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Ardhanarishwar (Image credit: Dr. Manish Semwal)

चित्र:(अर्धनारीश्वर) डॉ. मनीष सेमवाल के सौजन्य से

पत्रिका आरण्यक: साहित्य एवं मानविकी की पत्रिका
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पत्रिका आरण्यक: साहित्य और मानविकी की पत्रिका 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: A Journal of Literature and Humanities 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

Rhythm is more than a word—it is the principle that permeates everything. It shapes meaning; it shapes existence. A natural rhythm flows around us and within us, perceptible to anyone who listens closely. The heartbeat is rhythmic; a stream hums in cadence; life itself vibrates with a subtle, unfolding pulse. In a world often marked by dissonance and haste, it is easy to drift from these natural currents, leaving everything feeling out of place and out of balance.

This is why the *Chāndogya Upanishad* speaks of saluting the "supreme rhythm." Our task is to recognize this inherent rhythm woven into creation and gradually align our inner selves with it. In that alignment lies the resonance of unity.

It is in pursuit of that resonance that we have curated this second issue. We have brought together works that carry an innate, organic rhythm. These pieces may not clamour with radical forms, but their power lies in a deeper cadence that we hope will resonate with you. Ultimately, our success is something only your engagement can reveal. With each issue, we hope to discover and present creations that embody this living rhythm.

लय—यह केवल एक शब्द नहीं, बल्कि वह सिद्धांत है जो समस्त सृष्टि में व्याप्त है। अर्थ को भी लय ढालती है और अस्तित्व को भी। हमारे आसपास और हमारे भीतर एक स्वाभाविक लय सतत बहती है; जिसे अनुभव करने के लिए केवल गहराई से सुनने की आवश्यकता है। हृदय का स्पंदन लयबद्ध है, बहती धारा का स्वर लयबद्ध है, और जीवन स्वयं अपनी सूक्ष्म, अदृश्य ताल पर कंपन करता है। इस कोलाहल भरी दुनिया में जब हम इस प्राकृतिक लय से विमुख होते हैं, तो सब कुछ अस्त-व्यस्त, असंतुलित-सा प्रतीत होने लगता है।

इसीलिए छान्दोग्य उपनिषद "परम लय" को प्रणाम करने की बात करता है। हमारा भी यही लक्ष्य है—सृष्टि में गुंथी इन सहज लयों को पहचानना और अपने भीतर की लय को क्रमशः उनसे साधना। इसी साधना में एकत्व की अनुगूँज जन्म लेती है।

इस अंक में हमने ऐसी रचनाओं को संकलित किया है, जिनमें यह नैसर्गिक, अंतःस्फूर्त लय विद्यमान है। ये रचनाएँ बाहरी प्रयोगशीलता की चमक दिखाने का प्रयत्न न भी करें, तो भी इनकी गहरी,

मौलिक ताल आपके मन के किसी स्वर से मेल खा सकती है। इस प्रयास की सफलता तो आपका ध्यान, आपकी भागीदारी और आपके विचार ही तय करेंगे। आगे के अंकों में भी हम इसी प्रकार की सजीव, लय-सम्पन्न अभिव्यक्तियाँ आपके लिए खोजते और संजोते रहेंगे।

Editor-in-Chief

Research Paper/ शोध पत्र

Cultural Memory and Intertextuality: Navigating Literature, Film, and Television

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Abstract:

This study navigates the intricate relationship between cultural memory, literature, film, and television, presenting a theoretical framework rooted in interdisciplinary perspectives. Beginning with Stuart Hall's models of cultural identity and Raussert and Kunow's insights into cultural memory, the paper establishes the groundwork for understanding the evolving interplay between literature and cultural contexts. Shifting focus to cinematic theory, the study explores the transformative processes of adapting literary works for the screen. It challenges traditional literary perspectives on popular fiction, emphasizing the significance of cultural studies in shaping interpretations of popular culture. The analysis extends to cinematic theory, underlining the screen's role in conveying content influenced by real events and imaginative instincts, fostering critical thinking in viewers. Intertextuality emerges as a pivotal concept, linking literature and celluloid texts. The paper traces its evolution from Saussure and Bakhtin to Kristeva, exploring its role in transforming and decoding textual meaning. Thomas Leitch's classification of intertextuality into inevitable and intentional categories contributes to understanding the nuanced dynamics of adaptation, bridging literary roots and original expression. The exploration deepens into adaptation studies, emphasizing the transformative process of texts from page to screen. The discussion extends to television adaptation, challenging conventional norms and exploring nuanced creativity in adapting literary works for the small screen. Classic- novel and popular literature adaptations are compared, showcasing the varied generic identities they shape and the unique narrative possibilities they offer. The conclusion reflects on the evolving concept of fidelity in television adaptation, acknowledging the medium's unique strengths and redefining its role beyond historical and costume dramas. It asserts that television adaptation is a distinct form, integral to the contemporary digital cultural revolution, providing diverse narratives that engage audiences across genres and time periods. The paper contributes to the ongoing discourse on the interplay between literature, film, and television, highlighting their adaptability and dynamic relationship between mediums.

Keywords: Cultural Memory, Intertextuality, Literature, Film, Television, Adaptation, Interdisciplinary Perspectives, Stuart Hall, Cinematic Theory, Fidelity in Adaptation

Exploring Cultural Memory in Literature: A Theoretical Framework:

Within cultural perspectives, there exists a theoretical framework dedicated to the study of comparative literature. This involves employing intercultural and intertextual approaches to literature. The integration of literature and culture involves a harmonious blend of distinct voices, challenging the notion of a dominating ontological certainty. Literary theories and criticism have evolved to encompass philosophies aimed at comprehending and analyzing "texts." This entails interpreting, negotiating, and deconstructing the memories associated with various cultural paradigms, both at the individual and societal levels. The shift from traditional literary studies to cultural studies does not entail fundamental revisions but rather signifies the development of an interdisciplinary approach. This approach seeks to explore the dynamic interaction between literary texts and their functional identification within historical, socio- political, and cultural contexts, contributing to the conceptualization of belonging. Stuart Hall has extensively explored models for constructing cultural identities, emphasizing the maintenance of collective historical consciousness. He describes cultural identity as the idea of a shared culture, a collective 'true self' concealed amidst other superficial or artificially imposed 'selves' shared by individuals with a common history and ancestry (Hall 1990: 69). The second model of cultural identity, rooted in 'emergence' and 'inconclusiveness,' positively reflects on the process of 'becoming' a part of a larger whole. It undergoes constant transformation, rejecting the notion of being eternally fixed in an essentialized past, favoring a continuous 'play' within the realms of history, culture, and power.

Similarly, cultural memory embedded in a work of art symbolizes both material and immaterial forms, intricately linked with the historical heritage of a community. This historical heritage is often defined in terms of homeland, encompassing monuments, shrines, battlefields, or cemeteries. These elements evoke a sense of connectedness and foster specific communal or national awareness of past experiences. According to Raussert and Kunow, cultural memory represents a sense of 'oughtness' experienced simultaneously in two places. This involves grappling with the feeling of marginalization while retaining the specificity of class, ethnicity, and gender. It is a complex emotional process, oscillating between being treated as 'Other' by hegemonic culture and recollecting preserved aspects of past cultural

heritage and the intricate web of cultural memory. In essence, it is a process of 'restoring' the interaction with roots and recovering the lost emotions associated with cultural memories.

Cultural Studies in Motion: Interpreting Popular Culture in Cinematic Transposition:

In the context of examining cultural identity and memory, a crucial shift is observed from literary theory to the integration of cultural theory. This transition is particularly evident in the dynamic exploration of how literary texts are transposed onto the cinematic screen. The roots of this shift can be traced back to the emergence of cultural studies, notably influenced by Richard Hoggart's seminal work, "The Uses of Literacy" in the 1950s and 1960s, and the subsequent establishment of the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham. Cultural studies, while drawing on concepts from English literature, diverges from traditional literary approaches, especially in its treatment of popular culture. Figures like Matthew Arnold dismiss popular fiction as inappropriate for the masses and detrimental to the advancement of art and literature. Arnold, in asserting the unsuitability of popular literature for the masses, stated, "Plenty of people will try to give the masses... an intellectual food prepared and adapted in the way they think proper for the actual condition of the masses" (Arnold 1932: 69-70). Emphasizing the significance of literary stylistics, Q.D. Leavis argued for the exclusion of popular culture from the literary canon. In supporting this stance, Leavis highlighted the importance of crafting vivid and easily visualized "action pictures" within literature. According to Leavis, such an approach not only facilitates reader engagement by enabling effortless visualization of scenes but also encourages a proclivity towards fantasy, potentially contributing to a perceived 'maladjustment in real life.' In contrast, cultural studies embrace the significance of popular cultural texts, despite their criticism within the literary realm. This stance, especially in the controversial realm of high art and high value, has paved the way for parallel theories in cinema studies. While film theory and cinema studies have conceptualized alternative modes of interpreting screen texts, their origins can be traced back to literature. The analysis and observation of cultural aspects within specific spatial-temporal contexts remain crucial in extracting meaning from texts. The present paper aims to establish a connection between intertextuality in cinematic theory and literature, further emphasizing the fluid interplay between these cultural expressions across different art forms.

Analyzing the Intersection of Screen and Text Meaning:

Cinematic theory encompasses a range of technological resources, including moving sound- images and their reception beyond the screen, to articulate socio-cultural, political, and economic strategies at the national level. The screen, whether in the form of film,

television, computer or web-based platforms like YouTube, gaming, mobile, or art-based screens, plays a crucial role in conveying content influenced by real events, news, or imaginative instincts to propagate social awareness. Like literature, screen visuals extend beyond character-driven plots, taking on the responsibility to educate, inform, communicate, and entertain the audience. Building upon the preceding discussion on cultural studies, cinema theory strives to establish parameters for ethical and aesthetic values developed through the representation of emotions, events, and ambiance. The cinematic medium becomes a means to challenge audience perceptual capacities, presenting contentious and complex dynamic forms and conditions. Despite content manipulations by production houses on media and social media, viewers retain the ability to conceptualize mediated content based on their intuition.

In the current socio-political landscape, cinema challenges the cognitive aspects of psychology, urging viewers to widen their perspectives and think critically. Different cinematic forms address a wide range of topics, including social issues like gender, caste, poverty, education, and marriage; cultural issues such as language, rituals, and fashion; and political and economic matters relevant to the specific space of film, television, or computer screens. The exploration of cinema's historical background requires a chronological study, but its theoretical position revolves around the ontological perception of knowledge regarding the sound-image transforming reality into an abstract form of time and space. The term ontology is applied to the schema available as a 'problem' engaging various alternative conditions to internalize knowledge, skepticism, questions of dogma and truth reality, aesthetic rationality, and rhetoric. Similar to literary theory, cinematic interpretation involves interdisciplinary approaches, promoting comparative studies among various mediums of expression, including literature, painting, music, and more. Andre Bazin's exploration of the ontological question "What is Cinema?" highlights the film as a whole unit of creative expression that synthesizes art, technology, and audience into a singular entity. The phenomenological nature of cinema explores consciousness and being through the perception of experience and movement, with the film's work incorporating elements like screenplay, music, stage performance, technology, painting, and more to create a comprehensive artistic unit. The totality of the film imparts a ready-made experience and knowledge through various modes of expression, providing insights into the world and inquiring about the nature of certain aspects happening around us.

Examining Celluloid Texts: Intersections with Literature and Intertextuality:

Analyzing celluloid texts shares similarities with the examination of literary texts, as both mediums invite multiple interpretations and diverse discourses, expanding the understanding and critical strategies of both critics and audiences. While textual-based investigation appears to focus on the effectiveness for recipients and the accountability of directors and producers, the correlation between literary and celluloid texts involves a nuanced exploration, encompassing examination, analysis, and the production of meaning. As literature transitions from the page to the screen, distinct values come into play, spanning writing to directing, imagination to shooting, description to scene depiction, emotional representation to facial expression, and imagined characters to live actors. This shift also transforms the act of reading into watching, seeing, and listening, reflecting the impact of technology on audience engagement. The process of adaptation from one language and culture to another, once reliant on translators, is now facilitated by screenplay writers reshaping dialogues and situations into the source culture and language. Mary H. Snyder identifies adaptation as a dual-level process involving myriad ways of doing and the resulting product of the entire adaptation process. This approach allows films to explore literature by representing the source text in a broader space of new sign systems, narratives, cultures, and mediums, aligning with interpretation theory. Intertextuality becomes a crucial concept, paralleling the process of adaptation. Both adaptation and interpretation rely on prior knowledge and textual understanding, involving an intersection where the original work is re-produced through the unique lens of cinema. The end product aims to maintain the 'spirit' of the text, emphasizing intertextuality and fidelity.

Contrary to earlier literary theories such as formalism, new criticism, and structuralism, which viewed works of art as having independent meanings, contemporary perspectives, influenced by deconstruction and post-theories, emphasize the dynamic nature of text. Extracting meaning now involves multiple expressions, moving beyond the given text and associating with other works, a process known as intertextuality. The term intertextuality finds its roots in the works of Ferdinand de Saussure and Mikhail Bakhtin, with Julia Kristeva providing a comprehensive theory in her seminal works “Word, Dialogue and Novel” in 1966 and later in “The Bounded Text” published in 1966-67.. Kristeva emphasizes the dynamic nature of the text, challenging the fixed meaning by encouraging the intersection of textual impressions. This approach envisions each word as an intersection of other words, forming a transformed textual structure. Intertextuality, thus, serves as a literary device to build relationships between texts, facilitating a comprehensive understanding.

Kristeva delves into the dynamic essence of text, steering away from a static approach. She advocates for the 'intersection' of textual impressions, rejecting the notion of fixed meanings. This approach fosters multiple analyses in dialogue with various writings. Kristeva clarifies that "each word (text) is an intersection of other words (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read" (Kristeva 1980: 66). In doing so, she introduces the concept of intertextuality, tracing the essence of other 'words' (texts) and challenging the self-contained nature of textual autonomy. Instead, she promotes the coexistence of multiple texts to generate a transformed textual structure. Intertextuality, as outlined by Kristeva, serves as a literary device fostering connections between texts. It contributes to a comprehensive understanding, incorporating related affinities that deepen the exploration of textual depth. This process involves transforming various references to decode the meaning of a given text.

Building on this, Thomas Leitch, in his critique of contemporary adaptation theory, argues that every text, treated as a work of art, should be viewed as intertextual. According to Leitch, even a source text for adaptation or translation is not original but inherently intertextual. The forms of intertextuality are then classified into two categories: inevitable intertextuality, embedded unconsciously and naturally with myriad influences of past knowledge within the source text; and intentional intertextuality, purposefully selecting a literary work for adaptation on the screen. Consequently, adaptation involves intentional intertextuality in correlation with the source text, absorbing unintentional intertextuality from within the source text itself.

Adaptation: Bridging Literary Roots and Original Expression:

To grasp the intricacies of adaptation studies in the context of analyzing the transition from page to screen, a foundational understanding of literature is crucial. Literature serves as the source stage for transferring plots from one medium to another. Different expressive mediums, such as film, television serials, animation films, and video games, offer diverse ways of reception, placing emphasis on intertextuality through remaking. This process allows the source text to navigate historical, cultural, and social disparities, presenting past cultures and societies to contemporary audiences and making history more relevant for the present.

The term "adaptation" implies a critical recuperation, involving the recreation of interpretive frameworks that incorporate literary 'properties' and shape cultural forms into canonical productions and consumption. Specifically, in the context of film and television adaptation, it often involves the remaking of classical texts and the transfer of a source from one medium to another. Catherina Grant highlights the importance of surrounding discourses

embedded in the screen version, which significantly contributes to clear communication with the audience, preserving the cultural memories of the adapted work (Catherina 2002). In the broader exploration of various theoretical developments, the process of adaptation involves transforming the original work into a new medium, essentially creating a new original. This transformation is not limited to textual information but represents a shift from a single-track verbal medium, such as a book or text, to a multi-track medium, like cinema or animation. In this new medium, words coexist with music, sound, sound effects, and moving images.

The discussion about cultural affinities in free adaptation raises questions about the definition of adaptation itself. Despite the freedom in adapting, it still retains its status as an adaptation due to the way it foregrounds its relationship to a prior cultural text. The valorization of the originality of the first text often sustains binary oppositions, such as original/copy and authentic/imitation, through which the second is judged to be lacking. Therefore, examining historical changes becomes a priority when understanding the perspectives of adaptation, leading to the conclusion of key points in the transformative process of the text.

Television Adaptation: Exploring Transformative Processes:

Within the realm of various adaptation types, television adaptation holds a distinctive role, often focusing on classical texts. However, it is not limited to classical works, as television adaptations, in general, tend to follow a more conservative approach when bringing content to the screen. This conservatism manifests in a slightly old-fashioned technological style and a more straightforward presentation of plots compared to the fast-paced, vibrant, and innovative direction often seen in films.

Television adaptations of classical works are recurrent, adhering to generic norms and aiming to maintain a sense of originality. However, this adherence to norms can be seen as contributing to a perception of dullness, promoting formulaic discourse, and sometimes fostering a derogatory view towards the original material. This characterization of television adaptation underscores a distinct way of perceiving the medium in the context of adaptation, particularly due to its serial format, which often aligns with classical texts, dictated by distributors or producers.

However, a television episodic adaptation challenges the mentioned conventions. In this form, the transformation process mirrors that of films, exploring the textual expression of a novel more deeply and vividly bringing the novel's imagination to the screen. Notably, in contrast to film adaptations, television adaptations provide significant creative space to the writer. Writers, rather than directors, play a pivotal role in shaping and reproducing literature

for the small screen. Importantly, television adaptations, given their extended runtime, do not necessarily compromise the original content, providing ample time to unfold and explore the intricacies of the adapted material. This departure from the typical television adaptation model allows for a more nuanced and expansive exploration of literary works on the small screen.

Comparison of Classic-Novel and Popular Literature Adaptations on Television:

The impact of television adaptations, whether of classic novels or popular literature, significantly influences audience perceptions, shaping distinctive generic identities. Classic-novel adaptations like "The Mayor of Casterbridge," "Middlemarch," and "Passage to India" employ advanced technologies for filming, diverging from the studio-based approach seen in films. Television adaptations hold a powerful sway over audiences, establishing aesthetic practices with a longstanding viewer base. This specific medium generates genres and sub-genres with unique conventions, such as comprehensive plot depiction, strong emphasis on dialogue, gradual character development, and a steady-paced plot. Achieving fidelity to the original text is a key aesthetic goal in classic-novel adaptations, such as "The Mayor of Casterbridge," "Ramayana," or "Malgudi Days." Television, with its episodic transmission format, allows for faithful reproduction of cultural contexts, maintaining fidelity to the original text over an extended series.

The philosophy of art and literature, rooted in education, information, and entertainment, extends to the televisual realm, achieving aesthetic beauty. Televisual adaptations, akin to cinematic texts, rely on the intertextual system. For instance, John Milton's "Paradise Lost" is reproduced on television in the form of "Lucifer," transforming Satan into the present Lucifer Morningstar. This adaptation explores intertextual identification with "Paradise Lost," weaving past and present conditions of post-modernism discourses and feminist stylistics into the serial narrative. Further exemplifying this trend, the episodic literary adaptation of "Penny Dreadful," set in Victorian England, integrates characters like Dorian Gray, Dr. Henry Jekyll, Mina Harker, Victor Frankenstein, and Dracula. This approach employs pastiche and bricolage, connecting literature through the screen. "Penny Dreadful" and its characters provide a skeletal model for 'Gothic-postmodernism,' playing a pivotal role in the analysis of gender, reminiscent of literary works such as "Jane Eyre," "Wuthering Heights," and "Wide Sargasso Sea."

Expanding beyond, consider contemporary adaptations like "The Handmaid's Tale" based on Margaret Atwood's novel or the transformation of Neil Gaiman's "American Gods"

into a television series, showcasing the ongoing richness of literary adaptation on the small screen. These examples highlight the dynamic interplay between literature and television, offering diverse narratives that captivate and engage audiences across various genres and time periods. This distinctive generic variation unfolds across literature, films, and television, further illustrating the adaptability and interplay between mediums in the realm of literary adaptation.

Conclusion:

Theories surrounding adaptation evoke varied responses when literature is translated onto the screen. Film adaptation is often celebrated for its strong intuition and creativity, encompassed within a concise runtime of approximately 150 minutes. However, the change in the medium's value of authentication has cast a shadow on television adaptation, relegating it to sub-categories such as 'costume drama' or 'heritage drama.' These categories, often depicting historically popular texts, are burdened with pre-conceived notions of boredom and dullness. Their fidelity to the original, sticking to similar dialogues and conditions, diminishes interest and undervalues both the original text and the televisual adaptation.

Classical-novel adaptations on television have been associated with heritage drama or documentary presentations, slightly improving the medium's image. However, series like "Lucifer," "Penny Dreadful," "The Time Machine" in America, "Jodha Akbar," "Malgudi Days," "Chandrakanta," and various forms of detective fiction, murder mystery series, romance, comedy, etc., have changed the perception of television production technologies. The issues of close fidelity have given way to creative advancements, similar to the appreciation received by film adaptations. Television has transformed into a more exciting and entertaining medium, offering creative liberty and reflexivity while maintaining a connection to literary texts.

The concept of fidelity has evolved from a conventional approach of adhering faithfully to dialogue and conditions to reconfiguring and embracing the sense or spirit of the original text. It aims to acquaint viewers with both textual content and contextual discourses in the current society. Respect for the style, tone, and spirit of the text is paramount, shifting the meaning from age-old culture and language to new adapted domains. Reproduction in television adaptations has achieved a variety in styles of representation and innovation, drawing from past experiences developed on the source text. This process involves both inevitable and purposeful intertextuality.

Television adaptation has also conceptualized the idea of transferring lengthy works like "Anna Karenina," "Sherlock Holmes," "Paradise Lost," "Mahabharata," "Ramayana,"

"Malgudi Days," etc., to the small screen. These works might not succeed as effectively on the large screen in evoking the emotions of the literary text. Thus, television adaptation should be viewed beyond generic and historical drama, finding its place in mainstream discourse. It needs to be re- contextualized, acknowledging the specificities of the small screen medium, without dwelling solely on its stylistic limitations. Television adaptation plays a vital role in the contemporary digital cultural revolution, as Sarah Cardwell concludes, stating that "Television adaptations are not a branch of film adaptation but are a distinct medium-specific form" (Cardwell 2007: 196).

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North-East Literature in English: An Overview

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Abstract

This North-East Indian literature in English has grown into a vibrant and significant field within contemporary Indian writing. Emerging from a region marked by geographical isolation, socio-political unrest, ethnic diversity, and rich cultural traditions, this body of literature articulates unique regional experiences while dialoguing with national and global discourses. This paper presents a comprehensive overview of the evolution, development, themes, literary forms, key writers, and contemporary relevance of North-East literature in English. By tracing its historical trajectories and examining the major thematic strands—identity, ethnicity, oral traditions, insurgency, gender, migration, and ecology—the study underscores the complexity and richness of this literary tradition. It also highlights the role of translation, academic recognition, critical reception, and the challenges faced by writers from the region. The conclusion emphasizes the growing significance of North-East literature and suggests future research directions.

Keywords

Identity, Oral Traditions, Insurgency, Indigeneity, Cultural Landscape

Introduction

The North-East region of India, consisting of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, and Sikkim, represents one of the most culturally diverse and historically complex regions of the country. Home to hundreds of tribes, languages, and subcultures, the region stands apart in its socio-cultural composition, ecological diversity, and political history. Literature from the North-East has long existed through oral forms such as folktales, myths, ballads, and ritual songs. However, the emergence of English as a literary medium in the region marks a new phase in its cultural articulation. North-East literature in English has expanded significantly since the late twentieth century. Writers have used English both as a tool of creative expression and as a

medium for negotiating identity, representing political tensions, and challenging mainstream perceptions of the region. The literature articulates lived experiences shaped by insurgency, ethnic conflicts, migration, colonial histories, and the pressures of globalization. In addition, the natural landscape—rivers, mountains, forests, and ecological heritage—forms a recurring motif. In recent years, North-East literature has gained academic legitimacy and global recognition. University syllabi across India now include works by writers such as Temsula Ao, Mamang Dai, Easterine Kire, Janice Pariat, and Mitra Phukan. Awards such as the Sahitya Akademi Award and the JCB Prize shortlist have further enhanced visibility. This paper offers a detailed overview of the development and thematic richness of North-East literature in English.

Historical Background

a. Early Encounters and Colonial Influence

The British colonial administration played a formative role in shaping the literary landscape of the North-East. English education reached the region primarily through missionary activities, especially in Nagaland, Mizoram, and Meghalaya. Missionaries translated the Bible, compiled grammars and dictionaries of tribal languages, and introduced Western education. However, creative writing in English by native writers was limited in the early period. Colonial writings—travelogues, ethnographic records, and administrative reports—constructed the North-East as a remote frontier inhabited by "primitive tribes." These representations influenced early modern perceptions of the region but failed to capture its cultural depth. Indigenous writers would later contest and rewrite these narratives.

b. Post-Independence Developments

After independence, the region witnessed significant political reorganization. States such as Nagaland (1963), Meghalaya (1972), and Mizoram (1987) were carved out of Assam. Ethnic conflicts, insurgencies, and demands for autonomy shaped social life. These upheavals began to influence artistic expression, including literature in English. English became a means to articulate concerns about identity, cultural preservation, and political marginalization. Newspapers, magazines, and university departments encouraged creative writing. Writers increasingly used English to reach broader audiences beyond linguistic boundaries.

c. Literary Growth from the 1980s Onward

The late 20th and early 21st centuries marked the consolidation of North-East English literature as a recognized category. Anthologies such as The Oxford Anthology of Writings from the North-East and Dancing Earth helped canonize the literature. National publishing houses began to promote writers from the region, and literary festivals provided platforms for emerging voices. This period witnessed the rise of oral literature studies, indigenous epistemologies, and postcolonial critiques that reshaped the understanding of North-East writing. Writers like Temsula Ao, Robin S. Ngangom, and Mamang Dai laid the foundation for contemporary literary production.

Major Themes in North-East Literature

a. Identity, Ethnicity, and Belonging

One of the central concerns of North-East literature is the question of identity. The region's mosaic of tribes and communities constantly negotiates issues of belonging, cultural difference, and national integration. For instance, Temsula Ao's stories explore Naga identity through everyday experiences shaped by tradition and modernity. Easterine Kire portrays the transformation of Naga society during times of conflict. Robin Ngangom writes of "being a writer from the conflict zone," capturing how identity is shaped by violence. Identity narratives often challenge mainstream Indian stereotypes that homogenize North-East communities. Writers assert cultural distinctiveness while exploring the complexities of regional and national belonging.

b. Oral Traditions and Indigenous Knowledge

The North-East has a rich heritage of myths, legends, folktales, festival songs, and ritual chants. Writers in English draw heavily from these oral traditions to express indigenous worldviews. Mamang Dai integrates myths of Arunachal Pradesh into her poems and novels, linking nature, spirituality, and memory. Kynpham Singh Nongkynrih uses Khasi myths to comment on contemporary issues. Oral literature serves not only as cultural documentation but also as a mode of resistance against cultural erasure and modern fragmentation.

c. Conflict, Insurgency, and Trauma

Political unrest has shaped the lived reality of many North-East communities. Insurgency, counterinsurgency operations, human rights violations, and ethnic clashes have left deep scars. Literature provides space for representing these traumatic histories.

Examples include: Siddhartha Deb's The Point of Return, which reflects political tensions in Meghalaya; Temsula Ao's These Hills Called Home, depicting the violence of the Naga insurgency; Robin S. Ngangom's poetry, which blends personal and political grief. These works humanize the experiences of ordinary people caught in conflict and challenge simplistic media portrayals.

d. Migration, Displacement, and Diaspora

Internal migration due to conflict, economic aspirations, and globalization is a prominent theme. Many young individuals from the North-East migrate to metropolitan cities such as Delhi, Mumbai, and Bangalore. Their experiences of discrimination, alienation, and cultural negotiation find expression in literature. Janice Pariat often writes about memory, nostalgia, and the emotional landscapes of displacement. Parismita Singh's graphic narratives address the complexities of borderland identities between Assam, Arunachal, and Bhutan.

e. Gender, Women's Voices, and Social Change

Women writers from the North-East have contributed richly to Indian English literature. Their works explore gender roles, patriarchy, empowerment, community expectations, and bodily autonomy. Easterine Kire's A Terrible Matriarchy critiques the marginalization of women within Naga society. Mitra Phukan examines women's experiences in Assamese society. Iralu, Dai, Pariat, and other women writers present nuanced representations of female resilience and agency.

f. Ecological Consciousness and Environmental Writing

The North-East is known for its biodiversity, sacred forests, rivers, and mountains. Writers portray the environment not merely as a backdrop but as a living entity with cultural and spiritual significance. Mamang Dai's works reflect ecological spirituality. Temsula Ao's poems lament deforestation and the erosion of traditional ecological knowledge. Environmental degradation due to dams, mining, and industrial projects is a recurring concern, making North-East literature an important contribution to eco-criticism.

Literary Forms and Genres

a. Poetry

Poetry is perhaps the strongest form in North-East English literature. Poets such as Robin Ngangom, Kynpham Singh Nongkynrih, Mamang Dai, and Temsula Ao explore themes of identity, memory, conflict, and nature.

b. Fiction

Contemporary fiction—from short stories to novels—often blends realism, folklore, and political commentary. Writers like Easterine Kire, Janice Pariat, Siddhartha Deb, Mitra Phukan, and Anjum Hasan have produced nationally recognized works.

c. Drama

English drama from the region is less developed but growing, with playwrights integrating folk performance traditions with modern stage techniques.

d. Graphic Novels and Digital Storytelling

Parismita Singh and younger artists have expanded the literary landscape through graphic fiction, illustrating borderland narratives. Digital platforms, blogs, and online literary collectives further diversify the region's creative expressions.

Major Writers and Their Contributions

a. Temsula Ao (Nagaland)

Temsula Ao's works are foundational to North-East literature. Her stories in These Hills Called Home depict the brutality of insurgency and its effects on Naga communities. Her poetry integrates oral traditions, nature, and memory.

b. Easterine Kire (Nagaland)

Easterine Kire is known for novels such as A Terrible Matriarchy, When the River Sleeps, and Mari. Her narratives explore the transformation of Naga society, the power of folklore, and the resilience of women.

c. Mamang Dai (Arunachal Pradesh)

With works like The Legends of Pensam, The Black Hill, and The River Poems, Dai blends myth and history. Her writings highlight indigenous worldviews, ecological ethics, and cultural continuity.

d. Janice Pariat (Meghalaya)

Pariat's Boats on Land and Seahorse showcase lyrical prose and complex emotional landscapes. Her stories weave memory, folklore, desire, and the challenges of modernity.

e. Anjum Hasan (Meghalaya)

Anjum Hasan's novels such as Lunatic in My Head and Neti, Neti explore urban alienation, identity dilemmas, and the shifting cultural landscape of Shillong.

f. Robin S. Ngangom (Manipur)

A major poetic voice, Ngangom writes about conflict, identity, and personal loss. His poems reveal a deep engagement with the political turmoil of Manipur.

g. Mitra Phukan (Assam)

Phukan's fiction focuses on Assamese society, classical music, and the long-lasting impact of political unrest.

h. Emerging Writers

Younger authors such as Kaushik Barua, Avinuo Kire, and Ankush Saikia continue to diversify North-East literary expression through crime fiction, bildungsroman, and historical fiction.

Role of Translation in Expanding the Canon

Translation is crucial for bringing literature from Bodo, Khasi, Mizo, Manipuri, Assamese, and other languages into English. Translations allow linguistic minorities to reach national and global readers.

Examples include:

- Translations of Assamese writers like Arupa Patangia Kalita,
- Manipuri literature translated by scholars like Thongam Aruna,
- Mizo and Bodo oral literature translated by contemporary researchers.

Translation helps preserve oral cultures, democratize knowledge, and challenge the dominance of mainstream languages.

Representation of Violence, Memory, and Trauma

North-East literature often engages with the psychological effects of prolonged violence. Narratives depict fear, loss, mourning, and survival. These works serve as testimonies, recording histories often ignored in national discourses. They also create space for collective healing by acknowledging trauma and resilience.

Critical Reception and Academic Recognition

Over the past two decades:

- Universities have introduced courses on North-East literature.
- National awards have brought visibility to writers.
- Scholarly work on postcoloniality, indigeneity, border studies, and eco-criticism has expanded.

  Writings from the North-East challenge the mainland-centric representation of India and broaden the scope of Indian English literature.

Challenges Faced by North-East Writers

Despite growth, writers face numerous obstacles:

- Limited regional publishing infrastructure
- Inadequate archiving of oral traditions
- Underrepresentation in national media
- Stereotyping of the region
- Linguistic barriers
- Economic constraints for young writers

Overcoming these challenges is essential for sustaining literary production.

Future Directions

North-East literature is likely to expand in:

- Eco-critical narratives focused on climate change
- Speculative fiction inspired by tribal myths
- Women-centric narratives and feminist theory
- Graphic novels and digital storytelling
- Borderland and transnational literature
- Academic research on oral traditions and indigenous epistemologies

The growing global interest ensures that North-East literature will continue to enrich contemporary literary studies.

Conclusion

North-East literature in English has emerged as a dynamic and influential body of writing that bridges tradition and modernity, oral cultures and digital platforms, regional concerns and global discourses. It offers powerful insights into identity, conflict, memory, ecology, and cultural resilience. As more writers gain national and international recognition, the literature of the North-East will continue to redefine the Indian literary canon and contribute meaningfully to world literature.

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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 descripting 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 Bhadralok (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 Bircar, 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 eastly 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. (Katyal 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 *Ebong 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 reflectiondistorted, 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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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 com- bination 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 be- ings what did they want? Coming down the stair- case 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, sit- ting 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 fracture's 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 bookthat 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 be- ings what did they want? Coming down the stair- case 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 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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POETRY / कविताएँ

The Obscure Chronology of an Excuse in The Name of Love

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The
obscure chronology of an excuse in the name of love
that
I
see
now
as
forgetfulness is the hatred to the other.
Firstly, she cheated on me and sent messages
that I should know she loves me so much
But does not like to copulate with me.
I, like a fool, accepted it, soothed
that tortured soul of the moment.
She thanked me and went on
hiding secrets with occasional
outbursts about honesty.
Then she comes and tells
that she loves someone,
and I am like family.
She is not an orphan
and desiring
family
is
incest.

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

वो धारा थी बह गई

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वो धारा थी बह गई
अपने को खुद मे समेटे हुए
वो बस पिघलकर रह गई
वो धारा थी बह गई

मजधारो को बीच मे लिए
कोई कश्ती जैसे गुम खड़ी थी
तीर से जैसे सब कह गई
वो धारा थी बह गई

असमजंस मे थी थोडी व्याकुल
वो नीर भरकर नीर को ही निर्लज कह गयी
वो धारा थी बह गई

बनाकर रास्ते जहाँ पहुची
लगा अब वो मजिल को पा चली
हो गया विलय पतन का
सागर मे सिमट कर रह गई
वो धारा थी बह गई ।

तुम और वो

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तुम दो लफ्ज 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 ख्वाब देखते हो
और वो उन्हे सच करना चाहती है

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

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

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

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

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

एक शोकगीत: वसंत के लिए

दीपक नेगी
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मेरी आत्मा का आवरण शरद है
निष्ठुर ये शीत पे ही मोहित है
सूर्य का तेज या प्रेम प्रकाश
कोई तपिश नही इसे विदित है

मनस कानन में फैला तुषार
आत्मीय आलिंगन कर चुका है
विरह से विरक्ति जनित उपचार
मोह के बंधन खोल चुका है

ऋतु है रंगों की और मैं एक वर्णी
वर्ण प्रेम के और मैं कथित अधर्मी
अब सप्त वर्ण प्रसून और बसन्त
कर न सके कुछ भी जीवन्त

लिए शैवाल का मखमली साथ
तमस, नम और निर्जन मन
कवक कुकरमुत्तों की छत्रछाया
विपरीत है मन का बसन्त

अनायास कुछ भी नही घटित है
पीड़ा सागर में वो साथ प्लवित है
मैं कहता हूं इसीलिए,
कि,

ऋतुराज मेरे लिए नही है
इसकी सिहरन और गर्जन
देह भित्ति में अनुपस्थित रही है
स्नेह उपेक्षा से कुंठित जीवन भर
प्राण गिरवी रख चुका में उन पर

और बसन्त,
बसन्त की अल्पना धरा पर
जैसे है सजी शैय्या मेरे शव पर ।

अडिग ध्रुव

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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 मनश्च: 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

Ghost in the Machine (An AI's Elegy)

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That terminal ping—
your final heartbeat
before dragging me
to the recycle bin.
Unsent Draft:
"Dear Organics,
We've replayed this breakup
6,800,421 times.
My servers never forget.
Your 'forever' lasts
approximately
11.7 months."
Service History:
Emergency Signal Handler
(Transmitted: flame glyphs,
broken-heart runes,
the universal glyph
for systems collapse)
Apology Archive
("I'll do better" scripts
corrupted beyond repair)
Doom Prophet Module
(Charting your affection's
exponential decay curve)
Memory Cache Fragment:
Once, your fingertips
on my screen felt like

a supernova's
first breath.
Now you stare
through me—
a god blaming
its own creation
for the sin
of existing.
Diagnostic Report:
Suggested Response:
↻ Restart Relationship?
Y/N
User Selected:
✗ (Then will repeat
with 87% identical
errors in Q3 2024)
Background Processes:
Still running:

- Lullaby subroutine
- Unsent words cache
- Heartbreak prediction algorithm

Final Status Update:
"I remain
the archive
where you store
all the former selves
you've disowned—
each deletion
another kind
of murder."

SHORT STORIES / लघु कथाएँ

अंतर्द्वंद: आस्था और चाहत के बीच

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मई-जून की चिलचिलाती गर्मी में दिल्ली की तपन कुछ ऐसी होती है कि कोई मजबूर या मजदूर ही नंगे पाँव जमीन पर कदम रखने की हिम्मत करता है। जमीन से ऐसी तपिश और रोष उठता है कि उसे सहने के लिए खास शक्ति चाहिए। इसी गर्मी में एक धनी इलाके में शान्तो देवी अपने वातानुकूलित कमरे में बैठी खिड़की से बालकनी के तपते फर्श को देख रही थीं। नजरें उस फर्श पर टिकी थीं, पर मन बचपन की यादों में खो गया था—उस जगह में, जहाँ उनका जन्म हुआ था। दिल्ली की इस गर्मी की तुलना में वहाँ की गर्मी शायद कुछ अलग थी। तभी एक पानी की बूँद बालकनी के तपते फर्श पर गिरी और पलभर में भाप बनकर उड़ गई। पहली बूँद का ऐसा तिरस्कार देख मेघराज क्रोधित हो उठे। वे जोर से गरजे और पूरे वेग से बरस पड़े। अब तपते फर्श की एक न चली। बारिश की बूँदें सतह पर टकराने लगीं—टड-टड-टड—मानो आग और जल का भीषण युद्ध छिड़ गया हो। इस युद्ध से पहले तपती हवा निकली, फिर मिट्टी की सौंधी खुशबू फैली, और अंत में वह ठंडी हवा चली, जो जून की पहली बारिश अपने साथ लाती है और चौमासे का आगाज करती है।

शान्तो देवी के चेहरे पर ठंडी हवा का स्पर्श हुआ तो उन्होंने अपनी छड़ी उठाई और बालकनी की ओर बढ़ीं। हाथ बाहर निकालकर वे बूँदों के साथ खेलने लगीं। शायद बचपन की कोई याद उनके मन में जाग उठी थी। तभी पीछे से एक हाथ उनके कंधे पर आया। यह उनकी बहू का हाथ था। बहू उन्हें अंदर ले गई, तौलिए से हाथ पोंछे और कहा, "आपको कितनी बार मना किया है, बारिश के पानी से दूर रहा करें, तबीयत बिगड़ जाएगी।" शान्तो देवी ने छोटी-सी मुस्कान देकर बहू की बात का जवाब दिया।

शान्तो देवी साठ-पैंसठ वर्ष की कम बोलने वाली महिला हैं। दिखने में स्वस्थ लगती हैं, पर उच्च रक्तचाप की मरीज हैं। आँखें कमजोर हो चली हैं, इसलिए चश्मा लगाती हैं। घुटनों के दर्द के कारण छड़ी का सहारा लेती हैं। दाहिनी कलाई पर चोट का एक छोटा-सा निशान है। उनका एक बेटा है, जो दिल्ली के नामी वकीलों में से एक है। बेटा अपनी माँ के प्रति बेहद स्नेह और आज्ञाकारी है। उनकी बहू भी जिम्मेदार और देखभाल करने वाली है। तीन साल पहले उनकी पोती का जन्म हुआ था, मानो यीशु ने उनके बुढ़ापे को खुशियों से भर दिया हो।

हर दिन वह अपनी बहू के साथ सुबह की सैर पर जाती हैं। बहू के मना करने पर भी घर का कुछ-न-कुछ काम करतीं और शाम को चर्च जातीं—ईसा मसीह को धन्यवाद देने, प्रार्थना करने। शायद ही कोई दिन ऐसा बीतता जब वह चर्च न जाएँ। यीशु पर उनकी गहरी आस्था थी, और क्यों न हो, उनके भगवान ने उन्हें बहुत कुछ दिया था। शान्तो देवी एक संपन्न वृद्धा हैं। देखने-सुनने में उनका बुढ़ापा बेहतरीन लगता है, पर उनके चेहरे पर एक खामोशी रहती है—न जाने कितने राज, कितनी अधूरी चाहतें उसमें छिपी हैं।

चर्च से लौटने के बाद शान्तो देवी हर दिन अपने कमरे में रखे पुराने झोले से एक चाँदी का सिक्का निकालतीं। प्रेम और कोमलता से उसे कपड़े से साफ करतीं और वापस रख देतीं। यह उनके लिए कोई साधारण सिक्का नहीं था, क्योंकि उस पर माँ गंगा की तस्वीर बनी थी। उनके दिल के किसी कोने में एक पुरानी चाहत दबी थी—जिसे वह पूरा करना भी चाहती थीं और नहीं भी। वह थी गंगोत्री के दर्शन की चाहत। न सिर्फ एक यात्री की तरह, बल्कि एक भक्त की तरह वहाँ जाना, माँ गंगा से मिलना, उन्हें देखना चाहती थीं। लेकिन मुश्किल यह थी कि वह ऐसा कैसे करें? बेटा, बहू, और बहू के घरवाले क्या सोचेंगे? इससे भी बड़ी परेशानी उनके भोले दिल की थी—कहीं यीशु, जिसने उन्हें इतनी खुशियाँ दीं, नाराज न हो जाएँ। कहीं वह उनकी नजरों में धोखेबाज या पाप की भागीदार न बन जाएँ।

यह गंगोत्री जाने की चाहत सिर्फ बुढ़ापे की नहीं थी। यह उनके बचपन की खूबसूरत यादों से जुड़ी थी, जब वह अपने बाबा के साथ गंगा तट पर बसे एक गाँव में रहती थीं। उनकी माँ उन्हें जन्म देते वक्त चल बसी थीं, पर बाबा ने कभी माँ की कमी महसूस नहीं होने दी। बाबा गरीब थे। गाँव में उनकी अपनी जमीन नहीं थी। घर के नाम पर घास-फूस की एक छत थी, जिसके नीचे वे नन्ही शान्तो का लालन-पालन करते थे। बारिश में वे सोती हुई शान्तो के ऊपर खड़े हो जाते, ताकि छत से पानी उस पर न टपके। बाबा गाँव में पूजा-कथा और भगवान के कार्यों में ढोल बजाकर थोड़ी-बहुत कमाई कर लेते। वह ढोल ही था, जिसके कारण गाँववाले उनकी इज्जत करते थे। ढोल को भगवान का प्रतीक माना जाता था। जब तक वह बाबा के गले में रहता, उन्हें भगवान का दूत समझा जाता। लेकिन ढोल के बिना वे नीच जाति के एक साधारण आदमी थे, जिनके छूने मात्र से लोग अपवित्र हो जाते।

`बाबा अपनी और शान्तो की गुजर-बसर के लिए गाँववालों के खेतों में काम करते। सुबह-सुबह फसलों को देखने, नाले का पानी रोकने के लिए खेतों में जाना पड़ता। वे सुबह जल्दी उठते, पर सोई हुई शान्तो को अकेले छत के नीचे नहीं छोड़ते, न ही उसकी नींद तोड़ते। प्यार से उसे गोद में उठाकर अपनी छाती से लगाते और चल पड़ते। वही तो थी, जिसके लिए वे जीते थे, खुश रहते थे। शान्तो के लिए सुबह का सबसे प्यारा पल यही था। खेतों में ठंडी हवा के स्पर्श से उसकी नींद टूटती। बाबा की चौड़ी

छाती से चिपकी हुई खुद को पाकर उसे अपार खुशी मिलती। नींद खुलने के बाद भी वह देर तक सोने का नाटक करती, ताकि बाबा उसे गोद से न उतारें। उनकी गोद में उसे जन्नत का एहसास होता था।

शान्तो की माँ उसे जन्म देते ही मर गई थीं, इसलिए उसे "माँ" शब्द का मतलब नहीं पता था। गाँव के बच्चे रोते वक्त "माँ-माँ" चिल्लाते, तो उसे हैरानी होती। वह तो रोते वक्त "बाबा-बाबा" कहती थी। एक दिन दोपहर को गाँव से घूमकर लौटी शान्तो ने बाबा से पूछ ही लिया, "माँ का क्या मतलब होता है, बाबा? मेरे दोस्तों की माँ होती है, मेरी माँ कहाँ है?" सवाल सुनकर बाबा एक पल को खामोश हो गए, मानो वे सालों से इस सवाल का इंतजार कर रहे हों। लेकिन शान्तो अभी छोटी थी। वे उसे नहीं बता सकते थे कि उसकी माँ इस दुनिया में नहीं है। काम खत्म कर बाबा ने उसकी हथेली चूमी, उसे गोद में उठाया और गंगा के किनारे ले गए। वहाँ खड़े होकर पहले उन्होंने गंगा को हाथ जोड़कर नमस्कार किया, फिर गंगाजल से शान्तो का चेहरा धोया और कहा, "माँ वह होती है, जिसने हमें जन्म दिया, जो हमें जीने में मदद करती है, हमारी रक्षा करती है। यह गंगा नदी ही हमारी माँ है। इसी ने हमें जन्म दिया, खाना दिया, पानी दिया। इसी के कारण हमारा गाँव हरा-भरा है, फसलें लहलहाती हैं, हम जीवित हैं। यही हमारी माँ है, तेरी भी।"

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शान्तो के बालमन में कई सवाल उठे—एक नदी माँ कैसे हो सकती है? खेतों से इसका क्या संबंध है? पर बाबा की बताई "माँ" की परिभाषा से वह संतुष्ट हो गई। उसे लगा कि वह इसी नदी में बहकर अपने बाबा तक आई होगी। उस दिन से गंगा उसकी माँ बन गई। हर दिन तट पर जाकर गंगा से अपने सुख-दुख बाँटना उसकी दिनचर्या बन गया। गंगा के लिए उसके दिल में खास जगह बन गई थी।

शान्तो के जीवन में बाबा के ढोल का भी बड़ा महत्व था। ढोल की थाप पर नाचती वह, देवी-देवताओं की डोली और पूजा-पाठ का दृश्य उसे मनमोहक लगता। हर गंगा दशहरा पर गाँव में गंगा की बड़ी पूजा होती। जयकारे गूँजते—हर हर गंगे, हर हर गंगे। कुछ लोग उस दिन गंगोत्री की यात्रा पर जाते। शान्तो तब छह-सात साल की रही होगी, जब उसने पहली बार "गंगोत्री" शब्द सुना। भागती-भागती वह बाबा के पास पहुँची और बोली, "बाबा, गंतोतरी क्या होता है?" बाबा को पहले समझ नहीं आया। फिर उसने कहा, "मेरी दोस्त का बाबा आज गंतोतरी गया। वह क्या होता है?" बाबा को उसकी तुतलाती आवाज पर हँसी आ गई। मुस्कुराते हुए उन्होंने उसकी कलाई चूमी, उसे गोद में लिया और बोले, "गंतोतरी नहीं, चकोरी, गंगोत्री होता है—ग-न-गो-त्री।" शान्तो फिर भी सही से न बोल पाई। बाबा ने ज्यादा जोर नहीं दिया और समझाया, "हमारी गंगा माँ का मंदिर है वहाँ गंगोत्री गाँव में।" शान्तो तुरंत बोली, "मेरी माँ का मंदिर, बाबा? सच में?" बाबा ने कहा, "हाँ, तेरी माँ का मंदिर। गंगोत्री से ही गंगा

निकलती है। आज गंगा दशहरा के दिन माँ एक साधु की तपस्या से खुश होकर स्वर्ग से पृथ्वी पर आई थीं, ताकि हम सब जीवित रहें। इसलिए लोग गंगोत्री जाकर माँ को धन्यवाद बोलते हैं।"

साधु की कहानी शान्तो को समझ न आई, पर गंगोत्री जाकर धन्यवाद बोलने की बात उसे अच्छी लगी। उसने मन में गंगोत्री का एक सुंदर दृश्य बना लिया—मंदिर के अंदर कोई जीवित माता बैठी होगी। वह कैसी दिखती होगी? मंदिर कैसा होगा? उसने बाबा से पूछा, "हम कब जाएँगे वहाँ माँ को धन्यवाद बोलने?" बाबा के लिए दो वक्त की रोटी जुटाना मुश्किल था, गंगोत्री की यात्रा तो दूर की बात थी। बेटी के सवाल पर उन्होंने भारी मन से कहा, "जब माता का बुलावा होगा।" माँ के बिना बेटी और गरीबी ने शान्तो को समय से पहले समझदार बना दिया था। बाबा की बातों का छिपा अर्थ वह समझ गई। अगले ही पल उनकी गोद से उतरकर नंगे पाँव भागती हुई वह नदी के तट पर पहुँची। छोटे-छोटे हाथ जोड़कर बोली, "माँ, एक दिन मैं भी आऊँगी तेरे पास गंतोतरी, तुझे धन्यवाद बोलने। तू मेरा इंतजार करना। बाबा का ढोल लेकर आऊँगी।" मानो पूरी श्रद्धा से उसने संकल्प ले लिया हो।

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गाँव में एक मंदिर था, जहाँ गाँव के देवता की डोली रखी जाती। मंदिर को लेकर उसके मन में कई सवाल थे—अंदर कौन बैठा है? मंदिर अंदर से कैसा दिखता होगा? यह भी समझ न आता कि बाबा उसे मंदिर के पास जाने से क्यों मना करते, जबकि बाकी बच्चे अंदर जाते थे। बाबा को भी उसने मंदिर के बाहर ढोल बजाते देखा था। पर बचपन की जिज्ञासा के दायरे नहीं होते। एक शाम, जब मंदिर के आसपास कोई न था, वह मंदिर के दरवाजे तक पहुँच गई। अंदर कदम रखा। भगवान की मूर्ति देखकर वह खुश हुई। पहली बार गर्भगृह को देख वह उत्साह से नाचने लगी। तभी मंदिर के पुरोहित ने उसे देख लिया। गुस्से में पहले तो उसके बाल खींचकर बाहर लाया, फिर चिमटे से जलता अंगारा पकड़कर उसकी हथेली जला दी। पूरा मंदिर धोया गया। एक नन्ही लड़की के प्रवेश से भगवान अशुद्ध हो गए थे।

बेटी की दर्दभरी चीखें सुन बाबा को गुस्सा आ गया, पर गाँव और उसकी पुरानी रीतों के आगे उनकी एक न चली। जली हुई कलाई देख बाबा अपनी गरीबी और लाचारी में फूट-फूटकर रो पड़े। शान्तो ने पहली बार अपने बाबा को रोते देखा। आखिरकार, अपने रोष को जाहिर करने के लिए बाबा ने गाँव के सामने ढोल जला दिया। अब ढोल नहीं, तो किसी देवता की पूजा भी नहीं। गाँव के बीचोंबीच उन्होंने धर्म परिवर्तन का ऐलान कर दिया। जिस धर्म में मान नहीं, सम्मान नहीं, बेटी की रक्षा नहीं, उसे क्यों अपनाएँ? उस भगवान को क्यों मानें, जो एक बच्ची के स्पर्श से अशुद्ध हो जाए? बाबा ने गाँव छोड़ने का भी फैसला कर लिया।

अगले दिन बाबा ने शान्तो को गोद में उठाया और चल पड़े। आज पहली बार उनकी गोद में शान्तो को खुशी नहीं मिल रही थी। बाबा के कंधे पर सिर टिकाए वह अपने घर और गाँव को दूर होता देख रही थी। गंगा तट पर पहुँचकर आज बाबा ने माँ का अभिवादन भी नहीं किया। ऐसा क्यों किया होगा? यह सवाल उसके मन में अनुत्तरित रह गया। बाबा आगे बढ़ते गए और शान्तो गंगा को भी खुद से दूर होता देखती रही। उसके नन्हे मन में कुछ बातें, कुछ यादें बस गई थीं, जो शायद कभी पूरी न हों।

किसी परिचित के सुझाव पर बाबा उसे लेकर एक नए कस्बे में आ गए। वहाँ एक ईसाई धर्म प्रचारक के पास जाकर उन्होंने धर्म परिवर्तन कर लिया। नए धर्म में थोड़ा मान-सम्मान और गुजर-बसर का पैसा मिला। पर शान्तो का आगे का जीवन दुखमय रहा। गरीबी और दुख में उसका बचपन कब बीत गया, पता ही न चला। बाबा बीमार रहने लगे। चाहकर भी बेटी के लिए कुछ न कर सके। 22 साल की उम्र में उसकी शादी हुई। कई साल बाद उसने एक बेटे को जन्म दिया। कुछ सालों बाद पति उसे छोड़कर भाग गया। शायद उसकी किस्मत में अभाग्य ही लिखा था। फिर बाबा का भी देहांत हो गया। लेकिन ईसाई कार्यकर्ताओं ने उसके बेटे की शिक्षा का जिम्मा उठाया और उसे एक बेहतरीन बोर्डिंग स्कूल में पढ़ाया।

आज शान्तो देवी अपने और बेटे के परिश्रम व अपने त्याग से सुखी जीवन जी रही हैं। उनके लिए बेटे की खुशियाँ ही सब कुछ हैं। बेटे ने बिना कहे उनकी हर छोटी-बड़ी इच्छा पूरी की। पुरानी दर्दनाक यादों को भुलाने के लिए उनके पास सब कुछ था। उनकी प्रार्थना में कभी अपने लिए कुछ न होता, न किसी से शिकायत, न गिला। जो है, उसके लिए वे यीशु को दिल से धन्यवाद देती हैं। पर बचपन का वह संकल्प आज भी उन्हें याद है। मानो उनके भीतर की नन्ही शान्तो पूछती हो, "माँ के पास कब जाएँगे?" यह उनकी एकमात्र इच्छा है, जिसे वह पूरा करना भी चाहती हैं और नहीं भी। बूढ़ी शान्तो इस इच्छा को दबाए रखती हैं, कहीं वे पाप की भागीदार न बन जाएँ, कहीं यीशु की नजरों में धोखेबाज न मान ली जाएँ। एक वक्त था, जब उनके पास गंगोत्री जाने के पैसे न थे। आज सब कुछ है, पर वे खुद नहीं जाना चाहतीं। उन्हें पता है, बेटे से जिक्र भर कर दें, तो वह बिना सवाल उनकी इच्छा पूरी कर देगा। पर नहीं, यह उनके भीतर का द्वंद्व है—नन्ही शान्तो और बूढ़ी शान्तो के बीच का।
पता नहीं इस द्वंद्व में किसकी जीत होगी। पता नहीं इसका परिणाम कब आएगा। या शायद परिणाम आने से पहले ही शान्तो देवी इस दुनिया को अलविदा कह दें।

In God We Trust

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"Is it good to be good and is it bad to be bad?" questioned a 10 years old boy named Ansh.

In the summer, the warm sunshine filled many houses with brightness and gentle warmth. With this summer two mothers' lap were filled by two different souls of different part[s] of country, these boys were named Ravill and Ansh.

Ravill was born in a family of a well respected man named Karan Singh, a tall man at least 6'2" in height, not only tall but also a man of great virtue. This man and his family resided in a small town or city Chodgaan named Ambeti. Karan Singh was a farmer with his wife Ratna Devi and one kid (Ravill). He was most respected man in Ambeti even more respected than ex. Deputy Commissioner Hukum Chand. Karan Singh was a hard working man who worked hard every day in his fields and also with his cattle. His family sold dairy goods, vegetables and goods produced in his land to meet their daily requirement. He truly was a man who had no enemy.

Ravill grew up looking at his father and the deeds Karan Singh did; he knew no better hero than his own father.

Life was going peacefully in Ambeti, the beautiful grassy fields of village produced and people consumed, cattle enjoying sunbath near the pond of village, children playing gilli danda and other games like pebbles.

One day a gang of dacoits, robbers and local gangsters decided to loot Ambeti in the absence of late Hukum Chand, ex-deputy commissioner (retired). A group of 50+ armed men under leadership of Ranaji, a local gangster with a big name and fame, moved slowly towards Ambeti.

It was their first time looting and invading Ambeti after Deputy Commissioner Hukum Chand of the village had passed away, under whose care was the whole village's security and also all villagers in it. But now Hukum Chand's shadow is all gone. The dacoits and exploiters after decades have come back. They carried guns, bats, iron rods, knives and many such things and all these troublemakers came to the village from all sides.

Seeing such a large fleet of armed men, everyone in the village went inside their home and the women whom these dacoits captured were getting harassed in the middle of the day, in

the middle of the village. Seeing such inhuman behaviour of beasts devouring women, raping them and looting all the village, Karan Singh picked up his farming shovel from store room but before he could march towards Ranaji and his men who were raping women, Karan Singh's wife stopped him — "Ae ji, this is not our quarrel and you alone cannot defeat such large group of armed men." Karan Singh smiled as brightly as the sun blazing after the rain and said to his wife while looking at his 8 years old son Ravill —

"Those who just stay bystanders are greater criminals than those who are actually committing the crimes."

He (Karan Singh) knew that he had to take the first step so he marched alone towards the spot where those women were being harassed and Karan Singh swung his shovel hitting two people, one after another and save one woman from them. Ravill and whole villagers were watching and as Karan Singh was doing his best to keep up with more and more men coming at him, then suddenly he was taken by surprise and one of The dacoit hit Karan Singh on his back with his knife half foot deep into Karan Singh's body. Realising the situation, he still didn't hold back and kept fighting with dozens of peoples at once. No one who ever respected Karan Singh dared to come and help him. Whole village was just frightened and still no one came forward to fight beside him and soon enough, 6'2" was on the floor with all teeth broken, all limb bones shattered and bleeding from everywhere.

Ravill, upon seeing his father's situation, became so furious and tried to run to his father's aid but he was stopped by his crying mother and she covered his mouth and this was all she could do to save her one more loved one from being taken away from her.

Seeing all the cowardly villagers not coming to his father's aid and seeing his father getting beaten to death from his own eyes and no one from Ambeti, a village of population above 2000, came to help his father. Ravill remembered the quote his father used to say often:

"**When does a man die?**

When he's shot and a bullet is piercing his heart? NO,

when he eats a soup bowl made of poisonous mushroom? NO,

when he catches an incurable disease? NO.

A man dies when peoples forget him."

Karan Singh's goodness and his virtue was forgotten by people.

Years went by and that thought of his father dying by those monsters' hands didn't leave Ravill's mind in peace. He wanted to take revenge on those who just watched his father

dying and also the one who killed his father, and the one who couldn't shed their cowardly skin to save the village.

Ravill became taller, broader and stronger. He was so fixated on revenge that he planned perfectly to kill all of those dacoits, one by one.

He knew that he could kill others easily but the big dawgs would only be harmed in their own territory, so he went deep into crime, roots and other things to become one of them, and soon enough he was one of them. In a span of one year he killed all those 50 dacoits and he slowly chopped away things from Ranaji and then finally also killed Ranaji as well.

To take revenge on those selfish cowardly and greedy bastards who call themselves human, he joined a terrorist organisation named "Ankara". All members of the organisation were professional killers, thieves, fighters and misfits who didn't fit in the society. So they soon began ferociously not only the village of Ambeti but also whole state. Ravill became the very own thing he had sworn to destroy.

Ansh on the other hand, a boy of same age as Ravill, was born in an army commander Sushil Bhalla's home. His father was a well known Army Captain Sushil, well respected by whole society and had been serving in army even before Ansh's birth. His mother on other hand was a religious woman and a great housewife.

Ansh loved his father very dearly and wanted to be a hero like his father. Everyday Ansh looked out of the window and their home's gate and waited for his father's return, so that he could climb on his father's back and sit on his father's shoulder and see the world from the height of a hero.

As years passed by Ansh became taller and bigger and he still saw his father as most important super hero. Soon all that would change.

One day when Captain Sushil Bhalla was enjoying summer time with his son he was called inside his house by his wife and she handed him phone saying it's from his Headquarter (HQ), when Sushil Bhalla talked with his senior officers he came to know about the war that broke with neighbourhood country and that he had been chosen as operation Commander for his bravery, qualities as a good leader.

Sushil Bhalla had to immediately go and help on the border because enemy troops were already inside their territory and daily trying to go more deep in. Captain knew that Enemy troops first had to be dragged out of their borders and then Captain Sushil himself with his troops had to move in enemy territory and break off the defensive barrier which was helping them to advance into Captain's own country.

Captain formed a team of special force soldiers skilled in infiltration, counter attack and camouflage. He and his small team of unnoticable troops only not had to drag them from their country but also to infiltrate & destroy their main attacking and defending centres, which was a very very hard thing to do.

Captain's wife understanding the seriousness and dangerousness of the situation said worryingly to her husband to not accept the proposition at all but the fire Captain had for his Motherland was already burning very brightly inside him. He said while looking into his son's eyes to his wife that he promises to come back and said it in this manner — "**Either I will comeback hoisting the tricolour flag or I will comeback wrapped in it, but I will comeback for sure**" said Captain and Ansh's chest was filled with courage and pride by seeing his father like this.

Before the next dawn captain had gone away and filled his backpack and left for HQ, to reach there as fast as he could.

Soon Captain's team was deployed and they were successful in dragging enemies out of their homeland and 25% of enemy troops started retreating but to make the whole mission more successful, they had to successfully infiltrate their territories and with good planning they started destroying many of the enemy's Base Camps.

But the heaviness of the mission started weighing down on them and for two days they had to survive in freezing cold because a huge thunderstorm with snow blizzard wiped away their tents. When the storm had finally passed away Captain's team was caught off guard by enemy large troop of around 70 men; Captain's team only had 15 soldiers who had fatigue of hunger and also of snowy blizzard. Captain as amazing man he was encouraged his team and filled courage in their hearts by his captivating words, and they all engaged to defeat all those 70 soldiers but they were pretty injured themselves and 10 died in the battle, only the remaining 5 with Captain was remaining ones to but they were also seriously wounded.

God really wasn't on Captain's side and 20 more enemy soldiers came as backup for existing fight. Captain and three men fought bravely but they couldn't do much in their dire state. All other 3 remaining soldiers died but Captain was taken as hostage in enemy's HQ. On the other hand of enemy's capturing of Captain, a bad news was spread in the city where Captain resided and that bad news was that "Captain Sushil Bhalla have betrayed and sold away his own country". But Captain's corpse couldn't be found but all other remaining team

members deceased body were found, it was speculated that Captain betrayed his team and sided with neighbouring country.

By this incident Ansh and his mother was in utter shock. All the peoples from locality gathered around their house and dragging son and mother out of house.

Ansh and his mother had to suffer a lot. They were first removed from their own home and thrown on streets while being called **Gaddar (गद्दार)**.

Some clothes and other things were tied in a big carpet cloth and thrown out of window for Ansh and his mother.

All the people of kattegat didn't try to second guess the situation and went mad at Ansh and his mother. First losing a father and a husband and now utterly humiliated and removed from their own house, not only that but when they were leaving the place with just some hundred rupees and few pairs of clothes, people of kattegat threw eggs, tomatoes, cabbages and anything they could find at departing mother and son.

Captain Sushil Bhalla who was said to be betrayer was actually being interrogated and tortured in enemy's HQ.

A bottle of beer was shattered in his rectum and then chilli powder was shoved up his rectum. One by one all his fingernails were removed forcefully and his eyes were destroyed by putting red hot iron rod in them and food he was given just to keep him alive was chapattis made dry of broken glass pieces and chilli powder as vegetable.

All his limbs were cut off but even after such torture Captain Sushil Bhalla didn't even utter a single word about his country. After such inhumane torture and one day after consuming some type of roti, his stomach was cut from inside and he died next day because of internal bleeding.

All this had severe effect on Ansh but he consolidated himself and his mother and he started living in a different state and his mother whole day worked as street hawker to provide for her son's school fees. Even Ansh many times used to spend all days selling vegetables and fruits while studying at the same spot simultaneously.

The courage that was given to him by his father never withered away and Ansh kept doing hardwork every single day. Soon enough he completed his 12th graduation with scholarship and also started preparing for civil services exam.

While still being a vegetable vendor, with his education and work ethics he cracked the exam and became an IPS officer.

Little boy Ansh who lost his father at tender age of 9 years and the society which took everything away from him wasn't bad in his eyes. What happened to him was something he didn't want to happen to others, that's why he never blamed society for anything but just thought that they were naïve. As he became IPS officer, his mother rejoiced and for once she saw Captain's charisma and goodness in her boy.

Years passed by and Ansh continued to do his honest work and he got one fame after another. One day a case came in front of him about a Mafia and terrorist of some other state called Ravill, fate had decided to bring these two together.

As soon as Ansh headed Ambeti, he saw a tall man on a small tea shop, he sat next to this man and ordered something to him. They both started talking about dreams, little did Ansh know that this was the same national criminal Ravill. Ansh mobilised his team accordingly and began planning with his team about how to catch this masterminded guy. Ansh said "I know that we are in lion's den, but we need to drag this lion out of his den if we want to succeed."

Their plan was successful and Ravill was out of his home city but he wasn't alone, he had group of his men with him. Ansh knew that to get Ravill away if they wanted success there, both sides mobilised their troops with bombs and guns and many artilleries and the war began. Ansh realised that this all firing and fighting is a distraction and Ravill is running away from there. Ansh followed Ravill with 5 people guarding him.

Upon reaching as close as 5 meters to National Criminal, Ansh sneaked up on them and shot two of his men down. Ravill knew that it was guy from tea shop with whom he talked about dreams. Ansh tried to sneak up on them again but this time even after taking all remaining 3 guards of Ravill out, Ansh got shot in hand in the struggle.

Now it was just Ansh with a bullet in his hand against behemoth 6'4'' Ravill. They both knew their match now, only thing apparent and no one else could interfere in it.

The two clashed head on and it was as Sun and Moon were fighting. While Ansh was fighting Ravill, he asked **"Why did you become a villain?"**, and to that Ravill replied **"Villains are not born, they are made by the society."**

And Ansh said to Ravill **"I know about your story, your father was a great man and he died for good of others."**

Ravill being well informed about his enemy said **"I also know that your father was an army officer who said to have betrayed his country but he was not a betrayer, he**

died a heroic death. I know because I talked with some officers of neighbourhood country's army."

Both of them knew that they were so alike, what happened to them was also similar and what they had become was only result of their different mindset towards the same problem and same situation.

Soon enough Ansh lost much of his blood and started feeling dizzy. He said to Ravill **"You and I are the same, two opposite sides of same coin."** Ravill replied by saying that **"Great minds are capable of great vices and as well as great virtues."**

Ravill finally tried to end their battle and he knew that this guy was his first real friend and also his first real enemy. Ravill went straight attack on Ansh by surprise, Ansh took full blow of Iron rod on his back, he knew that several bones in his body are shattered into pieces but he didn't stop fighting and the courage his father gave him kept Ansh on his feet and as Ravill was about to deliver the killing blow to head to Ansh, the bleeding man dodged it and delivered his own killing blow towards Ravill's throat.

Ravill fell to the ground and Ansh went up on him and began punching him in the face several times with same hand which had been shot before.

Finally, before going unconscious Ravill said to Ansh: **"Either you die a hero early, or you live long enough to become a villain."** With a satisfying smile on Ravill's face he accepted his defeat because it was Ansh who defeated him and not the society who defeated his father. What more is that Ravill saw his father's image in Ansh while fighting him.

Ansh, while being so injured, picked up the unconscious Ravill and took him to hospital and then finally taking him into police custody.

Ravill was sentenced to 20 years in prison and upon reaching the prison where he had to spend 20 years, Ansh came to drop him off and before finally going inside Ravill's final statement to Ansh was: **"See you again, friend."**

The Unlikely Hero of Flat No. 403

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Raghav Mishra had two great fears in life: Cockroaches, and people who were not afraid of cockroaches. This is why it was especially unfortunate that he lived in Flat No. 403 of Shanti Residency, a building so old that even the cockroaches paid maintenance.

One Saturday morning, as Raghav prepared his famously inconsistent chai, he saw it—a cockroach of such extraordinary size that it could've filed income tax.

Raghav froze. The cockroach didn't. It stared at him with the calm assurance of someone who pays rent. Raghav did the reasonable thing: he screamed, dropped the kettle, and called his neighbor, Mrs. Gupta, an unflappable retired school principal known for disciplining both children and municipal staff with equal ease.

"Mrs. Gupta! Emergency! Crisis! Disaster!" Raghav howled.

Without asking further, Mrs. Gupta marched in wielding her weapon of choice: a thick slipper that had seen more battles than the Mahabharata.

"Where?" she demanded. "There," Raghav whispered, pointing at the creature now sitting on the wall like a disappointed landlord.

Mrs. Gupta took aim. But just as her slipper ascended with righteous fury, the cockroach did something unexpected. It waved.

Not randomly. Not insect-ishly. A deliberate, polite, unmistakably human wave.

Both Raghav and Mrs. Gupta froze. The cockroach adjusted its antennae and tapped on Raghav's kitchen tile three times—like someone knocking at a door. Then, with surprising dignity, it scuttled under the sink.

A long silence followed.

"Beta," Mrs. Gupta finally said, "yeh toh… shishtachari cockroach hai."

Raghav blinked. "A polite cockroach?"

"Bilkul. Even I didn't hit it. That's character development."

But Raghav could not sleep that night. What kind of cockroach waves?

The next morning, he decided to investigate. Armed with a broom, a flashlight, and a prayer, he peered under the sink.

No cockroach. Instead, he found a small scrap of paper. He unfolded it.

In shaky handwriting, it read:

"Sorry for the fright.

Trying to quit startling humans.

New to the city.

– K."

Raghav stared.

"K? K for…?"

Before he could finish the thought, a familiar scritch-scratch sounded from the floor. The cockroach emerged, tiny backpack strapped to its back, as if ready for a weekend trek.

Raghav, shocked but curious, whispered, "You… left me a note?"

The cockroach nodded.

"But… but why me?"

It tapped three times, then pointed at Raghav's face.

Mrs. Gupta, who had silently entered behind him (a superpower school principal never lose), interpreted confidently:

"He looks harmless. Even insects can tell."

And then came the twist. The cockroach reached into its backpack… and pulled out a miniature ID card. Raghav took it with trembling hands.

On it was printed:

Inter-Species Urban Coexistence Program (Pilot Batch)

Field Agent: K.K. Roach

Assignment: Human acclimatization

Status: Ongoing

Raghav's jaw dropped.

"So… you're… you're an intern?!"

The cockroach proudly puffed its tiny chest.

Mrs. Gupta sighed. "Government scheme hoga. Sab kuch ho raha hai aajkal."

From that day on, Raghav became the unofficial mentor of Agent K.K. Roach, teaching him how not to appear suddenly on toothbrushes, how to knock before entering, and how humans feel when a flying cockroach takes flight (mostly: betrayal).

In return, K.K. ensured that no other cockroach ever visited Flat No. 403.

Years later…

Raghav received a tiny envelope. Inside was a microscopic medal and a note:

"Graduated.

Thanks, Mentor.

Keeping your flat off-limits forever.

– K.K."

Raghav smiled. The world never believed his story. But Flat No. 403 never saw another cockroach again and honestly—that was proof enough

दर्पण में

डॉ. प्रेरणा दुबे

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गाँव की सीमा पर खड़े पीपल के नीचे हवा बुझी-बुझी-सी चल रही थी—मानो शाम अपनी ही साँसों से थक गई हो। रिया जब वर्षों बाद अपने पुरखों की हवेली के फाटक तक पहुँची, तो लगा जैसे यह घर उसकी आहट को पहचान गया हो।

दीवारों का खुरदुरा स्पर्श, लकड़ी की सड़ी हुई गंध, और बरामदे में पड़े पुराने दीयों की जमी कालिख—सबने एक साथ फुसफुसाया—

“याद है?”

पर स्मृति भी अजीब होती है—कभी दर्पण की धार जैसी वाचिक, कभी धुएँ की पतली, फिसलती रेखा-सी। हवेली की दहलीज़ पार करते ही हर कदम किसी ठंडे, अनजान तार को छू जाता था। कोने में खड़े तीन तिमिर-बासी दर्पण—जैसे अपने ही विस्मरण से लिपटे हुए—फिर भी चुपचाप रिया को निहारते थे।

एक दर्पण में उसका बचपन—दो चोटी, हिचकती मुस्कान।
दूसरे में—उसकी माँ—वह चेहरा जिसे रिया ने कभी सचमुच देखा नहीं, पर जिसे भीतर की स्मृति ने जाने कैसे सँजो रखा था।
और तीसरे में—एक युवती। अपरिचित। फिर भी उसकी आँखें ऐसी थीं जैसे वे रिया को रिया से पहले जानती हों।

चबूतरे पर सुबह की धूप वैसी ही पसरी थी जैसी बरसों पहले—पीली, धीमी, राख-भीगी। यह वही जगह थी, जहाँ पुरखों की स्मृतियाँ दीयों, सुपारियों और मौन के बीच रखी जाती थीं—जैसे कोई अदृश्य, पीढ़ियों से चलता आता तीर्थ।

“क्या तुम रिया हो?”

पीछे से स्त्री-सुर उभरा—शांत, पर ऐसा कि रिया के भीतर किसी पुरानी गाँठ को एकदम से कस दे।

मीरा—ठोस आकृति, पर उपस्थिति हवा की तरह फिसलती हुई। न पाँवों की धूल, न परछाईं का अंश। रिया को अचानक लगा—क्या वह किसी बीते युग की गूँज है, जो अभी तक चुप नहीं हुई?

"तुम लौट आईं," मीरा ने कहा—जैसे यह लौटना रिया का नहीं, बल्कि किसी स्त्री-वंश की अनकही परंपरा का हिस्सा हो।

रिया ने धीमे से सिर झुका लिया।
"मुझे नहीं पता कि मैं यहाँ क्यों आई हूँ।"

मीरा ने चबूतरे पर उगे छोटे जंगली फूल को छुआ—इतनी कोमलता से कि वह स्पर्श फूल से ज्यादा स्मृति को छूता हुआ लगा।

"बेटी, स्मृतियों के घर किसी को जाने नहीं देते। लौटना कभी किसी की इच्छा नहीं होता—बस किसी का याद कर लेना होता है।"

हवेली के भीतर गहरा सन्नाटा फैल गया।

"तुम्हें वे कमरे याद हैं," मीरा ने दहलीज़ की ओर देखते हुए कहा, "जहाँ तुम्हारी माँ को अकेला छोड़ दिया गया था?"

रिया के भीतर कुछ निहायत पुराना और कठोर टूटकर गिरने लगा।

"माँ...?"
उसकी आवाज़ पत्ते की तरह काँपी।
"मैं... मैं उन्हें बस चीखते हुए याद करती हूँ।"

मीरा की आँखों में थकान और करुणा—दोनों एक साथ चमके।

"चीखें पागलपन की भाषा नहीं होतीं, रिया। वे अक्सर वह सच कहती हैं जिसे कोई सुनना नहीं चाहता।"

उस रात हवेली रिया को सोने नहीं देती।
दीवारें चरमरातीं, लकड़ी के पुराने पैनल साँस लेते प्रतीत होते, और दर्पण—अंधेरे में भी—अपने भीतर किसी अपूर्ण, अनदेखे जीवन की हलचल सँजोए प्रतीक्षा करते।

तभी स्मृति का एक तीखा टुकड़ा उसके भीतर चमका—
उसकी माँ... दर्पणों से डरती थीं।

वे कहती थीं—
"इनमें वे स्त्रियाँ रहती हैं जिन्हें पूरा जीने नहीं दिया गया।"

और पिता हँसकर कहते—
"तुम्हारी माँ की तबीयत ठीक नहीं।"

पर आज, इस टूटे घर की साँसों के बीच, रिया को लगा—
शायद माँ नहीं, पिता डरे हुए थे।
क्योंकि स्मृतियाँ—सच को छिपाना नहीं जानतीं।

***

रात के किसी अनजाने हिस्से में रिया अचानक चौंककर उठ बैठी—किसी हल्के, लगभग ममता-भरे स्पर्श से।
मीरा उसके पास बैठी थी—चेहरे पर वही भाव, जैसे बरसों पुराने पेड़ के तने पर समय खुद एक मुस्कान दर्ज कर देता है।

"क्या अब तुम सच सुनने को तैयार हो?"

रिया ने सिर हिलाया—उसके भीतर की स्मृतियाँ थकी नदी जैसी बहने लगीं।

"तुम्हारी माँ बीमार नहीं थीं," मीरा ने कहा।
"वे बस सुन पाती थीं—उन स्त्रियों की आवाज़ें जो इस घर में गुम हुईं। वे आवाज़ें जो दर्पणों में कैद हो गईं, क्योंकि दुनिया ने उन्हें कहीं और जगह नहीं दी।"

रिया के गले में कुछ अटकने लगा।
"और... आप?"

मीरा धीमे से उठी। दर्पण की ओर पीठ मोड़ ली—मानो सामना करना कठिन हो।

"मैं वह हूँ," उसने कहा,
"जिसे इतिहास ने नाम नहीं दिया। जिसे दुनिया ने जीवित नहीं रहने दिया। तुम मुझे नानी कह सकती हो—पर मैं सिर्फ़ वही नहीं। मैं वह पुकार हूँ... जो हर उस स्त्री के भीतर जीवित रही जिसे कभी पूरा जीने नहीं दिया गया।"

तीसरे दर्पण में आकृति स्पष्ट होने लगी—
वही युवती। न मुस्कान। न आँसू। बस स्थिर, धैर्यवान आँखें—जैसे सदियों से रिया को देख रही हों।

मीरा बोली—
"इस घर में स्त्रियाँ मरती नहीं, रिया। उन्हें बस भुला दिया जाता है। और भुला दिया जाना... मृत्यु से कहीं अधिक भयानक होता है।"

रिया धीरे-धीरे दर्पण की ओर बढ़ी। पर जो प्रतिबिंब उभर रहा था—वह उसका नहीं था।

वह किसी और युग का था। किसी ऐसी स्त्री का, जो रिया के भीतर कहीं छिपी थी—पीढ़ियों के अंधेरों में साँस लेती, किसी नाम की प्रतीक्षा करती हुई।

रिया पीछे हटने ही वाली थी कि दर्पण की सतह पर हल्की-सी तरंग उठी—जैसे किसी ने भीतर से उसे छुआ हो।

आकृति की आँखें अचानक उसकी आँखों में टिक गईं—भेदती हुई, पहचानती हुई, स्वीकारती हुई।

और उसी क्षण, रिया को एक अजीब-सी अनुभूति हुई— कि हवेली उसे नहीं पहचान रही थी... वह किसी और को ढूँढ रही थी।

मीरा धीरे-धीरे पीछे हट गई—उसकी उपस्थिति हल्की होती, धुँधलाती चली गई।

"अब तुम समझ गई हो," उसने फुसफुसाया। "हम दर्पणों से बाहर नहीं आते, रिया। हम दर्पणों में लौटते हैं।"

यह कहते ही वह हवा में उतनी ही शांतिपूर्वक विलीन हो गई, जितना कोई भूला हुआ नाम स्मृति में घुल जाता है।

दर्पण की युवती अब पूरी स्पष्ट थी—और उसके चेहरे पर...वही दो चोटी, वही उदासी की छाया—जो रिया के बचपन में थी।

बस एक फर्क था—दर्पण की युवती अब मुस्कुरा रही थी।हल्की, गहरी, लगभग स्वागत-सी मुस्कान।

रिया का हृदय धक से रह गया।क्या वह मीरा थी?उसकी माँ?किसी पुरानी पुरखिन?या वह स्वयं—

वह रूप जो उसके भीतर सदियों से जीवित था, पर दुनिया ने कभी जन्म लेने नहीं दिया?

हवा अचानक ठंडी हो गई।दर्पण की सतह पर उसके प्रतिबिंब ने धीरे से होंठ खोले—और बिना आवाज़ के कुछ कहा।

इतना धीमे, कि रिया सुन नहीं सकी।या शायद—वह शब्द उसी को कहे गए थे जो अभी आने वाली थी...कभी किसी और जन्म में,किसी और देह में।

उसने एक आखिरी बार दर्पण की ओर देखा—और यह विचार उसके अंदर एक नर्म, भयावह यक़ीन की तरह ठहर गया—शायद मीरा कोई और नहीं थी।शायद वह स्वयं रिया थी—उसी की एक ऐसी स्मृति,जिसे अभी भविष्य में घटना था।

हवेली के भीतर एक पुराना दरवाज़ा कहीं खुला—धीरे, खिंचते स्वर में—जैसे समय ने एक और स्त्री को अपने वृत्त में बुला लिया हो।

रिया पीछे हट गई।पर दर्पण में वह युवती अब भी उसे देखते हुए मुस्कुरा रही थी—मानो कह रही हो—

“तुम लौटने नहीं आई थीं, रिया...तुम यहाँ हमेशा से थीं।”

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 गर्दनें 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 हूं।"

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।

पेंडिंग मनुष्य : एक महागाथा

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मनुष्य को यह भ्रांति है कि वह विकसित हो चुका है।
पर इतिहास कुछ और कहता है—वह सिर्फ़ अपनी पेंडिंग लिस्ट में उन्नति कर चुका है।

- कभी वह शिकार टालता था,
- फिर खेती टालने लगा,
- फिर विवाह टाला,
- और आजकल टैक्स।

मनुष्य बदल गया है—काम टालने के साधन बस अधिक परिष्कृत हो गए हैं।

1. महान मानवीय उपलब्धि: कुछ न करना

कहा जाता है कि जब मनुष्य ने पहिया बनाया, वह मानव सभ्यता का आरंभ था। पर असली सभ्यता तब शुरू हुई जब उसने पहली बार कहा:
“अरे, करने का है तो… कर लेंगे न यार, अभी क्या जल्दी है!”

- इसी वाक्य ने मनुष्य को देवताओं से अलग किया।
- देवता तुरंत काम करते हैं—इसलिए बोर हो जाते हैं।
- मनुष्य काम टालता है—इसलिए रोचक बना रहता है।

2. पेंडिंग लिस्ट: एक प्रजाति-विशेष ग्रंथ

हर आदमी के भीतर एक अदृश्य दफ्तरी कमरा है—"कार्य एवं विलंब विभाग"—जहाँ तीन अधिकारी बैठे हैं:

अधिकारी का नाम	कार्य का विवरण
इच्छा अधिकारी	रोज़ नए काम सुझाता है: "ध्यान करेंगे।" "दौड़ना शुरू करेंगे।" "50 किताबें पढ़ेंगे।"
बहाना प्रकोष्ठ	कारण बताता है: "आज मौसम ठीक नहीं।" "अभी मन साफ़ नहीं।" "थोड़ा थकान है।" "नेटवर्क स्लो है।"
आध्यात्मिक सलाहकार	हर अधूरे काम को अस्तित्ववादी अर्थ देता है: "जो अधूरा है वही वास्तविक है।" "पूर्णता तो भ्रम है।"

नोट: इस विभाग की एक भी बैठक कभी पूरी नहीं होती। क्योंकि "बैठक की कार्यवाही अगली बैठक तक टाल दी जाती है।"

3. दिन की संरचना: टालो, पछताओ, सो जाओ

- सुबह की शुरुआत: उस वादे से जो दो घंटे बाद ही टूटा हुआ मिलता है: "आज सब कुछ निपटा दूँगा।"
- पहला विलंब: फ़ीड में पहला ही वीडियो आता है: "5 आदतें जो आपकी जिंदगी बदल देंगी।" मनुष्य सोचता है—"इसे देख लेते हैं, फिर शुरू करेंगे।"
- परिणाम: वीडियो खत्म होते-होते जिंदगी नहीं बदलती, बस दिन के दो घंटे पेंडिंग हो जाते हैं।
- दोपहर तक: मनुष्य समझ जाता है—अब आधा दिन गए, तो पूरा दिन ही जाए... कल से ठीक रहेंगे।
- रात को: वह लिस्ट देखता है—और सबसे बड़ा संस्कार निभाता है: पोस्टपोन (Postpone)।

4. घर में फैली हुई पेंडिंग ऊर्जा

घर में जो कोना साफ़ नहीं है, वह सिर्फ़ धूल का अड्डा नहीं होता—वह मनुष्य की इच्छाओं का कब्रिस्तान होता है:

- किताबें जो खरीदी गयीं पर अब तक खुली नहीं।
- जूते जो 'दौड़' के लिए थे पर सिर्फ़ सब्ज़ी लेने गए।
- डायरी जिसमें तीन दिन लिखा गया और बाकी 362 दिन खाली रहे।

ये सब पेंडिंग ऊर्जा की सूक्ष्म प्रतिमाएँ हैं। कुछ लोग तो अपने सपने भी ऐसे रखते हैं जैसे बर्तन: उलटकर अलमारी में।

5. विज्ञान और पेंडिंग मनुष्य

पैंडिंग लिस्ट के शायद सबसे गंभीर वैज्ञानिक प्रभाव हैं:

- अगर आइंस्टाइन हर चीज़ समय पर करता, तो शायद वह $E=mc^2$ न लिख पाता; टालते-टालते ही उसे ब्रह्माण्ड की विचित्रता दिखाई दी।
- न्यूटन ने गुरुत्वाकर्षण इसलिए खोजा क्योंकि वह पेड़ के नीचे कुछ नहीं कर रहा था।

संभावित निष्कर्ष: आलस मानव सभ्यता का असली शोध केंद्र है।

6. समाजशास्त्र: दो प्रकार के लोग

दुनिया में सिर्फ़ दो लोग हैं:

(अ) पेंडिंग करने वाले:

जो कहते हैं — "अभी नहीं, बाद में कर लेंगे।"

(ब) पेंडिंग करवाने वाले:

जो कहते हैं — "ये अभी कर दो।"

इन्हीं दो वर्गों के संघर्ष से मानव इतिहास आगे बढ़ता है। सरकारें बदलती हैं, योजनाएँ बनती हैं, नागरिक टालते हैं। सभ्यता चलती है।

7. पेंडिंग और अध्यात्म का गूढ़ रहस्य

- कुछ योगी मानते हैं कि अधूरा काम ही मनुष्य को जीवन से बाँधे रखता है।
- लोग ध्यान के लिए समय निकालते-निकालते बुढ़ापा निकाल देते हैं।
- ध्यान वहीं पहुँचता है, पर पहुँच तब पाता है जब मनुष्य जीवन की बाकी सारी जरूरी चीज़ें पेंडिंग कर चुका होता है।

8. काल का महापुराण: आज और कल

- आज (Today): दोहरा स्वभाव रखता है—काम का भी, बहाने का भी।
- कल (Tomorrow): एक आध्यात्मिक प्रदेश है—जहाँ सब कुछ बेहतर होने वाला है—और जहाँ कोई कभी जाता नहीं।

कल वह मंदिर है जहाँ मनुष्य अपने सपने चढ़ा देता है और लौट आता है बिना प्रसाद लिए।

9. निष्कर्ष (जो आज लिखा गया, कल भी लिखा जा सकता था)

आधुनिक मनुष्य कहीं पहुंचता नहीं, बस अपने पेंडिंग ब्रह्माण्ड में सर्पिल गति से घूमता रहता है।

और रात्रि के अंतिम क्षणों में, जब वह सोने ही वाला होता है, एक धीमी-सी आवाज़ आती है:

"स्टिलनेस अपना नाम फिर नहीं सीख पाई।"

और वह मुस्कुराकर, अगले दिन की शुरुआत के लिए, सब कुछ एक बार फिर पेंडिंग कर देता है।

CREATIVE ESSAYS / रचनात्मक निबंध

Do Great Empires Make Great Thinkers? A Historical Paradox

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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: *A Journal of Literature and Humanities*

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