daughter they got some more to eat. It was only because



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her father had some prestige amongst their community and if it were a common Mahar girl she might be thrown out of the function.

Pawar ponders an incident which is so memorable because the caste prejudices made her loose, a good friendship which she had with the girls who stayed in room which her mother given for rent. "There was hardly any conversation between us on the way back. They did not speak to me; they also walked at a distance from me." (105). This is how the above mentioned good friendship turned into dust when elders taught the Vimal's friends about her caste and the distance which they should keep to her. There are descriptions about the humiliation which Vimal had to suffer from the class teacher of her fourth standard. He made her clean the verandah of the school which was messed up with cow dung keeping a false notion that it is Vimal's cow which done such a nauseating deed. Though her mother informed the teacher about the practice, the humiliation which Pawar suffered could not meet any end anywhere.

During the flow of narration, at some places, author, revealed her experiences of sexual exploitation at her early adulthood and about her classmates. "My maternal uncle plays dolls with me and pretends to be my husband drags me into an alcove and presses me hard." (79). This incident shows not the oppression from the side of upper class but from the part of their own men. This is a clear depiction of the doubly oppressed state of Dalit women. There are descriptions about her husband's references to her as frigid in the intercourse which they had in the first night. Urmila quotes an incident from her childhood which clearly depicts how untouchables turn

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into touchables when they are in sexual affairs. "Once we were playing outside. [...] After a long time the door opened and a Konti girl called Ulgawwa came out, her face wet with tears, in a terrified state. Then the priest also came out but he left without giving us any 'Prasad'. Suddenly I was frightened of the priest." (66). Though the apparent explanations are only this much, Pawar suggests the prevalence of sexual violence against Dalit women.

"A girl had said, 'My stepbrother sits on my sister's stomach and has threatened to do the same thing to me if I told anyone.'" (53). It was the words of the classmate of Vimal while she and the friend were only little children. All the experiences which are first hand or explained to Vimal are the true examples of materialistic trauma the women folk of their community had suffered.

After getting married to Harishchandran, her living status updated a little economically. Slowly she started engaging in social work and further education. She qualified BA and MA in the due course and began to enter to the developmental programmes which specifically intended for the Dalit women's liberation through literature. Along with so many other workers/activists she could establish some programmes. The untimely death of her son made her emotionally and physically pathetic. Later on when, her husband, Harishchandran passed away she could somewhat put up with the torments and tried to engage in social work in a more elaborate manner. So fascinated with the ideologies of Ambedkar she and co-activists came forward with new prospects during the member gathering scenario, they could meet so many

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families, who tried to hide their caste symbols and followed the ways of upper class life styles.

Hence, the autobiography, *Aaydan* is a trauma narration of caste struggle and the hard sufferings of the women, especially, to get rid of their caste burden and to meet the two ends of the life of the family

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### The Archetypal Images of Women in Anita Nair's *Mistress*

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The archetypal images of women are clearly pasteurized in *Mistress* by Anita Nair who is an Indian

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contemporary author. The author's main focus is on the struggles of women with archetypal codes and patriarchal system. She projects herself as the representative and perfect spokesperson of the women folk of the present time. Women's in her novels seem to be a personification of modern women who can be able to face the burden of inhibition they have carried from generation to generation. The family setup of all heroines of Anita Nair is purely patriarchal with archetypes. Domestic violence is portrayed very well in the novel *Mistress*, where Sadiyaa with some of her dialogues explicit that how much she is afraid with her husband and arguments with him.

**Keywords:** *Archetypal images, patriarchal, domestic violence*

Feminism is a criticism of the prevailing social conditions, which have excluded women from the dominant male culture, social, political and intellectual pursuits. Modernity is clearly evident in the emergence of the new woman writing. The differences are notable in the pioneering work of modernist women writers. The focus of this paper will be on the expectations the predominantly male-oriented society requires, and also on the approaches the women examined adopt to either conform to them or revolt against them, by taking into consideration of Anita Nair's *Mistress*, the novelist of the Post independent era who very skillfully and effectively presented the predicaments which are imposed upon them and while fighting against these predicaments, how they come out of their traditional role as a wife or a home

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maker. Most often female characters are fixed by gender stereotypes so that their attempts to transcend this position are often questioned.

It is an undeniable fact that women have not only been denied existence as complete human beings, physically and mentally set to perform on a egalitarianism with men, but also destitute of the opportunity to give expression to their feelings, their fears and their distress. Anita Nair is a popular Indian English language writer. She is one of the finest writers in Indian Writing in English with an international reputation. Anita Nair refuses to be labeled as a feminist writer. She makes an attempt to show the quality of strength in a woman. Anita Nair also adds that strength is not usually considered a womanly thing. Her style ultimately differs from other feminist writers. In other words, she is a feminist with difference. She traces the real position of women in the families as well as in the society. She has created ripples in the society of male domination by taking women as women in a serious manner. Her attempt to exhibit the plight, fears, dilemmas, contradictions and ambitions of her women characters is remarkable. Anita Nair's descriptions and portrayal of characters are highly appreciable.

Anita Nair too has unconsciously taken these archetypes as symbols for her novel. All her female characters are archetypes of women who suffer physically and mentally, caught up in a traditional male dominated society, whether they are rich or poor or between the two, whether educated or uneducated or whether employed or unemployed. The women undergo a heavy psychological disturbance as they are to choose between tradition and modernity.

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Anita Nair has taken a pioneering effort in raising her voice against gender discrimination, rape, child sexual abuse, internal partner violence, female feticide through her various portrayals of characters. Though all these are the various forms that express the plight of women, the one and only cause behind these is the deeply rooted concept of patriarchy in the society. Anita Nair is a strong feminist as she makes her women characters question their plight in the patriarchal society or break the rules formulated by it.

In *Mistress* Anita Nair deals with the concept of patriarchy and signifies a relationship of equality. She has attempted to show how, in life, suppression and oppression do not always come in recognizable forms, but often under the guise of love, protection and the assurance of security. Though patriarchy is a common concept in every woman's life, Anita Nair depicts carefully the diversity within each woman, as she does not want to pin down the lives of women to one ideal. In the words of Sunita Sinha:

“Nair's India suffers from a patriarchal system which has tried in many ways to repress, humiliate and debase women. The question she poses in her novels not only shakes the ideological ground of man's patriarchal role in our traditional society but also implies the existence of an alternative reality.” (P. 149)

Feminism claims for equal rights for a man and woman. It is against the strict social pattern that women are inferior to men. And Anita Nair has carefully drawn characters like Radha to express how women are strong conservatives of the patriarchal structure that has imposed

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strict social, political and economic limitations on women. Sandra Lee Bartky states:

“Feminist consciousness is the experience in a certain way of certain specific contradictions in the social order. This means that the feminist apprehends certain features of social reality as intolerable. The feminist consciousness is the consciousness of victimization. As the philosophy of life it seeks to discover and change the more subtle and deep-seated cause of women's oppression.” (P. 23)

As a feminist writer, Anita Nair's feminism is rooted in the larger frame work of human rights of personal freedom and right to body. But women in literature, over centuries have been the archetypes of Sita, the silent-sufferer, the model of Indian womanhood. So a woman is always passive to accept the dynamic role of the man in her life. What Gauri Shankar Jha says is relevant to this context:

Pitaa Rakshati Kumaree, Bhartaa Rakshati Yauvane; Putroo Rakshati Vardhakyee; Na Stri Swaatantvram Arhati. (Sastri, 1983, IX, 3) (The father protects the woman during childhood, the husband during her youth, and the son during her old age; a woman does not deserve freedom)

Anita Nair beautifully portrays the status of women in Indian society. A wife's identity depends on her husband. If she becomes an abandoned wife or a widow, she has no identity in the society.

Feminism is a powerful tool for voicing some of the basic concerns and aspirations of women. The seminal question is not gender equality but gender independence, not just women's liberation but women's autonomy. A woman



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gives her best in autonomy. It is in autonomy she is liberated (45).

Like Manu Bhandari, Anita Nair has drawn the character of Saddiya to show how women are denied freedom as per the rules set by their community and how she is unable to shrug-off her emotional and psychological dependence on men, family and community. As quoted by Sunita Sinha,

“Feminism is an attack upon social opinion, wherever it discriminates in its attitude towards man and woman” (221).

Anita Nair through the character portrayal of Saddiya, shows her concern for women who are denied basic freedom even at home, restricted within the strict framework of religion. As Prasanna Sree says,

“Through the centuries, women in Hindu tradition are depicted as silent sufferers, they have been given a secondary status both in the family and society” (P. 18).

In the same way, over many years, religions looks upon women as inferior to men and has made women suffer under its strict laws. Saadiya is the youngest daughter born in a traditional Muslim family. Her father is very particular in keeping his womenfolk in Islamic tradition as he often says, “it is our duty to safeguard the bloodline” (*Mistress* P. 99). So it is the fate of women like Saadiya to be born and die in the same room. The four walls become their world:

“Saadiya stared at the square of blue over her head. Twenty feet by thirty feet. That was the measure of her sky, the peripheries of her life. She touched the grey walls of the terrace roof. Even if she stood a solid six feet and two inches high, making sure she would never see

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what was not meant for her eyes, ensuring that she was not visible to anyone. Saadiya felt what was by not a familiar sense of despair. Would she like her sisters and every other women born here, live and die hidden by these walls? Was there never to be a way out from here?" (*Mistress P.* 99)

Saadiya cannot express her thoughts. She wants to cry out the discrimination that their religion has drawn between men and women. She wants to tell her father what is right and wrong. She wants to break her throat to say, "It isn't fair that you men get to go wherever you want, see and do whatever you like, and we are expected to be content with this patch of blue and this maze of alleys" (*Mistress P.* 99)

The more Saadiya questions about such restrictions the more she craves for freedom and attempts to break the rules. But violation of rules will end in violence against women. This is what is the result in Saadiya too. In the words of Neeru Tandon:

Violence against women has been accepted and even condoned throughout history. More than 2,000 years ago, Roman law, gave a man life and death authority over his wife. In the 18th century, English common law, gave a man permission to discipline his children and wife with a stick or whip no wider than his thumb. Feminists claim that men are more likely to use violence to keep their dominant position. While society claims to abhor violence, we often make heroes of men who are aggressive (P. 140).

These words are true with Saadiya's strict father. Breaking the rules when she steps out and goes to the common alley where men would walk, she knows that her

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father would be furious. As she expects, the furious father, takes violence as his weapon to discipline his daughter. Patriarchy overflows through his veins and says he is the man of the family. This makes him too violent to press a very hot iron rod on her calves twice.

Moreover, he wants him to be the hero of his family who could keep up its honour, by disciplining his girls this way:

You feel the need to break rules. This is my Saadiya; good girl. The next time you feel the need to break your reins, remember how your flesh melted... This is a lesson for you as much as it is for me, that it is unwise to give girls even a little rope. That it isn't in women to understand the nuances of freedom. And if I have left you unpunished I may risk the honour of my family (*Mistress* P.130)

Here Anita Nair reveals the gender discrimination marked by religion. It is obvious through Saadiya's story that women in Arabapatnam are not allowed to go out of the four walls even for education. There is no reference of girls being sent to school. Moreover they were fully covered with black dress all over their body excepting their eyes: "She took away the black fold of the cloth that covered her face and flung it on to her shoulder" (Nair 101). But men enjoyed endless freedom. Women seldom saw the sea though they lived close to it. These questions arise in Saadiya's mind:

Though we live so close to it, we don't get to see it ever. All the men in Arabapatnam went to beach every day, like they went to the mosque. It was a part of their routine. We were allowed out, perhaps once a year. At other times, we knew the sea existed only when the breeze set in at early

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noon, bringing into our homes a whiff of salt and on hot days a brackish odour, part fish, part decay, part mystery (*Mistress P.* 138).

Women pursue freedom by rebelling against the religious code. The rules are likely to be broken as the situations trigger the urge to cross the line. So Saadiya breaks the religious code, crossing the line set by it. Her father expels her from their society in order to keep up the honour of his position in the religious circle. Saadiya craves for a new world of freedom and that is why she leaves her home and goes with Sethu, a man who is not of her religion.

She expects total freedom, in the sense that it allows her to follow that freedom her religion and inculcating its rituals on her child after marriage. When this is denied by Sethu her husband, she thinks of her past in her father's house. She breaks the traditional conventions and comes out, but unfortunately she is unable to come out of it fully. She stands at the crossroads of ancestry and life and at the end chooses death as the only solution to the problem. She drowns herself in the sea, "not to feel so torn between my ancestry and my life as it is now. The body washed up three days later. A bloated Saadiya ..." (*Mistress P.* 228) Neeru Tandon has this to say by way of comment on the attitude of Saadiya, "By remaining free, women hoped to retain not only their independence but those rights that, in spite of some change, they still lost on marriage" (126).

In the feminist concept of the 'New Woman', she challenges the traditional notions and is essentially a woman of awareness of her inferior status in the family and society. She tries to bring it up in her best of efforts.

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She chooses to rebel against the accepted rules and regulations formed by the society. In the words of Neeru Tandon: "Her protest is not for equality only but for the right to be acknowledged as an individual - capable for intelligence and feeling. She does not look for freedom outside the house, but within too. She is new in the dimension of time by being a rebel against the general current of the patriarchal society." (32)

In *Mistress Radha* is a woman who rebels against the patriarchal society. Shyam is a dominating husband who thinks that a wife should not interfere with his business affairs. He owns several businesses. But in none of them he needed Radha for anything. He just wants his wife to pretty herself for him and keep herself home. For him a pretty glossy wife will be malleable, "He prefers a glossy, silly wife. Glossy, silly wives are malleable" (61).

He is a husband who thinks that a wife should always be inferior to her husband, so that she can be easily controlled. But Radha likes to visit his women employers and empower them. She wants to be independent. When once she meets her friend Susie, she asks her, "But Radha, why don't you drive? She immediately says "But Shyam won't let me" (60) This shows that she cannot do anything beyond his control. But she wants to be independent. She doesn't want to merely sit at home and waste her time. As a first step, without informing her husband, she visits Shyam's employers in the match factory and teaches them many things starting with literature. She is severely criticized by Shyam.

In a patriarchal society a husband's proud concept is that he has nothing to do with his wife's income. No matter she earns or not, she should not be independent in any

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way. He always wants her to be at home and she should not dream of anything else more than that. This attitude of Shyam is revealed when Radha says:

“I wanted to teach in one of the primary schools and you said it was too much work for too little money. When I wanted to start a tuition class, you said the same. Then I wanted to start a crèche and you said you didn't want the house filled with bawling babies. So I thought I would find something else to do which didn't involve making money, but even that isn't right” (73).

The tradition on concealing their sufferings within was “womanly” according to Indian society. But the “New Woman” revolted against this. She could not be a silent bearer against male chauvinism and male-egoism. She was not ready to be used as a sex object whenever her husband needed. Radha breaks the silence and questions Shyam, “Don't I have a right to an opinion? I am your wife. But you treat me as if I am a kept woman. A bloody mistress to fulfil your sexual needs and with no rights” (*Mistress* P. 73). So according to Radha, if a wife is not given the right to opinion, she cannot give her husband the right to touch her. Rape is a subject which society takes less preference to discuss, even if it is rape within marriage. By discussing this in her writings, Anita Nair brings to limelight the most hesitated issue. Jacqueline rightly points out:

“Rape has always been a horrible indignity heaped on a woman by the male species, merely on the strength of brute force. Rape is still a menace for women, an act of aggression of male. Rape is not rape of the body alone but rape of the mind itself. The feeling of being victorious and gloating over the act makes the rapist even more

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detestable. This violence and denigration becomes worse when it occurs within the sanctity of marriage.” (P. 41)

Shyam is an aggressive husband who proves his brutal strength by raping his wife Radha. By doing this he thinks he has made her feel low of herself. By possessing her through this violent manner, he thinks that he had proved his dignity as a husband. He gloats over his victory, thinking that he has slapped her with indignity. He is a tyrannical husband who repeatedly claims her to be his wife as he rapes her:

“You are my wife. I have my rights”, I said. “Don't I have the right to say no”, she demanded. I kneed her legs apart and tore her panties away. I spat into my hand and smeared her with my spit. “You are mine, do you hear me”, I muttered. Then I fucked her. “You are my wife, you are mine,” I said.” (*Mistress* P. 163)

Radha, the physically and mentally weak Radha, is unable to resist this. It is not only rape of her body, but mind too. She is not able to shut her mind to this. “I felt sore and bruised, invaded and robbed. Is this rape, I asked myself again and again” (*Mistress* P. 165). The bruised Radha is not lost forever. She makes up her mind. She knew how to deal with it. She is not the woman who will remain silent at a husband's brutal victory. She is ready to break the sanctity of marriage:

“If I can give this attack a name, I will know how to deal with it. My mind was made up. I would pretend that nothing had happened. I would cheat him of the pleasure of having imposed his will. Shyam might think he owned me, but he didn't. I was never his. And I never will be. All day long he had expected anger, but I felt no anger. Revulsion, yes and disgust. But not anger. Shyam thought

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all was well. I let him believe it. For there was Chris now”  
(*Mistress P.* 166)

Hence Radha is determined to break the leash of social norms and choose Chris outside the marriage, unable to bear with her tyrannical husband. Child-bearing occurs only when both the husband and the wife are fertile. And if a wife delays in pregnancy it is always believed that infertility is with the wife because in a male-dominated society it is a dishonour to the male to blame him of infertility. When Shyam and Radha are left without a baby, it is Rani Oppol, Shyam's sister who unreasonably blames Radha saying that she is infertile, “May be there is something wrong with her. You must go to a specialist and get it verified” (*Mistress P.* 202) Shyam too has never thought that the delay in pregnancy could be because of his infertility too. He is very confident that he is a man. He even stoops down to the extent of an indecent husband who maintains a secret calendar of Radha's menstrual periods. When Radha finds this out, she is angry at this attitude of Shyam. She thinks that it is something personal of her and does not like Shyam's intervention in this, “You see you want to rule me. You won't let me breathe. It isn't right” (*Mistress P.* 203). She is heart-broken at this. She even sobs. But she does not allow this distress rule over her. She musters up courage and confidence in fury says to her husband, “I was pregnant once. So it isn't that I can't conceive. Perhaps you need to find out if you can father a child” (*Mistress P.* 203). She says this even without any uneasiness of her being pregnant before marriage, because she turns furious against Shyam's pride of a man more than that of a husband. She is a revolutionary woman as she does not feel bad about,



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telling her husband right to his face a matter that cannot be told by a wife to her husband. She boldly tells to his face that she was pregnant before she was married. Her ultimate aim was to bring down Shyam's pride of a man. At the end of the novel one can find that she decides to live alone, neither longing for Shyam's nearness nor the love of Chris. She decides to live in autonomy. In the novel it is seen that the female characters struggle against the negative forces often engendered by the ruthless and sapless archetypal codes with patriarchy, with their new emerging ideas and views against the age-old norms of the patriarchal society. Anita Nair has portrayed the plight of women, who silently accept this patriarchy and also the women who raise the question about their way of life in it and see it not only as the site of their oppression at home and in society but also make it a battle-field to vanquish their oppressors. She portrays how the freedom of women is curtailed by the dominant ideas of men and how they are able to overcome it or make a reconciliation to make the life perfect and beautiful. She also highlights the fact, how some women are very stubborn about not crossing the patriarchal code.

### Conclusion

The novel *Mistress* reveals the archetypes assaults of women and their quest for feminine identity. The male chauvinism is still alive in this world. It should be completely vanished out from the world. Primordial women pictured as slaves to man. But some of the post modern women also confined as slaves for men by men is unacceptable. This may not happen for present women. Because present modern women are appear against male dominated society. They are the bold thrasher. They

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have come up to the all the fields. On the other hand man must think that if not a woman, there is no man. The woman empowerment must take all the necessary steps to woman's struggles. Thus the greatest versatile novelist Anita Nair has clearly depicted her women characters in the archetypal portrayal. They are new woman from traditional rules of a woman. Hence the study suggests that woman should come out from the struggles of traditional archetypal rules. Hence Anita Nair is a feminist writer with her presentation of the feelings and aspirations of the women that have made her novel a powerful weapon for the awakening of women who suffer in the patriarchal society.

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### **Culture, Language and Translator's Challenge: A Reading on the Malayalam Translation of *The God of Small Things*, Kunju Karyangalude Odeythampuran**

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Giving priority to the aim of cultural translation, there is no relevance to the question whether a work of literature is translatable or not. Discussions regarding the Malayalam translation of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* initiated as early as the time of its publication itself. The culture of the language of the original i.e. English and that of Malayalam, the culture of

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which is the content of the former poses a series of challenge to the Third world bilingual feminist translator. The two prominent views emerged about this include the uncertainties the architecture of the novel celebrates and the untranslatability of the linguistic innovations of the novel. The Malayalam translation of *The God of Small Things*, titled as *Kunju Karyangalude Odeythampuran*, written by Priya. A.S addresses the skeptical reader in the midst of the untranslatability discourse. The present study aims at exploring the domains where the cultural and linguistic factors of the Source and Target texts conjoin, ramble or wither on the cultural front of the culture in, to which the culture of the original English version is translated. The relevance of it lies in exploring the degree of fidelity to the culture of the text, the writer maintained with an aim to describe the third world cultural translation

*Keywords: culture, language, translation*

The language I speak  
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queerness  
All mine, mine alone. It is half English, half  
Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest,  
It is as human, as I am human, don't  
You see? ( Thieme, 717)

*The God of Small things*, the magnum opus of Arundhati Roy, the Booker Prize winning novel, has depicted the landscape and mindscape of the South Indian State, Kerala. The place has not only been presented in the novel as a background, but also put depicted with its imprints through the unique language of the text, an amalgam of Malayalam and English. The novel, in many respects, deviated from the conventionalities: the theme

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of confrontation between 'Laltain and Mombatti', the architectonics, the postcolonial mimicry, the forbidden relationship between a touchable and untouchable, the political drama underlying the pseudo-secular policies etc. These are a few among the many that made the text remarkably distinctive. But the most striking part of the novel for an analyst is the narrative, which is made through the eyes of the dizygotic twins Rahel and Estha, and the linguistic play. The entire story is swinging between 1960s and early 1990s. The exact location of the happenings is Ayemenem, a village in Kottayam District in Kerala. The native language of the locale is Malayalam. The language, generally, is a space to locate the individual speakers as a member of a group, a social community, and as separate from other living beings belonged to other spheres of cultural negotiations. It marks the cultural and historical inscription of the region. Hence the language plays the role of a vehicle traveling from past to present.

Malayalam, though spoken and limited its scope in a comparatively small geographical territory- the narrow strip of land between Western Ghats and Arabian Sea and Lakshadweep and used by a limited population, counts its relevance due to the presence of Malayalees worldwide. Originated from proto- Dravidian family of languages, Malayalam is closely linked to Sanskrit and Tamil. In due course, the exchanges through commerce and colonization the language boundaries are expanded, since the interferences of English, French etc. are not considered as invasion, but as cultural and linguistic enrichment. At the same time regional languages such as Malayalam lost their charm, due to the subaltern status assigned to the speakers of the once colonized territory.

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There existed some imperialist agenda behind this degradation as John McLeod rightly remarked, "...it (colonialism) operates by persuading people to internalize its logic and speak its language; to perpetuate the values and assumptions of the colonizers as regards the ways they perceive and represent the world." (McLeod 18) Recently, contrary to the past the notion about Malayalam as an eternal receiver of loan words at the micro level, and the existence of the binaries of high/low, governing/governed, colonizer/colonized, global/regional with regard to this language is subverted by the attempts from within and from outside and Malayalam has been included in the list of the givers. The attempts made by the post colonial writers are remarkable in bringing forth the transition.

In the postcolonial India translation studies have focused on two main, sometimes contrasting approaches. On the one hand, there was a linguistic approach to translation and on the other a cultural approach accountable for translation phenomena which placed translation, a once marginalized activity as an inevitable component in the ongoing globalization process. Recently, the renewal of interests in the cultural roots spread to the west is attempted to bring back with translation. In her essay "Politics of translation" Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak stated that surrendering oneself before the western translation strategies producing an immediately accessible text disregarding the context of origin, the stylistic innovations, the target audience who are keen on reading a twin of the original and the author is a betrayal from the part of the translator( Spivak 372).

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Tejaswini Niranjana has pointed out that the danger imminent in translating anti-colonial narratives is the complicity of the translation with the master narrative of imperialism. Even after overcoming this crisis, the myths of nationalism and secularism will come to conquer heterogeneity (Niranjana 167). Gender inscribed in the text and the gender of the translator is yet another issue that has a potential to make mistranslations. In order to avoid trivial patriarchal reading and to safeguard a text translation is vital. The current study analyses the possibility of the Malayalam translation *Kunju Karyangalude Odethampuram* to convey *The God of Small Things* in all its subtleties to the Malayalam readers. The focus lies in estimating the challenges of the translator to translate the culture conveyed through a second language.

The greatest challenge of the translator of *The God of Small Things* is the apparent untranslatability of the text. *The God of Small Things*, to a certain extent, shows resistance to translation. Through the metaphors, similes and the graphical representations of capital letters and small letters, their fractions and multiplications, a fantastic world in English was built within the text. This world is subtly suitable to a signifying system of representation say English language and hence no translation can replace the text. Secondly, and paradoxically, *God of Small things* is a translation in its essence: it being a part and parcel of postcolonial literature and culture, it translated the native culture in bits and pieces to the outsider. So every Malayalam translation of *The God of Small Things* is a kind of back translation.

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A third issue is the translation of the once transliterated words and the fourth, the style, tone and feel of the novel that is to be conveyed in addition to the content.

The vision of *The God of Small Things* is indeed kaleidoscopic. It projects the native culture through the language of the text irrespective of the actual language used as the medium of communication. It is a bilingual text. Without understanding Malayalam, the understanding of *The God of Small Things* is difficult. But it was a text that made English language less rigid in grammar, vocabulary and unfastened in structure. So in order to translate the text the translator surrendered before the text to bring *Kunju Karyangalude Odeythampuran* into being.

*Odeythampuran* is a cultural term for God, as it was used among certain cultural groups alone. The word God is a secular word, culturally neutral, but *Odeythampuran* was conceived to be a cultural expression for God. It appears to be a free translation and after reading the novel, the translation is appreciable as it conveys the rhetoric of the God in the novel. It catalysed the reading as it placed the text in a particular cultural, social and linguistic plain. Among the chapters, the names of six of them are reproduced in the Malayalam letters out of which five are the names to designate a pickle factory, a train, a harbor, an anglicized individual and talkies. Only one among them i.e. "Kochuthomban" was retained under the allowance of a name which is originated from Kerala. In the title *Wisdom Exercise Notebooks*, "wisdom exercise" remained untouched. The only title which translated considerably was the crossing with the



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substitute “Akareyku”. But while doing this, extreme care has been taken to use a word that was extensively used in the original text.

The play of language makes the text translation strenuous. The hybrid language of the children constructs a puzzle to be tackled with intelligently. The hard decision the translator made was that she did not try demonstrating the adamant loyalty to the target language. Creatively retaining the English language of the source text, she triumphed over the loss of the rhetoric before the ease of reading. She even ventured to use the English script in Malayalam Translation. This is evident in several instances:

- Mostly the rhyming lines of Rahel and Estha are presented in English script:

1. While in the theatre, they three, Rahel, Ammu and Babykochamma shared the comfort of a urinal together, Rahel sang:

Rubdub dub (Rahel Thought)

Three women in a Tub

Tarry a while said slow . (114)

2. In the presence of orange drink lemon drink man Estha sang:

How do you keep a wave upon the sand?

How do you solve a problem like mare..yah?(119)

3. The song accompanying the sexual exploitation of the man was retained in

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English in order to maintain the intensity of helplessness of the child:

Fast faster fest

Never let it rest

Until the fast is faster,

and the faster's fest.(121)

- In several situations the English words such as “Alright”, (163), “thank you, you are welcome” (159), “how do you do?” (162) are reproduced with the help of Malayalam script.
- Again in the passage of the car song they sung, in order to indicate stress, capitalization was used. In the translation the passage is copied without any changes. But in the next line the word pronunciation is reproduced in Malayalam script as “prar nun see ei shan”.(171)
- In some passages the translation is given in brackets as original along with the text: I hate Miss Mitten and I think her knickers are TORN.  
(*Enikk Miss Mittane Veruppanu. Avarcku Keeriya Nikkarukal Aanu Ullathennanu Thonunnath*) (220)
- The home work passage, the quotes from Julius Caesar (290) and the reverse reading passages (287) are given in English letters.

But when coming to the Malayalam cultural texts and poems such as kookoo koo koo theevandi and the song from Chemmeen, she presented them in the way that these songs were a part of the harmonious development of the story in Malayalam. Certain expressions such as

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“stoppited” is used as to bring the humour and mockery of the original.

The Malayalam words in the original presented in the transliterated format are presented without many innovations. So at this point the difficulty to retranslate Malayalam into the Malayalam translation obstructs the technique, translating the style. The words such as: enda(196), Nale(340), Aiyo Kashtam(172), valare (70), orkunnundo( 134) etc. served the special purpose of introducing a particular culture to the foreign audience are represented naturally when the same text is introduced to the natives. The two levels of translation linguistic and cultural made the translation an ‘Estha’ to the original resembling ‘Rahel’, the dizygotic twins. The linguistic play of the text made the translation difficult and the cultural detachment of the original made it painless. Since the translation shared the linguistic freedom of the original, it produced a translation meant for bilingual readers capable of understanding English. The linguistic ingenuity of the original text liberated the translation by proposing the freedom one can enjoy with the text. As in the way the original was a book of love and pain, the third world postcolonial translation was a book of pain and love, and the gendered reading made the translation privileged with more joints and less hurdles making it as a twin of the original in every sense.

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