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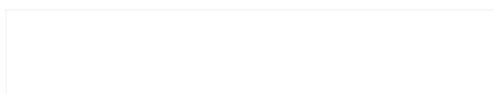


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Editorial

The July 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 May 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 seven research/critical articles, in this issue. Before concluding, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my reverend Associate Editor and 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

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

Nasmeem Farhin Akhtar

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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.

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

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 mediapersons 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 ‘secondhand nonexperience’, 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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Impression of Motherhood : Consternation and Endearment in the short stories of Binapani Mohanty

Chinmayee Nanda

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Abstract: Ms. Binapani Mohanty is a renowned short story writer in Odia, India. Her reflection basically includes a feminist perspective. My paper focuses on her observation of motherhood and how a mother dwindle between her role as a mother and, performing the same and in case of failure how it leads to anxiety. She has portrayed varieties of women as mothers- working women mothers, home maker mothers, single mothers, deserted mothers, rich mother or poor mother. In an Indian society, she is expected never to defy her role as a mother. A mother is definitely affectionate and her position in her children's life is something unparalleled. Attaining motherhood makes her a complete woman where as inability to become a mother makes her life horrible. However, she does not hold the authority to decide when to become pregnant and how many children she desires for. It is again the jurisdiction of patriarchy which decides the same for her. Hence, though motherhood brings the most delightful experience for any woman, with in the clutches of patriarchy, to what extent actually it becomes enjoyable for her, Mohanty has exhibited through her select short stories.

Keywords: Motherhood, anxiety, maternal fondness, patriarchy, feminism, pregnancy.

Introduction:

Ms. Binapani Mohanty is a Retired Professor of Economics, who is an academician, a short story writer in Odia. Her interest in Literature compels her to read, reflect and eventually write what all she experiences in the society. So far, she has published around 29 collections of

stories. Almost 500 stories have been published in different newspapers and magazines. Her works are being translated into various other Indian as well as foreign languages, English, Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Bengali, Urdu, Telugu, Russian etc. Mohanty's short story *Patadei* was first translated into English and subsequently got aired at Delhi Doordarshan in a programme called *Kasmakash* in the year 1987. The collection of short stories *Patadei* had won the Kendra Sahitya Akademi Award. Besides also, she has won many other awards and accolades for her creative contribution.

Her portrayal is quite realistic, her writings reflect a true picture of Odia vis-a-vis Indian society. This paper primarily focuses on her concern for mothers, their issues, their psychology, fulfillment and frustration. So basically she has shown the mothers, the way they are. Operation of patriarchy becomes quite crucial in this context, though at times latent yet very much instrumental. Her projection of families in the contemporary society she has been living is a true one. In her stories, at times she is a successful mother and wife, where as in other stories she is being dejected and downplayed by her husband and children too. The basic question lies in whether motherhood and pregnancy brings fulfillment or resentment in a woman, as she has to shoulder multiple responsibilities, at times beyond her capacity. It sounds too superficial to conclude that the only fulfillment lies in attaining motherhood. Rather aftermath, the various changes she has to undergo, becomes crucial in her changing psychology. She has been tormented, tortured. In a family structure, woman has to play varieties of roles. Primarily she is a mother. The writer has been specially attracted towards the status of motherhood. Her sacrifices and affection towards her children is unparalleled. Irrespective of the social status, elite, middle class or lower class, a mother remains nonpareil. She always bears that motherly tenderness and warmth but at times due to the financial condition and cultural environment too

decides her approach as soft or rude. So a mother plays a pivotal role in her family as well as the society. Both Betty Friedan and Juliet Mitchell found the family to be the lynch pin in an ideology which offered feminine fulfillment within the confines of the home and apart from a world of self-creative and paid work. (Friedan,36)

Her first collection of short stories *Nabataranga* has one such piece reflecting a mother's affection, *Naaugachha*. *Naugachha* refers to a tree and it bears the symbol of a joint family. In Mohanty's words:

Sitaa dinia chhitthi re Bou ku khushi karibaa paen naugachha sambandha re samaste bou ku chitthi lekhandi. Aji b sitaa aase...golapa au hena ra khabar ase chitthi re..mafasali naugachha ra khabar mafasali bou saathire jepari luchi jaichhi...(Mohanty,50) (My translation: Letters during the Winters would definitely include mention of naaugachha so as to please mother...today also winters arrive...letters speak about roses and other flowers... but it seems as if both naaugachha and bou(mother) have taken a shelter somewhere..)

In the above story, Bou(addressing mother in Odia language) is the affectionate mother. Her daughter is ultra modern yet, gradually she is missing the presence of her mother and reminded of her childhood memories associated with that tree and her mother. She has been quiet throughout, but after her demise only her absence is more felt by her children. To a larger extent, that is true. Today's generation hardly feels the mother's contribution until she stops doing so. Here this particular tree is serving as a token of remembrance for the children. They can feel the void after her eternal departure.

Asta Chandra Ra Kabita (Panthasala o' Raktakaribi), Mohanty has portrayed another character Himadri, a mother of two daughters. She is neither too much modern nor an outdated

lady, but of course quite contemporary. But she is unable to raise both her daughters in a similar fashion. Terry Apter has shown the same psychology in his work regarding grown up female individuals that,

adolescence is a time of rebellion against parents , a time of detaching oneself from parents and turning to peers for self validation. It is a construction of adolescence which has also been reproduced and applied to black female adolescence in which it is stated that in mid-adolescence, a teenager will push herself away from family and become more closely allied to peers. And separation and independence between a female adolescent and her parents are constructed through conflict and questions of control. (Apter, 77)

So the mother is unable to accept the transformation in relation. She is disturbed for the same as if the onus is solely on her for their upbringing. Moreover, she tries to draw that assimilation between herself and her daughters.

In *Chameli Ra Cha (Kasturi Mriga O' Sabuja Aranya)*, Chameli is a poor mother, she is being addressed as Buli's mother, a very usual address for any mother in our Indian context. She is just a perfect portrayal of a poverty stricken wife and mother. Mohanty writes:

Goli ra bapa katha kahana kahana...ee deha ki kasta na sahichhi...chhati pathara kali..deha ku kathina kali..chari dina re mande torani jutena juba bayasa re. telaa haladi katha chhada. Manaku kana jutilaa kejaani- pana dokana tie kari basili-jhia o mu basuthaee. Taaku tah fer baha debi.”(Mohanty,184) (My translation: just don't ask about Goli's father..what not I have suffered..toiled everything..became more strong..almost unable to feed my young daughters...I thought...and finally opened a paan shop..both my daughter and I manage there.. It is I have who have to get her married too.)

Here Chameli's husband is unable to earn and support the family. But a mother has to overcome all odds to shoulder the responsibility. Plight of a poor mother is really heartbreaking. In this case as the mother is a poor woman, she becomes doubly disadvantageous.

In *Satidaha (Sayanha Ra Swara)*, the difficulties of a working mother is being reflected. The female protagonist undergoes mental torment as she is incapable of fostering her children. It leads to anxiety and frustration which she fails to overcome. Her only attempt is to provide proper education to her son Tuku. Mohanty writes:

“Why did not he chose the right path? She has not yet got the answer. Who will answer to this question? My flesh and blood, so much of hardship and just to earn money, for what reason? For whom?”(Mohanty,115)

In this context, I quote from Friedan,

The ‘self sacrificing’ mom when hard pressed may admit hesitatingly that perhaps she does look ‘played out’ and is actually a bit tired, but she chirps brightly ‘what of it’?...the implication is that she does not care how she looks or feels..For in her heart there is the unselfish joy of service. From dawn until late at night she finds her happiness in doing for her children. The house belongs to them.(Friedan, 160)

A mother's heart always weeps for the goodwill of her children and that is the sole reason a mother's love is invaluable. Another poor mother in the story *Swapna Agami Prabhata re*, Subhadra's only purpose in life is to educate her only son Aju. She belongs to the lower strata of the society, being a helping hand to many; she earns their bread and butter. Another painful chapter of her life which she actually does not reveal in front of her son is her husband has deserted them. Only way is to persuade him otherwise, so Aju does not misunderstand his father.

Here the innocent child keeps on dreaming that the day his father would arrive, he would bring lot of goodies for him. But this situation becomes heart wrenching for her. In Mohanty's words:

falatah lathan re telaa pakau pakau se kaandi uthichhi karana chhua tah kichhi bujhini, swapna dekhuchhi, michha kahi taaku bhulauthibaara annichhakruta jantrana subhadra ra chhati bhitara ta kori nei jauchhi.”(Mohanty,10)(My translation: Consequently while putting oil in the lantern, she starts crying. Because her innocent child does not understand the worldly affairs, dreaming, and she is guilt-ridden even though unwillingly she has to lie to her son about his father's whereabouts. She is in a wretched condition.)

Though she is distressed, yet she has to conceal the same anxiety due to her son.

In another story *Byuhabheda*, Malati has no other option rather to work outside home so as to financially support her family. Hence, she is doubly burdened, at home as well as her workplace. The writer reflects:

If she is scared of the chilling cold how would she take care of her family? Specifically if she does not work, if does not bear the responsibility of a mother and wife, why would her family or the society would approve of her? For this approval only, for this self worth, she has been compromising on many things. But no one in her family has ever acknowledged or sympathized with her. (Mohanty, 100)

I quote, “These tensions are compounded for women in paid employment who are most often the primary or "psychological parent" responsible not only for the material functioning of the household but also "for the whereabouts and the feelings of each child.”(Curtis, 42)

Mohanty's portrayal lies in her brutal honesty and presentation of the characters, the way they are. So basically it is never a superficial reading rather an intense observation about motherhood. Ironical though it may sound yet, at times a mother's desire and want for a male child seems to be peculiar, mostly affected by the culture they are living in. When a woman has to carry forward the lineage through giving birth to a male child, she has no other option left rather to seek for a male child. Even today one can find in the Indian society, love for a boy child over a girl child.

In *Sruti O' Srastaa* has a similar portrayal of a mother Anuradha. She is so much in want of a male child that she forgets about her own daughter Shelly. To the extent she keeps on ignoring her and hating her. Even she has forgotten her dead daughter Pally, which is so unlikely in case of a mother. Though a mother's affection and love is quite spontaneous yet culture is also controlling and contributing for the same in a way. But Anuradha's husband is unable to forget their dead child. There is this stark contrast which does exist in the society. Anuradha is not the ideal mother which usually Mohanty keeps on projecting. So a father's love has dominated over mother's affection. Through this portrayal Mohanty tries to draw attention that when being a mother, a woman lacks solidarity and keeps on discriminating between male and female child, gradually she has become an instrument. If only a mother understands this very fact closely then, certainly female feticide can be checked. Through this Mohanty has reflected on a social malady- gender discrimination. In this context Anita Desai's view is quite befitting, "In India the gift of education is reserved for the sons and rarely given to daughters, just as the best food is given to the boy child and not wasted on the girl" (Uniyal, 37). In addition I quote, "The Female child is often denied the basic right to survival and most female children are given second class status in terms of human rights." (Singh, 126)

The story *Chitrita Andhara* has another social dimension, how due to poverty a single mother has to witness the most unexpected turn in her life. Rupa has been dejected by her drunkard husband where as she has three daughters and two sons to be brought up. On the other hand, Rupa herself is ill, almost bedridden. Without being left with any other alternative, her daughters chose prostitution for survival. This act of her daughters becomes suffocating and unbearable for her. So at last, she does not hesitate to poison them, and poisoned herself too. This projects the poverty stricken family, helplessness and hopelessness of a mother, the unbearable drudgery, but under no circumstance she is ready to compromise with her morality and ethics, and at last she chose death for all. Her inability to feed her family has left her guilt driven, but on the other hand she is helpless due to her ill health. In a country like India, irrespective of cultures, it is a true picture which this Odia writer has projected very candidly.

Another short story, equally heart touching and very much life like is *Patadei*, here Pata is the poor mother, a rebel, who does not stop fighting for her child. Pata has been dejected by her husband immediately after their marriage. Her plight does not come to an end here, rather a beginning. She has been gang raped and consequently bearing a child. Hence, she has to bear all sorts of torture and foul remarks by the so called civilized society. But death cannot embrace her, as she has a son to take care of; she prioritized her son over all the social norms. She has become a stronger woman after becoming a mother. Though that child is not born out of her wedlock, yet, she is considering him as a “Divine child”, *deba sishu*. Her motherly love is so pure and celestial. Even though society might not give approval to an “illegitimate child”, yet for a mother, and here Pata, no child is illegitimate, it is just a divine gift. Such is a mother’s love. A pregnancy of this sort is never desirable, but the writer has so beautifully captured the essence of Pata’s motherhood is commendable and heart touching too. Here a mother is concerned only

about her child, rather than focusing on the brutal attack on her. As a fetus develops inside a mother's womb, so the sense of belongingness becomes more in case of a mother. So it becomes quite natural for her to have a unique kind of attachments with her offspring.

Sumati is another struggling character in *Maruchhaya*, who is a mother of four children. She has been tortured by her in-laws. When she thinks of coming back to her parents, there also, no one really cares for her. But all her struggle she can bear, only due to her children. Mohanty writes:

se nijaku biki bhangi khatei jete kharcha kale b tara peta purini ki laja tutini. Bias khaibaaku chestaa kale sudha se bias khai parini.(Mohanty,33)(My translation: Whatever she can do, she does, yet she is unable to feed her children. Even if she wants to poison herself, yet that also she is unable to do.)

In *Samajika*, Puspa's desire to become a mother is the central theme. She is an innocent girl from a village, so after her marriage, the only wish she has, is to attain motherhood and to achieve that she can bear with anything. In addition, it also shows the disgust of a woman against another woman. Alaka and Puspa, having the usual traits of a woman, Alaka shows disgust against another woman, always tries to keep herself look young and beautiful for which she does not mind spending too much. And Puspa considers her sole purpose is to attain motherhood, the only accomplishment in her life. Mohanty writes:

phone re Alaka ra pariskar gala subhuthila- Puspa paen tumara ajatha darada mu pasanda karena Jayanta. Puspa ra bahaya parishara tume dekhichha;kintu tara bhitara ra kantaka re tume tah aghata paena? Emiti nasty, cold blooded jhia-I don't appreciate.../ bahut inferiority complex tara/ athacha Sachindra pari sportsman spirit...(Mohanty, 206)(My translation:

Alaka's voice was quite clear over phone, " You are unnecessarily concerned about Puspa which I do not appreciate, Jayanta. You have just seen her from outside, but you are never been hurt by her true self? She is such a nasty, cold blooded girl- I don't appreciate...she has got inferiority complex...and on that Sachindra has got such sportsman spirit.)

Alaka is quite rich, a mother of six children, a woman who justifies her womanhood as she has attained motherhood, and what more a society can expect from her where as Puspa is a rural girl, she has been living only to attain motherhood but it goes in vain. On the other hand, Alaka is beautiful, as she keeps herself beautiful after spending a lot of money. Her friendship with Sachindra, Puspa is aware of yet she has no say, as she is unable to bear a child for Sachindra. She is mute. In Mohanty's words,

Aau se Puspa? Niriha Mafasali jhia ti. Maa hebaara akankhya re jie banchi rahichi, Sachindra ra feriba patha ku chahin se bechari raati sara dholeiba sina-soi padibara adhikar tah tara nahin.(Mohanty,210)(My translation: And that Puspa? Innocent rustic girl. She has been living as if just attain motherhood, while waiting for Sachindra she would doze off the entire night, but she does not have the right to fall asleep.)

Mohanty has shown another dimension of motherhood in *Bastraharana* where Sarasi is suffering due to multiple pregnancies and though she is not ready for any further, her wish is hardly valued or heard. Because the aftermath of pregnancy is every time contributing in the deterioration of their health. No more the physical condition is permitting to further become pregnant, yet the husbands are the demigods and their wives have to agree to what they desire for. Mohanty writes:

“Panchata pilankara jatna o’ khadya abhaba re jemiti deha ra hada mana gani hei jauchhi.”(Mohanty,681)(My translation: she has really become pale and ill after bearing and rearing five children.)

Sana pila ta hela dinu sarasi kama ku paruni- kana hela kejani sedinu bleeding laagi rahichhi, fuli rahichhi petaa...hajam heuni, sabu bele jara jara laguchhi. Kete se mana karithilaa, kete se hata goda dhari anunaya karithilaa. Hele Girish kintu sunila nahin. Sansare sabu stree pila janma karanti, prati barsha karithanti o’ seithi paen semane jane purusha ra hata dhari anyaa gharaku asanti. Stree ra bharana poshana, bhala manda sabuku Purusha sweekar karithaee. Kebala tara utpadikka shakti jogun...tara chitta binodana karibara bises guna jogun. Akatya jukti Girish ra . Sarasi swaeechha re paristithi saha saalish nakale Girish j anyatra bandobast kariba, ethire tara sandeha nathilaa. Nija swami pakhare Sarasi hoichhi thare nuhan, bahubar dharsitha, laanchitaa o’ apamaintaa.(Mohanty,681-682) (My translation: Sarasi is unable to work after the youngest child is born. Bleeding still persists since then. Her stomach has swollen. Digestion has become very poor. Frequently she feels feverish. She did not want that child, she had requested many a times. But Girish did not listen to her. Every woman gives birth to a child, every year she gives birth and for that reason only they are married to someone. A man feeds her, only due to her reproductive capacity; in addition she too can entertain. Baseless argument Girish puts. If Saraswati does not listen to him, it is a known fact that he can have his other alternative. Sarasi is being exploited, insulted and raped by her husband not once, but multiple times. The mother only carries the children in their womb yet she cannot take the decision of being pregnant or not. The sole authority becomes the husband to decide upon. The situation is more horrifying when the wife always faces marital rape and as it is laid down by the society she cannot open her mouth, she cannot protest even if she is

being devoured either by the husband or someone else. She is being reminded of the fact that she is the home maker, primarily she has to make the home.)

Mohanty has reflected:

Sarasi ku kichhi b bhala laguni, helebi se muhan kholi sidha salaka sabu katha re pratibada kariba Madhya sambhaba heu nahin. Kahinki? Kahinki ra kaifiat nahin. (Mohanty 681)(My translation: Though Sarasi does not like the treatment she receives, yet it is not possible in her part to be vocal about it. But why? And there is no answer to this why.)

Mother-child association is always different from that of father. "To visualize how the hominid line could have arisen," Nancy Tanner and Adrienne Zihlman propose a theory of early hominid evolution centred on and dynamized by the exigencies of the mother child relationship (Tanner, 1981).I quote,

Motherhood became a gratifying role because it was now a repository of the society's idealism The mother was frequently compared to a saint, and it was believed that the only good mother was a "saintly" woman. The natural patron saint of the mother was the Virgin Mary, whose whole life bespoke her devotion to her child"(Badinter, 1981).

To conclude, basically the women characters in Mohanty's short stories are those mothers who cannot escape any of the responsibilities. Patriarchy is operating in a subtle way. It really becomes very difficult always to separate that innate maternal fondness and the subsequent anxiety it leads to. The social structure is such that a mother can be guilt stricken, if at all she is unsuccessful in fulfilling the social expectations. Through the idea of acculturation she ingrains this very sense of motherhood from her early childhood, so basically she is unable to come out of the shackles of gender roles. Mohanty's stories have captured the very essence of parenthood

equating with that of motherhood, though unfortunately in an Odia culture or many of the other linguistic communities in India, patrilineal or patriarchal structure controls the overall system.

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Home, Migration And Women: A Critical Study Of Chitra Banerjee

Divakaruni's *Arranged Marriage*

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Abstract: The concept of home has extended its horizon to incorporate not only the actual, physical place, but also the psychological space. In his essay “From Sugar to Masala: Writing by the Indian Diaspora”, the renowned diaspora critic Sudesh Mishra talks about the transformation of the concept of ‘home’ for the different categories of diaspora, arguing that, while ‘home’ for the members of the old diaspora, is a place for putting down the cultural roots, for the new diasporas, ‘home’ is related to ‘rootlessness’ and the “constant mantling and dismantling of the self in makeshift landscapes.” Nevertheless, the issue of ‘home’ remains an extremely sensitive one for members of diasporic community. It is more delicate for women, who, deprived of the opportunity to create some space for themselves in their own country, often take recourse to migration in pursuit of empowerment and liberty that the foreign countries would offer. This paper aims to critically analyze Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s collection of short stories anthologized under the title *Arranged Marriage*(1995) in terms of the journey of the female protagonists abroad, their varied experiences which would eventually inculcate a desire among them to create some space for their own. Since most of the stories reflect the condition of Indian women abroad post marriage, the issues concerning marriage, women’s condition, their expected roles, duties and responsibilities, will be considered with emphasis.

Key words: Home, Immigration, Women, Liberty, Empowerment.

The concept of 'home' has undergone transformation and extended its boundary to denote not only the actual physical existential plane, but also a space that is overtly psychological. It is an extremely sensitive issue for the people belonging to the diasporic community, who have left their original homeland in search of a new, prosperous life in a new country. While discussing the characteristic features that are observed in every members of diasporic community, the critic William Safran, in his 1991 essay "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return", has reflected that these people would always consider their country of origin to be their actual homeland and the place of 'eventual return', as the belief persist among them that they would never be accepted, neither can they acculturate with the host society. However this perception has altered significantly over the course of years. The renowned diaspora critic Sudesh Mishra observes a transformation in the concept of 'home' of the diasporic personalities belonging to separate categories marked by temporal, spatial and psychological differences. While the members of the old involuntary diaspora tend to restrict themselves within their own experiences and consider 'home' to be a place for putting down "cultural roots", the new voluntary diasporas relate 'home' to rootlessness, taking into consideration that "each resting place [is] home."

Since the last few decades of the twentieth century, a number of people have migrated from their original homeland to foreign countries in pursuit of a better life ahead, and a number of writings, both fictional and non fictional, have been published based on the experiences of these people. A number of writings have also come out with a female protagonist at the centre. If one delves deep into the issue of women and migration, it can be observed that most women migrate from their own country in pursuit of freedom and own individual space, which are most often denied to them in their home country. Good educational opportunities, better career

prospects and liberal immigration policies would often inspire and enable a woman to cross the physical boundaries of 'home' and undertake a journey abroad where she has to face and endure every hardship to create her own place. Often, marriage would act as a catalyst in their journey towards a foreign and unknown territory. The argument presented in this paper is based on a critical study of a renowned Indian diasporic writer Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's debut collection of short stories *Arranged Marriage* (1995). In this collection, every story has a woman (often women) at the centre, and most of the stories deal with the journey of the female protagonists to the foreign countries, their varied experiences and the eventual formation of desire among them to create some space for themselves.

Born in Kolkata in 1956, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (originally named Chitralkha Banerjee) has migrated to the United States twenty years later for the purpose of higher education. Most of the stories of her first collection *Arranged Marriage* represent Indian, more specifically, Bengali women's journey to the States and the changes that they would experience, which would most often result in their psychological transformation. As the title indicates, the central theme of most of the stories is marriage (mostly arranged). In an interview with Metka Zupancic (2010), Divakaruni talks about her stories in *Arranged Marriage*, and states:

It is related to the frequent theme of immigration in my stories and how it changes us, particularly women. My characters are mostly Indian women growing up in India in a very traditional family. In *Arranged Marriage*, many come from a background similar to my own. I grew up with very definite notions of womanhood, of who is considered a good woman and how she is to behave, especially within the family context. Much of that was based on the notion that a good woman makes sacrifices. As a result of immigration, when we find ourselves in the West, there is quite a

definite notion of what a good woman is and what she is expected to do. Many characters in *Arranged Marriage* are dealing with this sudden change in worldview, at once exhilarating and also terrifying. They have to make sense of the new situation, which begins to transform them as women. It begins to change their relationships with the people in their family – their husbands, who are with them in the new country, and their parents, who usually are back in India. There are children who are now born in the new environment, still caught between two cultures, yet with a completely different worldview.

The book showcases the journey and experiences of a number of women, whose nature of and purpose behind migration are different. Some of the women characters are found to migrate with the aim of pursuing their academic career. In the story “Silver Pavements, Golden Roofs”, the daughter of a sophisticated Bengali family in Kolkata, Jayanti, migrates to Chicago in order to study in a reputed university. However, her perception of America as a land of ‘dream-come-true’ starts altering gradually when she reaches the small, shabby apartment of her uncle Bikram and aunt Pratima, which is “not at all what an American home should be like”, and undergoes a humiliating racial assault on the open streets by some American teenagers(40). In spite of her disillusionment and the dilemma of being an immigrant, Jayanti does not think of going back, instead she gets herself ready for every struggle that lead her a step ahead to form her ground in American soil. She watches the white snow covering her hand “so they are no longer brown but white, white, white. And now it makes sense that the beauty and the pain should be part of each other” (56).

Written in the form of interior monologue, the story entitled “The Word Love” is about an unnamed girl, who has immigrated to the America, leaving her widowed mother in India, to study in an institute in California. She starts sharing an apartment with her boyfriend, of which she

feels guilty and doesn't gather up enough courage to tell her mother about the matter, which creates a gap in the mother-daughter relationship and worsens her love affair. Being dejected from her mother and unable to cope up with the situation, she decides to start everything afresh, and this time she is "going to live only for [herself]." She understands the meaning of the word "love", which she feels, "is like rain, and when you lift your face to it, like rain it washes away inessentials, leaving you hollow, clean, ready to begin" (71).

In "A Perfect Life", Meera refuses to conform herself to the traditional roles of a wife and a mother in favour of her education and career in America:

Because in Indian marriages becoming a wife was only the prelude to that all-important, all-consuming event – becoming a mother. That wasn't why I'd fought so hard – with my mother to leave India; with my professors to make it through graduate school; with my bosses to establish my career (76).

However, her perception of life alters after meeting a seven year old orphan boy Krishna, whom she decides to adopt and raise by herself. After some time the child disappears from the Foster home office, leaving Meera terribly affected.

Apart from foregrounding liberal women's thoughts and perspectives of life, these stories offer glimpses to marriages and married life as well. Jayanti's life of liberty and extravagance in India is juxtaposed to the confined life of her aunt Pratima in America. Jayanti cannot help but expresses her surprise to observe such an incompatible wedlock and spurs out: "I wonder how a marriage could take place between a man like Bikram uncle and my aunt, who comes from an old and wealthy landowning family" (39). She fantasizes about a handsome, white professor with whom she would get involved in a romantic relationship and decides: "No arranged marriage like

Aunt's for me!" (45). In their essay, "*Arranged Marriage: As an Example of Marginalized Relationships*", Gunjan Agarwal and Gunjan Kapil argue that, "The women in *Arranged Marriage* are portrayed as strong and willing to change their situations in life but sometimes they do also feel themselves trapped in a myth of wife, mother and daughter-in-law" (89). In "A Perfect Life", Meera finally decides to engage in a nuptial bond with her boyfriend Richard as she realizes that it would provide her the essence of becoming a mother biologically.

In the story "Clothes", the protagonist Sumita, born and raised in the rural ambience of Bengal, travels "halfway around the world to live with a man [she] hadn't even met". Her apparently happy married life in California gets devastated after the murder of her husband Somesh at his workplace. After the initial shock, Sumita recovers herself, and hears the voice coming out of the deep of her heart:

I want you to go to college. Choose a career... That's when I know I cannot go back. I don't know yet how I'll manage, here in this new dangerous land. I only know I must. Because all over India, at this very moment, widows in white sarees are bowing their heads, serving tea to in-laws. Doves with cut off wings (33).

. She decides to stay back in America alone and fulfill both her and her husband's dream:

I straighten my shoulders and stand taller, take a deep breath. Air fills me – the same air that travelled through Somesh's lungs a little while ago. The thought is like an unexpected intimate gift. I tilt my chin, readying myself for the arguments of the coming weeks, the remonstrations. In the mirror a woman holds my gaze, her eyes apprehensive yet steady. She wears a blouse and skirt the colour of almonds (33).

In his essay “Representation of Women in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s *Arranged Marriage*”, Dr. Sarabjit Kaur argues that Sumita’s “changing clothes at different stages of her life symbolizes her changing characteristics, which describes constant tussle between her emotions and external pressures which in turn gives rise to a new hybrid identity...”(154).

Most often, the condition of women who have migrated to some foreign country after marriage is loaded with isolation and disillusionment. They feel alienated in the culture that is very different from their own, and the lack of mutual understanding and compatibility with their partners further intensifies their isolation, resulting in the breaking off of the relationships. The stories “Affair” and “Disappearance” centres on women who have to undergo such circumstances. In the story “Affair”, Meena reveals her loneliness: “I hated to be alone in the house. It was so deathly quiet, not like India, where something’s always going on – street vendors, servants, people dropping in to gossip...”(239). Her loneliness is intensified by her first miscarriage and this brings her close to her best friend Abha’s husband Ashok. After making several efforts to mend their relationship, Abha realizes that the gap between them can never be bridged, and decides to devote her time and talent to something worthwhile that would help her to establish independently. She learns that her friend Meena is having affair not with Ashok, but with her colleague Charles “who understands [her]” and with whom “[she] can be herself.” This inspires Abha to take the decision of moving out of the suffocating conjugal bond, which has become a burden for both herself and Ashok. She decides to start a new life for herself: “I closed my eyes and tried to see my new life – not as I wanted but as it really would be....Living in a one-room apartment above some garage where on my off-days I heated soup over a burner” (271).

The story “Disappearance”, as the title indicates, revolves around the disappearance of a woman from her family house in America, leaving her husband and little son. At first, she was

thought of being either kidnapped, or dead; but it is gradually discovered that she has willingly left them as she could no longer tolerate the abuse and torture that marriage has provided her with.

In the essay “Blurring Borders/Blurring Bodies: Diaspora and Womanhood”, Monbinder Kaur argues that in the immigrant life that is fraught with cultural collision and lack of adjustment, women become ‘the common targets’ and are forced to play the stereotypical roles that will fulfill the patriarchal expectations. “Expatriate communities look upon their women for the preservation and continuation of ethnicity” (76). Women, in turn, fall easy prey to the demands of patriarchy and as a result their individual desires and urges get suppressed. After some time, some women can no longer bear the pressures and decides to move out of the bond that restricts their freedom, power and individuality. Most of the stories of *Arranged Marriage* represent women fraught within this suffocating condition, and their determination and struggle to create some space for their own. Their desire for physical space is symbolic of their desire of psychological freedom: what they want is to have the power to think and decide on their own and recognition as a free human being. In the process, as Divakaruni observes “they gain certain things, and they lose certain things. It is a very poignant and often painful process but also a very exhilarating, energetic process and for many women it is an opportunity for new empowerment and freedom.”

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Of Atopic World: Some Reflections on Contemporary Horror Films and TV Shows

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Abstract: Horror focuses on the aesthetic and cathartic effect on the reader/audience. It triggers our emotive experiences such as fear, dread, anxiety and disgust. As a genre, it does not follow a single, closed structure like other literary genres. Such equivocacy facilitates horror a trope not to be conformed to one particular ideology. It surprisingly comes with all or nothing, maximum or minimal keeping the beholder guessing, startling and leaving them bizarre and ambivalent. The desire of the audience to stay connected or to feel as a part of the film/show has always been kept in check. This experience of association and engagement comes in the form of continual disengagement here. The genre with its utter denial to be a genre exposes our monotonous, structured way of everydayness, challenges our rigorous narcissistic fixation and throws us into chaotic, anarchical and nihilistic existence. The recent escalation of horror in popular platform can be called as revive and rediscovery of this art form. Now any historian of this genre may claim that this is the golden age of horror. But, my point of departure here is why there is sudden abundance of horror films and shows. Why are we fascinated with ghost, monster, spirit, someone or something more than mystery, magical and unknown? The easy answer is choice and religious propaganda? This, I argue, is limited and too fragile in understanding of the physio-psycho-cultural conditions. The paper, therefore, would be a brief introduction to explore the depth and possibility of horror as a genre vis-à-vis a cultural and philosophical reading of the contemporary horror films and shows.

Keywords: Horror, Cognition, Body, Marxism, Sublime.

[P]hilosophers of art have wanted to alleviate the overly constricted configuration of the field by looking at the special theoretical problems of individual arts, by returning to older questions of the aesthetics of nature, and by re-situating traditional questions about art within broader questions about the function of symbol systems in general (Carroll 9).

“Spectrality does not involve the conviction that ghosts exist or that the past (and maybe even the future they offer to prophesy) is still very much alive and at work, within the living present: all it says, if it can be thought to speak, is that the living present is scarcely as self-sufficient as it claims to be; that we would do well not to count on its density and solidity, which might under exceptional circumstances betray us.” (Jameson 39)

I will start with an anecdote. Recently in a popular television game show in Bengali *Dadagiri* stir a little spark of controversy. The show featured a contestant who claimed herself as a paranormal investigator. She shared her paranormal experience on the show and the host, Sourav Ganguly agrees to some of her statements. This infuriates some rational viewers and ends up with a complaint filed by Paschim Banga Vigyan Mancha with an assertion that it may encourage wrong belief and superstition. We would not ponder here to think if the participant was true of her experience. The discourse of this article rather begins with the understanding of such puzzling appeal of horror that even a popular game show tries to encash it. *The Witch* (2015), *The Nun* (2018), *Annabel: Creation* (2017), *Eli* (2019), *Veronica* (2017), *Annihilation* (2018), *Stranger Things* (2016), *Babadook* (2014), *Blair Witch* (2016), *In The Tall Grass* (2019) and many notable others in Hollywood bring some new spectrum of horror and chill in theatre. India is not far behind entering with *The House Next Door*, *Typewriter*, *Pari*, *1920*, *Phillauri*, TV shows like *Fear Files*, *Laal Ishq*, *Daayan*, *Nazar* and the list is soaring high. Indian shows,

admittedly, sensationalize things, poorly add cheap ‘masala’, and misrepresent occult practice with a cautionary disclaimer that they do not endorse superstition. Now any historian of this genre may claim that this is the golden age of horror. But my point of departure here is why there is sudden abundance of horror films and shows. Why are we fascinated with ghost, monster, spirit, someone or something more than mystery, magical and unknown? The easy answer is choice and religious propaganda? This, I argue, is limited and too fragile in understanding of the physio-psycho-cultural conditions of the time. The paper, therefore, would try to explore the depth and possibility of contemporary horror films and shows vis-à-vis a cultural and philosophical reading of it.

The inception of horror as a literary genre can be marked with the tradition of gothic literature popular in 18th century Europe with the fiction such as *The Castle of Otranto*, *The Monk*, and *The Vathek* etc. The authors like Ann Radcliffe, Horace Walpole, Bram Stoker, William Beckford, Matthew Lewis and notable others developed an eerie setting out of castle and deserted mansion and created such characters that became archetypes for the genre. The prototype of monster, demon, ghost, mad scientist, and vampire and so on has been developed in this period. There is a tendency to associate horror with science fiction and fantasy fiction since Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. However, unlike other genres horror does not stand on a single codified structure; it rather focuses on the aesthetic aspect and cathartic effect on the readers (fear, horror, anxiety etc.).¹ Therefore, it would be fore wise to classify horror in different categories and approach differently to each alike. It includes subgenres like Psychological horror, Gore, Slasher, Folk horror, Zombie, Apocalyptic horror etc. This equivocal, genericness of horror facilitates the genre a certain edge, an opportunity to have the ‘symbolic structure’ at ‘play’. It surprisingly comes with all or nothing, maximum or minimal keeping the beholder

guessing, startling and leaving them bizarre and awkward. The desire of the audience to feel as a part of the film has always kept in check in horror. This experience of association, engagement comes in the form of continual disengagement here. The genre with its utter denial to be a genre exposes our monotonous, structured way of everydayness, challenges our rigorous narcissistic fixation and throws us into the chaotic, anarchical and nihilistic existence.

Horror is like pebbles in your shoe that keeps tormenting. It produces awe and fear among its audience. In his idea of 'sublime' Edmund Burke defines it as the 'strongest emotion' that can cause pain and fear among us. This corporeal pain and fear, though works in a different measures, act on our nervous system, effect on our body organs causing a great amount of strength and weakness. If sublime articulates greatness beyond any calculation or imitation, horror in extreme form represents the sublimity of ugliness, the annihilation of beauty and devoid of taste. The anesthetics of horror impede the suspension of morality, thrusting rationality and objectivism. The antithesis, anti-art produces art in its raw form, unshaped, vulnerable, and faulty that is more close to 'truth' and reality. Such normative of the un-rule, inorganic whole pushes us to consider the ideology of 'trash' and the philosophy of 'imperfection'. It bestows us a responsibility to decipher the deceptive reality.

We live in the 'post-truth' world, in the age of information where our memory is constantly stuffed with the loads of social media news feed, relevant, irrelevant, factual or apocryphal. The junk of information overload scrolled down every day makes our memory transitory, fleeting. This collective loss of cultural reminiscence is set against the positive construction of a phenomenon. The public 'consent' becomes a manufacture by means of the propaganda model of communication designed by the mass media. Recently we have witnessed some of the deep crises, ecological and political like Syrian Refugee issue, Rohingya problem,

Hong Kong march, wildfire in Brazilian Rainforest, surface water shortage in India just to name a few. In this delirious cultural whirlwind we are afraid of the 'Other' if it is racial, ethnical or religious. For this constant suspicion over every moment of life horror best serves the time. In the historical amnesia propelled by the neo liberal economic policy we appear only as a potential threat to each other. The jumpscare in horror cinema often in the form of sudden abrupt scream, jarring sound effect and image is correlated to our constant fear of daily life. The art in its true sense catches this very anxiety of the people, the danger of living and the horror-reality we experience every day. This fear is purely contextual and bourgeois production. Horror, therefore, can be read here as a metaphor of cultural contingent, metaphor of fear and metaphor of Precarity. In this connection another loosely defined subgenre called Eco Horror which connects environmental problem, landscape and horror together reflects our anxiety of recent environmental destruction. The narrative of 'the revenge of mother nature' in cinemas like *Annihilation* (2018), and *The Bay* (2012) manifests our ongoing fear of ecological imbalance. Sometime the animal brutality and their loss of forest habitation portrayed in these films speak for the agency of animal and the settler's notion of belongings.

In Marx's *Capital* Volume 1 while describing capitalism and its early development he said, "capital comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt" (538). He further added that, "Capital is dead labor, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labor, and lives the more, the more labor it sucks" (163). Here Marx uses occult images to describe capitalism and the condition of working class, which is very fitting in the sense that it refers to the slavery of dead labour class.² The concept of vampirism or zombie suggests to the symbolical control of capitalist system even after death. The real horror lays in this indication that one remains slave and is subjected to work even after becoming a corpse and they. The excessive

gore or violent stuff in slasher horror and serial killer movie reflect our schizophrenic self, alienated and consumerist subject who tries to break their monotony. The primordial act of killing indicates their helplessness and search for recognition, and quest for identity. The horror films serves like a cultural purgatory for us; it cleanses our repressed desire, effects on our performativity.

There is a popular Zizek joke about the apocalyptic cinema; it goes like that it is difficult to think the end of capitalism, so we tend to think the end of the world. The zizekian pun leads to a justification of Negri's claim in *Empire* that in modern times the transition of imperialism from a particular nation state to the postmodern global capitalist power is monumental, where every subject in some forms is colonized and within the spell of capitalism. Here the 'imagine resistance' comes only in disguise of negation, depending upon the subject's 'will to be against'. Whereas, Marx's *Capital* ends with a hope of mass revolution, the glocalised world leaves a bleak possibility if not end of it. However, the ghost of revolution, the spectre of Marx haunts the glimmering cities, neo-liberal world in the name of student protest, women's march for safety and so on. The figure of the ghost just like the unseen but omnipresent 'thing' in the movie, *Bird Box* (2018), displacing the authoritarian structure of metaphysics, nullifies the priority of being and the possibility of Levinasian 'Other'.³ It is a locale of de-registration of our known constructed reality, which is responsible for preserving the otherness. Ghost with its possibility of deferred non-origin, neither present nor absent, an always already entity remains as a residual, the worm in decomposition which is necessary for fertilization, and revitalization.

However, the anthropologist suggests that fear is biological as much as cultural. It exists in human cognition; it is a production of natural selection. The sense of fear in human psychology is prehistoric, pre-scientific and universal. Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio informs

that the weird chemical action in our brain created due to feelings is a process of our natural approach to any particular place, thing or a person.

We all share these phenomena—mind, consciousness within mind, and behaviors—and we know quite well how they are intercorrelated, first because of our own self-analysis, second because of our natural propensity to analyze others. Both wisdom and the science of the human mind and behavior are based on this incontrovertible correlation between the private and the public—first-person mind, on the one hand, and third-person behavior, on the other. Fortunately, for those of us who also wish to understand the mechanisms behind mind and behavior, it so happens that mind and behavior are also closely correlated with the functions of living organisms, specifically with the functions of the brain within those organisms (Damasio 12-13).

Human cognition assimilates reality as an unending encounter of experience and horror as an art capitalizes the dark threat of this encounter. Horror, therefore, is an ontological phenomenon captured in artistic expression. In views of Stephen T. Asma, “During the formation of the human brain, the fear of being grabbed by sharp claws, dragged into a dark hole and eaten alive was not an abstraction” (24). So, the fear of mankind, coupled with its biological aspect, can be traced through historical evolution of man as a species, where *Homo sapiens* has been exposed to extreme weather condition, deadly beast, and ‘Paleolithic peril’.⁴ Horror ghastly reminds us the pre-civilized form of natural history. Thus, the story of a troubled widow and single mother called Amelia Vanek in *The Babadook* (2014) after a long exhausted confrontation ends with her acceptance of the monster. It undertakes the presence of horror, uncanny feeling as organic and inherent.

Ghost in collective consciousness breathes in liminality where meaning collapses; boundary transgresses blurring the world of human/non-human, living/dead, absence/presence.

Recent horror films and shows challenge the demarcation of ‘high’ art-horror and ‘low’ physical horror and take a ‘corporeal turn’ instead. The ‘elevated horror’ takes a bloody turn to gore and body horror, which hold no bars. Here ghost unlike its existence in imaginative and psychological level in classic, cerebral horror, appears with a physical presence, badly and harmfully. Although in gore, fetish towards violence is there. Still beyond its moralistic criticism, true horror undoubtedly is more than gore. In Zombie movies which have a Haitian origin later popularized in America, the Zombies have been seen eating human flesh. The cannibalism represents more than an act of eating a flesh. If Ghost is soul without body, zombie is body without soul. In a recent Netflix series, *iZombie* (2015-17) a medical resident Liv is presented as a zombie who engages in a job at a morgue to gratify her desire for eating human brains every day. On the due course of the show we observe that she starts to absorb the memories of those she feeds on. The reference of eating brains suggests devouring the ‘core’ of the body forms which thoughts, memory, extra bodily ideas generate from. It opens up the question about the signification of our body. Is it our body or the body is we? Neuroscience would claim that nothing remains outside the body; the bare physicality is our signification of existence. In horror the binary of internal, external, flesh, mind, sacred, dirt- everything enmeshes with each other. Human, animal, insects, soil become just a part of the earth through the contemplation of all hierarchical structure. Just like Lars von Trier’s *Melancholia* (2011) ends with Justine’s realization of accepting depression, not to fight against, horror with all its physical torment, mutilation, and annihilation manifest the deep acceptance of pain and suffering, where ‘becoming’s melancholic, depressed is more real than the hide behind the mask of fighting back.

The notion of 'atopia' helps us to see that cohabiting, or living together, requires a certain level of vagueness. Atopia can be used to designate a certain common part of each of us. This part is neutral because it is pre-individual and impersonal. It cannot be referred to with an "I" of identity or with a unilateral collective "we." ... In other words, atopia indicates a part of ourselves and between each of us that cannot be localized (Millet).

According to Barthes, atopia means someone or something uneven, unusual and unpredicted.⁶ The concept which combines two notions, *topos* and *topic* leads us to think and perform beyond tradition and everydayness. Atopia disturbs prediction in communication with each other and implies the loss of topic or subject. So, in the wake of global ecological crisis, neoliberal force and deep rooted sadomasochist society world appears as a place which is marked by placelessness. If Utopia is an ideal space constructed through the rejection of flawed or real, atopia would be 'neutral', where ideal and real coexist together. It neither prioritizes individual nor collective. Horror as a genre is based on transgression; it violates the foundational concept of art, which epitomizes 'realism'. Horror at its core has a turbulent relation to reality; it is fictional but shares the 'truth condition' of art with its extreme fictionality. Thus, horror reiterates the sense of atopia, tinkers the ideal and make us believe in plurality.

Notes

1. For a good length analysis of horror as genre see Mgr. Viktória Prohászková's article, "Genre of Horror" published in *American International Journal of Contemporary Research* 2.4, P. 132-142.
2. See Tyler Malone's paper, "The Zombies of Karl Marx: Horror in Capitalism's Wake" on Literary Hub.

3. See Jacques Derrida's "What is Ideology" in *Specters of Marx, the State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning*. Routledge, 1994.
4. See M M Owen's "Age of Horror" in *Aeon Essays*.
5. See Samantha Bankstone's *Delueze and Becoming*, Bloomsbury, 2019.
6. See Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*. Vintage Classics, 2012.

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Widowhood –An undeclared ‘Lockdown’: Re-reading of Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Water* in the time of Pandemic

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Abstract- In the present day world the terms like ‘ quarantine’, ‘lockdown’ , ‘social distancing’ has become ‘new normal’. The whole world has seen the sudden emergence of these words. The situation through which we are going right now is unexpected to us , these words may seem new ,but for some sects of the society they are lifelong companions. People like homosexuals, eunuchs ,transgenders, prostitutes and widows – all have suffered undeclared lockdown and social distancing throughout their lives. Lockdown has its social and psychological implications across culture, gender and people. With the help of literature this paper tries to rewrite the phenomena of ‘ quarantine’ , ‘ lockdown’ and ‘social distancing’ which is covertly pervaded in the life of Hindu widows . Since the time immemorial, much before the emergence of the pandemic Covid-19 widows are experiencing every possible kind of restrictions to go out and mingling with the ‘mainstream world’. This restriction apparently seems incomparable to the present scenario of hibernation but ironically from a psychological aspect it is very much similar. Therefore , through this paper I have tried to examine and analyse the pangs of separation , suffocation and locked up situation of the Hindu widows in the threshold of the ashrams. To carry out my project I have repeatedly looked back to Bapsi Sidhwa’s critically acclaimed novel *Water* which is a vivid account to look into the life of the widows confined in an ashram in the 1930s. Pandemic or no pandemic – they go through a lifelong untold lockdown.

Keywords- Widowhood, widow ashram, social distancing, lockdown, gender, religion.

Bapsi Sidhwa, the Pakistani-Parsi-Punjabi novelist, now residing in the U.S.A. , is generally considered one of the finest novelists of Pakistan writing in English. All her works depict the picture of the position of women in a family as well as in the society. All her novels are written from a particular socio- cultural scenario and in every case female questions are addressed with profound care. Her *Water* which is written on a film script by Indo- Canadian director Deepa Mehta. Deepa's film also bears the same title , and Bapsi has not changed the narrative much in order to give it a novelistic form. The film as well as the novel continuously question the age old customs that victimises the women. The controversial and complex narrative describes the plight of the Hindu Widows and their isolated life in a widow ashram in the 1930s . For controversial reasons Bapsi has not clearly mentioned the actual location of the ashram but as the narrative goes we somehow find a close resemblance with the ashrams in Kashi or Vrindavan. Though the narrative takes place roughly some ninety years ago and it may seem that such customs are not any more practiced but surprisingly enough , even in 2000 when Deepa was filming the movie in the ghats of Banaras she faced vehemence of reaction from several corners of the country. Since the film attacks some core beliefs of Hinduism it agitates the right winged politics of India. Angry Hindu mobs called for several violence protests destroying the set and equipment and Deepa received death threats many times as the film was viewed as ' anti-Hindu'. Some people even threatened her of committing suicide themselves, among them one actually did that. Finally Deepa was forced to shift her shooting to Sri Lanka and made some changes in names. Even after release, the film received several attacks for the second time by the Hindu nationalist – the pirated DVDs were destroyed by burning and even shopkeepers were threatened not to stock it. This kind of violent attack for filming a condition of some ninety years ago clearly shows that the situation has not changed at all. Even in the twenty-first century

the plight of the Hindu widows remained unchanged. They are 'locked up' in distant places , silenced and cornered throughout their lives. Even if they are allowed to stay at their home they are severely dominated by the male members of their families and their opinions remain neglected or unheard. They spend their entire life in ' social distancing', participating in holy rituals and obeying a lifelong undeclared lockdown.

Subjugation of women by patriarchal or patriarchal agents and their consequent suffering has many times been the subject matter of world literature. But the sensitive issues of the plight of the Hindu widows in the name of religion depicted by an apparently Non- Residential- Indian filmmaker who herself belongs to Hinduism is undoubtedly something new and unique. The film as well as the novel continuously raises questions on the protocols thrust upon the widows in the name of religion and God which has become a religion itself and quarantined them into a farthest corner from where their voices are no longer being heard. Besides *Water* there are very few other literary works that deal with the widow's questions, Tagore's *Chokher Bali* (1903), Assamese female writer Indira Goswami's *The Moth Eaten Howdah of Tusker* (1986) and *Blue Necked God*(1976) being prominent among them. Mona Verma's recent publication *The White Shadow* (2014) also breaks the myth of Kashi/ Banaras being the shelter of widowhood.

Before this pandemic hits , the notion of social distancing , lockdown and quarantine were already present in the society in some other forms. After the contamination of Coronavirus whose medicine is still undiscovered by the scientists the entire world has locked itself in the safest corner at home. WHO has declared it a pandemic and opined that there is no other option left to us than quarantining ourselves in a locked house to break the contamination chain. In order to prevent the virus from affecting people most of the countries had declared complete or

partial lockdown or curfew. Several rules and regulations have been employed to ‘lock’ people at their home. From a psychological and cultural point of view today’s lockdown and quarantined condition in many ways resembles the isolated life of the widows in widow ashrams.

Declaration of lockdown must have a clear agenda. It is declared because no other option is visible to control the virus. Whenever humans feel any threat before the society which is beyond their control or simply which they could not tame, they end up prescribing lockdown. For the same reason society has cornered the non-conformist section like homosexuals, transgendered and widows whomever they consider social threats. New rules and protocols have been made to counter their agenda. Here through the re-reading of the novel *Water* I would bring light to the occasion of perpetual lockdown of a widow’s life which a society always fears to acknowledge.

Sidhwa’s novel portrays the violation that marginalizes a particular section of women in the Hindu society. Today, in the era of modernization and globalization human society may apparently look progressive but a closer view of the customs and rituals will prevent us from claiming so. From time immemorial gender is viewed as the significant marker of superiority and inferiority and it has almost become a very common phenomena in every culture and nation across the globe. Here being male privileges men to enjoy an unquestionable authority whereas females are always inferior and meant for continuous subjugation. Hindu Brahmin society is not an exemption from this universality. Before going to the detailed textual analysis a brief discussion on the Hindu ideologies will help us to establish our point.

As I have already mentioned that in almost every places in the world women are the victim of male dominance in one way or the other. In Indian Hindu society, even today, the scenario becomes worst when a woman loses her husband. With her husband her every legal rights are gone. Most of the cases their property is wrongly consumed by the other male members of their

family since most of them are unaware of the constitutional laws regarding property inheritance. With the death of her husband they lose their position in their family and in twentieth century it was very common that often were compelled to take a journey to Varanasi or Vrindavan to spend their rest of the lives in a subhuman condition. The situation has not changed much from then. Even in twenty first century when females are in every sphere walking hand in hand with men a trip to these two cities will leave you in despair when you see multiple white robbed women roaming from this temple to that with a begging bowl in their hands. Their suffering is prominent – being rejected by their own families they come here in order to seek solace from religious practices and to derive comfort by devoting themselves to Lord Krishna. But they end up being mistreated and misled without having anyone by their side. To survive some of them join prostitution. Whatever little amount they earn -- they accumulate them for their last rites.

Widowhood in many ways is the saddest turn in a woman's life. After the death of the husband a woman suddenly realizes ,for her parents she belongs to her in- laws whereas her in-laws consider her as a burden to their family's finances and hence she is not at all welcomed there. Suddenly she becomes conscious of her limbo state and eventually feels that she belongs to nowhere and welcomed by no one. She is exposed to suffer in the world with a long list of dos and don'ts. Martha Alter Chen in her essay ‘ Listening to Widows in Rural India’ (2008) observes – “ There are about 33 million widows in India, representing 8 percent of total female population (Census of India 1991). The proportion of widows in the female population rises sharply with age, reaching over 60 percent among women aged sixty and above” (Chen). In her 2001 book *Perpetual Mourning: Widowhood in Rural India* Martha tries to find out a decent cause for such a huge percentage – “ ... marriage in India is near universal: husbands are five

years older on average than wives. Male mortality rates are still rather high; women begin to outlive men after their productive years and most importantly widow remarriage is infrequent ... even now in some communities in India girls are married before reaching their puberty. As a result there are child widows, including so-called 'virgin widows' whose marriage has not been consummated before their husband died" (Chen 3). In *Water* also Sidhwa goes into the root and writes what the scriptures has decreed for the widows – "According to *Manusmriti* the foremost Sanskrit text in the orthodox tradition, a widow's head is shaved, her ornaments removed, and she is expected to remain in perpetual mourning. She is to observed fasts, give up eating "hot" foods in order to cool her sexual energy, avoid inauspicious (for having caused her husband's death) and to remain celibate, devout, and loyal to her husband's memory"(Sidhwa172) In *Vridhdha Hirata* rules are more explicit as Sidhwa mentions – " She should give up chewing betel nut, wearing perfumes, flowers, ornaments and dyed clothes, taking food from a vessel of bronze, taking two meals a day, applying collyrium to the eyes; she should wear only a white garment, curb her sense and anger, and sleep on the ground" (Sidhwa 172).

The theme of widowhood, child prostitution and forbidden love is scattered all over the novel. The film or the novel may not be considered as a historical document of the condition of the widows of the time but literature being a reflection of the society it offers a serious retrospection on the issues of the Hindu widows. The entire novel is written from an omniscient narrator's perspective and the story revolves around a eight year old little widow Chuhiya and her struggle in a widow ashram. In the beginning of the novel we see Chuhiya undergoing religious observances after the death of her old husband with whom she hardly remembers being married. Then she is sent to a widow ashram where she will have to spend a lockdown life away from mainstream society. Here she observes life , for the widows are caged in the tiny quarters of the

ashrams; and surprisingly she sees how the widows have accepted this inhuman treatment as their fate. They even believe that it is their *karma* that made them widows – such horrible the interpellation is.

In the ashram each widow has a story to tell. Every one of them will offer you the same narrative of patriarchal dominance with different contexts. Kalyani , a beautiful young widow , is a dear friend to Chuhiya. Apparently she looks liveliest among them all but as the narrative progresses the reader discovers the underlying emptiness. Her character exposes the hypocrisy of the religion. She is forcefully dragged into prostitution. On the one hand society decrees them to observe lifelong celibacy and on the other hand leaves no option for them other than selling their bodies. Later in the novel when she finds love in Narayan , a young man ,all her spirits are curbed and crushed and she was compelled to commit suicide. Sakuntala was once married to a rich widower in the hope of bearing a son for him. But unfortunately she remained unproductive. When her husband dies she becomes useless for her in-laws and hence dumped into the widow ashram. Even the story of Madhumati, the apparently rude head of the ashram, has a tragic story. Her story is also somewhat disturbing. She too was a young girl with hopes and dreams but her dream dissolves when after becoming a widow her brothers-in-law repeatedly raped her. He herself narrates her story with so much pain in her words – “... the two bastard raped me for a week. I was shorn and beaten and taken twenty miles into the wilderness and discarded”(Sidhwa 86). As a result of continuous rape she became pregnant brought to the ashram by Gulabi , a eunuch, who was basically a pimp. After aborting the child in her womb she , like Kalyani, was forced into prostitution. This is life precisely in these ashrams – a female body once violated by patriarchy is nourished back to life only to be violated by the same patriarchy again. Bapsi

skilfully portrays the double marginalization of these widows – once marginalized being women they go through another marginalization when they become widows.

Throughout the novel Chuhiya goes on questioning the ways of the widow's world. Her heart and reason fail to reconcile with the 'interpellation' that justifies all her deprivations. Chuhiya's questions bring out all the cruelties and subjugations they face by society in the name of religion. At the age of eight when she receives the news of her becoming widow of a marriage she can no longer recall, she vaguely questions – “ For how long baba?” (Sidhwa 40). She does not understand that there is no expiry date of her widowhood and her helpless question makes it clear that the widows really need that date. She once firmly declared that “ I don't want to be a stupid widow!” (Sidhwa 53). In the ashram she is told that when a woman loses her husband she is 'half dead' therefore she should not feel any kind of pain. It unveils the cruelty of the society that skilfully ignores that they are at least half alive ; their very much existence is overlooked. Another question of Chuhiya shows gender disparity when she asks “ Where is the house for the male widows?” (Sidhwa 97). The way the other widows in the ashrams react to this remark unmask the unquestionable authority of the male territory.

In the novel what Madhumati, Shakuntala or Kalyani fail to do Chuhiya, the little girl, does that very often – she questions, she argues and moreover , she dares to defy. But the other widows have somehow accepted their isolated, subhuman condition as their fate – as if it is 'normal'; Sidhwa writes – “ Shakuntala had never questioned the belief in *Dharma Sastra* that widowhood was a punishment for a sinful experience in the past, and she atoned for it with prayer and observance of fasts as prescribed. Focusing on studying the scriptures and trying to live as purely as possible the obligation to pray constantly in penance for her husband's death brought her solace. It also dulled the pain of the memories of all she had lost and all she had endured” (

Sidhwa 66). One incident with Shakuntala will help us to understand their life with perpetual social distancing. One day while fetching water from the Ganges : Shakuntala was bumped into a marriage ceremony on the *ghat*; promptly she was warned by the priest – “ Watch it! Don’t let your shadow touch the bride” (Sidhwa114). Here lies the cruelty of the society towards the widows – it corners them, isolates them and treats them as untouchables. A woman without a living husband is almost a ‘dead woman’—they matter to nobody. Dipti Mayee Sahu in her article writes – “ widows in India have a pronoun problem. The estimated 40 million women widows in the country go from being called “she” to “it” when they lose their husbands. They become “ de- sexed” creatures” (Sahu)

In the beginning of my article I have mentioned that it is not only the widows who are isolated from the mainstream society but people like homosexuals, transgenders and the eunuchs all have their lockdown story to share. As they are the people who do not follow the society’s prescribed codes of conducts (some by choice and some by birth), Society tries to confine them in an isolated corner. It actually hunts them down with a trap of lifelong quarantine. In this novel we have Gulabi, the pimp, the eunuch friend of Madhumati. Gulabi is here the ‘ marginalized of the marginalized’. Despite being a friend to Madhumati she is never allowed inside the ashram – we always find her chatting with her friend through the window. People whom the entire world has isolated, isolates Gulabi. She knows there is no one to think about them ; whenever she tries to communicate the plight of their clan to Madhumati, she remains unheard. She never receives a word of compassion from the mainstream world. She is the poorest of the poor, wretchedest of the wretched.

The theme of forbidden love is also very much prevalent in the novel. Kalyani is a nineteen years old extremely beautiful young widow. In the middle of the story she falls in love with Narayan ,

a handsome educated man from an elite household. Narayan too dreamt of marrying her without paying heed to the fact that she is a widow. Though by then Widow Remarriage act has been passed we find the duo fails to convince the society. Narayan's mother, who had always been an ardent supporter of her son, cannot accept a widow becoming her son's wife. Being a follower of Gandhian ideologies Narayan challenges the patriarchal law makers and at the end of the novel realizes the hypocrisy in religion – that only exercises male domination on the women. widows are forbidden to love. And suddenly Kalyani discovers Narayan's father was among the many rich clients to whom she used to be sent by Madhumati. Though, apparently it is Madhumati who forced Kalyani into prostitution, but on a wider level it is the very society that has not left any other option for the widows. Disillusioned and disheartened, Kalyani now no longer finds herself capable of any further patriarchal subjugation, she can no longer return to the quarantined life of the ashram. She resigns to life and accepts death by drowning herself in the river Ganges. She finds her 'solace' at the cost of her life. By denying life as a widow she defies all kinds of dominance and rebels against the patriarchal monsters.

In twenty first century India the condition of the widows have not progressed much. Even today widow remarriage is not accepted whole heartedly. Widows have become somehow used to social distancing. They are accustomed to the lifestyle with which we are currently failing to cope up psychologically. Due to the pandemic milieu our mental health is suffering as we cannot go out and socialize at. We are feeling claustrophobic in our two/ three bedroom apartments. While dealing with tremendous emotional turmoil, reading of *Water* will leave us wondering about those widows in the ashrams who spend their entire life in social distancing and lockdown. Aren't they 'home(?) quarantined'? . Don't these widow houses very much resemble today's

quarantine centres where authority separates those people who are currently ‘threat’ for the society?

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Comparative Study of the Writings of Judith Wright and Eunice de Souza

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Abstract: This paper discusses the Australian sensibility in the writings of Judith Wright and the Indian sensibility in the writings of Eunice de Souza. The poems discussed or rather compared in this paper are Judith Wright's "Company of Lovers" and "Woman to Man" with Eunice de Souza's "Bequest" and "Advice to Women". I have attempted to examine the impact of World War II and the mystical ideas brought up by Judith Wright whereas the practicality of life together with confessionalism brought up by Eunice de Souza. This paper involves an extensive study regarding the feminine mind of both the writers together with their background of coming from commonwealth countries and the cultural movements involved during the period of their writing. The psychological analysis of both the writers and their poetry forms the base of my research.

Keywords: Australian, Indian, mysticism, practicality, feminine, mind, life, background, Commonwealth countries, psychological analysis.

Judith Arundell Wright (31 May 1915 – 25 June 2000), an Australian poet, environmentalist and campaigner for Aboriginal land rights. She is also the recipient of the Christopher Brennan Award. She was the one to struggle during the World War II. Her first book of poetry, *The Moving Image* was published in 1946. Her other works include "Woman to Man", "The Gateway", "The Two Fires", "Birds", "The Other Half", "Magpies", "Shadow", "Hunting Snake", and many other. She is specifically concerned with the Australian environment, an area which gained prominence in Australian art in the years following World War II. She talks of

relationship between settlers, Aboriginals and the bush tradition in her poetry. Together with the Australian flora and fauna her writings contain a mythic substrata and the correspondence between inner existence and objective reality. The themes brought up in her poetry is that of aboriginality, mateship, egalitarianism, democracy of the world and Australia, the national identity of the people belonging to Australia, their motherland, the issue of migration and the inclusion of settlers, being an environmentalist she talks of Australia's unique location and geography categorized as a pristine land together with the complexities of urban living as a repercussion of World War II. "The beauty and the terror" of urban life in Australian bush plays the major role in Judith Wright's poetry - it is known as the Bush tradition which is iconic in Australia. It refers to the sparsely-inhabited region, regardless of vegetation. It is used to describe their rural, country or folk-nature. Australia is superficially considered to be devoid of these elements. There is an element of very paradoxical yearning towards their National ideals and Self – Identity. The narrative art of Australian writers has since 1788, introduced the character of a new continent into literature. It is very evident in Wright's writings that she has faced the trauma of Modernization. Her writings bring up a piece of literature as a mode of engaging reality. There is the pattern of cultural politics together with the burden of hegemony of the colonizers. The writer has also experienced with the content and the style of writing in order to create a finished state of mind. Her poem "The Company of Lovers" published in 1949, carries within itself the theme of Love and Death. The trauma of World War II and the complexities of Modernization kept hovering over the mind of the writer throughout her poetry. The poem is written in two irregular octaves, with few short lines together with more commas in in first octaves and semi-colon to bring out the silences from the mind of the writer to the reader. It is to provide an opportunity to the reader to come out with their own interpretations. There can be

many interpretations of this poem and it depends on the reader as to which one he/she wishes to choose. I will discuss all sorts of interpretations possible of her poetry as I opted for a psychological analysis of the writer. So I will follow the Deconstructive Approach for analyzing her poetry.

While looking at the title of the poem it may seem as an erotic or a love poetry concerned with the issue of Man - Woman relationship. Well that is the first interpretation of her poetry. The other interpretation concerns with the idea of Self and the Other, the Post- Colonial perspective of her writing and the Eco-Critical Approach. The other approaches include the Metanarrative of her poetry together with the Diasporic Analysis of the writer. Her poetry works beyond the limit of words. The personification of death plays the major role.

The first interpretation of her poetry is about the Man - Woman relationship. The writer says that “We meet and part now over all the world; We , the lost company,” , she talks about the two lovers who were together for a very short while and about to lose each other and part their ways, they “take hands together in the night, forget the night in our brief happiness, silently.” . The poet says that the two lovers live their life to its fullest in their short moment of pleasure and then part away from each other without creating any sort of clamor. The brief moment of sexual pleasure is the most genuine, beautiful and the divine moment of their life which will always hold a special place in their heart till their last breath. In the end as well the only thing which will remind them of their lover and provide a sense of fulfillment is this brief moment of divine pleasure. They consider this union of two bodies as the divine involvement or rather the meeting of ‘Aatma’ and ‘Parmatma’, the union of the mere human with God – the Divine Power. Here the soul of one lover finds her over-soul in his/her partner. This reminds me of John Donne’s poetry “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning” where the poet urges his lover to not to mourn about

their separation and be happy of the sense of fulfillment and individualism which their true and divine love has provided them. He asks her to not mourn on their separation and degrade its divinity but to accept the decision of the fate bravely as they are, two bodies but one soul hence they cannot be separated by the wings of time and the cruelty of fate. Wright says that

“Their footsteps crowd too near. Lock your warm hand above the chilling heart and for a time I live without my fear”.

(The Company of Lovers)

She is talking of death which is trying to overcome their lives and separate them from one another. At this point of time they found strength to overcome their fear in each other company. The brief embrace provides them the confidence and a sense of togetherness. It is highly imaginative and picturesque piece of literature. The imagery involved is erotic and brings up the deep and poignant emotions of the two lovers.

The other interpretation of the poem is the trauma of World War II, its effect on Australia and the complexities of Post- Modernization. From the very first octave of the poem the poet expresses her fear of death hovering over her mind together with her fear of parting away from her loved ones. The consequences of World War II was effecting throughout the world. The people were meeting for the last time and parting away keeping in mind the sweet memories of their loved ones of the time which they had spent together. The silence of the night makes them aware of the coming catastrophe in their lives. The only thing they will remember till their last breath is the time spent together with their loved ones. This is the only thing they will remember in their grave, the coming loneliness is thoroughly disturbing their heart and mind. In the second octave the poet says that

“Death marshals up his armies around us now. Their footsteps crowd too near.”

(The Company of Lovers)

The armies or the people so called as the keepers of peace seem dangerous to the poet and her loved ones. As they approach near the fear inside the heart of the poet increases to manifolds. At this moment they just embrace the hands of their loved ones, in this brief moment the fear in their mind overcomes by the warmth of their hearts. And suddenly the sound of drums personifying the death approaches close and finally takes the company of lovers in its grip.

The third possible interpretation of the poem is the Australian sensibility of the poet being under the grip of colonizers. She calls her community as the lost company. Under the dominance of the colonizers of the Australian land lost its cultural value. The people of Australia are lonely in their wilderness.

Judith Wright's second poem "Woman to Man" is based on the sexual act between a woman and a man who are married to each other. It carries certain bold themes. It shows how mini-narrative meets metanarrative. It explains how a man needs his partner. She explains the divinity of the sexual act which not only carries the carnal pleasure but is also an act of resurrection in the process of how a woman conceives the seed of the man in order to bring a new life on this earth. It is considered divine as the union of two souls to create a new soul. This also brings forth the idea of the birth of New Literature and a New Culture. The poet brought in the innovative practice of writing. This marks the beginning of the New tradition in the World Literature. This poem also makes Judith Wright a feminist poet. It talks about the psychology of a pregnant woman who explains the divinity of sexual act, she talks of the role of the man in it and the child. The man or rather the poet's husband plays the role of planting the seed in a

woman's body, the seed of a child which holds a new life within. The child does not have any shape or any particular face, it has no name as well yet the man and the woman knows its stature. She says that "This is our hunter and our chase", as she knows that this is what a marriage stands upon- bringing up a new life in this world. The muscular strength of male body knows, wherein the woman's breasts compliment, bringing tears in the eyes of both and creating the intricate rose-like structure in the female body known as foetus. This is the first interpretation of this poem regarding the man – woman relationship, the marriage and the coming up of a new life through sexual act.

The other interpretation of this poem is coming up of New Culture in Australia, the advent of New Literature from the Commonwealth countries. It describes the era of Post-Modernism, the time when the people of Australia started to gain their voice and express their views on concrete basis. The whole poem also describes the birth of a New Tradition in the garb of a Man-Woman relationship. The way a couple gives birth to an infant by indulging in a physical relationship, in the same way the people of Australia have also struggled for a long while now, still they are very courageous, powerful as well as afraid of how the whole world together with literature will receive them. She says that

"This is the bloods wild tree that grows, the intricate and folded rose."

(Woman to Man)

She attempts to describe the birth of New Literature, its structure and how it attempts to grow. Blood signifies the vigor of the new writers and how they have been intricately folded up like a rose. They have now gained courage to open up their petals of heart and mind as well as

their ideas to describe their ordeals. They call themselves “the blaze of light along the blade” in the world of Literature as well as among the Commonwealth countries.

The other Feminist writer about whom I will be discussing in this paper is another very prominent writer of Indian Literature, Eunice de Souza. She is one of the contemporary leading Indian poets writing in English. She is the poet of 80s and is a major figure belonging to the Bombay School of Indian English poetry which has such eminent poets such as Don Moraes, Nissim Ezekiel, Anan Kolatkar, Dilip Critre, Adil Jurawalla, Udayan Patel, Jerry Pinto etc. Just like Judith Wright, largely in a male-dominance that Eunice de Souza stands out as one who writes on her own terms about what moves her the most. She writes about being a woman and the disappointment of her family members at the time of her birth. She writes about the silence imposed on women rejoices in every assertion of female individualism.

The contribution made by women to Indian poetry in English is very vibrant and rich. Indian English poetry by women came as a game on itself only during the 1960s with the emergence of Kamala Das on the literary horizon which later witnessed a galaxy of women poets which includes names such as Gauri Deshpande, Mamata Kalia, Meena Alexander, Sujata Bhatt, Suniti Namjoshi, Margaret Chatterjee, and a group of women poets who constitute the Bombay School of women poets in English.

Eunice de Souza is a major representative of this group which includes several other prominent women poets such as Tara Patel, Iartiyal Dhaokar, Charkanyne de Souza, Menka Shivdasani, Mukta Sambarani etc. Their poetry not only draws the stamp of women sensitivity and perception of reality of the commonplace, but is also expressive of the problems of women in contemporary society.

Apart from poetry, de Souza has several works of Literary Criticism, two novels, and four Children's books to her credit. The major poetic works are:- *Fix* (1979), *Women In Dutch Painting* (1980), *Ways of Belonging* (1990), *Selected and New Poems* (1994), *A Necklace of Skulls* (2009), *Learn from the Almond Leaf* (2016). Her two novels include *Danger Look* (2001) and *Dev and Simran: A Novel* (2003) . She has edited several anthologies and collection and a weekly column for the Mumbai Mirror. As an art critic Eunice was a regular contributor to The Economic Times. She was involved in theatre as well, both as an actress and director.

Eunice was born and grew up in Pune in a Goan Catholic family. Several of her poems depict caricature of the Goan community or reflect her Portuguese ancestry. In one of her poems, she writes:- “No matter that my name is Greek, my surname is Portuguese, my language alien. There are ways of belonging, I belong with the lame duck”.

The two poems of Eunice de Souza which I will be discussing in this paper are “Bequest” and “Advice to Women”. In these two poems, the poet talks about her disillusionment from the world. They have the element of Confessionalism like that of Kamala Das. There is a constant search for individualism and her belonging. She reveals her pain, her loneliness and her vacuous life, devoid of love. She criticizes the hypocrisy of the world and the sense of Otherness which she received from the male dominant society. There is a sense of coming from a Commonwealth country, after the years of domination of Colonizers as well as from a male-dominant society.

The poem “Bequest” has been taken from the *Ways of Belonging* (1990). It is one of the most highly acclaimed poems composed by her. She emerged as a powerful voice in Contemporary Indian Women's poetry. It is written in five uneven stanzas. It is written in first person pronoun “I” where the poet herself is the speaker. This poem is characterized by her self-

revelation and is confessional in nature. The literal meaning of the word 'bequest' means a kind of inheritance or endowment, a legacy, benefaction or donation. In the poem she talks about what she would like to present or gift in the form of the legacy and to whom. There are many interpretations possible for this poem as well as that of Judith Wright's poetry. In the opening stanza of the poem, she refers to the picture of Jesus Christ commonly found in almost every Catholic home. This picture is of Christ 'holding his bleeding heart in his hand'. She tells us about the presence of this picture in her home too, however it arouses no religious sentiments in poet's heart and only appears as a routine feature in every Catholic household. The bleeding heart refers also to as a Sacred Heart, often depicted in Christian art as a flaming heart shining with the divine light, pierced by the lance-wound, encircled by the crown of thorns, surmounted by a cross and bleeding. Sometimes the image is shown shining in the bosom of Jesus Christ with his wounded hands pointing at the heart. The wounds and crowns of thorns elude to Christ's death by Crucifixion, while the fire represents the transformative fire of the Divine Love. The heart of Jesus Christ is the symbol of Divine Love and a symbol of Humanity. The divine love and the devotion of the sacred heart forms the basis of the Roman Catholic devotion. She later talks about the feelings of her heart that she has tried to share in vain with the countless people (the only exception being her hairdresser) and the advice and suggestions, she received from them. While some tell her to be stern and firm with her point of view while others suggest her to try to float along and bear the situations which take place against her wishes. Jesus Christ too seems to suggest her to accept things as they are. She feels that the world, governed largely by patriarchal values, has several lessons, for a woman as to how she should live and survive in a 'respective' state. However, a poet being Eunice, who is a 'Non-Conformist', a kind of rebel with an assertive mind, expresses her desire to live her life on her own terms and does not want

to be directed by others. She considers those women wise who smile ‘endlessly’ and ‘vacuously’ like an artificial ‘plastic flower’ which always appears fresh and never wilts or fades. She does not want to reveal her inner feelings to anyone and prefers to live a life of pretense which perhaps is a wiser way of living because she does not want to surface her weaknesses and become a subject of sympathy for others. In her view people only use and take pleasure of a woman’s weakness rather than helping her to come out of it, in this aspect only a woman herself can work for her betterment and not anyone else. Towards the close of the poem, she expresses her desire to perform an act of Charity by bequeathing her heart to an enemy and thus getting rid of the pain and sorrow that lives there.

The poem is expressive of her anguish, pain, and trauma that lies in her heart. It is written in a characteristic manner of her poetry employing extreme brevity, directness, economy of words, apt and moving imagery and confessional tone. There is also a sense of rebel and revenge, when she wants to give her ‘bleeding heart’ filled with anguish and pain to an enemy and to any of her loved ones. In the garb of charity she wants also wishes to take revenge from her enemies by giving them all the pain she has in her heart.

The other interpretation of her poem is the representation of the sentiments of the colonized people, together with the sentiments of the women in the male-dominant society. In the first stanza, she uses the symbol of Christ to represent, how after facing so many ordeals, he still has a peaceful and a smiling face to inspire humanity, to teach them the idea of never losing hope and working endlessly for the welfare of the humanity. Similarly the people of colonized nations have also faced a lot but still they are smiling and working for the betterment of society. The poet says that “The only person with whom I have not exchanged confidences is my hairdresser”, the hairdresser can be considered as her colonizer or the male dominance, under

whose dominance she cannot exercise her free will. She talks of many advices coming to her from all around, some tell her stick to her own point of view and some tell her to conform, she expresses that she does not abide by the teachings of Jesus Christ, because she is a rebel by birth and cannot be as modest, docile and ever smiling like that of Christ. She would rather prefer to fight against all odds. She thinks that life would have been easier for her if she had the ability to conform according to the commands of her master, than she would have been considered wise by others. Then there would have been no compulsion of using her mind. She could also have smiling days like the 'plastic flowers' without creating any significance of her existence. Then she would not be able to create her own individuality. Instead of learning to become a conformist, in the last stanza she shows her rebellious nature and decides to take revenge from her enemies and all those who tried to dominate her and oppress her identity in the garb of charity.

The other poem of Eunice de Souza which I will be discussing in this paper is "Advice to Women". It is a one stanza consisting of twelve lines of uneven length. It contains all the elements of Irony and Satire as well as the characteristic features of Black Humor. The poet advises women to keep cats instead of lovers as they never betray their owner. If they want to deal with the indifference and 'otherness' on the part of their lovers then they should distance themselves from the male dominion and focus on creating their own individuality. She points out that otherness is not always neglect but has several connotations to it. It is demeaning, hurtful, embarrassing, painful, leading to a feeling of wretchedness and worthlessness. Most of the time men do not consider a woman as a bundle of feelings rather they consider them merely a subject of lust or just a physical entity which satisfies their desire of sex. The poet's advice to women in general is not to let themselves get subjected to the indifference or otherness of men in the garb

of lovers. Instead they should keep the company of cats as she feels that cats prove to be better companion than lovers, as they neither demand nor betray, they only give love and happiness to their owner. They too come back to their little trays and will not abandon you. She further advises women not to utter any curse at their enemies i.e. disloyal lovers because they are not worthy of your curses as well as your time. Instead they should focus on the perpetual element of “surprise” found in our cats “great green eyes” which teach one to die alone without any illusion or false hope. In this manner cats prove to be better than human lovers who most often deceive and cheat by giving illusions and false hopes and thus ruining the lives of women. Instead of men, cats prove to be a better companion for women to keep their spirits high.

In this poem the poet talks about the psychology of a woman who is betrayed in love and is disillusioned from life. She even questions her very existence. She says that cats prove themselves to be the best companion for women to deal with the ‘otherness’ of lovers or rather men. She says that it is not always the neglect but the dehumanizing of women by men as well as the whole male-dominated society. She says that cats never tend to abandon, they always come back to the place they moved from. She urges to not waste time on cursing their lovers who have established them as their enemies. The sparkling eyes of the cat makes them aware of the beauty of the world. It gives them hope and a desire to live their life on their own terms by establishing their own individuality instead of questioning their existence.

The other interpretation is that of coming from a colonized country where the poet has spent many years of her life under the dominance of the colonizers as well as under the patriarchal authority. Here she tends to look at her most common companion, a cat. Cat is the most common usually adopted in Christian households. She asks women to look into the sparkling and gleaming eyes of their cat and look forward for a better future.

When it comes to talk about the comparative study of the two well-known feminist writers, Judith Wright and Eunice de Souza, I came to the conclusion that both of them belong to the same plethora of injustice and disillusionment of the world. Both of them strived hard to create their own individuality. The minor difference between the two is that, I found Eunice de Souza to be more vocal of her ideas than Judith Wright. Judith Wright makes use of more vivid images and has great ability to play with language, whereas Eunice de Souza is more direct in her expressions. Both of them expressed the same sentiments differently. Still I found Judith Wright to be more neutral about her ideas, she leaves it for the reader to interpret and decide for themselves. Judith Wright uses forceful imagery to affect the psychology of the reader whereas Eunice de Souza makes use of a more forceful language, she brings the reader to a platform to think and answer to themselves, provides space to make them talk to their soul.

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Writing Lives, Writing Society: Reading Babytai Kamble's *Jina Amucha* as Dalit Feminist Historiography

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Abstract: *Jina Amucha* (1986) translated as *The Prisons We Broke* by Babytai Kamble is an autobiography by a Dalit woman chronicling the oppression and sufferings of Dalit, particularly women of the Mahar community in Maharashtra. Even though it is an autobiography, the focus is not entirely on her own life, rather, it appears to be a collective account of the trials and tribulations that Dalit women have been facing since time immemorial. Dalit women are subjected to a matrix of caste, class and gender oppression from which escape is difficult. However, Kamble's very act of writing appears to be an act of resistance against upper-caste oppression as well as the discrimination that women face within their own Mahar community. This paper shall attempt to analyse Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* as a Dalit feminist exercise that subverts the dual enslavement of Dalit women by the caste Hindus as well as the patriarchal hegemony within their own caste. Kamble's representation differs from some Dalit as well as 'savarna' writings that uphold the Dalit cause, as it provides a realistic and self-reflective account of the Mahar community. It appears that Kamble fashions her identity based on the larger suffering she has endured as a woman within a Dalit community. Thus, this paper shall examine the movement of Dalit feminism in context of Kamble's autobiography, and attempt to analyse her memoir as Dalit historiography recording the history of oppression of Mahar women.

Keywords: Feminist Autobiography, Dalit historiography, Mahar community, Dalit feminism.

Baby Kondila Kamble's autobiography, *Jina Amucha* (1986) in Marathi, translated as *The Prisons we Broke* by Maya Pandit in English, is a significant text within the corpus of Dalit feminist writing. Kamble's autobiography appears to be a challenge to the very genre of autobiography because rather than being an account tracing her life events, the narrative is focalised on the Dalit Mahar community of Maharashtra, to which the writer belongs. *Jina Amucha* appears to be a revolutionary Dalit text because it blatantly exposes the lived realities of the Mahar community- the oppression by the upper-caste, their everyday struggle for acquiring food and basic amenities, their customs, superstitions and the inhumane treatment of Dalit women by the upper-caste as well as their own family and the Mahar community. As Maya Pandit mentions in the introduction to the book ,” If the Mahar community is the ‘other’ for the Brahmins, Mahar women become the ‘other’ for the Mahar men”(15). Kamble's autobiography, in tracing the Mahar community's history of caste oppression includes the gendered oppression of Dalit women by both upper-caste and the Mahar community. This paper shall argue that Kamble's autobiography is a historical narrative of the collective suffering of Dalit women, leading to a redefinition of the boundaries of Dalit literature and historiography. Moreover, this paper shall also analyse the role of Dalit feminism and the significance of Dalit feminist writings in giving voice to Dalit women's resistance.

Dalit literature emerged in the 1960s but Dalit feminist literature in the form of testimonios agitated their way into the public sphere in the 1980s (Rege 74). Most of the Dalit writings are autobiographical in nature:

Dalit life narratives challenge the bourgeois genre of autobiography...emerged from the creative dialectics between exploring and interpreting self and society and ...Came to represent...a social and community based chorus of voices...Dalit life narratives became

testimonies that summoned the truth from the past...violated genre boundaries by depleting the “I”- an outcome of bourgeois individualism is displaced with the collectivity of the Dalit community...Dalit life narratives thus historically created the genre of testimonios in which the individual self seeks affirmation in the collective mode (Rege 13).

In this context, Kamble’s *Jina Amucha* appears to be a befitting example of Dalit life narrative as the self is represented through the oppressions of the age-old caste system on the Mahar community. The portrayal of the Mahar community in Kamble’s autobiography appears to be significant, as Dalits had led a dehumanised existence under upper-caste oppression and thus assertion of their rights as equals become necessary. Kamble mentions the animal like existence that Dalits were subjected to, “We were just like animals, but without tails. We could be called human only because we had two legs instead of four. Otherwise there was no difference between us and the animals. ...Who was responsible...people of the high castes!”(59). In this instance, the “I” of the autobiography becomes “we”, the collective radical voice of the Mahar community, interrogating the history of oppression meted out to them by the higher castes.

The “I” does not get subsumed by the “we”, and as Doris Sommer mentions in the context of feminist autobiography that the “singular does not become plural by replacing or subsuming the group, but because the singular is part of the whole, an extension of the collective”(Anderson 128).The genre of autobiography and the feminine subject has been an area of study for western feminists and as Linda Anderson (2006) mentions, in the

1960s and 1970s, as second-wave feminism flourished, autobiography seemed to provide a privileged space for women to discover new forms of subjectivity,...The writing is a

response to political emergency and is in some ways “impersonal,” part of a strategy to “win political ground” by recording the popular struggle (119).

However, Dalit women’s writing is included within third-world women’s writing and is excluded from western feminism. As Rege (2006) points out, narratives of the second wave feminism forgot the Dalit women’s remembrances from the caste. “Dalit testimonios offered counter-narratives that challenged the selective memory and univocal history both of the Dalit and women’s movements”(Rege 75). In this context, Kamble’s *Jina Amucha* appears to provide a counter-history to the sufferings of the Dalit by focusing on the Mahar women’s experience. Kamble appears to make the collective Dalit women’s voice heard, which had been excluded from “savarna” as well as Dalit male writings.

The subaltern appears to be speaking in her own voice for herself as well as for her community through the act of writing. Kamble chronicles the suffering that Dalit women faced in every stage of their lives. She talks about the ways in which keeping women inside the house was a matter of “honour” for the Mahar men and his family. Girls in the Mahar community were married off at a very early age, even before their puberty and had to bear the brunt of household work and ill-treatment of her in-laws and husband, “In those days, at least one woman in a hundred would have her nose chopped off...These sasus ruined the lives of innocent women... husbands, flogging their wives as if they were beasts”(p.108).In this context, Ambedkar’s idea of the caste emerging through the regulation of women and Dalit women serving as the gateways to the caste system (Pradeshi 360) is significant. Dalit men who are powerless due to the upper-caste oppression seem to reinstate their “masculinity” by controlling the women of their family. Similarly, when Kamble talks about mothers-in-law being the worst enemy of the daughter-in-law in the Mahar families, it hints at the normalisation of the harsh treatment of Mahar women

across generations. Mahar women were exposed to an equally inhumane treatment by the upper-caste, “If they saw any man from the higher castes coming the road, ...they had to say, the humble Mahar women fall at your feet master. This was like a chant, which they had to repeat innumerable times”(63). If they missed the chanting, the upper-caste man would hurl abuses on the father-in-law, which would ultimately lead to dire consequences for the poor Mahar woman.

Dalit women’s suffering is a result of the matrix of class, caste and gender oppression which lead to their social, mental and physical suffering. It seems that their entire lives revolved around being a submissive wife and a procreator of children. Their condition was deplorable and Mahar women had to struggle to stay alive. They hardly got any food to eat as they could only eat after the men and the children had ate. Mahar women suffered the most during childbirth. “The ignorant midwives would keep thrusting their hands into the poor girl’s vagina...Invariably, the vagina would get swollen, obstructing the baby’s path...It was a battle with death”(69).Only few women and children survived during childbirth because of the lack of medical facilities, hygiene and food. As mentioned by Pandit, Kamble’s account does not evoke a sense of self-pity, rather exposes the gendered reality of the caste system where Dalit women are the worst victims. As a member of the Mahar community herself, Kamble does not idealise the Mahar community in contrast to the upper-caste communities. Kamble’s vivid account of Dalit women’s suffering is significant in ensuring that the Dalit women’s history of oppression is not forgotten and “herstory” becomes a part of Dalit historiography.

It appears that the Mahar women did not entirely remain passive victims of oppression as Kamble traces the overt and covert ways in which they resisted. Mahar women have been constantly relegated to the margins but it is in the Hindu holy month of Ashadh that women seem to occupy the centre stage through their ritualistic possession by goddesses or the mothers.

As a witness to the beliefs, customs and rituals of the Mahars, Kamble provides a realistic account of their practices which were based on superstitions, “Resounding screams of these possessed women could be heard...All the men folk took off their turbans and placed them at the mother’s feet in utter supplication. They begged her ...O mother, what do we know...We are men with black heads. We are like dust underneath your feet”(36). It appears that through such a possession, women play on the hypocrisy of the mahar men who treat women as worse than animals but deify them as goddesses because of superstitious beliefs. Kamble does not provide an interpretation of such superstitious rituals but it seems that this was the only domain where women could assert themselves through such a play act and subvert the patriarchal hierarchy. Such local acts of resistance by women have been captured by Kamble in order to revisit the history of resistance of Mahar women.

The direct political resistance of Mahar women against the caste and gender oppression begun with Ambedkar’s call for “annihilation of caste”. Kamble, who appears to be a devout follower of Ambedkar and his ideologies focuses on Ambedkar and his ideals in her narrative. “The creator gave us a human form and sent us down to earth, and abandoned us... It was our Bhim who finally breathed life into lifeless statues, that is, the people of our community”(126), such was the devotion the Mahar community had for Ambedkar. In his speeches, Ambedkar, appealed to the Mahar community to give up eating dead meat, boycott the Hindu religion and its practices and encouraged Mahars to take up businesses to earn their own livelihood, instead of depending on the upper-caste. For Ambedkar, “the issue of caste and that of the subordination of women are inseparable and do not present a dichotomy. He saw the question of the Dalit women’s identity and self-respect as crucial to social reform and to a revolutionary struggle. Conception of identity was broad based and Dalit women constituted an intrinsic part of his

thought and struggle”(Pradeshi 346) . He called separate political meetings with women and Kamble notes how Ambedkar appealed to them,

You must educate your children...Send them to schools. When your children begin to be educated, your condition will start improving...We, too, have the right to live as human beings...Our women have had a major role in being superstitious, but I’m sure they will now give up these superstitions and take a lead in educating their children...I have full faith in you, my sisters (75)

Kamble recalls how Ambedkar’s emphasis on education of the Mahars was one of the major reasons that influenced her father to educate her and her brother.

Kamble was quite privileged in being able to acquire an education as most Mahar girls were not provided education for a long time. However, even after being educated, Kamble was forced to hide her writings from her husband. She mentions in the interview with Maya Pandit that her husband was a good man “but like all the men of his time and generation, he considered a woman to be an inferior being. He would not have tolerated the idea that I had taken to writing”(147). While Kamble was one of the earliest Dalit women writers, she did not publish her writings for a long time, fearing the anger and rejection of her family. This seems to suggest the possibility of the range of Dalit women’s writings, that chronicle the gendered caste experience, but are yet to be discovered. Dalit women’s writings are revolutionary, since women have to cut across multiple levels of oppression to publish their work and gain readership of the masses. As Ambedkar saw great potential in Dalit women’s resistance against caste oppression, Kamble too believed in the power of women to bring about changes in society. According to Kamble, it was the duty of Dalit women to cherish Ambedkar’s ideals and as she mentions that, “Today, many of our daughters and daughters-in-law are graduates. They are a hundred times

more superior to ignorant women like us. Even if their husbands forget the Father... it is their duty to reprimand their husbands”(131).Kamble mentions in the preface of her narrative that the very purpose of the book is to serve as a reminder to the future generations about the Dalit cause of opposing caste domination and celebrating one's identity as a Mahar. Thus, Kamble's testimony serves as an archival document which records the Mahar community's oppression and the very act of writing is a resistance against the exclusion of their suffering from the history of caste system in India.

Dalit feminist writings such as Kamble's narrative provides an unbiased account of the caste oppression as it not only opposes the 'savarna' domination but reflects inwardly into the domination meted out to women within their own Dalit community. According to Gopal Guru (2003), Dalit women have been excluded from the cultural arena and "Dalit male writers dominate the scene... reproducing the same mechanisms against their women which their high caste adversaries had used to dominate them" (83). Guru argues that Dalit women talk differently "because of external(non-Dalit forces homogenising the issue of Dalit women) and internal(the patriarchal domination within the Dalits) factors" (81), and in the context of Dalit feminist movement, he sees Dalit feminism as being separate from the mainstream feminist movement. He believes that "the Claim for women's solidarity at both national and global levels subsume contradictions that exist between high caste and Dalit women. The identity of the Dalit woman as 'Dalit' gets whitewashed and allows 'non-Dalit' woman to speak on her behalf"(82). However, Rege(2003) opposes this and argues for a Dalit feminist standpoint which "emphasises individual experiences within socially constructed groups and focuses on the hierarchical, multiple, changing structural power relations of caste, class, ethnicity which construct such groups"(98). The "Dalit woman" is not a homogeneous entity and Dalit feminism cannot flourish

“if it is isolated from the experiences and ideas of other groups and must educate itself about the histories, preferred social relations, the utopias and the struggles of the marginalised”(99) . Kamble’s *Jina Amucha* appears to have been written from a Dalit feminist standpoint. In the beginning of the autobiography, she mentions that within the Mahar community, their family was quite privileged as compared to other families. Her grandfather was educated, worked as a butler for European Sahibs and her father was an established contractor. Moreover, she went to a school where upper-caste girls came to study and there were hardly a few Mahar girls in her class. However, Kamble does not focus entirely on women of her own class and goes beyond such class divisions in order to represent the worst forms of suffering that poor Mahar women were exposed to. She speaks for the Mahar women without neglecting the various forms of suffering that they faced.

Thus, it appears that Baby Kamble through her narrative, *Jina Amucha* “broke the prisons” of caste, class and gender oppression in which Dalit women particularly had been trapped since time immemorial. As Maya Pandit mentions , “it is more of a socio-biography rather than an autobiography”(12) , there is a subversion of the narrative genre of the autobiography that privileges the self, in order to challenge the collective oppression of the Mahar community. The Dalit female self appears to have been fashioned by the memories of internal and external oppression on her body and mind, because of her doubly-deviant identity as a “Dalit” and a “woman”. There is also a questioning of the very genre of Dalit literature and historiography which had excluded Dalit women’s suffering. Dalit feminism as an academic discipline is a discourse of Dalit women’s suffering and resistance which had earlier been excluded from the Dalit and the mainstream Feminist movements. Dalit feminist writings such as Kamble’s autobiography chronicle the different forms of suffering of the Mahar women and

challenge the Dalit historiography and at the same time gives impetus to the Dalit feminist movement.

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