

The Quiet Catalyst: Decoding the Feminine Silhouette in Badal Sircar's Urban Canon

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Abstract

The urban tetralogy of Badal Sircar, i.e., *Evam Indrajit*, and *Pagla Ghoda* is broadly commemorated for investigating the existential angst, bureaucratic disenchantment, and emotive downturn of the men of post-independent India. Nevertheless, a critical fault happens when the women characters within this "urban canon" are rejected as the steady narrative devices or inert background to male angst. This paper investigates that the characters such as Mansi, the complicated spirit or ghost of the play *Pagla Ghoda*, Vasanti and Sunita are represented as quiet catalyst. They are not just the submissive sufferers, but they also fulfil the role of being important touchstone that reveal the scrupulous insolvency, mental timidity, and the systemic privilege of contemporary middle class male psyche. By describing the feminine silhouette in these four texts, it has exposed that critique of the contemporary Indian society by Badal Sircar depends completely on the hushed, organisational hold of its female characters.

Keywords: Urban Canon, Psyche, Mental timidity, Feminine silhouette, Domesticity

In India, the time of 1960, was pinned by an intense disrupt. The unworldly promises of a recently independent country commercial development, remunerative fairness, and highborn liberation, had paved the way to stern reality of middle-class exploitation, unemployment and systemic manipulation. In West Bengal, this contentment exhibited majorly within the Bhadrlok (the educated, urban middle class) consciousness. Any dramatist did not capture this limitless boredom more precisely than Sircar. The early urban plays of Badal Sircar, which were penned down for the conventional proscenium stage, efficiently framed a scenario of existential gist. Traditionally, the urban plays of Badal Sircar concentrate on male characters who flail against the conformity of the commercial ranting

and the desolation of domestic life. In these studies, the female characters are mostly downgraded to the verge, presented as signs of the domesticity the men search to escape.

Methodology and Approach

This paper is qualitative research and investigates *Evam Indrajit* and *Pagla Ghoda*, tracking down whole of the urban tetralogy of Badal Sircar to display how the feminine still develops across his complete early artistic performance. This paper is based on primary texts and secondary sources like journals, articles and archives.

Argument

Badal Sircar's treatment of Woman is a repetition of a very old paradigm which is part and parcel of Bengal's modernity. The entire scheme of modernity of Bengal was articulated through the figure of the woman. So the woman is in most cases a kind of storehouse of various desires—an empty signifier. (Bandyopadhyay) Nevertheless, the paper examines the major works of Badal Sircar i.e., *Evam Indrajit* (1963), and *Pagla Ghoda* (1967). By concentrating on the “feminine silhouette”, the reappearing, pensive presence of female characters in these texts, the researcher found out that the systematic anchors of the social critique by Badal Sircar have been represented in the plays. They do not only live through the existential angst of the male protagonist, their experienced realities, social enclosure and catastrophic ends are the impetus that disclose the ethical failure of contemporary Indian men.

While Badal Sircar's *Evam Indrajit* is usually read as a play about existential dread, a feminist reading shows how patriarchal rules trap both women and men in post-independence India. The character of Manasi highlights how literature often denies women their own agency. She is split into different roles—a muse for the Writer or a lover for Indrajit—acting more like a mirror for male feelings than a real person with her own voice. “Sircar calls Manasi 'the creation of the mind' and perhaps an Indian counterpart of Jung's anima” (Dubey vi). Yet, Manasi also shows a quiet independence that Indrajit lacks. As an educated, working schoolteacher, she understands how the system works. Her refusal to marry Indrajit because they are cousins isn't because she doesn't care; it is a realistic survival choice, knowing that society punishes women much harder than men for breaking moral rules.

MANASI. Don't say that! Don't ever say that. [Pause.] How can I explain it? Don't you know what you mean to me? I feel stronger because of you. Strong enough to live. Otherwise, I would have just gone in. [Pause.] But I can't get angry. I don't want to be angry. I like life. I accept a lot of things. I have to, but it doesn't worry me. Because you are there, I can take life more easily more... [Suddenly.] I can't explain!

INDRAJIT. Go on. Tell me.

MANASI. No. I can't analyse things. Let's talk of something else.

INDRAJIT. We were talking of something else.

MANASI. If I don't understand this book will you explain it to me? [He stares at her.]

Why aren't you saying anything?

INDRAJIT. The day I get a job-I'll marry you.

MANASI. NO!

INDRAJIT. Just watch.

MANASI. But don't you see I'm your first cousin. (24)

At the same time, the play shows how patriarchy hurts men too. The identical lives of Amal, Vimal, and Kamal parody the rigid path middle-class Indian men are forced to take: pass exams, get an office job, marry, and buy property. Indrajit's depression comes from resisting this robotic definition of manhood. His eventual exhaustion shows how society crushes male vulnerability, forcing men to become unthinking cogs. When he finally gives in and gets married, domestic life is shown not as a happy home, but as a boring trap of repetitive chores. Ultimately, a feminist view reveals that the meaningless routine Sircar critiques is kept alive by patriarchal expectations; while men have the luxury to complain about the system, women have to practically navigate its dangers just to survive. "Sircar's attitude to the middle class has changed significantly since *Evam Indrajit*" (Bharucha 136). That is why in the play, when Leela is expelled from the house, Indrajit becomes angry and demands that society's rules should be changed. But Manasi understands that and asks him to ignore. Indrajit insists on moving on from this patriarchy but Manasi knows that this is not possible right now so she approaches Indrajit and diverts his attention by changing the topic elsewhere. This is also why Indrajit wants Manasi as his own companion because in a way she completes Indrajit. Mansi does not want to spoil his friendship with Indrajit, so she says, "Perhaps there will be another type of friendship something deeper, more meaningful" (45). Badal Sircar did not design the character of Manasi through a feminist perspective but rather, reflects a way women are presented in the Indian culture. Anjum Katyal in her *Badal Sircar Towards a Theatre of Conscience* claims that,

In a play that is about the individual who can-not accept what is expected of him, who questions societal norms, Manasi is a set of ideas. The idea of a woman who completes the man, who fills in all the gaps, as it were, and matches what the man needs. She does not have her own story. She appears in response to the male's needs.

She is a sort of dream of the male mind-as her name suggests. Manasi is not a restless female version of Indrajit, though she could have been. (Katyal 197-98)

In the play *Evam Indrajit* by Badal Sircar, the main character Indrajit endeavours to escape from the cyclic, repetitive essence of a monotonous existence. He denies the similar paths by Kamal, Amal and Vimal, which easily glide into traditionalism. Yet, the key point of attitude throughout his existential wandering is Manasi. Manasi, whose name translates to "created by the mind or "desire", occur in different repetitions in the play, i.e., as a teacher, cousin, lover, and a mother. This transformation has been charted by critics as a reflection of the imagination of Indrajit, but Manasi is far better than a muse. She serves as a stern, social reality that Indrajit is so much involved into himself to entirely understand. As in an interview Sircar states:

In *Ebong Indrajit* and also in later plays [women] are mostly portrayed as Manasi, a construct of men who are themselves pre-fabricated. At best they signify some elusive Telos. They are there to remind the men how closed-in they are... Manasi, for example, is ephemeral; she is not a character; she is not there for herself. She is there to show the limits within which the masculine psyche moves. It is a signifier of the closure of the masculine characters. As a result, she does not have a claim to autonomy. She is some sense Utopic. The woman signifies a lack which is constituted by the male. (Bandyopadhyay)

When Indrajit contemplates self-suicide or running away to London in search of meaning. Manasi is stuck in stern rules of a patriarchal society. She cannot easily escape as her survival needs mediation with the social familial structure. Indrajit proposes her to marry him and reject the societal norms, from the perspective of patriarchy that permits him to romanticize revolt. Manasi's rejection to involve in the careless, conceptual, idealism isn't a symbol of weakness, but of grounded pragmatism; Manasi states mildly, rupturing his existential dramatics,

MANASI. I can't, Indra, I can't.

INDRAJIT. Why not?

MANASI. Don't force me, please. Give me some more time.

INDRAJIT. Time-time-time! I have been waiting for six months now.

MANASI. What am I to do? I don't have courage. (39)

By remaining a "static ideal", Manasi reflects the narcissism of Indrajit. Her steadiness emphasizes his purposeless drift. The angst of Indrajit is exposed to be an opulence of his class and gender. He is free to bleat about the purposelessness of life, contrastingly, should silently channelize the actual, palpable limitation.

MANASI. You will have to go on.

INDRAJIT. But why? Why? Why? The same old road... I walk and walk and walk.
Keep on walking. And yet is there no escape?

MANASI. No. There is no escape. (55)

Manasi tries to pacify Indrajit by saying that life is not as absurd as he thinks and everyone is moving in the same way. You are not different from others and hence there is no escape and you have to keep moving.

If Manasi constitutes to be the silent, domestic hook, the womanly *Pagla Ghoda* presents a horrific, multidimensional accusation of patriarchal brutality. The play operates, on a crematory ground wherein the four men, Shashi, Karthik, Satu and Himadri, come together to have a drink and play cards while a young, unidentified woman's body is burnt.

While Badal Sircar's *Pagla Ghora* is often read as a dark, psychological play, it is actually one of his most direct attacks on how patriarchal society treats women. The play is set in a graveyard where four men are drinking while waiting for the funeral pyre of an unknown young woman who died by suicide. As the night goes on, the ghost of this young woman takes the shape of four different women from each man's past—Malati, Lakshmi, Mili, and Ladli. Through these ghost stories, the men are forced to admit how their own selfishness and cowardice destroyed the women who loved them. "In this play, women are 'modern' enough to aspire to romantic love, and to express their desire to their men, but they remained defined by what the men are not they are indicative of a lack in the male." (Katyal 208)

The play exposes the deep hypocrisy of men, no matter their class or background. Every single one of these men chose their own pride, social status, or fear of what people will say over the women in their lives. For example, Shashi refuses to marry Malati just because he doesn't want to upset his male best friend, showing that male bonding matters more to him than a woman's life.

Malti: I know. Pradip is your friend, your brother, your cousin. You have known him since childhood. I know everything.

Shashi: Then what?

Malti: (screaming) Is this the reason why you will be pushing me away from yourself? (Sircar 36)

Another character abandons Lakshmi out of sheer cowardice, leaving her to die in poverty.

Satu: look, we have discussed this many a times. I, being all alone, have kept a lady like you as a maid, what will the world think of me? That will definitely affect my work.

Lakshmi: Nobody will be able to find out, Babuji. I'll be stay hidden. Please don't throw me out. Let me stay with with you Babuji. (88)

Sircar shows that these women didn't just die of heartbreak; they were systematically crushed by a society that values male reputation over female survival. Society has always seen male-female relationships as being very restrictive. Class, creed, religion, caste are such issues on which the society has focused to define the male-female relationships. Perhaps this is the biggest reason why the male is patriarchal in nature and patriarchy has made it all right for a man to do anything with a woman. The man never feels that he is doing anything wrong to her and even if he does, he can go beyond the rules made by society and does what the society approves. *Pagla Ghoda* presents this issue very well. "In *Pagla Ghora* you don't have a play about what men do to men, which is vintage Sircar, but what men do to women. Thus it has a unique place in Sircar's oeuvre." (Prasad 75)

The title *Pagla Ghora* (The Mad Horse) represents the wild, untameable force of human love and emotion that society constantly tries to lock down. By bringing the dead woman back as a ghost, the play stops the men from lying to themselves and making excuses for their past behavior. In a patriarchal world, women are caught in a trap: they are expected to give everything to support men's emotional needs, but the second they become a threat to a man's social standing or comfort, they are instantly thrown away. Badal Sircar makes full use of an excellent theatrical device, where a single woman character plays four different roles in the play, i.e.; Malti, Mili and Lakshmi, who were being loved, betrayed and finally demolished by these four men.

The fourth woman-who remains unnamed-is a prominent presence in the play. As the spirit of the girl who is being cremated, she goads the men into revisiting their memories, provoking, challenging, commenting and questioning throughout. She also repeatedly invokes the *Pagla Ghora* metaphor the wild horse of untamed passion which has never visited her. She longs to know true passion, with all its promise of in and deep emotion. At the end, when she realises that she is the object of Kartik's unrequited longing, she cries to be taken off the funeral pyre. She would never have killed herself if she had known there was some love in her life after all. This just makes her victimhood all the more pathetic. (Katyul 208)

This integration, using one physical body to mirror four different stories, is an intentional political statement. Badal Sircar utilizes the feminine silhouette to signify how patriarchy demolishes feminine identity, providing individual woman interchangeable and disposable object.

The male characters in *Pagla Ghoda* reflect the aspect of ill-fated romance, presenting themselves as devastated victims of the destiny. Nevertheless, as the women come into being from their imagination, the story changes. The female characters say the truth to strength from outside the grave, eliminating the melancholic illusions of men. They expose that these deaths were not mere ill-fated accidents of destiny, instead, they were the immediate outcomes of male timidity, social adherence, and emotional detachment.

In an interview with Abanti Chakravarty, Badal Sircar quotes:

I read Badal Sircar's women in three phases. The first phase consists of his comedies-very stereotyped and clichéd. I sometimes feel how strange that Badal Sircar has written these plays! Such an intellectual person, such a political person! In the second phase-which includes *Ebam Indrajit*, *Pagla Ghora*, *Baki Itihas* there is a modernity to the women, but it is men-centric. They are conditioned by men. I also feel that the women sort of belong to a dream world, not real. And then, in the third phase, women vanish. There is no woman.

Both plays, i.e., *Evam Indrajit* and *Pagla Ghoda* have been a part of Badal Sircar's proscenium theatre, where Sircar presented women empowerment in *Evam Indrajit* keeping existential problems at the centre and how women exploit the rules of society. While Leela, Malti, Lakshmi, and Milli, represent weak women, Manasi comes forward as a strong woman.

Conclusion:

The reason that the plays of Badal Sircar are still relevant today is that patriarchy is instilled in contemporary society and there are still so many women who are the sufferers of patriarchy. After independence, education has played a major role for Manasi to be recognised as a self-independent personality. On the other hand, women are still living the lives as of Malati, Lakshmi due to falling in the prey of unawareness and are completely dependent on males for everything.

In both the plays, *Evam Indrajit*, and *Pagla Ghoda*, Badal Sircar has shown the feminist perspective. In the play *Evam Indrajit*, Manasi is shown as an understanding and suitable match, whereas, in the play *Pagla Ghoda*, how a woman questions the society and attacks the male psyche, has been presented. Badal Sircar has written so many plays that can

be studied from a feminist perspective. The researcher has focused on *Evam Indrajit* and *Pagla Ghoda* and has attempted to present Badal Sircar's feminist perspective. Many of Sircar's plays are in Bengali, yet are still untranslated, and can be presented from a gender studies perspective.

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A Critical Analysis of Internalized Inferiority Complex in *The Bluest Eye* and *Coming Out as Dalit*

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Abstract

Inferiority complex and identity-shame constitute some of the most corrosive psychological conditions produced by systems of social stratification, and their manifestations in literature reveal how power inequities are internalized within marginalized subjects. Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye (1970) and Yashica Dutt's memoir Coming Out as Dalit (2019) provide two historically and geographically distinct but psychologically resonant explorations of how oppressed individuals come to see themselves through the distorting lens of dominant hierarchies—race in Morrison's African American context and caste in Dutt's Indian context. Despite the different structures of oppression each text confronts, both articulate how inferiority is not merely imposed from above but rooted deeply within the individual psyche, emerging through processes of socialization, discrimination, humiliation, and internalized ideology. This paper undertakes a comparative critical analysis of inferiority complex and identity-shame in both texts. Using Alfred Adler's inferiority complex, Frantz Fanon's racial epidermalization, Silvan Tomkins' affect theory, and Erving Goffman's stigma theory, the study situates both texts pwithin global structures of oppression that shape emotional selfhood.

Keywords

Inferiority complex, identity shame, caste, race, self-loathing, stigma, child-psychology.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola Breedlove embodies the most extreme consequences of internalized racial inferiority. Morrison reveals how racial hierarchies filter into children's psyches through beauty standards, commercial advertising, schoolyard taunts, and familial neglect. Pecola's yearning for blue eyes symbolizes the psychological violence inflicted by white supremacist aesthetics that equate whiteness with beauty, innocence, and value. From the opening scenes, Pecola is subjected to external denigration teachers who patronize her, shopkeepers who look past her, white girls who mock her, and a community that sees her as ugly. Morrison underscores Pecola's internalization of this humiliation: she interprets 'White-

gaze' not as racial prejudice but as her own inadequacy, thinking, "I am not worth seeing" (49). Pecola sees herself through the eyes of white people who deny her humanity, thus absorbing the racial hierarchy into her sense of self. In racially segmented America, Pecola Breedlove's inferiority is catalyzed by a cultural environment where whiteness is equated with beauty, morality, and worth. Pecola's desire for blue eyes "the bluest eyes" (Morrison 46) is a desperate fantasy aimed at resolving her internalized conviction that Blackness is inherently ugly and inferior. Importantly, she learns this conviction not only from white-centered media but from her own mother. Pauline Breedlove's own inferiority complex manifests through her fixation on white beauty standards, her near-religious devotion to the Fisher family, and her self-description as "ugly" (Morrison 123). Pauline's internalization of whiteness as synonymous with order and beauty becomes an emotional pedagogy for Pecola, who is forced to conclude that her mother's coldness is a reflection of her own inadequacy.

Meanwhile, Dutt's memoir *Coming Out as Dalit* reveals a more intellectualized but equally painful trajectory of internalized inferiority originating in the caste system. The memoir foregrounds how caste operates not only through visible discrimination but through the secretive, shame-laden pressure to hide one's Dalit identity in order to be accepted within mainstream Indian society. Dutt describes growing up with the unspoken rule that her family's caste must never be revealed, leading to an internal conflict between outward performance of respectability and inward fear of exposure. When her grandmother warns her, "Never tell anyone you are Dalit" (Dutt 12), Dutt learns to erase traces of her background, adopting mannerisms, speech styles, and cultural tastes that will allow her to pass as non-Dalit. This results in a sustained inferiority complex, one marked by hypervigilance, chronic anxiety, and a belief that acceptance can only be secured by disowning her own identity. Her academic accomplishments and professional achievements are shadowed by the dread that she will be "found out," revealing the psychological burden of caste mobility within a system that continues to stigmatize Dalit identity. A comparative reading shows that both Pecola and Dutt internalize inferiority not spontaneously but through repeated interactions with societal norms and daily microaggressions. In Morrison's text, Pecola's inferiority is tied to beauty and racial hierarchies; in Dutt's, shame is tied to caste purity and social stigma. However, the psychological mechanism is identical: each protagonist encounters a world structured to deny her value, just because of belonging to a particular 'race' and 'caste'.

Both texts illuminate how inferiority complexes form through the internalization of oppressive structures and how shame functions as a psychic regulation tool for maintaining social hierarchies. During their formative years of life, children form their self-concepts by imagining how others perceive them, evaluating these imagined judgments, and developing self-feelings most significantly pride or shame based on these perceptions. In Pecola's world, whiteness is the imagined judge, omnipresent through Shirley Temple, Hollywood movies, school primers, and marigold advertisements. Pecola imagines how white society sees her, and this reflection distorted, contemptuous, and dehumanizing constructs her sense of self. She perceives herself as ugly because the world teaches her that Blackness is an aesthetic and moral flaw. Yashica Dutt's upbringing mirrors this process: she internalizes upper-caste expectations as the imagined standard and learns to evaluate herself through a Savarna gaze. Every gesture her clothes, speech, friendships, academic performance becomes filtered through the anxiety of being discovered as Dalit. Both Morrison and Dutt reveal that when external systems define worth, individuals learn to evaluate themselves through those systems. Pecola learns to believe that blue eyes are the ultimate marker of beauty and thus of worth; Dutt learns that caste purity determines social acceptance. Both protagonists develop compensatory strategies Pecola through fantasy, Dutt through concealment that reflect attempts to overcome inferiority but ultimately reinforce the underlying shame. In both cases, identity is shaped by societal narratives that render certain bodies undesirable or impure, demonstrating how deeply structural inequalities infiltrate personal psychology.

Theoretical scholarship on shame deepens this comparison. Psychologists like Silvan Tomkins and Gershen Kaufman identify shame as the most painful affect because it strikes at the core of the self, signaling a perceived failure to live up to internalized standards. Shame becomes especially toxic when these standards originate from discriminatory systems. In Pecola's case, the standard is whiteness; in Dutt's, the standard is caste purity. Tomkins argues that chronic shame produces self-alienation, making the individual turn inward against herself / himself, interpreting structural injustice as personal deficiency. Pecola exemplifies this: rather than questioning why beauty standards exclude her, she takes these exclusions as confirmation of her own deficiency. Dutt, too, internalizes caste shame, describing how she felt compelled to detach herself from aspects of her culture in order to appear "acceptable." Social theorist Beverly Skeggs explains that marginalized groups internalize shame when society labels them as lacking value; this affects how they carry themselves, speak, and

imagine their futures. Pecola internalizes shame so profoundly that she stops imagining any future at all; Dutt imagines a future, but only through self-erasure.

The psychological impact of a mother's internalized shame on her children is a crucial but often overlooked dimension in both *The Bluest Eye* and *Coming Out as Dalit*, where maternal self-perception becomes an emotional blueprint for the next generation. Contemporary trauma psychology emphasizes that children learn not only through parental instruction but through parental affect; they absorb the mother's anxieties, fears, and emotional wounds through what developmental theorists call "emotional modeling." Research in intergenerational trauma argues that when mothers experience chronic shame, inferiority, or stigmatized identity conflict, these emotions inadvertently shape the child's self-understanding, producing what psychologists identify as "inherited shame." In both Morrison and Dutt, the mother's response to oppression becomes the emotional environment in which the child learns what it means to exist within a stigmatized identity; therefore, the mother's shame becomes a psychic inheritance.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Pauline Breedlove functions as a powerful example of how maternal shame anchors a child's psyche in self-loathing. Pauline's internalization of racial beauty standards her belief that her dark skin, her tooth loss, her lack of glamour, and her poverty determine her worth shapes the emotional ecosystem in which Pecola grows up. Pauline finds her sense of identity not within her Black family or community but through her role in the Fisher household, a white space where she performs cleanliness, order, and service to be validated (Morrison 127–135). Her admiration for the white family, and her emotional withdrawal from her own children, communicates to Pecola that Blackness is inferior, that whiteness is aspirational, and that love is conditional on conforming to white standards. Trauma psychology explains that when mothers direct their internalized shame outward often unconsciously the child interprets this as a reflection of their own worth. Thus, Pauline's racial self-hatred becomes Pecola's earliest lesson about beauty, dignity, and love. Pecola's later desire for blue eyes is rooted not only in societal beauty norms but in the emotional absence and identity shame of her mother, who teaches her, through rejection, that Blackness is an identity to escape. The psychological impact of Pauline's shame aligns with contemporary theories of intergenerational trauma, which argue that unresolved parental shame transmits to children through emotion, behavior, and silence. Pecola internalizes not only the racial standards of American beauty but also her mother's conviction that Blackness

is inherently unworthy of love. Fanon's theory of racial epidermalization explains this process: social stigma becomes inscribed onto the skin, transforming the body into a site of humiliation. Pecola's body becomes a repository of her mother's internalized racism. Her obsession with blue eyes is an attempt to erase the body her mother has taught her to despise.

Similarly, Yashica Dutt's narrative in *Coming Out as Dalit* reveals how a mother's caste-based shame can deeply influence a child's psychological development, especially within an oppressive system where identity visibility is dangerous. Dutt's mother, like many Dalit parents navigating casteist environments, engages in constant concealment, passing, and hyper-vigilant self-monitoring to protect her daughter from discrimination. Her mother's fear of exposure changing speech, modifying behavior, maintaining a façade of castelessness creates an emotional atmosphere in which Dutt learns early that Dalitness is something to hide. Dutt describes how her mother avoided mentioning caste, discouraged the use of their native dialect in public, and insisted that their home appear indistinguishable from that of upper-caste households, all in an effort to protect her child (Dutt 44–51). From a psychological standpoint, this protective concealment functions as a form of inherited shame: the mother's survival strategy teaches the child to associate her own identity with danger, stigma, and contamination. Even though Dutt's mother seeks to protect her, the emotional message that passes to the child is that Dalit identity is something shameful, something that must remain invisible to ensure safety and belonging. The silence surrounding caste combined with the everyday performances of blending in shapes Dutt's early self-perception, embedding a sense of inferiority that she later recognizes as internalized casteism. Thus, the mother's shame becomes a transmitted emotional script that structures the child's relationship with her own identity.

In both texts, the mother becomes the first mirror through which the child sees herself. Morrison and Dutt demonstrate that when this mirror is clouded by oppression-induced shame, the child receives a distorted reflection that compounds societal prejudice with maternal emotional imprinting. Pauline's inability to love her own Blackness means she cannot provide Pecola with an affirming mirror of Black beauty and dignity. Her maternal identity is built around loving what she can never be a white ideal so she cannot model pride or acceptance for her daughter. As a result, Pecola inherits not only societal racism but her mother's deeply internalized racial inferiority. Dutt, on the other hand, inherits her mother's

silence and caution, which teaches her to fear her own Dalit identity before she fully understands what caste means. This emotional inheritance shapes her adolescence, influencing her decisions, friendships, and sense of belonging. In both cases, the mother's shame does not remain an individual emotional experience; it becomes a psychological blueprint for the child's understanding of self.

The intergenerational transmission of shame in these texts highlights how identity oppression functions not only structurally but emotionally and familially. Mothers, positioned as emotional anchors within families, often bear the heaviest burden of navigating stigma while attempting to shield their children from it. Yet the very strategies they use withdrawal, concealment, idealization of dominant norms, silence become emotional cues that the child internalizes as truths about their own identity. Pecola and Dutt develop their earliest understandings of themselves not only from society at large but from observing the emotional patterns modeled by their mothers. The mother's identity shame thus becomes a powerful force in shaping the child's self-loathing, low self-esteem, inferiority complex, and identity fracture. Morrison and Dutt demonstrate that maternal worldview can become emotional legacies for the child, shaping the trajectory of his/her selfhood.

Alfred Adler's theory of the inferiority complex lays the psychological foundation for understanding how shame becomes internalized. Adler posits that feelings of inferiority are common and even necessary to motivate growth, but they become pathological when an individual repeatedly encounters messages of inadequacy from their environment. When inferiority becomes chronic and unresolvable, it evolves into a full inferiority complex characterized by persistent self-doubt, self-loathing, and the belief that one can never measure up to societal standards. What distinguishes the inferiority complex from ordinary insecurity is its structural reinforcement: an individual made to feel inferior not by isolated events but by entrenched social hierarchies learns to see this inferiority as a natural condition. Frantz Fanon extends this view by examining how racialized systems produce psychological damage in the colonized subject. Frantz Fanon's analysis of the colonized mind in *Black Skin, White Masks* offers another crucial lens through which to view the internalization of racial and caste-based stigma. Fanon theorizes that colonized individuals begin to see themselves through the eyes of the colonizer, a process he calls "epidermalization." This term aptly describes Pecola's desire for blue eyes her belief that beauty, worth, and love belong to the realm of whiteness. Pecola's longing to see the world through blue eyes is an embodiment of

Fanon's theory: she seeks transformation not for aesthetic reasons but because she believes that only whiteness can liberate her from the self-loathing imposed upon her by a racist society. This aligns with Dutt's candid admission that she constantly attempted to "pass" as non-Dalit by altering her speech, clothing, cultural preferences, and public behavior (Dutt 59–64). While the specifics of racialized beauty differ from caste-coded behavioral performances, both reveal how marginalized individuals internalize the dominant group's value system and evaluate themselves according to oppressive norms. Fanon's framework reveals that Pecola and Dutt respond to discrimination by developing deep-seated desires to escape their own identities: Pecola through fantasized physical transformation, Dutt through lived performance and concealment. Both forms of self-alteration reflect a profound emotional consequence of inferiorization: a psychic split between the self and the self-as-seen-by-others. These frameworks collectively explain how inferiority and shame manifest not only as personal emotions but as the internal echoes of structural inequity. Adler's theory of inferiority suggests that children integrate perceived deficiencies into the very core of their being, developing compensatory mechanisms fantasy, perfectionism, denial, or submission to cope. Pecola chooses fantasy: blue eyes become her imagined escape from racial abjection. Dutt chooses hyper-performance: academic success and cultural assimilation become her compensatory tools. Yet both strategies reveal the emotional cost of surviving in societies that deem their identities deficient. Fanon's racial theory and Ambedkar's caste theory converge here: both argue that oppressed individuals develop compensatory identities that are ultimately unsustainable because they are built on negation of the self, not acceptance. Dalit feminist theorist Cynthia Stephen argues that caste shame uniquely shapes girl children, producing "fractured subjectivities" where the inner self is perpetually at odds with the external identity demanded for survival. Pecola becomes the extreme manifestation of this fracture: her inner world becomes so incompatible with social reality that she collapses into psychosis. Dutt's fracture is less visible but deeply felt: she describes her adolescence as a constant negotiation between who she was and who she was permitted to be. Her testimony reflects Stephen's insight that caste-oppressed girls are taught early that their authentic selves are incompatible with social acceptance. This insight also aligns with Gopal Guru's distinction between humiliation and dignity. Guru argues that oppressed individuals oscillate between internalized humiliation and the desire for dignity.

Building further on the intergenerational transmission of shame, it is essential to recognize that the psychological dynamics in both *The Bluest Eye* and *Coming Out as Dalit* are not merely shaped by mothers but by the structural systems that produce maternal subjectivities. Dalit theorist Gopal Guru emphasizes that humiliation “settles into the body,” reshaping emotional responses and self-understanding for generations. This embodied humiliation explains why mothers in oppressed communities often become unwilling carriers of history’s wounds, transmitting anxieties to their children even without explicit intention. Pauline Breedlove does not consciously teach Pecola that Blackness is a curse; instead, she acts from her own internalized racial injury. Similarly, Dutt’s mother does not intend to teach her daughter to hate her caste identity; rather, she seeks to protect her, operating from a lifetime of caste-conditioned fear. These maternal psychic wounds reflect what Sara Ahmed calls “sticky affect,” where emotions adhere to bodies over time and circulate within intimate spheres. Shame becomes inherited, even when unspoken.

The tragic ending of *The Bluest Eye* and the upward arc of *Coming Out as Dalit* reflect the political intentions of each author. Morrison chooses tragedy to expose the structural cruelty of American racism, showing how society destroys vulnerable Black girls. Dutt chooses reclamation to demonstrate that caste shame can be undone through awareness, solidarity, and resistance. Yet the two narratives share a central message: identity shame is socially constructed and intimately tied to systems of domination. Whether through race or caste, oppressive ideologies shape emotional life, teaching individuals to measure themselves against standards designed to devalue them. Healing requires dismantling these standards, reconstructing identity on one’s own terms, and rejecting the internalized gaze of the oppressor.

Ultimately, the comparative analysis of Pecola Breedlove and Yashica Dutt reveals that inferiority complexes and identity shame are not individual weaknesses but collective injuries inflicted by historical systems of power. A crucial difference between the two texts is the possibility of narrative reclamation. Pecola has no voice; her story is mediated through Claudia, whose reflections register both empathy and guilt. Claudia recognizes that the community scapegoated Pecola because of its own internalized racism, noting that they “looked down on her to keep from looking down on themselves” (Morrison 205). Morrison’s narrative structure emphasizes the communal complicity in Pecola’s psychic destruction; her tragedy exposes the collective investment in hierarchical structures. Conversely, Dutt writes

from the position of survival and articulation. While Pecola succumbs to her inferiority complex, Dutt analyzes and resists hers. She describes the moment she publicly “came out” as Dalit as liberating, stating that “naming myself became the first step toward reclaiming myself” (Dutt 198). This shift illustrates the power of narrative to transform shame into empowerment.

Conclusion:

The integrated theoretical analysis shows that internalized inferiority, identity shame, and self-loathing are interconnected psychological outcomes of caste and racial oppression that profoundly shape the protagonists’ lived experiences in *The Bluest Eye* and *Coming Out as Dalit*. Pecola’s tragic disintegration exposes the devastating consequences of internalized racial beauty norms and emotional abandonment, while Dutt’s memoir demonstrates the painful but transformational journey of confronting and rejecting internalized caste shame. Through Adler, Fanon and contemporary trauma studies, we understand that the roots of self-loathing lie not within the individual but within the oppressive social structures that define certain identities as inferior. These texts ultimately reveal that reclaiming selfhood requires dismantling the emotional, psychological, and ideological foundations of caste and racial hierarchies. While Pecola’s story warns of the human cost of unchecked internalized racism, Dutt’s narrative charts a path toward healing, political activism, and self-reclamation. Together, they underscore the urgent need to challenge the hegemonic forces that produce a sense of self-disdain in the psyche of subjugated victims and to create a world in which marginalized identities can flourish without shame.

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