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# Editorial

The October 2020 issue of GNOSIS had a very warm response from the readers in India and abroad that articles have been flowing in quick succession to fill the folder for this issue even before the deadline of 30 August 2020. The thumping reception of the journal shows the depth of multicultural issues in literature to which critics and readers are attracted. As a journal committed to quality research and writing, we are aware of the need to delink quality from publication cost. Hence, our decision to charge no publication fee from the scholars whose papers will be published in the issues of GNOSIS. At the same time since GNOSIS is a self-financed venture, co-operation and support in the form of subscriptions are solicited from the readers and admirers of English Literature and Language from all over the world.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all the Academicians and well wishers of GNOSIS who recommended GNOSIS for publication. There are five research/critical articles in this issue. Before concluding, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my our esteemed members of the Board of Advisors and Review Editors for their selfless and tiresome efforts in assessing the articles very sincerely and giving their valuable remarks to bring out this issue in such a grand manner. I am also grateful to the revered contributors who have made this issue of the Journal a beautiful reality. Wishing all the readers a mental feast. Happy Reading!

**Dr. Saikat Banerjee**

Editor

# Nature, Reading/Writing Fiction: An Analysis of Barbara Understanding Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior*

**Nasmeem Farhin Akhtar**

***Received 05 August 2020 Revised 06 August 2020 Acceptance 12 September 2020***

**Abstract:** This paper is an attempt at reading Barbara Kingsolver's novel, *Flight Behavior* (2012) with an aim to (i) understand how literary fiction can engage to address the challenges of global warming and climate change; and (ii) examine how the 'politics' behind environment conservation and preservation not only aggravates the problem but more seriously, it further makes humans lose a sense of connection with our surroundings. Thereby it seeks to contend that any literary representation of environmental issues must be a representation in part of the emergent human or planetary reality involving the social, psychic and emotional complexities that an upheaval in the ecology entails along with the various social and economic pressures that lead to environmental damage.

**Key Words:** Anthropocene, ecology, fiction, scale framing.

> You couldn't stand up and rail against the weather. That was exactly the point of so many stories. Jack London and Ernest Hemmingway, confidence swaggering into the storm: Man against Nature. Of all possible conflicts that was one that was hopeless...Man loses. (*Flight Behavior,* 245)

Over the last few decades, the alarming impact of anthropogenic global warming eventually has turned out to be widespread and potentially catastrophic: water shortages and the spread of diseases has lead to decreased agricultural productivity, while the rise in sea level, increased seasonal flooding, and extreme weather events are wreaking havoc in rural and urban areas alike. While scientists had expressed concern over anthropogenic climate change as early as the 1950s, it was with the signing of the Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC) at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, that abating greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions began to be regarded as an urgent global responsibility. Post Rio, decades of deliberations and diplomatic intervention in the form of Kyoto Protocol (1997), the Copenhagen Summit (2009) to name a prominent few went on to mull public support towards widespread awareness and belief in the risk of climate change.

In this connection, along with other cultural artefacts, literature, climate change fiction, to be more specific, offers some very interesting deliberations on this issue:

> Climate change fiction...gives insight into the ethical and social ramifications of this unparalleled environmental crisis, reflects on current political conditions that impede action on climate change, explores how risk materializes and affects society and finally plays an active part in shaping our conception of climate change. It thus serves as a cultural, political attempt and alternative of communicating climate change. (Mehnert 4)

Along these lines, Mike Hulme's *Why We Disagree about Climate Change* (2009), Dipesh Chakrabarty's "The Climate of History" (2009) and its follow up essays, Karl Marie Norgaard's *Living in Denial* (2011), John L. Brook's *Climate Change and the Course of Global History* (2014), Dale Jamieson's *Reason in a Dark Time* (2014), Adam Trexler's *Anthropocene Fictions* (2015), and E. Ann Kaplan's *Climate Trauma* (2015), among others, have established a way of thinking about climate change that foregrounds historical memory and amnesia, socio-economic inequalities and cultural differences and the story templates and metaphors that have shaped public debates about the issue. In *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016), the writer Amitav Ghosh approaches climate change from a cultural, historical, philosophical and narrative angle, rather than from a still more common perspective of science, technology and policy. Adam Trexler in his overview of climate change novels over the past forty years titled *Anthropocene Fictions* (2015) views the novel as a comprehensive literary form capable of taking up an issue such as environmental degradation alongwith the treatment of the social, personal, political, cultural and aesthetic aspects. Along almost similar lines, Timothy Clark in his work titled, *Ecocriticism on the Edge* (2015) opines:

> The work of the environmental critic then becomes to consider and appreciate literature, criticism and arts that helps articulate this shift towards a new kind of eco-cosmopolitanism capable of uniting people across the world without erasing important cultural and political differences... an emergent culture, coterminous with the species, will make up a collective force strong enough to help counter day-to-day forces and decisions accelerating the extinction of terrestrial life. (Clark, 17-18)

There have been quite a few prominent works, where climate change appears as the dominant theme: Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*(1962), Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods*(2007), Ian McEwan's *Solar*(2010), Jonathan Franzen's *Freedom*(2010), to name a few. Along with *Solar* and *Freedom*, American author Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior* (2012) are novels which especially reflect the entire issues of climate change through a realistic lens.

It may be noted here that the United States occupies a central position in so far as climate change is concerned, not only because it is one of the greatest producers of carbon dioxide emissions through its domestic and international industries, but also because the entire climate change debate has experienced an unprecedented fervour and a comparatively high level of controversy in the US. Hence, quite naturally, an identifiable body of works with climate change as the governing motif has emerged in the US, which include novels Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl*(2010); Steven Amsterdam's *Things We Didn't See Coming* (2011), T.C. Boyle's *A Friend of the Earth* (2004) to name a few.

*Flight Behavior* (referred as *FB* in this article) very lucidly portrays as to how a literary text provides scope to examine and understand a natural phenomenon as climate change. Coming from a writer whose work abounds in themes such as local farming, bio-regionalism, survival of bio-diversity, interdependence between man and nature and above all, humanism, *Flight Behavior* drives home the message that while climate change is very much a physical phenomenon, one cannot ignore the personal, emotional and more intimate dimensions of the individual and global crises that it harbours.

Kingsolver's novel revolves around a small poor community in Tennessee whose local woodland has suddenly become a winter home for monarch butterflies. It begins at a critical juncture both for the human habitat, the protagonist in particular and the ecological set up. Dellarobia Turnbow, the central figure, is a twenty-eight year old wife living in the southern Appalachians,with her unambitious and passive husband ,two children and parents-in-law. Dellarobia is almost about to move out from the world of claustrophobic rural poverty and the drudgery of life to join a young telegraph engineer, when she encounters a bright orange display of light in the mountain:

> Unearthly beauty had appeared to her, a vision of glory to stop her in the road. For her alone these orange boughs lifted, these long shadows became a brightness rising. It looked like the inside of joy, if a person could see that. A valley of lights, an ethereal wind. It had to mean something. (*FB*15–16)

While she tries to understand this strange phenomenon as a dangerous warning, Dellarobia is later on familiarised by the lepidopterist Ovid Byron, with the unexpected arrival of millions of monarch butterflies on a small mountain in rural, southern Appalachia. The butterflies are a roosting colony representing a significant proportion of the entire monarch population. Waylaid by changing weather patterns on their way to Mexico, the entire species is almost on the verge of extinction in the freezing Tennessee winter. As Dellarobia later tells Ovid, "People can only see things they already recognize … They'll see it if they know it" (282), her curiosity prompts her to consult the internet, which becomes her gateway to all information regarding ecological imbalance.

In Ovid's words, "This system of local and universal genetics makes a kind of super-insect. The population can fluctuate fivefold in a year. It's an insurance policy against environmental surprises" (318). It goes without saying that due to severities of climate change, the entire world's biodiversity is almost on the verge of extinction.

Hence Dellarobia begins to understand that what she thought to be the "one spectacular thing in her life" turns out to be a "sickness of nature" (149). She realizes that the "forest of flame that had lifted her despair" (229) was a transient moment of beauty, which revealed that the underlying "migratory pulse that had rocked in the arms of a continent for all time" (ibid.) is now apprehending extinction.

As the novel progresses, two prominent issues come to the fore. First, the characters' understanding of climate change is shaped by the complicated terms of their own identity. In fact, the author Barbara Kingsolver in an interview confessed, "If I had to sum up the heart of this novel in a sentence I would say it's about why people can look at the same set of facts and come away with absolutely different convictions about what they've seen" (as told to Bryan Walsh). Dellarobia's mother-in-law, in her heart believes that the monarchs must be protected, though family 'inequations' make her reluctant to side visibly with Dellarobia, while her husband, Bear is more concerned with the impending default of the farm's debt and views harvesting the mountain's timber as his duty, regardless of any impact on the butterflies. Dellarobia's husband, Cub, dismisses global warming as a liberal fantasy and for him, "Weather is the Lord's business" (261). Dellarobia's immediate circumstances can make climate change seem irrelevant: "Her days swung between fury and humiliation...She envisioned crash landings everywhere" (218). Her preoccupation with quotidian life makes climate change disasters difficult to understand: "Getting the kids to eat supper, getting teeth brushed. No cavities next time. Little hopes, you know? There's just not room at our house for the end of the world" (283). By contrast, the family's pastor views the mountain's timber in terms of stewardship and frugality, finally persuading Bear not to proceed clearing the area where the butterflies have landed. Outside the locality, the media is more interested in stories and gossips about humans rather than on climate change. For instance, the media persons totally distorted the whole story Dellarobia narrated to them and under the caption, "Battle over Butterflies" their piece read: 'Dellarobia Turnbow has her own reason for believing the butterflies are a special something-or-other. They saved her life' (211). Also, since the underprivileged cannot relate to the lifestyle suggestions to protect the environment, they do not feel themselves to be part of it, as Dellarobia puts it: "The environment got assigned to the other team. Worries like that are not for people

like us" (322). On the other hand, Juliet, Ovid's wife argues that climate change denial has been incorporated into people's identity, and condescension only galvanises it:

> climate-change denial functioned like folk art for some people...a way of defining survival in their own terms. But it's not indigenous...it's like a cargo cult. Introduced from the outside, corporate motives via conservative media. (395)

As Dellarobia talks about believing only that which one sees, the writer reiterates in her interview:

> It's very hard for us to believe in things we don't see. We don't see the effects of climate change, we don't see that melting sea ice. It's hard for us to believe that the world under our feet could ever be any different than how it's always been. It's hard to convince ourselves that that's not the case. But most of all we're wired to fight or flee. That's the title of this novel. It's *Flight Behavior*. Every cell in our body wants to run away from the big scary thing. So this is a novel about flight behavior, all the ways that all of us are running away from scary truths.I think every one of us operates in our various modes of denial. (with Bryan Walsh)

In a study of public attitudes towards climate change in Norway and the United States, in the book *Living in Denial: Climate Change, Emotions, and Everyday Life* (2011), sociologist Kari Norgaard identifies three common strategies, through which the concern related to climate change is brushed aside, with an intention to do away with all apprehensions, guilt and fear. First, one tries to divert the topic to something less disturbing; second there is a tendency to focus on one particular "addressable" aspect of the problem and third, the subject is treated with humour so as to lighten the pressure mounted by such alarming topics.

Ultimately, as Adam Trexler puts it, "The effects of climate change are borne disproportionately by those who cannot afford them, even as their economic niche leads them to deny its existence" (Trexler,228). In fact at times, Ovid seems to be the imperfect vessel of the truth about climate change, conveying the limits of science in the contemporary world. He is a scientist who is tragically constrained: "After decades of chasing monarchs and their beautiful mysteries, he would now be with them at the end, for reasons he had never in his whole life foreseen" (245). For him, biology must be distinguished from matters of conscience and he seems dead against scientists addressing the public. In this regard, Bruno Latour's stance bears relevance. In this context, his ideas bear mark as he interrogated the widely accepted divide between natural or hard sciences and the humanities or 'soft sciences'.

In *Laboratory Life* (1979), Latour and Steve Woolgar question the very objectivity which natural sciences proclaim to be arriving at by contending that all 'truths' that scientists arrive at are results of social interaction. They propose that "scientific activity is not 'about nature'; it is a fierce fight to 'construct' reality" (243). Hence all the 'natural facts' that objective scientific research arrive at are also always culturally constructed. Later in the novel Ovid seems to acknowledge Heise's words, "how such a planetary transformation might affect particular places and individuals, therefore [it] amounts to a paradigmatic exercise in 'second hand non experience', envisioning a kind of change that has not occurred before" (*Sense of Planet,* 206) :

> What scientists disagree on now...is how to express our shock. The glaciers that keep Asia's watersheds in business are going right away...The Arctic is genuinely collapsing. Scientists used to call these things the canary in the mine. What they say now is, The canary is dead...We have arrived at the point of an audible roar. (Heise,367)

Ovid thereby indicts the American media for its complicity, as he further goes on exposing their nature of duties: "You are letting a public relations firm write your scripts for you. The same outfit that spent a decade manufacturing doubts for you about the smoking-and-cancer *contention*" (author's italics, 368). A similar kind of cynicism also typifies the climate activists as is evident in the instance when the local community college's Environment Club pickets the farm for "trying to kill all the butterflies": they show up at the wrong house, have barely legible signs, and more significantly do not even consider the most pertinent issues: local economic hardship being the primary force behind the logging, while global emissions is one of the primary causes of the extinction of the butterflies. Other activists pass away almost unnoticeably like the group of women who craft pretty butterflies out of recycled yarn.

The monarch butterflies acquire so many personal associations for Dellarobia at a crucial point in her life that their final fate becomes increasingly difficult not to be read as symbolic of her personal trajectory. Bruno Latour in *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic* Regime (2018) suggests that in this age of the Anthropocene, every human activity entails some consequence in the natural order, so much so that there has taken place a complete shift from the idea of 'nature-as universe' to that of 'nature-as-process'. Hence, an account of climate change is neither purely natural nor purely human. To cite a significant instance, the belief amongst some people is that the monarchs are "the souls of dead

children" (389). This leaves Dellarobia in a state of utter shock, "astonished by the connections unforeseen" (389), as it reminds her of her first baby whom she lost. Therefore, in the final section, as Dellarobia discloses to her son the crucial decision that she and her husband have decided to separate, and that she would move to a nearby college, the admission being made possible by Ovid Byron, the butterflies reappear overhead. In the last paragraph but one, Dellarobia looks up to see:

> Not just a few, but throngs, an airborne zootic force flying out in formation, as if to war. In the middling distance and higher up they all flowed in the same direction, down-mountain, like the flood itself occurring on other levels. The highest ones were faint trails of specks, ellipses. Their numbers astonished her. Maybe a million. (433)

This brings us to the second prominent aspect highlighted by *Flight* Behavior, namely that the crisis of climate change in a way challenges the very norms of fiction writing. In this context it would not be out of place to refer to Timothy Clark's theory of 'scale framing':

> As the Earth turns into a novel, partly incalculable hybrid entity where human effects interact in emergent ways with partially understood ecological systems...many habitual modes of thought, understanding and action now emerge as constituted by a kind of increasingly anachronistic 'scale framing', that is discursive practices that construct the scale at which a problem is experienced as a mode of predetermining the way in which it is conceived. (Clark, 74)

In Kingsolver's novel, the monarch butterflies almost entirely symbolize a turning point in the life of the protagonist, as Clark puts it, "a kind of visual background music for Dellarobia's story" (Clark, 177). The writer engages the reader's interest in climate change in an individualizing way, thereby exemplifying the many pitfalls one may encounter while negotiating with a global issue, which seems opaque to immediate representation. As Maggie Kainulainen suggests, "because climate change as a totality can only be encountered through discourse, the issue of representation is key" (Clark, 176). In fact, in *Flight Behavior*, Pete is quoted as saying:

> The official view of a major demographic... is that we aren't sure about climate change. It's too confusing. So every environmental impact story has to be made into something else. Sex it up if possible, that's what your news people drove out here for. It's what sells. (230)

Hence, it may be suggested that Kingsolver in this novel dramatizes the issues in the form of a confrontation or conflict between the stance of characters with opposing views, so that a reader's engagement with intellectual debate tends to become eclipsed by familiar modes of suspense and

identification, which have more to do with the human psyche than with the true complexities of the issue. In other words, one has to read beyond the given modes of interpretation in climate change novels as in the case of Flight *Behavior* .This would undoubtedly call for abandoning the guard-rails of given borders between humanities and sciences, since the issues to be considered overspill the traditional parameters of critical judgement. This seems more pronounced in *Flight Behavior* as it poses a challenge to the genre of climate change fiction while complicating the whole aspect of environmental degradation by focussing on a variety of perspectives on the issue, ranging from the struggles within a small rural community to the national news media, science, activism and party politics on local situations. Also these newly counter-intuitive demands on representation and response being made by climate change novels as the likes of *Flight Behavior* indicate that ultimately the more serious challenge may be the other way round: that still dominant conventions of plotting, characterization and setting in the novel need to be openly acknowledged as pervaded by anthropocentric delusion and environmental research and thinking would be effective if it explored directly and aggressively the drastic nature of the cultural break that this realisation may entail.

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# Bengalis at Present: Creating a New Identity in *From Valley to Valley*

**Abantika Dev Ray**

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**Abstract:** Displacement and identity crisis resulting from Partition affected people of undivided India immensely. The loss of 'home' and land which led to this crisis became eternal to the postcolonial experience on the eastern side of the border. This search for 'home' was the only way to recover their identity. This paper will study Dipak Kumar Barkakati's *From Valley to Valley* to understand how displacement and the consequent search for 'home' helped in the creation of a new identity for postcolonial Bengalis in Northeast India.

**Keywords:** Displacement, home, migration, identity, hierarchy.

Among the many effects of the Partition of India (1947), the most significant were the experiences of Bengalis as immigrants in Northeast India, migrating from erstwhile East Pakistan. The demarcation of territories which was the curious cause of this occurence, created differences among people of same ethnicity and culture, following which they relocated to various places across Assam and Tripura. The two remarkable effects that it led to were: (a) displacement and (b) creation of fractured identities. It took almost a lifetime for immigrants to settle, although sometimes, generations that came after often adjusted well to the land.

*From Valley to Valley*, written by Dipak Kumar Barkakati and published in 2002 in Assamese as *Upatyakar Para Upatyakalai*, talks of the phenomenon of displacement and resettlement in great detail. Translated by Gayatri Bhattacharji, it charts the lives of landed gentry and their tenants in erstwhile East Bengal, who witness struggles of various kinds as they deal with the pressures of riots and Partition and resettle in the newly divided country. It begins with the description of the Noakhali riots, prior to India's Independence. A significant portion in it deals with the consequences that an average Bengali citizen is left with after a mass riot involving loot and plunder. Kalikishore Dutta is the central protagonist of the novel; changes that take place in and around East Bengal are seen from his point of view and therefore, Kalikishore's story is as much a *bildungsroman* as it is an attempt at tracing the trajectory of the lives of Bengalis in Assam and Bengal. Kalikishore is quite young when the narrative begins; but when it finally ends, he is an aged man, much stronger and wiser than he was while he lived in his zamindari. The novel

is a representation of Kalikishore's uprootedness and his trials to find a 'home', much like other Bengali residents of the time. At the beginning of the narrative, he is married and has a young wife Sailabala. He is lovingly known as 'Chotobabu' of the Dutta zamindari. His elder brother, Shyamkishore, a high school teacher at Noakhali is a much respected man. However when trouble breaks out one afternoon, Shyamkishore does not return home. Nothing is known of his whereabouts, only it is assumed that he is a victim of the Noakhali riots between Hindus and Muslims. Kalikishore instead is left with the responsibility of accompanying his wife and sister-in-law Kalyani to a safer place. Amidst the conflagration, it is heard that they must take shelter in safe places still unscathed by fire. Ironically, Kalikishore takes refuge with a Muslim family who help them escape safely (by masquerading them as *lungi* and *burqa* clad Muslim men and women).

It is interesting that the novel represents various hierarchies of this society in this limited scope in which each class is subservient to the Duttas, thus according them the respect and status befitting a *zamindar* or landlord. There are the *Suklabaidyas, Sabdakars, Rudrapals, Malakars, Karmakars* (identified by their professions in many cases) – who have, for generations, been living under the patronage of the Duttas. There are also fellow Muslims who are quite friendly with the Dutta men, who are ready to assist the Duttas in any sort of misfortune. Although there are also instances in which the tenant farmers are treated as nothing more than tenants only, yet by and large, there is a predominantly harmonious coexistence among these people. This is in stark contrast to the political scenario around the time of the Noakhali riots, which is why these people are so perplexed and hapless in the face of this crisis. They have absolutely no clue as to their next course of action; they are also bemused about the causes of the conflict. The average/common man is beside himself with doubt and fear. Kalikishore's wife is about to give birth in this complicated condition. Everyone rushes to help the Duttas and this sort of fraternity with each other reminds one that religious and communal differences are still unfamiliar to this feudal society. It is remarkable that this same sense of helplessness, loss and desperation at being so unjustly dealt with runs across all classes in this hierarchical structure.

It is perhaps true that most people had no clear idea that in voting in favour of a Muslim majority province, they would alienate their own countrymen from one another. The symbol for India was a spade which lots of young people carried with themselves to show that they were in favour of Hindustan/India as an independent nation state. It was as though nationalism drove people at this time into doing whatever they did. At least in Bengal and Assam, people were mobilized into treating the

religious issue with a magnitude like never before. It was stoked into stimulating the Sylhet Referendum and eventually, the Partition of the country. Kalikishore and his family are immensely affected by this Referendum like most others of their ilk, but they decide that they would go with the flow and shift to safer regions of the country that were as yet unaffected by the Partition. The rest of his clan follow in his footsteps – as though they are inseparable. They encounter numerous struggles on the road but they brave these one by one to migrate to the neighbouring state of Assam. In one episode in the novel, the tenants gather around to ask for the Duttas' advice on the ongoing crisis. The congregation is composed of people from all religions and classes – and while some like Dheeman Chakravarty, the priest vehemently protest the presence of Muslims in their group, some others are not quite so sure yet about their hatred towards the Muslims. In fact, at this point, the crisis is not so much of their identity as it is of their religion. Kalikishore has an uncle, Charitrachandra Dutta who has already served during the time of *Banga Bhanga* or Partition of Bengal in 1905. Charitrachandra tries to maintain harmony among his people – he refuses to consider the possibility that Muslims mean any harm. To this view, he gets a mixed reaction. While it is Charitrachandra's opinion that they must stay back in Kulaura (Sylhet) and fight all odds, 'their' people or the Hindus decide otherwise. It is their religion that they try to salvage at this time and demands of patriotism cannot stop them from migration. It is also at this early point that they realize the complexity of their position: what country they all belong to determines their identity from now on. The Hindus' conscious decision to leave would also mean relinquishing their rights over the land and thus ascertaining East Pakistan (which was to be born in this crisis) as completely a Muslim territory.

Muslims are not sure about their position in the crisis. Particularly for Muslims of Kulaura, it is difficult to take a stand since they had spent so many years together in peace. In one such episode, the author shows how old Rashid, who is also a childhood friend of Charitrachandra's, recollects the days of their youth – how they spent time rowing across the rivers Meghna and Barak. Rashid remembers how he had once attended the *shraddha* ceremony (last rites) of one of the Duttas, and how he had begun to be friends with Charitrachandra, whom he addressed as *Sahari Babu*. When Abu Mansur, another elderly Muslim of the village, visits Rashid after the Partition of the country, he reflects on the impossibility of the situation: "We had all hoped that there would be peace and happiness after Independence. But is there any peace, any contentment?" (Barkakati, 38). The resounding calls of *Allah ho Akbar* once again remind them that the Hindus have almost deserted the land – the Duttas' own house

is occupied some years later by local Muslims of the area. It is a distressing situation that they are in – neither are they happy with the division, nor can they completely relinquish the religious majority provided to them by the Partition of India and inclusion of their land in East Pakistan. Opposition to the implicit love affair of Matin and Maya (who belong to different religions) highlights the fact that relations between the Hindus and Muslims is indeed very sore. This incident spurs even more hatred between the two communities – houses and villages are ravaged and burnt down. Kalikishore's own attraction to Rashid's daughter, Zinnat remains unmentioned throughout his lifetime and even if he remembers it sometimes, he never gets round to mentioning it, particularly at this time.

Kalikishore's story is significant in that it portrays the resilience of immigrant Bengalis and shows how they coped, with the ambience of hatred and discrimination, albeit against their wishes. After Kalikishore has moved to India, he finds that there are also other people from East Pakistan who are trying their best to find suitable places for themselves in the new land. This struggle is similar irrespective of location. Kalikishore and his people shift to Badarpur, Karimganj and Silchar which are geographically proximate to East Pakistan. It is here that Kalikishore meets his friend Niranjan who is a victim of this condition too. The novel provides an almost accurate description of refugee life and crisis common to all immigrants from East Bengal. While these people were used to an abundance of food, clothing and land in East Bengal, here they had to fight for their share, even after which these items were not readily available to them. It must be remembered that it was out of this critical condition that crisis of identities arose soon after. The struggle of having to redefine themselves, to determine their fair share in this milieu of refugees intimated them with this crisis of identity. That Kalikishore had belonged to a *zamindari* family while in East Pakistan aids him in getting services earlier than others in the refugee camp; however, resources, even then, are extremely limited. Niranjan has already made himself quite popular during his stay at the camp, and assures Kalikishore that he would also be accorded the same privileges. It is remarkable to note that while in East Pakistan, people like Kalikishore used to first look after other people's (their tenants') interests, in this refugee camp, now they consider their own interests primarily. This moment marks the beginning of defining and determining their selfhood. It is out of scarcity that people are led to think about themselves, in a rather selfish manner. Perhaps this thought leads Niranjan to keep the news of his new job from Kalikishore. The author makes this comment quite unequivocally: "It was not lost on Kalikishore that Niranjan was not happy that Radharani had told him about the job. And almost immediately Radharani's happy enthusiasm dimmed"

(Barkakati, 138). There is a very poignant description of starving children rushing towards their camp and fighting and jostling to get a share of the fish that Kalikishore buys for his family. Kalikishore and Niranjan reflect on the predicament: "And in this camp, we are simply a crowd of beggars – fit only for charity" (128).

Kalikishore has difficulty adjusting himself to the new mode of life – he can never understand how he would take up any other profession and although he finds employment as a clerk in the Refugee Rehabilitation Office he is not quite at home there. He also witnesses unfair division of ration to refugees, but can do little to solve this. Dipesh Chakrabarty in his essay, 'Remembered Villages: Representation of Hindu-Bengali Memories in the Aftermath of the Partition' analyses a series of essays published in the Bengali newspaper *Jugantar* and later collected in a book *Chhere Asha Gram* ('The Abandoned Village') in 1975. One of these testimonials from Bhatikain, Chittagong have mentioned the poor food and living conditions in the camp and specifically mentioned that they "… do not approach the 'relief babu' who only gets into a rage …"(Chakrabarty, 2144). It is apparent that Kalikishore gets the best treatment in the camp owing to class hierarchy, but most other families get lesser than their fair shares in this scenario. Poor people in *From Valley to Valley* often have to consume stale rice and pulses; but Sukumar Sarkar, the Relief Officer is enraged when someone points out the discrepancy. The essays in *Chhere Asha Gram* betray a sense of loss for the ancestral village which is the embodiment of everything sacred and beautiful and thus, the instances of defilement mentioned in the essays point to an emotion of sacrilege of the pristine village. *From Valley to Valley* represents this exact emotion as Kalikishore, Niranjan and other Bengali Hindus reminisce about their glorious past in East Pakistan. According to Dipesh Chakrabarty, the sense of loss which predominates is also interspersed with memories of their ancestral land, tinged with both nostalgia and trauma. Nothing could have prepared these people for the violence they were subjected to; the authors [of the essays] "express a stunned disbelief at the fact that it could happen at all, that they could be cut adrift in this sudden and cruel manner from the familiar worlds of their childhood" (2144). Kalikishore, Niranjan and others find themselves overwhelmed by patriotic fervor for their motherland, its spacious house, ponds, courtyard, orchards and groves whenever they reminisce about East Pakistan. The sense of bewilderment at Hindus and Muslims thus being estranged is immense for Kalikishore, Niranjan and others. The authors of these essays were also puzzled at how "neighbours turned against neighbours after years of living together in bonds of intimacy and affection, friends took up arms against friends" (2144). Thus dealing with the

sense of betrayal added to the pressures of creating a new identity in a new country, making the struggle all the more difficult. Niranjan tells Kalikishore that the days of the past have gone by and therefore, he must "… find, and plant, [his] own roots" (Barkakati, 167). Niranjan himself settles in Lumding as a high school teacher and suggests that Kalikishore should do the same. If Kalikishore represents the not-so-flexible landed gentry of East Pakistan, Niranjan is representative of the assiduous middle class which is always in search of opportunities to recreate themselves. In the text, there are instances of Kalikishore giving up his job as clerk, buying land at a village called Pingchora and cultivating it to relive his experiences as a landlord. This venture fails miserably and it is then Kalikishore realizes that he must find his niche by becoming one with the mass of people that had immigrated to India. In his attempts to reaffirm his roots in this new country, he tries to participate in multiple roles in the society – as an official in the Relief Office, as a landlord and lastly as a teacher. By the end of his career, he realizes that one must find employment to sustain oneself, which would provide him with an authoritative identity. By this time, the demands of upholding their identities had seen quite a progression: it was not merely their religious identity but also communal identity as Bengalis that they had to look after. The text also mentions the protest against the use of Urdu as the principal official language in East Pakistan around 1952 that would soon add another dimension to Bengali identity crisis.

Kalikishore's last job as teacher takes him to Kathiatoli, a small town near Nagaon near Assam. He gets this job by means of Niranjan's connections with the Congress. Niranjan mentions to Kalikishore that he would like to be associated with the Assamese – the Boras and Hazarikas – thus pointing to assimilation as a solution to the problem of settlement. Niranjan realizes pretty early in the novel that the two communities must be amiable towards one another in their own interests and though Kalikishore is not entirely convinced, not having been able to let go off his zamindari conceit, he really has no better option at hand. It is ironical that while in undivided Assam and Bengal, Bengalis were better off at jobs, here in Assam of independent India, they had to struggle quite hard to find livelihood. In a final visit that Kalikishore pays to Kulaura, he comes to know that population in the region had increased so much as to create a scarcity in land and resources. Kalikishore reminds himself that he is very happy at Kathiatoli where tea garden labourers, Marwaris and Bengalis live together harmoniously. By this time, Kalikishore's family had begun to accommodate Assamese culture and traditions. They share Assamese delicacies like *sunga pitha* during the Assamese festival, Bihu. In a conversation

between Kalikishore and Dr Himangshu Guha, the local doctor, the aspect of assimilation is highlighted. Kalikishore is reminded of how many Muslim farmers employed in his farm at Pingchora had almost become Assamese themselves. The middle class view seems to be of that the migration of people from East Bengal/Pakistan made the situation difficult for Bengali Muslims and Hindus alike.

For most Bengalis during this time, assimilation and accommodation of Assamese culture continue until Assamese is proposed to be the only state language in Assam. This is during the 1960s and Kalikishore's family has just about begun to gain ground in Assam. They are taken aback at this sudden crisis again. For many Bengalis, accepting this demand would mean living safely in Assam; perhaps, the fear of being uprooted once again, and this time due to language, was too heavy a price to pay. Indeed, the fear of displacement makes one of the characters say in the novel: "… now we are, a community without roots" (Barkakati, 247). Kalikishore's daughter Banashree takes lessons in history from a Professor Phukan, who emphasizes on these very points as he narrates to them the history of the region. Prof Phukan is conscious of the fact that Bengalis had been first brought to Assam by the British which causes the unequal distribution of resources. But because they had assimilated so well with the local Assamese population, it became difficult to identify who is an original resident and who is not. Thus, while Prof Phukan in the novel is ideologically inclined towards and supportive of the agitators who want Assam to be rid of 'outsiders', on humanitarian grounds, he is not on their side, because he realizes that the entire process of identifying and deporting 'outsiders' is not free of fault; in fact, its functioning is largely erroneous. This situation gradually aggravates to make Bengalis the victims of Assamese hegemony.

Banashree eventually wants to get married to Ananda, who is an Assamese by origin. Her father Kalikishore does not initially like Ananda, but later accepts him with grace. Ananda takes responsibility of Banashree's safety during the Assam Agitation which redeems him in Kalikishore's good graces. He realizes finally that this is a new world; there are newer generations of people who can adapt well to this ambience. Perhaps, this is his final recognition that he must loosen his grip a bit and since the days of zamindari have gone by, now is the time for a more welcoming approach towards the local population.

Divested of all identities, Bengalis only have their language to hold on to, which has been continuously brought to trials. It is this language that lets them hold their own against all odds, aiding in the process of identity formation for Bengalis.

One would opine that a harmonious coexistence and assimilation of both cultures is the solution to the problems of communal and religious enmity. Kalikishore realizes this towards the end. One hopes that brighter and more peaceful days will ensue in the future, when there will be a solid cultural identity for postcolonial Bengalis in Northeast India that is at once independent and assimilative.

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# Delineation of the Issues of Gender Discrimination in Vijay Tendulkar's Sakharam Binder

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**Abstract:** In our society, the position of the marginalized is characterized by a sense of subalternity and negligence. These people do not have adequate place and identity in the society; they are living blighted lives in terms of gender discrimination, class differences, and caste position. Their suffering is long and has been avoided by mostly all Sections; they do not have any voice in relation to their own bodies. They are neglected in all walks of life, subjugated by multiple shades of oppression and domination. Vijay Tendulkar is among those playwrights who speak on behalf of these marginalized sections of the society. His writing stands as a powerful tool for exploring expropriation, deprivation, and degradation of these people. Vijay Tendulkar's plays bear testimony to the fact that he is a true representative of the voice of the marginalized. His approach is unique while representing stories from the side of those ignored group of people. The researchers with a human approach attempt to explore the position of the marginalized with special reference to Vijay Tendulkar's *Sakharam Binder*. In this play Tendulkar has shown how badly women are exploited at every step in the patriarchal society.

**Keywords**: Gender discrimination, Injustice, Violence, Dominance of Patriarchy, Victimization.

"Literature adds to reality; it does not simply describe it. It enriches the necessary competencies that daily life requires and provides; and in this respect, it irrigates the deserts that our lives have already become".

**–Lewis**

It is said that life on the planet is born of a woman but if one looks at the plight of women in society, it seems that fir sex is fair only on paper. Centuries have comes and centuries have gone but the plight of womeni s not likely to change. Time has helplessly watched women's suffering in the form of discrimination, oppression, exploitation, degradation, aggression and humiliation. Nishi Upadhyay observes, "Man's domination over women's body, mind and life is one of the many forms of

colonization that are found in the world" (167) and Tendulkar has dramatized this form of colonization in his plays. Reality with its true shades has been portrayed in Vijay Tendulkar's plays in various shades. Tendulkar has always tried to present controversial issues in his plays, such as gender discrimination, the sufferings of marginalization, corruption in politics, violence, and sexual relationships. Tendulkar has experimented with innovative techniques that made him different from the other playwrights of the time. Such an experiment has been done in the play, *Sakharam Binder*. The play delineated male dominance and exploitation of marginal's in modern society. In *Sakharam Binder*, these marginal's are women and Tendulkar brings to light the sufferings of these women.

It is sad to know that almost all Tendulkar's female characters meekly submit to the injustice, violence, and harassment perpetrated against them. They seem to be helpless and have no other option but to go through the path of life that they have chosen. In *Sakharam Binder,* Sakharam is an opponent of the marriage system. He doesn't believe in the concept of conventional marriages, but he brings deserted women to his house and asks them to serve him as his wife. Vijay Tendulkar has sharply shown Sakharam Binder's curious case of sexual relationships in the play through his relationships with women thereby bringing forth the clear division that society displays between both genders.

Laxmi was abandoned by her husband because she was unable to give him a child. Laxmi is the seventh woman brought by Sakharam to his house. She is portrayed as a shy, innocent, average looking woman who is submissive and timid. An argument with her drunkard husband led to her fleeing the house. Eventually she finds shelter in Sakharam's house. Sakharam instructs her duties, which include cooking, cleaning, and satisfying him sexually. Laxmi possesses a wonderful capacity to adapt herself to the vicissitudes of life without any protests. She silently accepts whatever life has in store for her. She quickly moulds herself to Sakharam's way of life and code of conduct. Soon after arriving in the house, Laxmi settles down in her new environment. After punished by Sakharam for her several lapse in observing the code, she picks it up with its nuances and subtleties. She learns to live with his code and takes charge first of the kitchen, then of the house. Soon she is seen behaving like a typical housewife, holding a considerable influence over Sakharam's household.

Sakharam shows signs of being domesticated a bit under her impact. Sakharam tortures and hurts her physically and verbally, now and then, on slight mistakes. She tolerates it "with the characteristic passivity of a traditional and fatalistic Indian woman…" (Rao 71). She clings to Sakharam because he is her only option to survive. She even starts worshipping him like her 'savior'. Laxmi even begins to regard Sakharam as her savior, her husband and elevates him too, to the stature of 'God'. She secretly

wears a 'Mangalsutra' (in the name of Sakharam) round her neck carefully hidden inside her blouse because otherwise it is impossible for her to enter into the kind of unsanctified union that Sakharam demands. It "demonstrates the pattern of thinking instilled in women by the patriarchal tradition." (Pandit 168).

Sakharam beats Laxmi for talking to an ant and not allowing Dawood (Sakharam's friend) to attend Ganpati puja. Sakharam beats her with a belt, and the abuse continues for months to come for various reasons from evening puja to her opposition to his physical needs. Laxmi, all this while, is portrayed as a humble, religious, pious woman with high moral standards. A twist comes in the play when Laxmi decides to leave Sakharam when she can no longer bear the abuse and torture in the home of Sakharam. The next woman is Champa, who is sold by her mother to Fauzdar Shinde. Fauzdar Shinde marries her, but he was torturing her and insisting that Champa should earn money by prostitution. Shinde is an impotent man but he beats Champa. Shanta Gokhale writes: "His play, *Sakharam Binder* reveals a specific psychopathic attitude of his male protagonist towards women coupled with an erotic interest in Sakharam's coercive sexual behavior. He, for instance, compulsively indulges in violently exploitative sexual orgies with hs women, Shinde, in the same play, is a man who tries to force his wife, Champa, into whoring and thus violates her sense of honour. He is also the one who derives sadistic pleasure by sexually torturing his wife" (146).

By nature, Champa is flamboyant, outspoken, is more exposed to the world, and lives on her own terms. Sakharam brings her to his home as his eighth woman. Champa is "a female mirror of "aggressive masculine behavior like drinks, swears, beats men and certainly is not household angel" (Rai 105). She is a woman who has the guts to walk out of her husband and who can show Sakharam his true place by not behaving like a destitute dependent. In the beginning, she does not allow Sakharam to come near. She not only ignores his rules but also violates them one after another with considerable aplomb. She even repulses Sakharam's advances towards her sternly: "Now look here, I may have walked out on my husband, but I am not that sort of woman. See? I left him because I had my honour to save…Now you just behave youself" (162) but at last, she surrenders herself to Sakharam's instincts because instead of facing "half a dozen animals every day", it is easier "to put up with this one" (118). Champa knows that if she is to survive in Sakharam's house, she will have to fulfil Sakharam's demands. So the only way she can do it "where you forge yourself, by drinking so much that yuou become senseless, no more a mind but only the body, only the animal, the sexual animal" (Mirajkar 51).

Champa involves in sexual relations with Dawood also, which leads her to her death. Sakharam has sexual relationships with many women, but he expects that the woman should be faithful to him when she lives with him. Once the bond is over both, Sakharam and his women are free to do anything. The very marriage system is questioned by Tendulkar in *Sakharam Binder*. Here the sexual relations between Sakharam-Laxmi and Sakharam-Champa bring out the dual violent nature of male and female sexuality. It also shows the double standards practiced by Sakharam who feels free to do anything but have restrictions for his women.

Sakharam throws Laxmi out and brings a new bird to his house-Champa, who is "the antithesis of Laxmi. She leaves her husband as she can no longer bear the sadistic torture of Shinde, her husband, while Laxmi is left by her husband for not bearing children. Champa never bothers about tradition" (Babu 57). Things get complicated after a few days when Laxmi returns. Laxmi comes back to Sakharam's house as she is humiliated and driven out by her nephew on the charge of stealing. At last, the play deals with the worst condition of Sakharam due to the presence of Laxmi and Champa. It also deals with his frustration, aggressive behavior and problem of impotence. His impotence later forces him to beat Laxmi and to kill Champa.

Tendulkar's way of introducing violence through the character Sakharam is remarkably presented. In spite of being a Brahman, Sakharam denies following moral and religious values of his caste and society and on the contrary, becomes the part of violence. Tendulkar represents how hollow men like Sakharam torture and harasses women like Champa and Laxmi physically, mentally, and sexually. The more brutal example of physical force appears in the play when Laxmi is beaten by a belt at the occasion of Ganpati puja. Laxmi objects to Dawood's participation in a Hindu puja because he is a Muslim. She says, "He's a Muslim-and we-we're Hindus" (144). Sakharam gets angry at her reaction and slaps her hard. Champa is first victimized by her parents and later by her husband, Faujdar Shinde, who tortured her physically. She expresses her pain:

> He (Faujdar) brought me from my mother even before I'd become a woman. He married me when I didn't even know what marriage meant. He'd torture me at night. He branded me and stuck needles into me and made me do awful, filthy things. I ran away. He brought me back and stuffed chili powder into that god-awful place, where it hurts most. (167)

Apart from this brutal expression of physical violence, Tendulkar also describes the sexual expression of violence that is inherent in the complex relationship between male and female. Tendulkar portrays a most savage form of sexual violence in the play, through his character Sakharam and his

relationship with various women. He exploits them sexually to fulfill his physical needs and treats them like servants. His conversation with his friend Dawood shows his inhuman nature. It proves him to be a person who does not treat deserted women as a human being and uses them as a thing to play as he says, "While it lasts, she has a roof over her head, and you get home cooked food. That's a cheap way fixing all your appetites" (129). Tendulkar shows how Laxmi is compelled to react against this inhumanity due to her excessive work and his brutal sex. She suddenly bursts out and responds to her oppression as she says:

> …How much more can a person bear? It is a year now since I entered this house. I haven't had a single day's rest. Whether I'm sick or whether it's a festal day. Nothing but work, work, all the time. You torture me whole day, you torture me at night. I'll drop dead one of these days and that will be the end. (146)

In the verbal expression of violence, a victim is subjugated through the abusive language of the victimizer that usually results in the physical expression of violence. Sakharam is presented as an abuser while Laxmi and Champa are subjected to his abuse. Laxmi and Champa both are illiterate so they cannot try to save themselves. They have submitted themselves to their fate. Champa, after subjugation, plays the role of an abuser and targets those who have assaulted her ever. Laxmi and Champa both are verbally oppressed, first by their own husbands and then by Sakharam. Faujdar's vulgar words for Champa, "What a woman! Buttocks this size breast so big …Each …" (165). This statement clarifies that both the men are vulgar and abusive towards women. Verbal violence also affects the mentality of a victim. Sakharam shows his emotional trick of violence when he offers Laxmi some tea and oppresses her verbally too. Sakharam says:

> Sakharam. Have some …
>
> Laxmi. I've left mine inside.
>
> Sakharam. I'll knock out your mouth if I hear that again! I'm offering you tea from my cup, and you tell me yours is in the kitchen (137).

The playwright is a potent force in determining the characters and life of his women. Geeta Kumar asserts that — "there is an underlying current of sympathy towards the women characters created by him" (16). Tendulkar highlights the injustice and absurdity of outsated social customs and the double standards of conventional morality. His play raises an accusing figure towards the nexus between gender and power. It is significant to not those female characters like Champa and Laxmi are the products of

typical patriarchal, social and cultural world. They are also, at the same time, locked up in a struggle against its coercive and constrictive power.

Thus, various sorts of violence can be visualized through each and every character of the play. The female characters are victimized by the hands of the main character Sakharam. Tendulkar has well depicted the fact that women are always marginalized in the male-dominated society. A man like Sakharam provides shelter to the deserted woman and tortures her mentally, physically, sexually, and verbally. Ujwala Karmakar has put it very succinctly in her review of the play *Sakharam Binder*. She says –

> He is unapologetic about his sexual appetites and is uncontrollably violent during his rages, when he gives the women 'what they deserve'. Sadly in a world, cruel to women, he finds women who are desperate enough to agree to his terms. But in his provocative way, Sakharam questions the hypocrisy of the bond of marriage. (148)

Tendulkar was a firm believer of the fact that good and evil both co-exist in every human begin and similarly love and violence are a part of one's self. Violence is a part and parcel of the character of each and every person, only its proportion differs from one person to another. Sakharam shows his violent side by threatening abusing and beating the women in his life but strangely enough, one also sees gender stereotypes breaking as both Champa and Laxmi show a different side of their characters. Champa becomes the provocateur, who provokes Sakharam to a point where he murders her. She had become the abuser and kept on taunting Sakharam to the ultimate end where he commits the crime. When Sakharam is petrified after killing Champa, Laxmi suddenly exhibits the innate violence in her personality by soothing him with the statement that it was not a murder but a killing of a sinner. Laxmi, who till now appeared so submissive and an embodiment of virtues, now helps Sakharam in disposing off the body of Champa. So on one hand, we have Sakharam, Fauzdar Shinde and Dawood as the abusive and violent males, we also see the changes in the personalities of the females like Laxmi and Champa.

Tendulkar has tried to catch different nuances and complexities of female psyche arising from their exploitation and marginalization. It is to be noted that Tendulkar seems to suggest that it is their emotional attachment, their desire to conform to tradition and the impact of socialization that makes them vulnerable. Tendulkar does not just present the panoramic picture of violence in middle-class society; instead, he wants to convey his message to the reader that women are not a commodity of the male in society. She has her identity and respect at home and out of the home. Gender discrimination,

harassment, violence, gender inequality, injustice, all kind of torture on women must be ended. But seeing the expansion of violence in daily life, Tendulkar believed that violence cannot be driven out from society as well as from the mind of people as he asserts:

> Unlike communists, I don't think that violence can be eliminated in a classless society, or, for that matter, in any society. The spirit of aggression is something that the human being is born with. Not that's bad. Without violence, man would have turned into a vegetable. (Mahida 14)

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# Diaspora in East is East: Exploring Cultural hybridity and Hyphenated Identities

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**Abstract:** Diaspora or displacement of people from their native land always inculcates a feeling of 'homesickness' and struggle to identify with the new land's culture. Struggles to accommodate with the new culture result in the adaptation of the dominant culture creating a hybrid identity, where they want to cling to their national identity but also want to assimilate into the new culture and eventually fails to associate with either of the cultures. In my paper, I will attempt to discuss the case of Diaspora in the film 'East is East' by Damien O'Donnell as well as the consequences it leads to, such as 'cultural hybridity' and 'hyphenated identity'. The film focuses on a half Pakistani, half British family where George Khan, aka Zahir Khan, the patriarch of the family, tries to impose his cultural, ideological beliefs and a Pakistani identity on his children who are born and brought up in Salford and doesn't assert themselves as Pakistanis.

**Keywords**: Diaspora, Hybridity, Postcolonial, Culture, and Identity.

## Introduction:

Homi K Bhabha in the postcolonial discourse on his theory of cultural difference, elaborates on the concept of 'hybridity' and the 'Third space of Enunciation'. Bhabha challenges T.S Eliot's views in his' Notes towards the Definition of Culture' that any culture or identity is uncontaminated or pure, arguing that 'all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity'. According to Bhabha, Cultural hybridity, in the most common sense, refers to the emergence of a newly constructed identity as a result of colonizer-colonized relations and interaction. Moreover, space, where this transformation and construction occurs, is referred to as the 'Third Space of Enunciation.' The product is the emergence of a new transcultural form in an ambivalent space where there is no 'primordial unity or fixity' in cultural meaning or representation.

The displacement of people from their native land or 'homeland,' referred to as Diaspora often leads to the creation of 'hyphenated identities' where individuals fail to associate themselves with either the land or the new land's culture. In contrast, in response to the Diaspora, they reshape or alter their identity to assimilate with the new culture. In my paper, I will attempt to discuss the case of Diaspora in the film 'East is East' by Damien O'Donnell as well as the consequences it leads to such as cultural hybridity' and 'hyphenated identity'.

**The Film:**

'East is East' is a film directed by Damien O'Donnell which is based on the autobiographical play written by Ayub Khan-Din focusing on a half Pakistani, half British family where George Khan aka Zahir Khan, the patriarch of the family, tries to impose his cultural ideological beliefs and a Pakistani identity on his children who are born and brought up in Salford and doesn't assert themselves as Pakistanis. George had moved to Salford in 1937, leaving his Pakistani wife behind in the homeland and marrying a British woman, Ella, with who he has six children.

The film's title has been derived from 'The Ballad of East and West' written by Rudyard Kipling with prejudiced views on the position of East in the world. The quote '*East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet*' signifies the vast difference between the two cultures embodies. However, in the film, the East and the West meet to create hybrid identities that the characters struggle with.

The first scene of the film showcases the cultural conflict present within the family when a Christian procession occurs with the children and Ella participating in them without being seen by George. George's unexpected arrival alerts the family member with the raising of the alarm of the code 'Red Alert' supposedly used for hiding from George. From the onset of the film, the dilemma of the children who are swaying between two cultures wherein they adhere to the British identity that is unwilling to accept them while the Muslim identity is imposed upon them that they are reluctant to accept as theirs, therefore, living in a state of Trishanku.

**Cultural Clash:**

The multicultural British society represented in the film results from the migration of people from the previous colonies after the Second World War. This multi-ethnic British society shapes children's cultural identity that comprises the language, beliefs, lifestyle, food, clothes, etc. The children reassert their 'Englishness' by rebelling against George's traditional Pakistani identity and giving into the hegemonic and dominant English identity. They try to assimilate by switching to English

names 'Tony' and 'Arthur' to enter a disco that prohibits Pakistanis, drinking alcohol and eating bacon which is prohibited in Islam, Nazir escapes from his arranged Muslim wedding in order to adapt to the British culture which results into their hybrid identities.

**Different generations**:

George, belonging to the first generation Diaspora, fails to understand his children's predicament situation who are mixed race and identify themselves as British. Moreover, he enforces Pakistani culture and religious practices on his children that they fail to understand. The children, belonging to the second generation of Diaspora, feels alienated from the Pakistani culture because of being mixed race and brought up in an English environment comprising of school and friends. The children consider Pakistanis as 'other' when they refer to them as 'Pakis' when Abdul and Tariq find out about the secret arranged marriage that is being planned by his father, Tariq furiously exclaims, 'I'm not going to marry a fucking Paki'. Being from different generations of Diaspora, they suffer from different issues as their aspirations and inspirations are different and clash with each other. As a result, the children feel suffocated in this 'in-between' space that endorses a sense of alienation and 'fractured identity' and cannot belong to either of the cultures. Stuart Hall in 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora' states that-

*"Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power."*

Hall argues about the changes and adaptations resulting from what one goes through in the process of 'becoming'. The children are placed in this liminal position as a result of the culture clash they experience.

**Education and Language:**

Communities living in Diaspora are often compelled to adapt to the new land's predominant social, political, and cultural norms, which results in a hybrid identity. However, George forcefully imposed Pakistani education and language on his children. Before getting his elder son prepared for his wedding, Nazir, he gifts him a watch with his name inscribed in it in Arabic. He receives these similar watches for Abdul and Tariq as well while planning their wedding. George uses language to connect his children to Pakistani culture, whereas his children use language to reassert their identity by calling

Pakistanis' Paki'. The children are forcibly taken to the mosque by George and made to recite Urdu prayers where they appear lost and disinterested. When the van arrives to take the children, they run and hide, which makes George furious, and he exclaims, 'I'll fix them' believing there is something wrong with them that needs to be fixed.

**Stereotyping Culture:**

With George's portrayal as a strict Muslim father who imposes Pakistani culture upon his children and wife, a stereotypical figure of an oppressive male has been created. He sees Islam as the most beautiful religion that considers everyone equal where there is no black man or a white man. He supports polygamy's patriarchal practice, saying 'first wife always treat second wife like sister…All live together happy'.

George tries to keep the traditional rituals and practices alive by following them and imposing them on his mixed-race children. Sajid is immediately circumcised as required by Islamic preaching when George discovers that he has accidentally missed being circumcised. He fails to acknowledge that Pakistan has also evolved as has started accepting other cultures. Meenah is criticized for wearing a saree that has become quite popular in Pakistan. Even after failing to get Nazir married to a Pakistani, he arranges another wedding for Abdul and Tariq with his friend, Mr Shah's daughters. These outrageous negative stereotypes about the Pakistanis have been foreground with humour, which creates a balance.

**Survival tactics:**

In order to escape from the atrocities of their father, the children try to escape by secretly engaging in rebellious activities such as sneaking out to night clubs, going out with white women, drinking alcohol, eating bacon, etc. The children try to strike a balance between contrasting expectations and aspirations.

The children are willing to reject any assertion of Pakistani culture upon them. Nazir and his siblings fail to understand the significance of Pakistani marriage's rituals and beliefs and make fun of the ornaments and costumes that Nazir is adorned with for his arranged Pakistani wedding. However, he escapes his fate by fleeing from the ceremony and later come out as a homosexual.

Instead of studying engineering that his father supposes he does, Saleem attends art school without his father's knowledge. Whereas, Sajid protects himself by hiding behind his parka hood from the harsh realities of the world and his father's oppression.

**East and West:**

The stereotypical image of Pakistanis in Britain is presented in the film. George dominates over his wife and children and demands submission and respect. He is represented as a patriarch. Aspiring to raise his children as good Muslims and tame his wife into a proper Muslim wife who obeys him and is submissive, George strictly follows the beliefs of his culture as well as oppresses his family to do the same. He also happens to inflict violence upon his wife and children as an instrument of obedience when his demands are met with a rebellion. Moreover, he abandons his elder son, Nazir, who fails to marry according to his father's wishes and flees, exposing the fanatic nature of George's devotion to his religion that he places before his family.

George's character is flawed and complex, which projects him in a negative light, creating a stereotypical Muslim character. However, his behavior is very likely to be the result of his experiences in a foreign land that will 'never accept him' and people like him as well as his longing for his native land that he feels alienated from and strives to be accepted in the local Muslim community. George appears the most complicated character as he wants his son to marry into Pakistani families while he himself married a white woman. It seems like George is
alienated from his culture and has absorbed the British culture by adopting a traditional English name, which might be the reason for his repeated effort to cling to his national identity. George's patriotism has been intensified with the mention of the India Pakistan conflict and war of 1971 as he criticizes India and defends his country, therefore, asserting his culture and belief.

**Xenophobia:**

The speech 'Rivers of Blood' by Conservative MP, Enoch Powell, featured in the film, highlights the English people's worries. The English treated the immigrants badly and considered them 'outsiders' motivated by the knowledge they've 'taken over'. Powell, in his speech, remarks:

*"While, to the immigrant, entry to this country was admission to privileges and opportunities eagerly sought, the impact upon the existing population was very different. For reasons which they could not comprehend, and in pursuance of a decision by default, on which they were never consulted, they found themselves made strangers in their own country."*

The British people worried not only about the immigrants but also their descendants that will later constitute a major of the population and exercise domination over the rest of the population as a result of increasing racial prejudices against them. George's neighbour, Mr Moorhouse, doesn't accept

the Pakistani family and paste Powell's poster on his wall and call them 'Paki'. However, his grandchildren are not corrupted by the hate and get along with George's family quite well, with Earnest often greeting him in Urdu.

**Nostalgia:**

People in Diaspora often carry their identity with them when they move to a foreign land, which they try to impose on things around them by manipulating or transforming them. As Powell in his speech 'River of Blood' talks about the complete erasure of a community from an area after the expansion of cultural diversity, similarly, people try to create a locality or colony that resembles their homeland with the notion of seeking belongingness in the unfamiliar land. In the film, Bradford has been transformed into Bradistan, which comprises a majority of the Pakistani population with streets filled with Pakistani outlets and cinema screening a Bollywood film, Bradford has been transformed into a mini Pakistan. George also laments not bringing up
his children in Bradford, thinking they might have been influenced by the dominant Pakistani culture and had turned out as 'proper Muslims'.

**Conclusion:**

Throughout the film, the vast cultural difference within George's family as well as outside is quite evident. 'East is East' is not only a tale of the hybrid identities that second generational immigrant have to deal with, but it is also about assertion their identity within the space of 'home' which doesn't prove as safe, secure and comfortable for them as it is generally perceived to be. It is a tale about freedom from oppression that is inflicted upon the children by their own father and creates a suffocating, anxious surrounding for them to grow up in. George's failure to understand the plight of his children makes them alienated from each other as well as themselves, creating a sense of dislocation and identity crisis. George's entire family doesn't fit into either the Pakistani community or the British community and lives with a multicultural identity.

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# The Real and the Absurd: An Examination of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*

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**Abstract**: A cursory glance at Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1954) manifests a seemingly incongruous play that appears to lack a concrete objective. The play's placement within the genre of theatre of the absurd in combination with its covert aim of establishing the fundamental reality presented within the fabric of the philosophy of existentialism often exhibits its detachment from realism and reality. Conversely, the play is actually an attempt to demonstrate the futility of human life by utilising the recurrence of the absurd to serve as a testimony of the reality of the meaninglessness of human life. Incorporation of imagery associated with the absurd is thus a means to imitate and reflect the absurdity of reality as is perceived by human consciousness. While the realisation of the fragility of human existence is evoked under the traumatic conditions created by war, it is nonetheless imperative to examine the disruption of conventional forms of literature with the ambivalent dialogues in the genre of theatre of the absurd that use the radical devaluation of language to suggest the possibility of multiple interpretations. The paper attempts to study the seemingly illogical sequence of actions in *Waiting for Godot* to analyse the development of a literary portrayal of universal reality through the usage of absurd imagery.

**Keywords**: Waiting for Godot, Existentialism, Realism, Absurd, Real.

## The Real and the Absurd: An Evaluation of 'Reality'

The emergence of realism in the 1840s in Europe and America has been attributed to the works of Flaubert and Balzac in France, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy in Russia, George Eliot and Charles Dickens in England, and William Dean Howells and Henry James in America. However, Ian Watt proposes that modern realism has its origins in Descartes and Locke. The fundamental aim of the movement of realism has been a passionate desire to oppose the foundations upon which Romanticism and subjectivism were constructed so as to enable the communication of 'accuracy' and the representation of an 'objective' reality.

Realist writers have incorporated various narrative strategies like the addition of descriptive detail, avoidance of any event associated with fantasy, elimination of unlikely scenarios and placement

of emphasis on the social collective. The individual often becomes the primary protagonist whose worldview governs the narration. By showcasing immediate reality, realism has been labelled as successful in its representation of the 'real'. Since the 'absurd' lies in opposition to the 'real', the absurd is generally denied access to the communication of reality.

Existentialism, often confused with empiricism, humanism, idealism, pragmatism and nihilism, is one of the many successors of realism in literature. Since Kierkegaard is unanimously regarded as the father of modern existentialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, his perception of the philosophy is a typical viewpoint shared by many other existentialists. Representation of existentialism in literature has been profoundly appreciated by the production of the genre of theatre of the absurd.

Nietzsche is the next significant figure involved in philosophising the politics of existentialism: he discards Kierkegaard's model since the former's 'existential syndrome' compels him to dismiss Kierkegaard's orthodox conventions of Christianity, which he even terms as "a continuous suicide of reason". Nietzsche's groundbreaking book titled, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1969), claims the death of God and asserts the urgency of the mutilation of the human spirit within his doctrine of the superman.

However, while the death of God leads to the liberation of the human spirit, it also inaugurates the age of nihilism where the human is positioned in an absurd universe without any foreseeable purpose. Critics like M.M. Bozmann aptly state that Nietzsche's philosophy ends in paradox like Kierkegaard's did.

The examination of existentialism in philosophy and literature has initiated research in the exploration of its thesis. Heidegger's *Being and Time* is claimed to be the most impressive examination of human existence to have emerged from the movement that was inaugurated by Kierkegaard. Camus, too, is another significant figure who has developed the embryo of existentialist philosophy and concretised it within his works, particularly "The Myth of Sisyphus" (1991).

The works of Beckett and Kafka are largely influenced by Camus' development of existentialism. Camus, an anti-theist, evolves the existentialism of the absurd by using the symbol of Sisyphus' continual struggle to signify the futility of human effort. Beckett expounds the philosophy theorised by Camus to influence the retention of though captured within existentialism in popular imagination and thus prevent the term's conversion into a jejune expression.

An examination of Beckett's works, particularly his plays and radio plays, elucidate his deliberate incorporation of implicit meaning that is often lost within literary expression conveyed through discursive language. V.A. Kolve argues that Beckett's excellence in defining narratology and

narrative technique enables him to forge complicated relationships with both existential philosophy as well as Christian theology. The duality of imagery produced as a consequence of this effort complicates the understanding of authorial intention.

This paper attempts to analyse *Waiting for Godot* to study the reflection of universal reality within the genre of theatre of the absurd. It briefly discusses the failure of realism to account for reality and proposes the ability of absurdist literature to present a more reliable version of the reality of human existence.

**Situating the Absurd in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot***

Martin Esslin's *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1961) is the first groundbreaking critical study of the emergence of unconventional theatrical forms that deviate from dramatic conventions and psychological realism to highlight the absurdity that envelops the core of human existence. Esslin is one of the founders to create appropriate nomenclature for the rubric of the absurd, which remains the chief concern of playwrights like Beckett, Ionesco and Pinter. By utilising Camus' philosophy of the absurd, Esslin argues that the plays within the category of the theatre of the absurd investigate the "metaphysical anguish" of the human condition to purport the absolute meaninglessness of human life and the consequent futility of action.

However, by assuming that Beckett's imagination refutes the existence of a God, Esslin is unable to formulate a coherent understanding of Beckett's works. Edith Kern's comment on Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in 1954 provides a better overview of Beckett's philosophical world: Kern's analysis enables the readers to perceive Beckett's vision by positioning human tenderness as the producer of falsified meaning and strength that ultimately provides humans the will to live in the absence of a God-like redeemer.

The genre of theatre of the absurd is detached from the realm of realism in popular imagination because its underlying ambiguity fails to create objective conclusions for an audience that thrives on narrative closure. Indeed, the genre is representative of the absurdity that lies in the philosophical mission to explore the mystery and 'purpose' of human existence. It is the usage of ambiguous imagery and inconsistent dialogue that give artistic expression to the subconscious anxiety of human mind. In this way, the absurd becomes a means to acknowledge and accept the governing principles of reality.

Beckett insists that *Waiting for Godot* (1954) articulates, "The irrational state of unknowingness wherein we exist, this mental weightlessness which is beyond reason. All that can be attempted is to see what questions are being asked in this play, though the questions remain unanswered." The absence of

concrete answers including the uncertainty of Godot's arrival illustrates the inevitability of human life as a static continuum that ends with death.

The play's obsession with time is evident in the repetition of the first act in the second act with a moderately different sequence and refashioned dialogue. The act of waiting for Godot is, in fact, demonstrative of doing nothing and doing something at the same moment because waiting constitutes inaction, not simply the absence of activity. Angelie Multani argues that waiting allows Estragon and Vladimir to formulate an illusion of engaging in a supposedly meaningful activity to escape the existential dread. However, the the monotony of waiting for a possibly non-existent entity makes boredom a narrative tool to escalate the tension between Vladimir and Estragon for subtly asserting the purposelessness of action in a world governed by the precariousness of time.

Pozzo's dialogue ("Remark that I might easily have been in his shoes, and he in mine," p.24) is a significant contribution to the thematic construct of time by implying Beckett's suggestion of the crystallisation of the element of chance in human destiny and the consequent despair stemming from the absolute inability of find meaning in human existence: since existence does not have a rational basis, the world is governed by the random and the uncertain that refute all attempts to find meaning.

The anxiety experienced by Estragon and Vladimir is symbolic of human uncertainty about the philosophical implication of human life. Both characters are always engaged in action to evade the horror of existing: they talk to each other, contemplate suicide, meet Pozzo and Lucky and attempt to think and remember to pass time. The breakdown of language enables to multiply the impact of human anxiety experienced by both characters by ensuring repetition of seemingly dull dialogue interspersed with silence.

Beckett's construction of the character of Godot is evidently an ironic allusion to the foundation of religion. Human tendency to believe in a God-like redeemer is an emblematic act that consciously rejects the reality of the futility of life to escape the existential dread by creating meaning in an otherwise absurd universe. This is another philosophical comment by Beckett that dismantles popular beliefs in a comic yet disturbing manner.

However, the portrayal of the hopeless expectation of salvation works concomitantly to function as an indicator of the necessity of believing in a divine presence. It is the hope of Godot's arrival that allows Estragon and Vladimir to continue living despite their acknowledgement of the absurdity of human life. If they stop believing in Godot, will there be any hope to continue a temporary period of existence that has no consequence whatsoever? While Beckett acknowledges the fruitlessness of blind

faith, he suggests that the refutation of the existence of God breeds a sense of dissatisfaction and despair because there is no possibility for redemption.

By situating *Waiting for Godot* within the bracket of religious existentialism, insights pertaining to Christian allegory can be uncovered to comprehend the positioning of religion. For instance, the audience is explicitly informed that Estragon and Vladimir will be "saved" after Godot's arrival since he is representative of an external figure that can inaugurate change in their largely immobile lives. During the painful period of waiting, the play exposes the reality of the artificiality of social discourse, the boredom concentrated in the act of waiting, the unreliability of salvation from a divine redeemer, the hollowness of religions that claim an inherent sense of certainty, and the uncertainty of expectation from Godot in case Godot arrives.

Adnan Ali Badar argues that the act of waiting that keeps Estragon and Vladimir engaged is ultimately hopeless since it will end only with death, not divine salvation. Even if the characters are trying to fill the time between their birth and death by ascribing significant meaning to the arrival of Godot, the fact that they inevitably meet with failure corroborates the supposition that human action is fundamentally meaningless. Beckett succeeds in presenting this portrayal through outright absurdity to induce humour into the play.

The suffering endured by all the characters during the time period of the play reflects Camus' proposition in *The Stranger* (1989): "But everybody knows that life isn't worth living. Deep down I knew perfectly well that it doesn't matter whether you die at thirty or at seventy, since in either case other men and women will naturally go on living—and for thousands of years…Since we're all going to die, it's obvious that when and how don't matter" (p.114).

Though Beckett never directly instructs his audience to escape life by turning to suicide, the framework of *Waiting for Godot* implies the absolute futility of life where death is the only certainty. That Estragon and Vladimir are hopelessly waiting in an excruciatingly monotonous and repetitive universe reiterates Camus' assertion of the worthlessness of living in a body confined by its limited imagination. Even when Estragon and Vladimir create artificial and temporary meaning to sustain their patience for Godot's arrival, the audience is made to appreciate the appeal of a death-like escape from the "net" of perpetual prosaicness in which the two protagonists are caught.

Sartre rightly asserts that word "existentialism" is so loosely applied so many things "that it no longer means anything at all." The works of Camus and Beckett mirror this kind of duality. Although Camus reinstates the worthlessness of life, he also suggests that humans encounter the true state of the

absurd when they are unable to create temporary meaning for this existence: this state of the absurd is termed as "philosophical suicide." Beckett's seemingly hopeless *Waiting for Godot* exemplifies the futility of human existence while simultaneously exhibiting the creation of artificial discourse between Estragon and Vladimir to ensure the passage of time until death. The existentialist style of philosophising is, therefore, hopeless and hopeful at the same time.

**Situating the Real in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot***

Although *Waiting for Godot* appears detached from what popular imagination perceives as 'reality', the play is actually closer to reality than realist literature. Social realism in the novels of Jane Austen and neorealism in the films of Calvino and Roberto Rossellini undertake the responsibility of using literature as a means of representing life in its immediate reality. The reflection of the popular perception of the 'real' makes realism a widely favourable genre for concretising the perception of reality.

In contrast, theatre of the absurd has generally been viewed as a genre that is dissociated from what constitutes the 'real'. While critics acknowledge the genre's potency in articulating a fraction of the philosophy of existentialism through theatrical performances, its capacity to express the fundamental reality of human existence remains divorced within critical opinion from the immediate reality portrayed by realism.

As a philosophical construct, existentialism raises deeply complex questions about human existence, action, recollection and repetition in daily life, conflict between existence and essence, and constant anticipation of 'something'. It surpasses the capacity of realism and realist literature to characterise reality. Realism attempts to constantly redefine the immediate reality in various geographical spaces: for instance, Austen's version of reality is different from Richardson's. However, existentialist literature, particularly theatre of the absurd, seeks to comprehend the universal reality without claiming the authenticity of any particular rendition.

Beckett is one of the many playwrights who endeavours to observe and examine human existence and the illusion of a definite reality. His works acknowledge the inherent absurdity of human existence and allow him a temporary escape from the existential dread by creating artificial meaning in his life. While his plays have been characterised within the bracket of the absurd, they embrace the absurdity that is inherent in human action: therefore, while Beckett succeeds in exposing his implied audience to the reality of the absurdity of existence, he does so by engaging in the absurd act of creating plays to pass his own time as long as he is alive.

The absurdity of playwrights who contribute toward theatre of the absurd is their acknowledgement of their conscious act of engaging in futile human action to evade their knowledge of the reality of meaningless existence. The absurd thus becomes a better representative of the real than real itself since the real is actually the absurd: the absurd reality of human existence can be best explained by absurd literature because realist works of fiction are incapable of comprehending or articulating a universal understanding of reality.

Estragon and Vladimir's constant experiment with action is the only means of ensuring some acknowledgment of their existence. To confirm that they exist, they strive to act by talking, remembering, eating and struggling. In *Waiting for Godot*, human suffering becomes the ultimate confirmation of existence: the act of waiting for Godot is itself a form of suffering to which Estragon and Vladimir cling because their anticipation for Godot's arrival helps them to find a pretext for living.

Beckett's radio play titled, *Breath,* is another example of critical commentary on the reduction of duration to fulfil the principle of anti-theatrical strategy for using minimalism as a narrative tool to expound the politics of existentialism. That *Breath* refutes its confinement in any definite genre further amplifies its interpretative scope within the ambit of existentialist literature produced for dramatic or theatrical purposes.

In *'Breath': Anti-Theatricality and the Visual Arts*, Sozita Goudouna (2019) illustrates that breathing in *Breath* urges an enquiry into the human body's 'medial' relationship with the world. The theme of corporeality also recurs in *Waiting for Godot* as the bodies of Pozzo and Lucky degenerate with the vicissitudes of time. This is another crucial demonstration of the 'existing' body's relationship with the external world that is governed by an absurdist principle that apparently lies beyond the ambit of human comprehension.

Therefore, absurdist literature overcomes the restrictions imposed upon realist literature by geography, race, history, culture, authorial intention, etc. While Beckett's plays have a distinct 'essence', they ultimately 'exist' within and for the broader category of existentialist literature. *Waiting for Godot* is a particularly complex play that questions the socially approbated version of reality by challenging all fundamental assumptions that humankind takes for granted.

The play presents an interrogation of existence, an evaluation of routine in human experience, and a profound need of ascribing meaning to insignificant goals and accomplishments for passing time to fill the emptiness of the void created by meaninglessness of the world as well as human failure to find meaning in a meaningless world.

*Waiting for Godot* reinstates the superficiality and limitation of discourse propagated by realism since the fundamental reality of futility of human life is depicted by absurdist literature. Waiting for Godot is a means for Estragon and Vladimir to seek haven in the anticipation of the fulfilment of an unlikely objective so as to continue living with a sense of purpose. The theatre of the absurd is, therefore, an extremely nuanced exploration of the human condition to search for meaning and inevitably fail in its attempt to do so.

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