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पत्रिका आरण्यक एक स्वतंत्र, द्विभाषी साहित्यिक मंच है जो हिंदी और अंग्रेजी साहित्य में मौलिक, चिंतनशील और नवोन्मेषी रचनात्मक आवाज़ों को प्रोत्साहित करने के लिए समर्पित है।

Patrika Aranyak is an independent, bilingual literary platform dedicated to nurturing authentic, contemplative, and innovative voices in Hindi and English literature.

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संपादकीय / Editorial Note

Every species leaves traces of its passage through time. Before intelligence took root in Homo sapiens, fossils were the only testimony life offered to the future. But once art, imagination, and inquiry emerged, the nature of those traces changed. Civilizations are remembered not simply for how long they endured, but for the depth of their expression—their art, their literature, their thought. These will be the signatures by which future generations know us.

In an age saturated with expression—where the immense weight of what has come before can feel immobilizing—the challenge is to create authentically: to draw together distant domains and shape them into something that resonates with the universal human experience.

Some attempt this through spectacle or shock. The more demanding path is to create a true vibration through craft—one that is undiluted yet accessible, refined without losing its human pulse.

In this first issue we present work that strives for such a vibration. We hope you find something here that speaks to you. With your thoughtful feedback, we will continue to refine and elevate this endeavor.

हर जीव अपने पीछे कुछ न कुछ चिन्ह छोड़ जाता है। कभी ये चिन्ह केवल मिट्टी में दबी हड्डियाँ थे, जिनसे धरती पर जीवन की कहानी पढ़ी जा सकती थी। परन्तु जब मनुष्य ने सृजन की क्षमता पहचानी—कला, साहित्य और जिज्ञासा के द्वार खोले—तो इन चिन्हों का स्वरूप बदल गया। अब सभ्यताओं की पहचान केवल उनके समय-मान से नहीं, बल्कि इस बात से होती है कि उन्होंने अपने युग को कितनी सूक्ष्मता और मौलिकता से अभिव्यक्त किया।

आज, जब अभिव्यक्ति के साधनों की कोई कमी नहीं और अतीत का विराट विस्तार कभी-कभी मन को स्थिर कर देता है, सच्ची चुनौती है—प्रामाणिक सृजन की। उन विविध क्षेत्रों को जोड़ने की, जो सामान्यतः भिन्न प्रतीत होते हैं, और उन्हें इस तरह गूँथने की कि वे साझा मानवीय अनुभव को नई व्यंजना दें।

कुछ लोग यह लक्ष्य चौंकाने या विचलित करने वाली कला के माध्यम से साधने का प्रयास करते हैं। पर कठिन मार्ग वह है, जिसमें रचनात्मकता की सूक्ष्म तरंग प्रवाहित हो—ऐसी तरंग जो अनावश्यक आडम्बर से दूर रहे, मन को सहज स्पर्श करे, और सरल होकर भी सतही न बने।

इस प्रथम अंक में हमने ऐसे ही प्रयासों को स्थान दिया है—वे रचनाएँ, जिनमें यह सूक्ष्म स्पंदन विद्यमान है। आशा है, इनमें आपको कुछ ऐसा मिले जो देर तक मन में ठहर सके। आपके विचार और सुझाव हमारे इस प्रयास को और परिष्कृत करने में सहायक होंगे।

Editor-in-Chief

Research Paper/ शोध पत्र

The Violence of Proportion: Medical Authority and the Modern Mind in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*

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Abstract:

This study undertakes a rigorous interrogation of Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway, foregrounding the entangled discourses of madness, modernity, and psychic disintegration as symptomatic of a civilization fractured by war and mechanized rationality. By situating Woolf's narrative within the epistemological crisis of post-World War I Britain, the analysis contends that the novel destabilizes psychiatric orthodoxy and unmasks the coercive violence embedded in medical authority. Septimus Warren Smith, the shell-shocked veteran, becomes the locus of this critique: his hallucinations, affective numbness, and estrangement from social reintegration are not mere indices of pathology but dramatizations of a culture incapable of acknowledging psychic trauma. His condition exemplifies the collision between individual subjectivity and the disciplinary imperatives of a society enthralled by order, productivity, and decorum. Woolf's deployment of stream of consciousness functions simultaneously as aesthetic rupture and diagnostic instrument, enabling access to interior states that elude conventional narrative representation. The novel's dual narrative architecture entwines Septimus and Clarissa Dalloway as dialectical foils: Clarissa's oscillations between existential dread and fragile social poise mirror Septimus's catastrophic psychic collapse, thereby mapping a continuum of mental experience intensified by the devastations of war. The figures of Dr. Holmes and Sir William Bradshaw epitomize Woolf's critique of proportion, a concept that transmutes medical practice into disciplinary surveillance. Their reduction of illness to social conformity reveals psychiatry as an apparatus of biopolitical control, subordinating individuality to the imperatives of stability and mechanized order. Septimus's suicide, therefore, transcends

pathological explanation; it becomes a philosophical act of resistance, a tragic repudiation of a dehumanizing modernity that annihilates singularity. Clarissa's empathetic recognition of his death underscores Woolf's plea for a more humane, emotionally attuned apprehension of suffering—one that resists rigid taxonomies and affirms the multiplicity of inner life. By foregrounding trauma, psychiatric power, and the social determinants of mental health, Mrs. Dalloway compels readers to reconsider the porous boundaries between sanity and madness, private anguish and collective obligation, thereby inscribing mental illness at the very heart of modernity's crisis. Ultimately, Woolf's text emerges as both literary innovation and cultural indictment, exposing the epistemic violence of medical discourse while affirming the irreducible complexity of human consciousness.

Keywords: psychiatric authority, bio-political control, stream of consciousness, trauma discourse, existential dread, epistemic violence

Exploring Cultural Memory in Literature: A Theoretical Framework:

Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), one of the most significant modernist novels in English literature, is commended for its exploration of temporality, consciousness, and the fractured conditions of post-World War I society. Among its numerous themes, the representation of mental illness is one of the most complex and culturally significant. Through the psychologically troubled war veteran Septimus Warren Smith and the socially astute but internally troubled Clarissa Dalloway, Woolf examines the boundaries between sanity and insanity. She demonstrates how some forms of suffering are unnoticed or unpleasant due to modernity's emphasis on order, rationality, and societal efficiency. Because Woolf herself experienced numerous mental breakdowns and consistently challenged psychiatric authority, *Mrs. Dalloway* might be read as a political and personal indictment of how society defines, diagnoses, and treats mental illness.

This paper contends that Woolf stages a significant critique of early twentieth-century psychiatry and its inability to identify psychological trauma, particularly that of returning soldiers, using her modernist techniques, especially stream of consciousness, shifting focalization, and temporal fragmentation. The study positions *Mrs. Dalloway* as a work that both reflects and challenges prevailing cultural narratives about madness by drawing on theoretical frameworks from Michel Foucault's study of medical power, Elaine Showalter's feminist investigation of hysteria, R. D. Laing's notion of ontological insecurity, and modern trauma theory (Bessel van der Kolk). Woolf portrays mental illness as a symptom of a highly

troubled modern civilization that is grappling with issues of war, empire, gender roles, and institutional authority rather than just as an individual sickness.

Madness, Modernity, and the Aftermath of War

Woolf sets Mrs. Dalloway in a post-war London that is struggling to restore social order following the psychological and physical devastation of World War I. The book reveals a world of suffering, disillusionment, and unresolved sadness beneath the surface of everyday life, such as Clarissa preparing for her party and the bustling city streets. Septimus Warren Smith, a combat veteran, is the embodiment of this concealed national trauma. His overwhelming guilt, emotional numbness, and hallucinations are all signs of what is today called post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). However, in 1925, this sickness was dubbed “shell shock,” a term that was often dismissed as a sign of cowardice or moral weakness.

The long-lasting violence of war that persists long after the battlefield is abandoned is made clear by Septimus's mental breakdown. In a biting critique of the naive and idealism that drove soldiers into battle, Woolf states that he “went to France to save an England which consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare's plays and Miss Isabel Pole in a green dress walking in a square.” He is deeply devastated by the treachery of the war. Septimus experiences an intrusive hallucination that blurs the line between recollection and the present after seeing his friend Evans die: “the branches parted and there was his friend Evans.” According to renowned trauma theorist Bessel van der Kolk, traumatic memory frequently “is timeless” and intrudes into the present as if it is happening again (van der Kolk 66). Woolf's portrayal of Septimus's hallucinations closely aligns with modern understandings of trauma, revealing her intuitive grasp of psychological suffering.

Woolf also highlights the profound sense of alienation that is brought on by trauma. Septimus feels as though “he could not feel,” thinking that reality has vanished. This lack of emotion Ness is a reflection of what R. D. Laing subsequently called “ontological insecurity” “a broken sense of self where the individual views the world as a threat rather than a source of support (Laing 42). Septimus's detachment from reality is not irrational; rather, it is a coping mechanism brought on by experiences that were too strong for the intellect to comprehend. Septimus's obviously unstable consciousness contrasts with Clarissa Dalloway's more socially acceptable form of psychological instability. Despite not being diagnosed with a mental illness, Clarissa experiences existential dread, ongoing anxiety, and a deep sense of emotional loneliness.

She recalls her fear of dying after a previous sickness when she had unexpected moments of confusion while strolling across London: “She felt somehow very like him the

young man who had killed himself.” Woolf’s claim that there is a continuum of mental pain is emphasized by this dual consciousness. Septimus’s more obvious psychological breakdown is echoed in Clarissa’s bouts of inward disintegration. Thus, Woolf’s parallel narrative method undermines the sanity/madness dichotomy, implying that everyone in contemporary society has some kind of psychic trauma.

Psychiatric Authority and the Violence of “Proportion”

One of the most critical aspects of Woolf’s examination of mental illness is her depiction of the psychiatric system as coercive, impersonal, and morally suspect. Dr. Holmes and Sir Rather than being a healer, William Bradshaw is presented as a social conformist. Their primary concern is not Septimus’s well-being but rather the preservation of “proportion,” a notion Woolf employs to symbolize the ideological power that medical authority holds over individuals. Sir William Bradshaw emerges as the embodiment of the novel’s critique of oppressive medical authority, personifying the coercive power embedded within early twentieth-century psychiatry. His devotion to the principles of “conversion” and “proportion” aligns closely with what Michel Foucault interrogates in *Madness and Civilization* as the medicalization of deviance an epistemological framework in which difference is reclassified as disorder and subsequently disciplined. According to Foucault, modern psychiatry functions simultaneously as a purported science and a covert apparatus of social regulation, enforcing normative behaviour under the benevolent rhetoric of care and cure (Foucault 38). Woolf’s depiction of Bradshaw dramatizes this dual function with striking clarity. As the narrator states:

He swooped; he devoured. He shut people up. It was this combination of decision and humanity that endeared Sir William so greatly to the relations of his victims. But Rezia Warren Smith cried, walking down Harley Street, that she did not like that man. Shredding and slicing, dividing and subdividing, the clocks of Harley Street nibbled at the June day, counselled submission, upheld authority. (152)

This passage exposes the predatory undertones of Bradshaw’s authority, revealing how decisiveness masquerades as compassion while masking an underlying impulse to dominate and contain. His unquestioned assertion of will is figured through violent, consumptive imagery swooped, devoured, shredding and slicing which strips medical intervention of its supposed neutrality. Woolf thus unveils the latent brutality within Bradshaw’s attempt to institutionalize Septimus, an act framed as benevolent treatment but experienced as psychic annihilation. Institutionalization becomes a process of social excision, whereby the inconvenient individual is removed from the collective body and rendered invisible, their

subjectivity erased in the name of order and stability. This critique is deeply inflected by Woolf's own experiences with dehumanizing psychiatric practices that privileged control, enforced rest, and isolation over genuine understanding. Critics such as Elaine Showalter have demonstrated that early twentieth-century psychiatry frequently pathologized nonconformity particularly in women thereby reinforcing rigid social norms and gender hierarchies under medical authority (Showalter 203). Read through this lens, Woolf's portrayal of Bradshaw also functions as a feminist intervention. His fixation on "proportion" echoes cultural expectations that women maintain domestic harmony, emotional restraint, and social decorum at the expense of personal autonomy. By linking psychiatric regulation to gendered discipline, Woolf exposes how medical discourse operates not merely as a response to illness, but as a powerful ideological instrument that polices bodies, identities, and forms of resistance. Even though Holmes is not as evil as Bradshaw, he nevertheless adds to Septimus's decline by writing off his symptoms as lack of proportion. Holmes tells Septimus to take a bromide and go on a walk, insisting that he should just show interest in everyday life. The general cultural unwillingness to recognize the psychological effects of the conflict is reflected in this trivialization of trauma.

Woolf is able to show how medical carelessness and entrenched paternalism actively exacerbate suffering through Holmes's fundamental inability and refusal to comprehend Septimus's interior reality. Holmes's reduction of psychological trauma to mere irrationality exemplifies what Woolf presents as the epistemic violence of modern psychiatry: a system that privileges authority, rationalism, and social conformity over empathy and subjective truth. Consequently, Septimus's final act of suicide must be interpreted not simply as a manifestation of madness, but as a radical gesture of resistance against medical domination. Faced with Bradshaw's impending plot to institutionalize him, Septimus resolves to preserve his autonomy at all costs:

He did not want to die. Life was good. The sun hot. Only human beings what did they want? Coming down the staircase opposite an old man stopped and stared at him. Holmes was at the door. "I'll give it you!" he cried, and flung himself vigorously, violently down on to Mrs. Filmer's area railings. "The coward!" cried Dr. Holmes, bursting the door open. Rezia ran to the window, she saw; she understood. (226-227)

This moment exposes the profound irony of Septimus's death: he does not seek annihilation, but rather escapes the coercive silencing imposed by psychiatric authority. His leap from the window becomes a refusal to submit to a system that would erase his voice under the guise of "care." In one of the novel's most searing indictments of medical power, Woolf reframes suicide as a tragic yet defiant assertion of selfhood against an oppressive institutional

order. Septimus's death thus embodies what Michel Foucault identifies as the paradox of madness under modern regimes of discipline, wherein insanity becomes "the only remaining space where the self can assert its autonomy against institutional domination" (251). Through Septimus, Woolf critiques a society in which survival itself demands submission, and where death emerges as the final means of preserving personal sovereignty.

Stream of Consciousness as a Literary Mode of Mental Distress

One of Woolf's greatest innovations in *Mrs. Dalloway* is the use of stream of consciousness, a technique that allows readers to enter the fluid, broken, and often contradictory inner worlds of her characters. Woolf is able to depict psychological trauma as a dynamic and evolving experience rather than a linear illness because to this narrative method, which becomes an essential tool for showing mental illness. Septimus's thinking is characterized by associative jumps, abrupt transformations, and sensory overload. For example, he immediately perceives a car backfire as dangerous: "It was plain enough; the motor car could not be said to hum; it roared." Ordinary stimuli become catastrophic. Trauma theorists argue that hypervigilance is a defining hallmark of PTSD, a condition in which the mind remains perpetually immobilized within a defensive, anticipatory mode of perception (van der Kolk 78). Woolf's narrative technique formally embodies this psychic state by transforming the mundane textures of everyday life into sites of latent menace, thereby dramatizing how trauma recalibrates sensory experience itself. Ordinary stimuli are rendered uncanny, charged with an excess of significance that mirrors the traumatized subject's inability to distinguish threat from safety. This perceptual distortion is compounded by a profound disintegration of temporality within Septimus's consciousness. Linear chronology collapses as intrusive memories rupture the present moment, revealing trauma's resistance to narrative containment. Although Evans died many years earlier, Woolf writes:

White things were assembling behind the railings opposite. But he dared not look. Evans was behind the railings! "What are you saying?" said Rezia suddenly, sitting down by him. Interrupted again! She was always interrupting. Away from people they must get away from people, he said (jumping up), right away over there, where there were chairs beneath a tree and the long slope of the park dipped like a length of green stuff with a ceiling cloth of blue and pink smoke high above (36)

Here, the past does not remain past; instead, it violently intrudes upon the present, collapsing temporal boundaries and destabilizing Septimus's grasp on reality. Evans's spectral presence exemplifies what van der Kolk defines as traumatic repetition "a reliving rather than

remembering “in which memory is not cognitively processed but somatically and perceptually reenacted (Kolk 195). Woolf’s stream-of-consciousness technique thus operates not merely as an aesthetic experiment but as a psychologically incisive formal analogue to trauma itself, capturing the recursive, involuntary nature of traumatic memory. As a result, Woolf’s portrayal is simultaneously lyrical and clinically astute, fusing imaginative beauty with profound psychological realism. Yet Woolf extends this fragmented narrative consciousness beyond Septimus, suggesting that psychic dislocation is not confined to pathological trauma but is endemic to modern existence. Although Clarissa is comparatively stable, her awareness is likewise marked by discontinuity, revealing the subtler, socially sanctioned ways in which contemporary life fractures identity. As she moves through London, her thoughts drift rapidly and associatively from memories of Bourton, to meditations on mortality, to fleeting impressions of shop windows and skywriting planes mirroring the dispersive pressures of modernity itself. Through this parallel structure, Woolf collapses the boundary between trauma and normalcy, implying that the modern subject is perpetually negotiating a fractured sense of self within an overstimulated, temporally unstable world. She experiences moments of pure exhilaration followed by sudden plunges into melancholy: “She had a perpetual sense... of being out, out, far out to sea and alone.” This fluctuating emotional register implies that Septimus and Clarissa share a spectrum of contemporary psychological instability rather than having completely different mental lives.

By emphasizing the flexibility and ambiguity of human mind, critics like James Naremore have claimed that stream of consciousness in modernist literature serves as a critique of Western rationality (Naremore 112). This method has two functions in *Mrs. Dalloway*: it challenges the inflexible medical and social frameworks that aim to define and contain mental illness while also dramatizing the lived experience of it.

Clarissa and Septimus as Psychological Foils

In order to emphasize the main point of the book that mental illness cannot be separated from the more general circumstances of contemporary life, Woolf draws a comparison between Septimus Warren Smith and Clarissa Dalloway. Even though the two protagonists never cross paths, there are deep philosophical and psychological parallels between their stories.

Clarissa’s inner life is shaped by persistent existential rumination and an acute sensitivity to the transience and precarious beauty of lived experience. Woolf frames her consciousness as one perpetually oscillating between presence and annihilation, vitality and erasure. As the narrator observes:

But every one remembered; what she loved was this, here, now, in front of her; the fat lady in the cab. Did it matter then, she asked herself, walking towards Bond Street, did it matter that she must inevitably cease completely; all this must go on without her; did she resent it; or did it not become consoling to believe that death ended absolutely? (12)

This open-ended interrogative structure resists philosophical closure, reflecting Clarissa's unresolved uncertainty about the purpose of existence and the inevitability of death. Rather than arriving at transcendence or despair, her consciousness lingers in ambiguity, revealing what may be read as an existential suspension an awareness of mortality that both destabilizes and intensifies her attachment to the present moment. Clarissa's social competence and outward composure function as a carefully maintained performance; she hosts parties and sustains appearances, seamlessly inhabiting the role prescribed by her social milieu. Yet beneath this surface fluency lies a profound sense of isolation. Her admission that she feels "invisible; unseen; unknown" signals moments of dissociation in which the self withdraws from social visibility, exposing the emotional costs of conformity and emotional restraint.

In this way, Woolf dramatizes the paradox of Clarissa's subjectivity: she is deeply embedded in the social world yet internally estranged from it. Her loneliness is not pathological but structural, produced by the demands of modern civility and gendered expectation. On the other hand, Septimus cannot conceal his inner turmoil. Where Clarissa's fragmentation is sublimated into social ritual and aesthetic contemplation, Septimus's psychic disintegration erupts uncontrollably into public space. The contrast between them underscores Woolf's central insight: that modern consciousness is universally fractured, but only certain forms of suffering are permitted to remain invisible, while others are pathologized and punished.

The instability that Clarissa represses is revealed by his breakdown. However, Clarissa senses a connection with him on an instinctual level. She experiences a profound, even supernatural connection when she finds out about his suicide during her party. Clarissa's response to Septimus's suicide culminates Woolf's exploration of the fragile boundary between sanity and madness, isolation and communion. Rather than reacting with conventional horror or moral condemnation, Clarissa experiences a moment of profound identification that collapses the distance between her socially sanctioned existence and Septimus's marginalized suffering. As Woolf writes:

She felt some- how very like him the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away. The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. He made her feel the beauty; made her feel the fun. But she must go back. She must

assemble. She must find Sally and Peter. And she came in from the little room. "But where is Clarissa?" said Peter. (283-284)

This moment crystallizes the novel's paradoxical ethics of survival. Clarissa's unsettling gladness does not signify approval of death but rather an intuitive recognition of suicide as an act of existential defiance an assertion of agency in a world structured by coercive norms and social surveillance. Septimus's death momentarily liberates Clarissa from the oppressive weight of "leaden" time, as the clock's authority dissolves into ephemerality, symbolizing a rupture in the regimented temporality that governs modern life. Through this symbolic suspension, Septimus "made her feel the beauty; made her feel the fun," restoring to Clarissa an intensity of perception that her carefully curated social identity often suppresses.

Yet this revelation is fleeting. Clarissa's imperative "She must assemble" signals the reconstitution of the self-demanded by social performance. Assembly here functions as both literal and metaphorical reconstruction: the gathering of guests and the reassembly of a fragmented subjectivity into a coherent, socially intelligible form. Her return from the "little room" enacts a quiet capitulation to social order, even as it is haunted by the knowledge Septimus embodies. Peter's question, "But where is Clarissa?" underscores the novel's final irony: despite her physical presence, Clarissa remains partially absent, suspended between private revelation and public identity. Woolf thus closes the novel not with resolution, but with a recognition that modern subjectivity is permanently divided sustained by ritual and appearance, yet secretly animated by moments of resistance, identification, and existential clarity. This moment represents the blending of their psychic experiences, implying that insanity is a normal aspect of life rather than an anomaly. Critics such as Alex Zwerdling argue that Clarissa and Septimus represent two responses to the pressures of modernity conformity and collapse (Zwerdling 152). Clarissa's social grace hides her frailty, while Septimus's fall exposes the limits of social standards. By comparing them, Woolf is able to critique the idea of social propriety and emotional reserve that define upper-class British culture. Woolf also uses their split consciousnesses to question the medicalization of madness. Clarissa's periods of existential dread, spiritual insight, and deep emotion are akin to the traits that psychologists pathologize in Septimus. However, because she demonstrates social normalcy, her experiences are accepted. According to Elaine Showalter, women's emotional outpouring is often classified as hysteria by society, while men's logic is respected (Showalter 215). By showing how Septimus's emotional transparency is penalized while Clarissa's repression is socially rewarded, Woolf questions this duality.

Suicide as Resistance and Social Critique

One of the most contentious and philosophically charged moments in *Mrs. Dalloway* is Septimus Smith's suicide, an episode that functions simultaneously as a deeply personal tragedy and a radical epistemological statement. Early critical responses tended to pathologize Septimus's death as the inevitable outcome of mental illness, reducing the act to a symptom of insanity. However, more recent interpretations shaped by disability studies, trauma theory, and Foucauldian critiques of institutional power reframe the scene as a deliberate act of resistance against coercive systems of normalization. Woolf herself destabilizes reductive readings by emphasizing not Septimus's desire for death, but his attachment to life.

With striking clarity, Woolf recounts the incident: He did not want to die. Life was good. The sun hot. Only human beings what did they want? Coming down the staircase opposite an old man stopped and stared at him. Holmes was at the door. "I'll give it you!" he cried, and flung himself vigorously, violently down on to Mrs. Filmer's area railings (226). The insistence that "Life was good" and "Life was lovely" profoundly unsettles conventional suicide narratives that equate self-destruction with nihilism or despair. Rather than rejecting existence itself, Septimus rejects the conditions under which life is made intolerable by an intrusive and authoritarian medical apparatus. His decision to die emerges not from passive hopelessness but from an active refusal to submit to Sir William Bradshaw's regime of surveillance, confinement, and psychic erasure. As Woolf insists, "He would not surrender," framing Septimus's final gesture as an assertion of agency rather than capitulation.

Within this framework, suicide becomes what Michel Foucault theorizes as the "last refuge of the self" against authoritarian psychiatric intervention, a final space in which subjectivity can resist institutional capture and epistemic violence (282). Septimus's leap thus operates as a grim yet resolute affirmation of autonomy in the face of medicalized domination. Woolf's portrayal compels the reader to confront the ethical ambiguity of survival within oppressive systems, suggesting that madness, death, and resistance are entangled within the structures of modern power. Through Septimus, the novel challenges readers to reconsider where agency resides when social institutions define conformity as health and dissent as disease. This perspective is supported by Clarissa's response to his passing. She expresses appreciation instead of horror: "Somehow it was her disaster her disgrace." She understands that Septimus's passing exposes a weakness in the social structure she supports. The idea of harmony and stability that Bradshaw's party stands for is called into question by his inability to fit in. Woolf's own experiences also influence how she approaches suicide. Before her death

in 1941, she made several attempts at suicide. Her own essays demonstrate a profound understanding of the intricate relationships that exist between mental illness, medical care, and personal action. Woolf's criticism of a society that sees psychological anguish as a problem to be solved rather than an experience to be comprehended can be seen in Septimus's suicide.

Society as the Source of Madness

In the end, Mrs. Dalloway contends that mental illness is a sign of larger society dysfunction rather than just an individual disease. According to Woolf, London is a city fixated on efficiency, order, and appearances qualities that stifle emotional depth and exacerbate psychological suffering. The entire book is structured by Big Ben's chiming, which represents the unrelenting strain of time and societal obligation. The rhythms of contemporary life, which Septimus and Clarissa both find difficult to adjust to, are reinforced by each blow. The expectation of emotional moderation in society is criticized in the book. The cultural taboo around sincere expressions of suffering is reflected in Clarissa's observation that 'one must not speak of death'. People like Septimus find it more challenging to seek understanding as a result of this emotional repression, which also makes mental illness invisible. Another important factor is class. While upper-class Clarissa avoids scrutiny despite her own psychological fragility, Septimus, who comes from a lower-middle-class background, receives the majority of psychiatric intervention. This relationship is consistent with Showalter's claim that gender and class biases have historically shaped mental disease (Showalter 233). By the novel's conclusion, Woolf situates lunacy not at the margins of experience but at the very centre of modern consciousness. Septimus's death reverberates through Clarissa's party like an unassimilable ethical shock, exposing the impossibility of containing post-war Britain's moral and emotional crises beneath layers of civility, spectacle, and social ritual. The glittering surface of Clarissa's gathering cannot efface the trauma that underwrites it; instead, Septimus's absence becomes a haunting presence that interrupts the illusion of coherence upon which social order depends. In this moment of reckoning, Clarissa comes to recognize the profound interdependence of human suffering and the fragility of the distinctions that separate sanity from madness. As Woolf writes: "She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away. The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. He made her feel the beauty; made her feel the fun. But she must go back. She must assemble. She must find Sally and Peter. And she came in from the little room. (283)" This unsettling affective response signals not cruelty or detachment, but an existential awakening. Septimus's suicide compels Clarissa to confront the precariousness of her own life and the insufficiency of social norms that presume to define

what is 'sane'. The dissolution of the "leaden circles" of time momentarily suspends the oppressive regularity of social existence, allowing Clarissa a fleeting vision of authenticity unmediated by performance. Yet her insistence that "she must assemble" underscores the tragic necessity of reconstituting the self in accordance with social expectation, even after such moments of insight. Woolf thus reveals sanity itself as a fragile and performative construct, maintained through repression, ritual, and denial.

In conclusion, *Mrs. Dalloway* offers a radical interrogation of mental illness that dismantles the medical, social, and cultural paradigms of its historical moment through the intertwined narratives of Septimus Warren Smith and Clarissa Dalloway. Woolf exposes the emotional austerity demanded by modern society, critiques the coercive and reductive tendencies of early twentieth-century psychiatry, and demonstrates how trauma infiltrates even the most apparently stable structures of everyday life. By engaging contemporary theoretical perspectives, this analysis shows how Woolf's representation of lunacy anticipates modern understandings of trauma, mental health, and the social determinants of psychological suffering. Septimus's breakdown emerges not as an individual pathology but as an indictment of a culture unwilling to reckon with the ethical and emotional consequences of war. Meanwhile, Clarissa's inner disquiet affirms that mental vulnerability is a shared human condition, revealing the cost of sustaining identity and coherence within a rapidly transforming and deeply fractured modern world.

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From Extraction to Regeneration: Reimagining the Anthropocene — Green Energy as a Catalyst of Environmental Renaissance

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Abstract

The Anthropocene, characterized by humanity's unprecedented influence on global ecosystems, necessitates a paradigm shift in environmental, ethical, and cultural consciousness. This paper explores the transition from extractivism to regenerative approaches, emphasizing green energy as a catalyst for planetary and societal renewal. Integrating the literary lens of Margaret Atwood's MaddAddam trilogy with empirical data from international and national organizations—including UNFCCC, IRENA, IEA, UNEP, IPCC, MNRE, and the World Bank—this study interrogates the interplay between imaginative narrative and material policy implementation. Atwood's speculative fiction illustrates the consequences of unbridled extraction and the potential for adaptive, cooperative posthuman societies, offering a symbolic blueprint for regeneration. In parallel, 2024–2025 data indicate significant advances in renewable energy capacity, carbon reduction initiatives, and climate finance, while highlighting persistent gaps between technological deployment and holistic sustainability. The paper also situates India's development Yadav 2 trajectory within this discourse, linking green energy adoption, equitable growth, and the Viksit Bharat 2047 vision to broader global sustainability efforts. By synthesizing literary critique, environmental humanities, and empirical evidence, this research demonstrates that regeneration is both an ethical imperative and a feasible societal pathway. It argues that the convergence of cultural imagination, green energy, and policy innovation can facilitate a renaissance in environmental and societal stewardship, establishing a model for developed, equitable, and sustainable futures.

Keywords

Anthropocene, regeneration, green energy, ecocriticism, speculative fiction, Margaret Atwood, renewable energy transition, sustainability, India, Viksit Bharat, posthumanism, environmental humanities

Introduction

The Anthropocene marks a period in which human activity has become the principal agent of planetary transformation, influencing climate, biodiversity, and geological processes (Crutzen 2002). Historically, human development has been predicated on extractive practices— industrialization, fossil fuel consumption, deforestation, and intensive agriculture—which have produced material wealth alongside environmental crises. Rachel Carson once remarked, “In nature nothing exists alone” (Carson 1962), emphasizing the profound interconnectedness disrupted by extractivist logics. Today, the challenge lies in reimagining civilization’s relationship with the Earth, moving from domination and depletion toward reciprocity, regeneration, and ethical stewardship.

Green energy has emerged as a pivotal instrument in this transformative process. According to IRENA’s 2025 Renewable Capacity Highlights, global renewable power capacity reached approximately 4,448 GW by the end of 2024, with solar contributing 1,865 GW, wind 1,133 GW, and hydropower 1,283 GW. Renewables now constitute 46% of global installed capacity, and IEA Yadav 3 projections estimate an additional 10% growth in 2025, with solar PV and wind expanding 26% and 19% respectively (IRENA 2025; IEA 2025). These figures reflect the tangible potential of green energy to drive decarbonization while simultaneously catalyzing economic development and environmental restoration.

Literature offers an equally vital lens through which to understand these transformations. Margaret Atwood’s MaddAddam trilogy—comprising *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009), and *MaddAddam* (2013)—presents a speculative exploration of posthuman survival in the wake of extractive collapse. Atwood’s narrative illustrates the moral, ecological, and technological consequences of unbridled industrialization, while envisioning cooperative communities, adaptive species, and regenerative ecological practices. As Haraway observes in her reflections on sympoiesis, life is made-with; survival depends on mutual interdependence rather than individual domination (Haraway 2016). Atwood’s trilogy embodies this ethic, proposing literary models for regeneration that parallel global sustainability initiatives.

The integration of literary imagination with empirical environmental data provides a multidisciplinary framework for assessing the Anthropocene. This paper argues that green energy is not merely a technological solution but a catalyst for environmental and societal renaissance, aligning with the broader ethical imperatives dramatized in Atwood's work. Furthermore, India's developmental agenda—anchored in Viksit Bharat 2047 and its net-zero by 2070 commitment—illustrates how national policy can operationalize these regenerative principles, linking technological transition, equitable growth, and ecological stewardship (MNRE 2025; UNFCCC 2025). This convergence of imagination, data, and policy forms the foundation for a holistic pathway toward a sustainable future.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

“Humans are part of a larger community of living and non-living things, and our survival depends upon recognizing this interconnection.” — Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble* (2016)

The Anthropocene challenges traditional notions of human centrality, demanding a re-evaluation of ethical, ecological, and literary frameworks. Central to understanding this epoch is the intersection of ecocriticism and posthuman thought, which provide a robust theoretical apparatus to examine how human actions influence both ecological systems and cultural narratives. Bruno Latour's assertion that the modern dichotomy between nature and society is a fallacy underscores the necessity of rethinking relational networks. In *Politics of Nature*, Latour contends that humans must engage with non-human actors—rivers, species, technologies—as political agents within co-constituted systems (Latour 2004). This conceptualization aligns with green energy transitions, wherein technology, policy, and ecological systems interact to shape planetary outcomes.

Post-Independence Developments

Donna Haraway's concept of sympoiesis emphasizes co-creation and interdependence across species and systems. Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy dramatizes these principles through hybrid posthuman communities, where survival is contingent upon collaborative ethical action rather than domination. Timothy Morton's *hyper objects* further theorizes the scale and persistence of phenomena such as climate change, offering a lens through which Atwood's catastrophic yet regenerative worlds can be interpreted (Morton 2013).

From a literary perspective, Atwood's speculative fiction is complemented by Amitav Ghosh's *The Great Derangement* (2016), which situates climate crises within socio-political and historical contexts, and Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Ministry for the Future* (2020), which emphasizes large-scale technological and policy solutions for climate mitigation. Together, these texts illuminate the narrative strategies through which literature interrogates extractive practices and imagines regenerative futures.

Empirical evidence underscores the urgency and feasibility of such regenerative pathways. According to IRENA's 2025 Renewable Capacity Highlights, global renewable energy capacity reached approximately 4,448 GW, with solar, wind, and hydropower contributing 1,865 GW, 1,133 GW, and 1,283 GW respectively. Renewables now account for 46% of global installed capacity, with an expected growth of 10% in 2025 (IRENA 2025; IEA 2025). Similarly, India's Ministry of New and Renewable Energy reports robust capacity additions, aligning with the country's *Viksit Bharat 2047* vision and Net Zero 2070 commitment (MNRE 2025). The data reflect that the convergence of technology, policy, and ethical frameworks can accelerate the shift from extractive paradigms toward regenerative models.

Methodology, Data, and Discussion

"Energy transition is not only about infrastructure, but about reshaping society's values and its relationship with the planet." — Fatih Birol, IEA Executive Director, 2025

Methodology, Data, and Discussion "Energy transition is not only about infrastructure, but about reshaping society's values and its relationship with the planet." — Fatih Birol, IEA Executive Director, 2025 Methodology This study adopts an interdisciplinary approach, integrating literary analysis, environmental humanities, and empirical data assessment. Primary literary texts include Margaret Atwood's *Yadav 6 MaddAddam* trilogy, supplemented by comparative references to Amitav Ghosh's *The Great Derangement* and Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Ministry for the Future*. The analysis focuses on narrative representations of extractivism, technological innovation, and ecological regeneration.

Empirical data were drawn from multiple authoritative sources: the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC 2025 Global Stocktake), International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA 2025 Renewable Capacity Highlights), International Energy Agency (IEA 2025 Electricity Mid-Year Update), United Nations Environment

Programme (UNEP 2024 Emissions Gap Report), IPCC AR6 2025 Summary, India's Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE 2024–25 Annual Report), and the World Bank Climate Data Portal. Data analysis examines trends in renewable energy deployment, carbon reduction strategies, and policy interventions in both global and Indian contexts.

Data Analysis and Findings Globally, renewable energy capacity reached 4,448 GW by the end of 2024, with solar contributing 1,865 GW, wind 1,133 GW, and hydropower 1,283 GW, accounting for 46% of total installed capacity. IEA projections estimate an additional 10% growth in 2025, with solar PV and wind expanding 26% and 19% respectively (IRENA 2025; IEA 2025). The UNFCCC 2025 Global Stocktake indicates that despite these gains, global emissions reduction targets remain unmet, requiring accelerated implementation to meet the 1.5 °C goal (UNFCCC 2025).

India's renewable trajectory is particularly significant. MNRE reports cumulative renewable energy capacity of 175 GW, with solar and wind leading expansions. Initiatives under Viksit Bharat 2047 envision India as a developed, low-carbon.

Pathways to Developed India

India's integration of green energy within its socio-economic planning illustrates a practical model of the Anthropocene's regenerative potential. Policies promoting solar parks, wind corridors, green hydrogen, and carbon-neutral urban development are aligned with Viksit Bharat 2047 and international sustainability commitments. The convergence of renewable energy deployment, investment in infrastructure, and policy innovation demonstrates a holistic approach to achieving a low-carbon, equitable, and technologically advanced India while fulfilling ethical obligations toward the planet.

Conclusion

The Anthropocene confronts humanity with the urgent task of reimagining its relationship with the planet. This paper has illustrated that the shift from extractive paradigms to regenerative frameworks is both necessary and feasible. Literature, as exemplified by Margaret Atwood's MaddAddam trilogy, provides not only a critique of unbridled industrialization and environmental collapse but also a visionary roadmap for ethical, technological, and ecological co existence. Atwood's speculative narratives, together with the

theoretical insights of Haraway's sympoiesis and Morton's hyper objects, underscore the interdependence of humans, non-human species, and ecosystems—an ethic that must guide practical interventions in the Anthropocene.

Empirical data from 2024–2025, drawn from IRENA, IEA, UNFCCC, UNEP, IPCC, MNRE, and the World Bank, demonstrate the transformative potential of green energy. Global renewable capacity, already exceeding 4,448 GW, and India's ambitious initiatives under Viksit Bharat 2047 and the Net Zero 2070 commitment, show that sustainable technological deployment can simultaneously drive environmental restoration and socio-economic development. Green energy Yadav 8 emerges not merely as a technological tool but as a catalyst for an environmental renaissance—a means to operationalize the ethical and imaginative lessons highlighted by literature and critical theory.

Ultimately, regeneration in the Anthropocene is both a moral imperative and a practical possibility. By integrating literary imagination, rigorous empirical data, and visionary policy frameworks, societies can foster resilient, equitable, and sustainable futures. Green energy, therefore, is not only a pathway to decarbonization but a cornerstone of planetary stewardship, ethical responsibility, and cultural renewal.

“The future of life depends on our ability to act as caretakers, not conquerors, of the Earth; regeneration is the work of our hands, minds, and hearts.” — Vandana Shiva, 2025.

We need to remember that - We have not inherited the Earth from our forefathers; we have borrowed it from our children.

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POETRY / कवितायें

The Thought of Love

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A
Hand
Holds the other
to feel the quietude and dissolve
in it. It doesn't talk, but stays underneath.
when a strong wind blows, we know the rains
are coming to welcome us with watery arms
into the bosom of a lovely land where
we are a bridge to the sky
where we forget all about
the dampness
of the four
walls.
Now
we
are
again
bound
by
the
thought
of love
and being loved

तुम और वो

सचिन बिजनौरी

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तुम दो लफ़्ज कहते हो
और वो लफ़्ज सुनाना चाहती है

तुम किसी का आसरा मांगते हो
और वो बिन सहारे चलना चाहती है

तुम भरी आँखों से ख़्वाब देखते हो
और वो उन्हें सच करना चाहती है

तुम समय को तकते हो
और वो समय में ढलना चाहती है

तुम ता उम्र आराम चाहते हो
और वो थक कर सोना चाहती है

तुम खुद को अकेला रखना चाहते हो
और वो तुमको खुद में बुनना चाहती है

तुम किसी पल हताश होते हो फिर भी
वो सदा मुस्कुराए रहना चाहती है

और खेलखिलाना चाहती है।
जीना चाहती है ! पल पल सभी को हँसाना चाहती है

अडिग ध्रुव

दीपक नेगी

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तुम्हारे शून्य से बड़ा हूँ मैं
और शून्य में ही खड़ा हूँ मैं
ध्यान में जिसको साधते हो तुम
स्वप्न में जिसके जागते हो तुम
उस मनश्चः से लड़ा हूँ मैं
चेतना बिंदु से बड़ा हूँ मैं

तुम्हारी ज्ञान दृष्टि के छोर में
अनुकल्पित एक कल्प भोर में
अस्तित्व के प्रश्नों के शोर में
उत्तर ले ध्रुव अडिग खड़ा हूँ मैं
तुम्हारी प्रेक्षा में ही प्लवित
चेतना बिंदु से बड़ा हूँ मैं

मूक अंतर्नाद की अनुगूँज हूँ मैं
गुंजित भ्रमरगीत का हेमंत हूँ मैं
सुर नर असुर सब ही तो हूँ मैं
कालकूट पीयूष मंथन में पड़ा हूँ मैं
तुम्हारे शून्य से बड़ा हूँ मैं
और शून्य में ही खड़ा हूँ मैं

Insomnia.exe (Critical System Update Required)

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PING!

Your Sleep Score™ is *"Better Than 92% of Users!"*
(Our data shows you're *technically unconscious*
between 3:17-3:19 AM. *Premium members see proof.*)

BUZZ...

*"Your Restfulness Trendline™ suggests
childhood trauma is impacting ROI.
Upgrade to TraumaLite™ subscription?"*

HMM~

"Soothing Sounds" Package Includes:

- "White Noise" (actually just a Nest thermostat screaming)
- "Ocean Waves" (NSA wiretap of Edward Snowden's nightmares)
- "Rainforest" (3 lawyers arguing Terms of Service in a Slack channel)

BZZT!

*ALERT: Your biological need for sleep
conflicts with shareholder expectations.*

Suggested Resolutions:

- ✓ Microdose melatonin *and* shareholder value
- ✓ Outsource dreams to Bangalore (*"5-star rated on Glassdoor!"*)
- ✓ Accept your new identity as *"Nocturnal Productivity Streamer"*

CLUNK.

=== OFFICIAL DIAGNOSIS ===

CODE: 418 // *"User Retains Trace Humanity"*

SOLUTION:

*"Your existence has been flagged
as unsustainable under current
late-stage capitalism protocols.*

[SYSTEM REBOOTING...]

[THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN SLEEP™]

[AUTOMATIC RENEWAL IN 3...2...]

SHORT STORIES / लघु कथाएँ

A Sunset in Chomasa....

Debashish

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After waiting for this moment for months upon months all together and lots of efforts put together, I was ultimately successful today in sipping my tea atop the summit of MOUNT BHAGIRATHI-II (6512 meters) *it is located in the Garhwal Himalayas in Gangotri National park right above the Gangotri glacier.* My closest companion was with me – my dairy.

Hello! I am Surya, a 25-year-old boy. I am a Mountaineer.... Mountaineering is my passion. I wish that one day I shall conquer the peak of "**Mount Everest**" for which I am making all efforts. It was the last day of sept, 2019 when I succeeded in climbing Mt. Bhagirathi and this meant a lot to me because it was my first professional success as a mountaineer.... It just felt awesome and very satisfying. My savings of the past several months got spent to make this possible.... but all this was worth spending because this very moment was more precious than any amount of money for me.

I was accompanied by nine other fellow members in the expedition, Tyagi Sir, Ravindra Sir with his 3 assistants, 3 men from England and my friend Nitin (*best team, best coordination, best people... I was very happy to be a part of this team*) Me and Nitin became friends during my stay in Dehradun and because of common interest in adventure trips the two of us developed a fine rapport. As we were accompanied by experienced mountaineers like Ravindra sir and Tyagi sir, so we did not need any local assistance beyond the base camp.

After 11days of hard trek, we reached back to our base camp at "*Bhojghasa*" and next day it was time for all of us to bid farewell to each other to move further towards our individual destinations. Me and Nitin rode back towards Uttarkashi. After covering a distance of around 35 kms on my bike, we finally reached the holiest center of pilgrimage, Gangotri; where pilgrims from across the world come to take a holy dip in the river Bhagirathi. We stopped at a roadside tea shop to warm ourselves with a cup of hot tea. My home town is Uttarkashi, so I had to drive back just up to Uttarkashi form where Nitin had to catch his bus for Dehradun. After finishing our tea as we resumed our journey, Nitin suddenly said to me that he had a great urge to stop for a night in the wayside hamlet called "**Dharali**" because he had read and heard much about the pristine beauty of this place. Dharali is a small village located in Uttarkashi district at a distance of around 75 kms from the District Headquarter and in

proximity with the well-known tourist destination named **Harsil**; but in every respect, Dharali is far better than Harsil more so because it has **Saat-tal** that is a cluster of 7 lakes.

As I am a great lover of natural beauty, I instantly accepted the proposal made by Nitin and within next two hours our bike was running past the rugged terrain and fast approaching towards the fairyland like hamlet named Dharali. I have several memories associated with Dharali because whenever I feel low or depressed in my life I always approach Dharali to spend a few moments in the soothing lap of mother nature which rejuvenates me (*I always suggest to all nature-lover to visit Dharali during the months of Sept and Oct only for the simple reason that at this time of the year there is no traffic at all, no disturbing sounds and one can communicate intimately with mother nature*).

As the wheels of my bike kept on heading towards our destination, I slowly started feeling a subtle grassy smell entering my nostrils which mingled with the smell of earth had an enchanting effect upon my senses. As I advanced further the gusts of evening breeze brought along a sweet fragrance of ripe apples and also I noticed that the entire area was dotted with shiny red apples and it suddenly struck my mind..... wow! we had reached Dharali. Dharali being a small village, has just a few shops and roadside hotels which constitute its tiny BAZAR. As I keep away from crowded areas as best as possible, so I stopped my bike a few meters away from the market and we got down in front of a small tea shop. Coincidentally, the moment we set foot in that village, tiny droplets of rain started falling down all around us. This being the season called **Chomasa**.

The thirsty parched-up earth gave out an earthy smell which had an enchanting effect upon my senses. For a few moments both me and my friend Nitin were totally lost absorbing within our consciousness the magic of this place. Even more than me Nitin was lost in the spell of this beautiful village when suddenly to my amazement I felt a moist touch of someone's hand upon my back and I abruptly turned around to find an old woman with wrinkled face staring towards us... she was wearing a traditional Garhwali headscarf and had a tiny nose ring (*Murki*) but she looked as if some deep agony was eating her up from within.

I hastily asked her what the matter was but instead of replying my question she simply asked... "*baba app log fozi ?? mera "Fozi saab" bhi fozi pr kayi salu bitin ghor na ayi .. oh!*" this was garhwali language and she was asking us that ..are you both in army .. my husband ("fozi saab") too is an army man but he has not returned home for years. She paused for a moment and then a sparkle of hope flashed upon her face and she further said will you kindly

give my man, my message. For a moment I was confused and rather perplexed by this type of strange behavior of this old woman whom I had never ever met before but then it suddenly flashed upon my mind that it was actually my costume and boots that gave her the misleading impression of my being an Army man.

I was about to tell her my reality of having nothing to do with Army and clarify that my cargo and boots just resembled that of an army man's costume but she held my hand and in a pleading tone with eyes ebbing with tears she repeated her request and consequently I just happen to say "yes off course! I will"

The very next moment she giggled like a sixteen-year-old girl and her eyes beamed with happiness making me conscious of the mistake that I had committed unconsciously. Somehow in a moment of confusion, I had just now promised her that I would deliver her message to her husband who was an army man and had not returned home since past several years.....

After the old woman went away smiling, both me and Nitin stood perplexed for a few moments trying to overcome to terms with what our eyes have just now witnessed. In the shadow of approaching twilight, both of us advanced towards a roadside hotel to rent a room for the night. Overcome with fatigue, we took an early dinner and slipped into our quilts. Next morning, we got up before daybreak and decided to go for a long walk toward "SATTLE" we deliberately took the root towards "SATTLE" which past through a nearby village. As we started climbing upwards through that village my eyes suddenly struck upon a short woman figure carrying a *Ghilda* (bamboo basket) on her back. The next moment I identified her to be the same woman we had met the previous evening at the road-side.

She kept on moving ahead of us without noticing that we were prodding a little distance away behind her. After a few minutes, we passed by a field where three other women were working in the field, we just halted there to take a little rest. I simply asked an elderly woman working next to me if the husband of that old woman with the bamboo basket was an army man to which she responded that it was true but her husband had died around 25 years ago, I briefly told her about the awkward behavior of that woman and her request to deliver her message to her husband, at which the elderly woman smiled faintly and said with a sigh that she is still waiting for the man who never will come home. Then she revealed to us the entire detail of that old woman and now it was clear to us why she behaved so strangely with us the previous evening. Her husband had died during some war while serving in the army but unfortunately his body could never reach back his village.

When I further asked that elderly lady if that woman had turned mentally insane due to this shock; she replied that for the most part of the year that woman behave normally but during the months of CHOMASA something happens to her. During CHOMASA she would often walk all the way from her village up to the DHARALI bus halt and keep sitting there for hours all together watching every bus that passed by. She would ask at all that roadside shop if they had seen her husband getting down from any bus then at dusk, she would return home mumbling something that no one could understand. By this time tiny droplets of rain had started sprinkling all around us and the morning sun was peeping from behind saffron hue clouds. We realize we had halted at this spot for quite long and so hastily moved further to resume our walk towards “SATTLE”and finally we reached the first lake which is approx 3 KMs away.

The water is so clear you can actually see right down to the lake bed. We enjoyed the view and cool breeze for a while and then moved on. The real steep section starts after this. At some places, we were hard-pressed to find the route. The second and third lakes are situated close by, the second one has completely dried up and have converted into a swamp now. The third one is also on the brink of extinction. There is a temple on one side of this second lake. There are some interesting stories about this temple and various caves on the hill face, some distance away. The fourth lake is just around the corner from the second lake it was close to 1 PM. It took us roughly 2-2.5 hours to climb this far. We gained an altitude of approx 1000 ft. during the trek. The other three lakes are a couple of miles away from this place. We were tired, hungry so we decided to get back to our hotel.

While returning from “SATTLE” we reached the spot where the path bifurcated. One way could lead us directly to the bus stop where we had parked our bike, while the other path entered the village. we had proceeded around 200 Ms towards the direct path to the bus stop, but then my step suddenly turned back towards the village and I told Nitin that we are going to visit that elderly woman whom we had seen moving ahead of us with the grass basket in the morning. We climbed up through the fields and finally reached that spot where that madwoman lived. There on the top of a cliff stood a small wooden hut adjoining a beautiful garden adorned with shiny Fyoli and **Rose** flowers, which were dancing in the moist breeze of CHOMASA, these flowers need a lot of care; and I was a little surprise if this woman whom I thought to be mentally insane could grow them in her backyard.

As we approached close to her hut, I suddenly got apprehensive about how she would react on seeing us at her doorstep. Suddenly my eyes observed her bending in a corner and feeding her cow and its calf the moment she noticed us she hurried towards us and asked from a distance "*baba ap log pension wala ya bijli wala*", she meant to ask if we were from the electricity department or pension department. We were wondering what to say and a bit timidly we explain that we were travelers who came here to visit "SATTLE", she smiled at us and warmly said "baba then you both are guest in village kindly have some water" we heaved the shy of relief to see that she was treating us nicely. She extended a mug of water towards us.

The water was ice cold and it pinched by gums slightly. We were wondering how to start a conversation with her when she herself requested us to wait a little while she could prepare some tea for us. She made this offer in such an affectionate manner that there was no question for us to refuse. Rather this made me wonder how the same woman who seems to be mad on the previous day was behaving like such a wonderful noble lady. The next moment she busied herself in preparing tea and we stepped a little towards the side of her garden; this entire area was interspersed with "*Deodar*" and "*Apple*" trees and in the area underneath she had planted various colorful flowers most of which were blooming in this season of CHOMASA. At this part of the day when the sun was heading westwards, the clouds had scattered a little and bright sun-rays peeping through them waved a magical spell around her garden which was enchanting our senses. Our spell got broken by her faint voice calling us to have our tea. Taking our tea glass steaming with creamy tea we started enjoying her gentle hospitality right in front of her beautiful garden but tea was really nice and on that chilly evening was giving us great pleasure. After finishing our tea, we took leave of her although in my mind I kept on thinking that the purpose of coming here to her hut was still unachieved.

Returning to our hotel we slept soon after finishing our dinner because the exhaustion of such long walk all through the day had drained our energy by evening time. The next morning, we woke up late and noticed that it was raining heavily outside. Packing our bags, we sat on the porch of our roadside hotel waiting for the rain to stop so that we could proceed towards our homes. In the meantime, we had finished our breakfast but again and again the thought of that old lady kept on making me restless. I was very curious to know the reason due to which such a wise noble lady behaved like a madwoman in front of us when we have reached DHARALI.

Around 1 o' clock in the afternoon the rains subsided and once again the sky became clear the sun shone brightly over our heads and so we made up our mind to proceed but then I suddenly asked Nitin if we could once again visit that old lady before leaving DHARALI. He agreed at this and so both of us climbed up once again to the hut of that old woman. After

prolonged rain for several hours DHARALI looked very fresh as if basking in the sun after a bath, the grass seemed greener, red and green apple shone brightly through the trees, the entire DHARALI shone bright with tiny raindrops sprinkled all around, it was so quiet all around that I could hear my own heartbeats while climbing uphill.

Finally, we reached the hut of that old lady but my heart sank to see that her doors were closed and she was nowhere around. We thought that it was all in vain to climb up to her hut but then we beamed with a smile to see her coming towards the hut with a "*banta*" filled with water, she had actually gone to fetch water from the nearby stream. On looking at us, she gave a gentle smile. As soon as she came closer I extended my hand to dislodge the "*banta*" off her head. At this moment, I simply felt nostalgic and my thoughts wandered into those childhood days when my "Nani" used to bring water in a similar way and I used to help her in keeping the "*banta*" down.

Nitin told her that he had once again come to bother her, but She replied with a smile that hardly anyone comes to meet her and so she was very happy that the two of us had come again. Today that old lady asked us affectionately to have food at her house. I would have refused but no.... I wanted to spend some more time there so that I could know her better, and so I stayed back. It was 4 o'clock by this time and the sun was advancing westward to set behind the hills. Suddenly my gaze fell upon the hill opposite the woman's hut behind which the sun was about to hide. It seemed as if it was kissing the entire earth as if promising her to return the next morning and saying, wait for me I will come again; and the earth, on the other hand, was growing faint in despair of parting away from the sun. Probably I can never capture in words the emotions that rose in my mind at that time beholding the setting sun from the garden of that woman's hut... but all I can say is that this sunset looked magnificent beyond words. In the meantime, she milked her cow and offered us 2 glasses of fresh warm milk. usually, she sold off the remaining milk to the villagers but today she did not sell the milk and kept it on the earthen stove to boil for preparing KHEER. While cooking she told us that today after a long long time kheer was being prepared in her house.

When I asked her, "Maa Ji when did you make kheer the last time" she just gave a mute smile without answering my question. After sometime when she had prepared food for us she called us in her kitchen and offered us Kheer and aloo sabzi all prepared on a wood fire. Really this food prepared on the earthen stove and forest wood tasted much more delicious than the food we eat in cities. She kept sitting beside us while we ate and now for the first time faintly mentioned about her husband who was Rifleman in Indian army. All she told us was that 25

years ago when he was posted somewhere in "Kashmir" near the LOC he wrote a letter for her and this was the last time she heard from him. I asked her what happened after this and what was written in that letter at which she rushed to the corner of her room and hastily dug into an iron trunk from which she took out a letter preserved safely in a small polythene packet.

I was amazed to see that after such a long time of 25 years she was holding the same letter in her hands. But for a few moments, she was lost in the haze of memories and her wrinkled eyes ebbed with two drops of tears. Holding her head down and staring at that letter she meekly said in husky voice "baba this letter came 25 years back... but my *"fozisab"* never came since then". She took out that letter carefully from the tiny polythene packet and left it in my hands. I hesitated a little to open her letter but then slowly unfolded the yellow paper with tender hands and started reading. It was a small letter that gave me the answer to all those questions that had kept on whirling around my head for the past two days.

After reading it fully, I silently folded it back and handed it to her. She quietly got up and placed it inside her iron trunk. The kheer she had so lovingly cooked for us was probably the best in taste that I had ever eaten. Having finished our dinner, it was time for us to leave and so with the fall of dusk, we bid her farewell. When both of us bent down to touch her feet she gently caressed our heads that once again reminded me of my beloved grandmother. As we were descending down the slops towards our hotel through the moist earth, I could feel my cheeks getting wet by tears that effortlessly ran down from my eyes while every word that I had read in that letter echoed into my ears and I could control my emotions no further. It was this that the letter said

भारत माता की जय!

प्रिय गोमती,

आशा करता हूं कि आप राजी खुशी होगी, मांजी पिताजी का ध्यान रख रही होंगी। मां जी पिताजी को मेरा नमस्कार कहना और शायद इस पत्र के पहुंचने तक हमारी गाय ने एक बच्चे को जन्म दे दिया होगा उसकी बधाइयां। मुझे पता है, आप इस पत्र में लिखें हर अक्षर को छूकर उस पल को महसूस करने की कोशिश कर रही होंगी, जब मैंने यह पत्र लिखा प्यारी सी मुस्कान आपके चेहरे पर होगी, भगवान करे वह हमेशा बनी रहे, आपकी खीर कि मिठास अभी भी मेरी जीभ पर बरकरार है, माफ करना मैं पिछले चोमासे घर न आ सका, यहां कश्मीर में माहौल थोड़ा गर्म है। पर चिंता की बात नहीं हमारी सेना ने परिस्थितियों पर काबू पा लिया है, जल्द सब सही हो जाएगा और मैं इस वर्ष भी हर बार की तरह चोमासे मैं घर आऊंगा। एक बार फिर आप और मैं घर के खलिहान में बैठकर चाय पीते हुए

सूर्यास्त देखेंगे, मुझे पता है आपको हमारे घर से होने वाले सूर्यास्त का दृश्य बहुत सुंदर लगता है- और क्योंकि चोमासे में मैं आपके साथ होता हूं तो वह चोमासे का सूर्यास्त आपके लिए सुंदरतम हो जाता है। इस चोमासे हम साथ होंगे, आप मेरा इंतजार करना मैं जरूर आऊंगा इसी वादे के साथ अपने शब्दों को विराम देता हूं।

राइफलमैन सुंदरलाल

गोरखा राइफल

The Names We Carry

Ishika Vishawakarma

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The city did not announce itself; it seeped in. First, as a chemical tang that replaced the memory of mountain air—ozone, diesel, the cloying sweetness of decaying garbage blooming in concrete heat. Then, as a frequency: a subsonic drone beneath the chaos of horns and commerce, a vibration that resonated in the molars, in the hollow of the chest, where Aiko's heartbeat used to sync with the rhythms of monsoon and harvest. Finally, as geometry: a brutal poetry of right angles and reflective surfaces, under a sky the colour of forgotten breath.

He arrived from the green, whispering hills not with naive hope, but with a calculated bargain. The scholarship and the corporate offer were lifelines thrown not merely to him, but to his crumbling world back home. The river that watered their paddy was sick, choked by a new upstream mine whose promises glittered like fool's gold. His father's bamboo craft brought in whispers of currency, not solid notes. Aiko's exile was not an adventure; it was an act of triage. He carried a folded degree, a heart heavy with duty, and his grandmother's last injunction, whispered with hands that smelled of loom oil and soil: "Carry the forest in your walk. But remember, a tree that only grows in one soil may starve when that soil turns to dust."

His new name was "Arun." A linguistic surgery performed for convenience. "Aiko sounds... particular," his manager had said, the pause a tiny cemetery for identity. So Aiko buried himself, layer by layer. He sanded the melodies from his speech. He imprisoned his body in starched cotton, a uniform of erasure. The isolation was a pervasive, atmospheric pressure. It was the lunchroom theater of wrinkled noses at his *axone*, the fermented soybean paste whose profound, funky aroma was a biography they refused to read. It was the jovial, "Hey, China-man, the report!"—a geographic and existential confusion delivered with a slap on the back. It was his own expertise being parroted by his project lead as "insights from our remote talent pool," his presence metabolized into corporate jargon.

At night, in his cellular apartment that hummed with the tinnitus of modernity, Aiko experienced a double haunt. Video calls home showed not just beloved faces, but the widened, hopeful eyes of his community. His success was their collective currency. Yet, on his screen,

he also saw the increasingly bare hillsides, the new, raw roads like scars. His displacement was both betrayal and necessity, a paradox that gnawed at him. He dreamed he was a *banyan* tree, but its aerial roots, seeking ground, found only fiber-optic cables, sucking data instead of water, turning his sap into silent, streaming code.

The moment of profound cleavage came during the corporate-sponsored Diwali party. Strings of lights mirrored the village festival of lights he missed, yet here they felt like a net. A well-meaning colleague, brimming with spirits and solidarity, boomed, “Arun! Now you’re truly one of us! No more ‘tribal’ and ‘mainland,’ eh? Just Indians!” The word “mainstream” echoed in Aiko’s skull. It felt less like a river and more like a laminar flow, demanding he shed all friction, all texture, to move silently within its current.

Seeking respite, he descended into the city’s bowels, taking the metro to its terminus. He walked until the ordered chaos frayed into a peripheral emptiness—a scab of land between highway and slum, masquerading as a park. There, on a bench facing a listless, chlorinated pond, he witnessed the unusual.

A myna, a bird he knew from home, was fighting its reflection in a discarded stainless-steel plate. It pecked, furious, at the other bird that mimicked its every move. But as Aiko watched, something shifted. The reflection seemed to lag, then move independently. It wasn’t mimicking the attack; it was *weaving*—its metallic beak tracing not a peck, but a complex, geometric pattern in the thin air above the steel, a pattern Aiko recognized from his grandmother’s shawls. Then, both bird and reflection froze, looked directly at him, and dissolved into a shimmer of heat-haze above the metal.

Shaken, Aiko’s gaze fell. There, in a crack in the cement, grew not a weed, but a small, determined *sapling* of a pine, a species native only to his high-altitude home. It was impossible. It was undeniable. Its roots, fine as hairs, vanished into the minuscule fracture, seeking a soil that could not possibly exist beneath the asphalt. A spirit line. Not just a flaw in a pattern, but a bridge thrown across an impossible divide by a stubborn, living will.

He did not quit. He did not rage. But the following Monday, he became a subtle architect of resistance. When asked about his lunch, he said, “This is the taste of a mountainside after the first rain. It is fermentation—the transformation of decay into sustenance. A useful alchemy.”

He let the ancient cadence of his mother tongue bleed into the edges of his PowerPoint presentations. He pinned a small, intricate *weaving shuttle* to his lapel, not a motif.

The unusual occurrences persisted, but only for him. His city-bought potted plant would sometimes grow, overnight, in the shape of his sister's profile. The numbers on his coding screen would occasionally rearrange themselves into the spiraling patterns of a traditional folk song. He understood these as messages, not hallucinations—the spirit lines of his own consciousness pushing back, weaving his reality back into a whole the city tried to split.

The conflict was eternal now. The money he sent home built a new water tank, but his sister's messages spoke of the mine's expansion, of the songs being forgotten by the younger generation who coveted his city life. He was both savior and destroyer. His roots were here, in the sterile crack nurturing the impossible pine, and there, in the increasingly alien soil of his home.

The ending was not a reconciliation, but a permanent, vibrating tension. Aiko-which-was-also-Arun stood at his high-rise window at dusk. The city below was a circuit board of desires, a million spirit lines seeking connection. He was the weed and the tree. The coder and the weaver. The displaced and the anchor. He had not found a home, but he had become a conduit between worlds. The forest in his walk had not been paved; it had learned to grow through the cracks, a silent, persistent, and beautifully unnatural rebellion. The path forward was not a return, nor an assimilation, but a perpetual weaving—his life the loom, his actions the thread, and the pattern, forever deliberately flawed, forever alive, forever his to choose.

The Spirit Line

Vijay Jangir

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The city's rain had no scent. It was merely dampness falling through smudged air, leaving behind the ghost of exhaust and stirred concrete. In the hills, the monsoon was an arrival—a thick, green breath of wet earth, crushed pine, and the sweet, decaying promise of mango leaves. Here, it was only weather. Zami felt the difference not in his skin, but deeper, in the hollow marrow of his bones, a quiet, constant leaching.

The scholarship for “Tribal Youth of Promise” had arrived like a gilded key. The brochure showed a composite of aspiration: a boy, his features carefully neutral, smiling in a blend of embroidered cloth and lab coat, a microscope his prop. Zami now wore the uniform blazer, its synthetic weave a persistent whisper against his neck, a poor echo of the homespun cotton that knew the shape of his shoulders. They had suggested, with administrative kindness, that ‘James’ might smooth his path. Zami. James. The names lived in his throat like two different languages, one rooted, the other floating.

His loneliness was not an event, but an atmosphere. It was the way discourse in the common room flowed around him like a stream around a stone—polite, unobstructed, leaving him dry and untouched. It was the curated curiosity that felt like being studied under glass. “So, the Naga hills—are people there truly animists?” He would answer, weaving explanation, and watch their listening faces become placid receptacles, filing his truth under ‘anthropology’ rather than ‘conversation.’

His refuge was an apologetic copse of trees at the campus periphery. It was not a forest, but sometimes the wind moved through it with a familiar syntax. One heavy afternoon, burdened by the weight of the seamless grey sky, he went there. He found a space hidden by a fallen branch, closed his eyes, and let a low, wordless hum rise from his chest—an old, spiralling tune for calling the rice spirit, a vibration meant for terraced fields, not library walls.

When he opened his eyes, a groundskeeper stood frozen, rake in hand. His expression held no malice, only a profound, blank interrogation, as if Zami were a peculiar mechanical bird

emitting an unexpected sound. The hum died in Zami's throat. The man gave a slow, single nod, a period punctuating the incident, and turned away.

The Sociology assignment was "Cultural Artifact and Modern Identity." Classmates presented filigreed lockets, sepia-toned photographs, recipes on card stock. Zami held up a *jhum* necklace—a single, polished black seed on a thread. He spoke of the *jhum* cycle, of fire and ash and rebirth, of the seed as a closed door and a hidden window. English felt like blunt clay in his hands, but he shaped it with a fervor that heated the air-conditioned room.

After, a girl named Priya floated over, her smile bright with appreciation. "That was utterly fascinating, James! It's so vital we preserve these beautiful, vanishing worlds. You're like a living archive."

He felt the words settle on him like a fine, suffocating dust. He was not an archive. He was a current, not a relic. But her gaze was a display case, and he was the curated object within it.

That night, dreams of erasure came. He stood before a vast map of the nation, but the northeast was not blank—it was a delicate, removed patch, like a healed wound where the skin is smooth and featureless. He tried to inscribe the contours of his hills with his fingernail, but the surface gave no mark. He tried to voice his name, but his breath dispersed into silent cartographic lines.

He began retreating from the cacophony of the dining hall, eating in the cellular silence of his room. The mess food was a monochrome of beige, a cuisine of absence. He ached for the piercing clarity of king chili, the profound, dark umami of fermented soy. In a cramped shop smelling of distant kitchens, he found treasures: dried fish, a knot of *akhuni*. That evening, he cooked on the contraband hotplate. The smell unfurled—pungent, fertile, an undeniable truth—and seeped under his door into the sterilized corridor.

A knock. The floor warden, Mr. Iyer, stood framed in the doorway, his face a mask of pained civility. "James, this aroma... it is rather *potent*. It disturbs the communal harmony. You understand, we must all make compromises for the collective good."

Zami looked at the swirling steam from his bowl, then at the warden's reasonable, immovable eyes. He thought of his grandmother's weaving, of the deliberate, cunning flaw woven into every pattern—the *spirit line*—a passage for the soul to escape the perfection of the cloth, to prevent its entrapment.

Silently, he wrapped the warm bowl in a cloth. He moved past Mr. Iyer, a quiet ghost in the fluorescent hallway, down the stairs, and out into the murmuring, sodium-lit night. He walked until he found a forgotten pocket of darkness behind the library: an empty parking lot, lit by a single, stuttering halogen light that buzzed like a trapped fly. He sat on the cold curb, the asphalt radiating the day's exhausted heat, and he ate.

Each mouthful was a rebellion and an elegy. The familiar, fierce flavours were a shock here, a beautiful dissonance against the geometric grid of cement and light. He was not eating for nourishment, but for testimony.

He finished, the empty bowl resting in his palms like an offering. Before him, the city stretched, a galaxy of artificial stars, a circuit board of immense, indifferent complexity. He was not a component, but a static charge, a brief, irreconcilable glitch.

The two names circled each other in his skull, planets with no gravitational pull. The spirit line was severed. He held one end here, on this cold curb; the other end, he knew, was still tethered to a mist-wrapped hill, a hearth, a loom. He was the flaw in both patterns now—too present for one world, too remembered for the other.

He did not know if a bridge was possible, or if his life was to be this permanent suspension. From his pocket, he drew the black seed necklace. The polished surface caught the epileptic glare of the faulty light, flickering—now a void, now a star. He held it up, letting it dangle before the vast, sleeping architecture of the university. It was a period. It was a question mark. It was a single, unblinking eye, seeing everything and nothing at once.

The night was long, and the path back to his room was a journey through a country he did not know how to claim. But in his hand, the seed was warm. And the quiet, now, was not merely an absence, but a kind of listening.

उम्मीदवार

डॉ. अंशुप्रिया

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सुमन की लड़ाई अब मैदान की नहीं थी। वह एक ऐसा युद्ध लड़ रही थी जिसकी कोई सीमाएँ नहीं थीं— न कोई चुनाव चिन्ह, न कोई मतपेटी, बस चारदीवारी के भीतर का वह सन्नाटा, जो उसकी आवाज़ को निगल जाने को आतुर था।

पंचायत चुनावों ने सब कुछ बदल दिया था। जब गाँव में सरपंच पद महिलाओं के लिए आरक्षित हुआ, तो पार्टी के लोग रमेश के पास आए। "तुम्हारी पत्नी का नाम भर दो, कागज़ी कार्यवाही है। असल काम तो तुम्हें ही करना है।" रमेश, जो सुमन के 'माटी की लाज' समूह की बैठकों में गंभीर मुद्रा में सलाह देता रहता था, अचानक सत्ता की इस संभावना के सामने झुक गया। उसने सुमन से कहा, "हम मिलकर गाँव सुधारेंगे।" 'हम' शब्द में एक विशाल स्वामित्व छिपा था, जिसे सुमन ने तब तक नहीं पहचाना, जब तक कि वह उसकी चुप्पी में दब नहीं गया।

जुलूस निकले। रमेश ऊँची जीप पर माइक थामे, "मेरी पत्नी सुमन देवी आपकी सेवा करने आई हैं!" की घोषणा करता। सुमन पीछे खड़ी, जीप के धुएँ और धूल में, अपने ही नाम के साये में लुप्त होती जाती। भीड़ रमेश को सुनती, उसकी ओर देखती। सुमन की उपस्थिति महज एक रूपक थी — महिला आरक्षण का जीता-जागता प्रतीक, जिसकी आवाज़ की कोई ज़रूरत नहीं थी।

जीत के बाद की पहली फोटो में, रमेश कुर्सी के पास खड़ा था, हाथ में फाइलें, जैसे कोई सलाहकार हो। सुमन कुर्सी पर बैठी थी, पर उसकी आँखों में एक प्रश्न था — "यह किसकी कुर्सी है?" अखबारों ने लिखा — "पति के मार्गदर्शन में नई सरपंच।" मार्गदर्शन शब्द एक कोमल पिंजरा था।

कार्यभार सुमन ने संभाला। वह फाइलों में डूबती, योजनाएँ बनाती, महिलाओं की बात सुनती। पर हर बैठक में, अधिकारी रमेश से हाथ मिलाते — "सरपंच पति जी"। सुमन की बनाई योजनाएँ रमेश के शब्दों में लिपटकर सामने आतीं। उसकी आवाज़ एक अनुवाद बन कर रह गई थी — मूल पाठ कहीं खो गया था।

स्कूल भवन के लिए धन आया। सुमन ने रात-रात जागकर नक्शा बनाया — भवन, शौचालय, पुस्तकालय। बैठक में रमेश ने योजना पेश की। जिला अधिकारी ने कहा, "आपकी सोच प्रगतिशील है, रमेश जी।" और सुमन की ओर देखकर मुस्कुराए, "आप भाग्यशाली हैं।"

सुमन ने उस मुस्कुराहट को पहचान लिया। वह वही मुस्कुराहट थी जो उसकी माँ के चेहरे पर तब दिखती थी, जब वह पूजा का प्रसाद पहले पुरुषों को देती थी — एक श्रद्धा, एक स्वीकृति, जो उसे अदृश्य कर देती थी।

"कल नींव का पत्थर मैं रखूँगी," सुमन ने कहा।

रमेश अचंभित हुआ, "प्रोटोकॉल है, बड़े अधिकारी मुझसे ही हाथ मिलाएँगे।"

"मेरा नाम सरपंच है।"

"हमारा नाम है," रमेश ने कहा, और 'हमारा' शब्द इतना भारी था कि सुमन का दावा उसके नीचे दब-सा गया।

समारोह के दिन, लाल फीता तना हुआ था। कैची रमेश के हाथ में थमाई गई। फ्लैश चमके। सुमन गुलाब का हार लिए खड़ी थी, उसकी मुस्कुराहट उसके चेहरे पर एक टेप की तरह चिपकी हुई थी। दूर, अपने समूह की महिलाएँ देख रही थीं। उनकी नज़रों में कोई सवाल नहीं, कोई हूक नहीं थी — बस एक खालीपन था, जैसे वे किसी अपरिहार्य नियति को देख रही हों।

उस रात, सुमन ने सोने की कोशिश नहीं की। उसने पुराना फाइल बॉक्स खोला — 'माटी की लाज' के दिनों के कागज़ात, जहाँ उसके हाथ से लिखे शब्द सीधे उसकी आवाज़ से निकलते प्रतीत होते थे। हस्ताक्षर, योजनाएँ, वे बयान जिनमें महिलाओं ने पहली बार अपना दर्द किसी भाषा में उकेरा था। उसने एक खाली पन्ना निकाला, और शीर्ष पर लिखा — "प्रोटोकॉल।"

अगले दिन, पंचायत भवन में, उसने सचिव से कहा, "आज से सभी बैठकों का रिकॉर्ड दो भाषाओं में रखा जाएगा — एक आधिकारिक, एक स्थानीय। और हर बैठक की शुरुआत में, महिला सदस्यों को पहले बोलने का अवसर मिलेगा।"

"लेकिन सरपंच देवी, प्रोटोकॉल—"

"प्रोटोकॉल बदलेगा," सुमन ने कहा, "क्योंकि मैं सरपंच हूँ।"

वाक्य हवा में लटका रहा। उसमें कोई क्रोध नहीं था, कोई चुनौती नहीं — बस एक सपाट, निर्विकार घोषणा, जैसे कोई तथ्य कहा गया हो।

शाम को, रमेश ने फाइलें माँगीं। सुमन ने कहा, "वे पंचायत भवन में हैं। सार्वजनिक रजिस्टर में दर्ज हैं। तुम देख सकते हो।"

रमेश चुप रहा। चुप्पी में एक नई भाषा जन्म ले रही थी — अनकही, पर सब कुछ कह देने वाली।

सुमन जानती थी यह लड़ाई कभी खत्म नहीं होगी। कोई विजय नहीं होगी, कोई पराजय नहीं। बस एक लगातार खुदाई होगी — शब्दों की, परंपराओं की, उन नज़रों की जो उसे देखते हुए भी नहीं देखती थीं। वह शायद कभी जीप पर न चढ़े, न कैची काटे। पर अब वह उस मेज पर नहीं बैठेगी जहाँ उसकी बात दूसरे के मुँह से निकलती है।

एक सुबह, उसने देखा — पंचायत भवन के सामने का खाली प्लॉट, जहाँ कूड़ा डाला जाता था, उसमें कोई बच्चे खेल रहे थे। उसने पास जाकर देखा — वे पुरानी फाइलों के पन्नों से कागज़ की नावें बना रहे थे। एक बच्चे के हाथ में वह पन्ना था, जिस पर रमेश ने पहली योजना का मसौदा तैयार किया था — अब उस पर मिट्टी के घर और एक चमकता सूरज बना था।

सुमन मुस्कुराई। उसने कुछ नहीं कहा। बस वहाँ खड़ी रही, उन नावों को देखती रही, जो कूड़े के ढेर और सूखी मिट्टी के बीच भी, पानी की कल्पना में तैर रही थीं।

लड़ाई जारी थी। पर अब उसमें एक नया शब्द जुड़ गया था — 'शायद'। और कभी-कभी, 'शायद' ही काफी होता है — एक खुली समाप्ति के लिए, एक नई शुरुआत के लिए, जिसका अर्थ अपने भीतर तलाशना होता है।

SATIRE / व्यंग्य

नकली विश्वविद्यालय में सच्ची उलझन

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डीन साहब का चश्मा उनकी नाक के आखिरी छोर से लटक रहा था, जैसे खुद को नीचे गिरने से रोकने की कोई कोशिश कर रहा हो। कमरा, जिसे "रणनीतिक योजना कक्ष" कहा जाता था, उसमें हवा का एक अंश भी नहीं था। शायद हवा को भी अंदर आने के लिए तीन चरणीय अनुमति प्रक्रिया से गुजरना पड़ता होगा।

"अगले शैक्षणिक सत्र के लिए हमारा फोकस एरिया," डीन साहब ने गंभीरता से कहा, "है 'सीखने के अनुभवों को बहु-आयामी, बहु-विषयक और बहु-संवेदी बनाना'।"

मेज के चारों ओर बैठे सभी विभागाध्यक्षों ने एक साथ सिर हिलाया, जैसे उनकी गर्दन किसी अदृश्य हैडफोन से जुड़ी हों जिस पर एक ही गाना बज रहा हो। केवल दर्शनशास्त्र विभाग के प्रोफेसर वर्मा, जो अपनी चाय की चुस्कियों के बीच अस्तित्व के संकट से जूझ रहे थे, ने आवाज उठाई।

"महोदय, एक व्यावहारिक प्रश्न है। क्या इस 'बहु-संवेदी अनुभव' में कक्षाओं में कार्यशाला की मरम्मत शामिल है? मेरे विभाग की छत से पानी टपकता है, और वह 'श्रवण' और 'स्पर्श' दोनों अनुभव प्रदान कर रहा है।"

डीन साहब ने चश्मे को ऊपर धकेला, जैसे विचार को धकेल रहे हों। "प्रोफेसर वर्मा, आप तुच्छ व्यावहारिकताओं में उलझ रहे हैं। हम एक बृहत् दृष्टिकोण बना रहे हैं। हमने एक कमेटी बनाई है जो 'शैक्षणिक वातावरण में जलवायु नियंत्रण के दार्शनिक पहलुओं' पर एक विस्तृत रिपोर्ट तैयार करेगी। रिपोर्ट को अंतिम रूप देने में केवल दो सत्र लगेंगे।"

व्यवसाय प्रशासन विभाग की प्रमुख, डॉ. शुक्ला, जिनकी पोशाक का रंग उनके पावरपॉइंट स्लाइड्स से मेल खाता था, ने हस्तक्षेप किया। "हमें अपने छात्रों को भविष्य के लिए तैयार करना है। इसलिए मेरा प्रस्ताव है कि हम 'डिजिटल एनालॉग सिनर्जी के युग में पारंपरिक ज्ञान प्रणालियों का पुनर्मूल्यांकन' नामक एक नया कोर्स शुरू करें। पाठ्यक्रम तैयार है, बस विषयवस्तु की जरूरत है।"

"शानदार!" डीन साहब ने उत्साह से कहा। "क्या इसे पढ़ाने के लिए कोई तैयार है?"

"कोई नहीं," डॉ. शुक्ला ने मुस्कुराते हुए कहा। "इसलिए हम एक गेस्ट लेक्चरर का बजट मांगेंगे, जो शायद कभी आएगा ही नहीं, और फिर बजट का उपयोग... अन्य रणनीतिक आवश्यकताओं के लिए करेंगे।"

हिंदी विभाग के प्रमुख, जिनका मानना था कि संस्कृत के सभी शब्दों का हिंदीकरण होना चाहिए, ने खांसी साफ की। "महोदय, एक और गंभीर मुद्दा है। कैंटीन के मेनू बोर्ड पर 'समोसे' की स्पेलिंग गलत है। यह हमारी शैक्षणिक गरिमा को कलंकित कर रहा है। मैं इसकी जांच के लिए एक त्रिसदस्यीय समिति का गठन चाहता हूँ।"

डीन साहब ने सहमति में सिर हिलाया। "बिल्कुल। हमारी प्रतिष्ठा दांव पर है। प्रोफेसर वर्मा, आप भी इस समिति में रहेंगे।"

"मेरा विभाग पानी में डूब रहा है," प्रोफेसर वर्मा ने निराश होकर कहा।

"तो फिर यह आपके लिए एक प्रासंगिक नियुक्ति है," डीन साहब ने निर्णायक तरीके से कहा। "आप 'नमी और शैक्षणिक नीति' के विशेषज्ञ हो जाएंगे। अब, अगले मुद्दे पर: हमारी वेबसाइट के 'अबाउट अस' पेज को अपडेट करने के लिए हमें 'कंटेंट राइटर' की आवश्यकता है। आवेदक के पास अंग्रेजी साहित्य में पीएचडी और कम से कम पांच साल की डिजिटल मार्केटिंग की अनुभव होनी चाहिए। वेतन: प्रतीकात्मक।"

बैठक एक और घंटे चली, जिसमें "ग्रेडिंग व्यवस्था में नीले रंग के उपयोग", "सेमिनार में बिस्कुटों की गुणवत्ता नियंत्रण नीति" और "पार्किंग स्थल पर कौवों की समस्या पर अंतःविषय दृष्टिकोण" जैसे महत्वपूर्ण विषयों पर चर्चा हुई।

जब बैठक समाप्त हुई, तो प्रोफेसर वर्मा बाहर निकले और उन्होंने देखा कि उनकी कक्षा की छत से अब एक स्थिर धारा बह रही थी। छात्र पानी के चारों ओर घेरा बनाकर खड़े थे, फोन से वीडियो बना रहे थे। एक छात्र ने उत्साह से कहा, "सर, यह वह 'बहु-संवेदी अनुभव' है जिसके बारे में उन्होंने बैठक में बात की थी न?"

वर्मा साहब ने चुपचाप अपना बैग उठाया। उन्होंने डीन साहब का आदेश याद किया: समिति की रिपोर्ट जल्दी जमा करनी थी। वह समझ नहीं पा रहे थे कि रिपोर्ट किस पर लिखनी है – समोसे की स्पेलिंग पर, या अपने डूबते हुए विभाग पर, या उस हवा पर जो कमरे में कभी आती ही नहीं थी। वह चाय की दुकान

की ओर चल पड़े। वहां कम से कम चाय गर्म तो होती थी, भले ही उसका स्वाद संदेहजनक ही क्यों न हो।

RESEARCH ESSAYS / शोध निबंध

Do Great Empires Make Great Thinkers? A Historical Paradox

Dr. Vishwanath Rana

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Do great empires make great thinkers? History tempts us with a seductive narrative: the “Golden Ages” of the Guptas, the Han, the Abbasids, and the European Enlightenment. Stable rule, abundant resources, and royal patronage appear to be the natural incubators of human creativity.

Yet a deeper pattern reveals a striking paradox. Empires are superb at consolidating and disseminating knowledge — but the spark of radical originality most often ignites elsewhere, in the fertile, fragmented, and competitive landscapes of plurality.

Consider India. Its most transformative leaps in philosophy, mathematics, and science rarely occurred under centralized rule. They blossomed instead during restless intervals of political division, when no single authority could dominate the intellectual field and competing schools, republics, and kingdoms cross-pollinated freely.

The Fertile Chaos of Fragmentation

The Mahajanapada period (c. 600–300 BCE) was an era of vibrant plurality: sixteen major states — monarchies and oligarchic republics — each fostering its own intellectual circle.

From this competitive milieu emerged the Buddha and Mahavira, overturning centuries of Vedic orthodoxy. The materialist Cārvāka school rejected divinity and the afterlife. In Gandhara, Pāṇini composed a generative Sanskrit grammar whose algorithmic elegance still astonishes. The Śulba Sūtras laid out geometric constructions, including a form of the Pythagorean theorem, long before Pythagoras.

This explosion of originality was possible because no single power could monopolise thought. A philosopher expelled from one court could walk to another. Debate was public theatre; dissent was not eradication.

This structural pluralism — competition among independent centres of power — created a resilient ecosystem for ideas.

The rise of the Mauryan Empire changed this dynamic. Under Chandragupta and Ashoka, intellectual energy bent toward statecraft and moral governance. Kautilya's *Arthashastra* is a masterpiece of political strategy, but its brilliance lies in administration, not open-ended speculation. Ashoka's edicts preach tolerance while simultaneously prescribing a state-sanctioned moral code. The Mauryas excelled at spreading ideas, not originating them.

After their collapse, India fragmented again. The Shungas, Satavahanas, Indo-Greeks, and Kushanas ruled over a shifting patchwork. In this fertile context, the great schools of Hindu philosophy were systematized; Buddhist thinkers like Nāgārjuna and Asaṅga pioneered new traditions; and the *Charaka* and *Sushruta Saṃhitās* detailed cataract surgery and rhinoplasty with remarkable precision.

This was also a period of rich intercultural synthesis: Greek astronomical models merged with Indian computational methods, paving the way for later breakthroughs in trigonometry and the decimal system.

When the Guptas finally established their celebrated Golden Age, they provided stability that magnified and preserved pre-existing genius. Aryabhata calculated π with striking accuracy, proposed Earth's rotation, and compiled seminal trigonometric tables. Kalidasa's poetry reached luminous heights; the Ajanta frescoes portrayed life with rare subtlety.

But these achievements were the culmination of seeds planted during centuries of fragmentation. The Guptas were magnificent curators — not the primary source — of India's intellectual efflorescence.

This pattern is not uniquely Indian. It is a recurring motif across civilizations.

A Recurring Pattern Across Civilizations

The fiercely competitive Greek city-states produced Plato, Aristotle, Euclid, and Archimedes. Under the Macedonian and Roman empires, Greek creativity cooled into commentary and preservation.

In China, the turbulent "Hundred Schools of Thought" era gave birth to Confucianism, Daoism, Mohism, and Legalism. The Qin and Han empires brought stability but narrowed intellectual daring under enforced orthodoxy.

Renaissance Italy's mosaic of rival city-states created the space for Leonardo, Galileo, and Machiavelli. The Enlightenment thrived not in a unified Europe but in a patchwork of competing kingdoms where thinkers could leverage rival patrons.

Even the 20th century echoes this pattern. The fragile Weimar Republic became a crucible for quantum mechanics, relativity's confirmation, and revolutions in art. Nazi ideological rigidity shattered this ecosystem, driving its greatest minds to more pluralistic societies.

When Empires Do Succeed

Empires are not inherently hostile to creativity. The Abbasids founded Baghdad's House of Wisdom, synthesizing Greek, Persian, and Indian traditions into algebra, optics, and astronomy. The early Han sponsored astronomers whose records remain invaluable. The Guptas fostered a climate where refinement thrived.

But when empires succeeded intellectually, they did so by practicing internal pluralism: tolerating diversity within their borders, protecting intellectual autonomy, and resisting doctrinal rigidity.

The Abbasids were consciously cosmopolitan. The early Han drew from multiple traditions before Confucian orthodoxy hardened. The Guptas patronized Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain thinkers alike.

When this internal pluralism decayed, creative vitality withered.

Modern Echoes

This ancient dynamic persists.

Modern democracies — noisy, competitive, institutionally plural — have proven fertile ground for breakthrough innovation, from Silicon Valley to Europe's research networks.

Conversely, the Soviet Union, despite early successes in rocketry, crippled genetics and cybernetics under ideological diktat. Contemporary China achieves remarkable applied innovations in AI and quantum communication, yet debates persist about whether centralized systems can consistently generate bottom-up theoretical breakthroughs.

Even the digital world follows the rule. The internet's most radical innovations emerged when it was decentralized and open. As power consolidated around a handful of mega-platforms, foundational invention slowed and the ecosystem began to ossify.

The Balance of Evidence

Across antiquity and into the present, the pattern stands firm. Centralized power is an excellent custodian of knowledge — it preserves, refines, and disseminates ideas on a grand scale.

But the shock of the new — the paradigm shift, the original leap — most often requires one of two conditions:

1. Structural Pluralism: the messy, competitive friction between independent centres of power.
2. Internal Pluralism: the fragile but powerful tolerance of diversity within a unified state.

The first is chaotic but reliably generative. The second is elegant but difficult to sustain.

So, do empires help or hinder original thought? They hinder it when they crush plurality; they help it when they consciously protect it.

Stability without pluralism is sterile. Plurality, even when chaotic, is profoundly fertile.

If we seek the next great leap of thought, we must look not only to imperial capitals or corporate headquarters but to the margins — the vibrant republics, the open networks, the noisy marketplaces of ideas.

It is there, in the jostling of rival voices, that human creativity most reliably catches fire.

Patrika Aranyak / पत्रिका आरण्यक

A quiet space for reflective thought—where language is not hurried, and instincts are not simplified.

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