

Praxis

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Rubaida Akhter
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Maswood Akhter

A Review of Sabiha Huq's *The Mughal Aviary: Women's Writings in Pre-Modern India*

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Muslim women's writings suffer from a wholesale eclipse even in feminist works. Most conspicuous, as Professor Sonia Nishat Amin mentions in the Introduction of *The Mughal Aviary*, is the absence of any mention of the Mughal women's writings in otherwise monumental books, *Women Writing in India: 600 BC to the Present* (vol. 1) edited by Susie Tharu and K.Lalita. Within this reality, when Professor Sabiha Huq boldly articulates that the purpose of the monograph *The Mughal Aviary: Women's Writings in Pre-Modern India* is to establish the "power of female writing" (p. 18) by exploring the diverse and creative voices of four Mughal women — Gulbadan Banu Begum (1523-1603), the youngest daughter of Emperor Babur, Jahanara (1614-1681), the eldest daughter of Emperor Shah Jahan, Zeb-un-Nissa (1638-1702), the eldest daughter of Emperor Aurangzeb, and Habba Khatoon (1554-1609), now famously known as 'the Nightingale of Kashmir', she uses her own academic and intellectual craft to cultivate a new garden. The task would have been slightly easier if her role was restricted in finding the lost voices and identities to mark them, as African-American womanist writer Alice Walker did for Zora Neale Hurston, whose genius voice was lost in racialised America as late as in the 1960s. But Huq's protagonists, at least three out of four, were heavily shrouded with multiple forms of misrepresentations, first as part of colonial orientalist enterprise to fantasise the Mughal women to cater to the gaze of the Europeans, and then how history itself emerged as a branch of knowledge in South Asia, prioritising the history of masculinity and warfare silencing others. The fourth protagonist, Habba Khatoon (1554-1609) perhaps lived her life away from the targeted orientalist gaze but shared the same gendered lot of

being lost under the blankets of history. Huq further questions the sexualised sensualisation lens at work in recreating historical fantasies to satiate the voyeuristic imagination of contemporary audiences/readers: “Why are today’s fiction writers resurrecting these women’s lives after so many years? Why are they stereotyping their female protagonists as sensual and arbitrary beings while there is scope for looking at their intellectual advancements?” (p. 2).

The task, therefore, is mammoth and daunting. But the rather slim book of 200 pages is massively benefitted by the author’s detailed interdisciplinary approach to contextualise the Mughal women and their creative works within the elite political context of the Mughal dynasty and its power play. The mirroring of these elite Mughal women with their Western counterparts, most notably, Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603), makes the book an exciting parallel reading of the first part of another groundbreaking work, *Sisters in the Mirrors* (2022) by Elora Shehabuddin, where Gulbadan Banu Begum does appear as “a poet, scholar” (p. 24) and a female Muslim traveller travelling to Mecca to perform the Hajj. Before Huq delves deep into the individual protagonist and their body of work, she first explains and reflects on the unusual but rather apt metaphor, “the aviary” (Chapter 1: The Mughal Aviary and Women In/Out). In the absence of many choices and when most words are heavily connoted with historically loaded sexualised images, it is never easy to define the spatial territory of elite Muslim women, who had a segregated but not necessarily a claustrophobic confinement. Though ‘Harem’ and ‘Zenana’ mean the same separated gendered space, it is interesting that they do not share the similar orientalist fetish. While Harem can hardly be used as a term of serious intellectual persuasion, many researchers use the term ‘Zenana’ to define the lives and living of elite Muslim women in the subcontinent. Huq needs to be critically applauded for offering us a truly third space between the Zenana and the world outside. “Aviary” serves as a point of reference to both subject and space — the talented women were caged-birds, yet they could fly both literally and metaphorically. The metaphorical flights of the talented Mughal women with their imagination, writings, words and verses

also challenge the stereotype that the Mughal women lived a perpetually caged and soulless life.

In fact, instead of portraying the Mughal women as dated and sedimented, Huq adopts the classic fairytale line “Once upon a time” in the first of the individual chapters on Gulbadan Begum to express their timeless yet mysterious presence. “Humayun’s Biographer Gulbadan Begam: A Quiet Observer of the Aviary” (Chapter 2) might seem a paradoxical title for a politically engaged woman who witnessed three generations of Mughal Emperors—Babur, Humayun, and Akbar—ascending the throne and spreading the Mughal territory across the pre-modern India. Gulbadan might have been a “quiet observer” in the sense that while she wrote the biography of his brother, Emperor Humayun (*Humayun-nama*), commissioned by her nephew, Emperor Akbar, son of Humayun, she remained silent about herself in her writing. Huq notes, “The fact that Gulbadan never wrote anything about her own education may be understood perhaps, as part of the larger trend of women not voicing their private selves” (p. 27). But as Huq highlights in much detail, even if Gulbadan did not write about herself, she set up a unique style of blending the political and the personal, the home and the world, in a memoir that provided a prototype of women’s creative expression.

“Jahanara’s Hagiographies: The Mind of a Matriarch” (Chapter 3) explores the life and work of enigmatic Princess Jahanara who, like her foremother, Gulbadan Begam, took up the art of writing men’s biographies from a female perspective. Biographer of two formative figures of Sufism in Mughal India, namely Moinuddin Chisti (*Munis-ul-Arwah*) and Mullah Shah Badakhshi (*Risala-i-Sahibiya*), Princess Jahanara, the eldest surviving child of Shah Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal, was not a fairytale princess, idling away her time, rather, at a tender age of 17, she was entrusted the title of Padshah Begum (the First Lady) of the Mughal Emperor. Heavily resurrected in recent historical fiction, Jahanara is the textbook example of Huq’s initial claim of further textual objectification of the powerful Mughal women in popular media/fiction. But the fact that a Mughal Princess not only could be a disciple of the Sufi tradition, a direct contribution of the Mughal expansion

in India, but also, a woman was entrusted to document the lives of saints who were by character nomads, powerfully dismantles any fantastical claim about the breathless confinement of elite Mughal women. Huq rightfully notes the magical realism-like feature in Jahanara's writing, "Jahanara is a biographer whose forte is actual events in Chishti's life, but she uses a great portion of imagination where dreams play an important part" (81). It is our loss that Jahanara is not in our imagination or in actual reference when experimentation of forms and techniques in creative writing is discussed.

The last two chapters before the Conclusion, although deserve to be discussed separately, but taken together, they constitute an interesting and poignant departure from the previous generations of Mughal women of talent. In Chapter 4, "Dissenting Songbird in the Aviary: The Poetry of Zeb-un-Nissa", Huq identifies, Zeb-Un-Nissa, the eldest daughter of the mighty and equally cruel Mughal Emperor, Aurangzeb, as the "third generation" of Mughal women, in the sense that, she, unlike their predecessors, was "born and brought up in Hindustan" (p. 103), thus much like the second-generation diasporic communities, her tie with her ancestral land was expected to be weaker than the previous generations. But if considered from the perspective of literary sensibility and the way in which pen is used to stretch the metaphorical aviary, Zeb-un-Nissa characterises a continuity as well as a significant point of departure from her foremothers, which can be charted as "second-generation" Mughal women of talent. While the previous generations of women chose to write prose in a depersonalised and detached manner, the new generation of women of the 17th century chose to express in poetry, freeing themselves from the confinement of prosaic form. At least, in her creative realm, Zeb-Un-Nissa did not have any less weaker ties with her Central Asian heritage than her predecessors. In some respects, she is the most successful of all in blending, as Huq notes, "the richness of Persian forms with Indian imagery" (p. 104). *Diwan-i-Makhfi*, the collection of Zeb-un-Nissa's "scattered writings" of "four hundred and twenty-one ghazals and several ruba'is" was published in 1724, more than 20 years after her death, being imprisoned by her father, Aurangzeb. Readers might be tempted to draw a parallel between Zeb-un-Nissa and one of the greatest American poets of all time, Emily Dickinson, in

more than one ways, in particular the ways in which Zeb-un-Nissa calls herself Makhfi (meaning hidden) yet makes her presence felt in most of the ghazals: “Makhfi, bear with patience your pain that is endless and your Night of passion/ ... only then Khizer spring of joy with you will be” (p. 119). While Huq rightly characterises Zeb-un-Nissa a “feminist” (p. 133), severely punished for disobeying the institutional performatives mandated by Aurangzeb, it would have been enriching if the author could offer more analytical interpretation of the conflict that might have made a mighty Emperor so fearful that he caged his own daughter for twenty years. Never being married yet having had several male suitors, Zeb-un-Nissa’s adaptation of a male persona to admire the beauty of a beloved is not a mere stylistic experimentation; rather, it was an expression of her sexual and imaginative fluidity, thus deserves a more nuanced attention.

Although placed in the final analysis chapter, “The Plaintive Songbird beyond the Aviary” (Chapter 5) simply because Habba Khatoon by birth was a commoner of pre-Mughal Kashmir, she was actually a contemporary of Gulbadan Banu Begum, the first of the four protagonists of the book. Therefore, it might have been illuminating to draw some parallels between two women, belonging to the centre and periphery of the Mughal Empire. Contextual comparisons can be considered essential to reflect on the kind of genres women of elite and modest backgrounds in the Mughal era called their own. While Gulbadan Begum wrote in the formal Persian language, Habba Khatoon did not write anything, yet her poems reverberated in the hills and valleys of Kashmir for centuries. Although Huq in her Introduction calls all of these women “subalterns” (p. 5), Habba Khatoon was probably the most underprivileged subaltern of them all. Without any concrete history, record or narrative, Khatoon, like Sappho of Lesbos, embodies myths, mysticism, facts and fiction. But this flexibility of existence made Habba Khatoon, the person or myth, one of the first female voices to express desire, sexual yearning, longing for heterosexual love in its rawest form, at a time, when elite Mughal women drew on Sufi style of blending spiritual and carnal love together. Huq notes the embodiment of physical desire in Habba’s poems, “her poetry is obviously a series of emotions extracted from personal experiences. This subjective poetry presents the

female lover as sensuous, who is not afraid of admitting her physical desire for the lover” (p. 151). If there truly was someone called Habba Khatoon, the wife of Yusuf Shah Chak, who lost the sovereignty of Kashmir to the Mughal dynasty, her life and writings are also the living testament of how elite politics and the shift of power ruin personal life and desires. In this sense, Habba’s voice, as Huq rightly notes, “is the voice of dissent in all senses” (p. 156), both within the context of present-day Kashmir but in a much broader sense than that: she embodies the voice of the oppressed yet resilient women and men.

By the time Huq comes to the end of the book, she has, as expected, more questions than answers. Therefore, the concluding chapter is aptly called, “Where to Conclude?” Indeed, this is only a beginning, but the beginning takes place at a time when India’s governmentality sadly rewrites its history, not only by erasing its Islamic history, but also by tarnishing the image of Muslims of past and present. Not very far away, Muslim women in Afghanistan, under the Taliban regime, are now denied higher education and employment in the local branches of international humanitarian organisations. But Muslim women throughout history curve their own paths, materially and creatively. Nothing, perhaps, is more lost in the world of literature than women’s voices and writings. Nothing, perhaps, is the least retrieved than women’s writings in the subcontinent. It may not be wrong to say that until now, whenever we wanted to trace the ‘garden’ of women’s writings in the subcontinent, we read Susie Tharu and K Lalita’s *Women Writing in India*, despite their limitations. We now have *The Mughal Aviary* to enrich our imagination with Muslim women’s writings in Mughal India. *The Mughal Aviary* stands against an Everest of historical and contemporary (mis)representation of fantasy and femininity, but it does so strongly, compassionately, and with conviction.

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Feminist Interpretation of John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*

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Abstract

Feminist criticism has been an important focus in literary studies these days; interpretation of texts remains incomplete if it does not take the feminist perspectives into account. Women's position, though far different today from what it was hundred years back, and there have been different women's movements for their rights, is still largely subservient. Their portrayal in literature and art also reflects their subservient and more or less voiceless existence, in societies and cultures, both eastern and western. However, it is proven that women have made very significant contributions to different fields of life in the past as well as in recent times. Their proven contribution and capability in every sphere of life prompted the women to raise their voice for their emancipation and empowerment, and thus started the feminist movement in literary and art criticism, which puts forward arguments for women's rights and raises voice against oppression of and violence against women and calls for a new appraisal of women and their portrayal in art and literature. This paper attempts to discuss and interpret portrayal of female characters in John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* from feminist critical stance. Apart from an examination of the representation of female characters, the paper also examines whether, as a male novelist, Steinbeck also upholds the stereotypical masculine position about women, or he presents any emancipatory, unconventional idea about women in the novel.

Keywords: Oppression, Stereotype, Representation, Emancipation, Feminist critical stance

Introduction

Feminist literary criticism, as it is well known now, has been a “movement which would reject every differentiation between individuals upon the ground of sex, would abolish all sex privileges and sex burdens, and would strive to set up the recognition of the common humanity of woman and man as the foundation of law and custom.”¹ It analyzes and describes the ways in which literature portrays the narrative of male domination. The basic concern in this mode of critical enquiry is the biased, unfriendly representation of women as voiceless subservient species of human beings in the world of literature, which has been dominated by male writers and patriarchal values; women’s portrayal by the male writers has always been negative and biased. The feminist critics seek to examine whether gender relationship is of ‘linking’ or ‘ranking’ type, that is, based on recognition of, and respect for gender differences, or hierarchical, marked by inferiority-superiority, oppression and domination of power structure. Feminists argue that women’s jobs are not only ‘looking pretty and talking dumb’, they are not only ‘objects’; but can very much be active agents capable of great things like men.² The feminists hold that a woman is not born but made unequal by the societies in which men had the supreme sway everywhere and in every age. Simone de Beauvoir (1988), for example, says that a woman is not born as a woman but becomes so: “we are exhorted to be women, remain women, become women... every female human being is not necessarily a woman; to be so considered she must share in that mysterious and threatened reality known as femininity.”³ It examines women’s roles in society and whether women’s dignity is upheld or not. It focuses on men-women relationship within marriage and in society.

This paper examines John Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men* from the feminist critical stance. Until very recent critical attention to Steinbeck’s female

¹Teresa Billington-Greig, *Feminist Dictionary*, 1911, 158.

²Carol Hanisch, “The Personal I Political.” In *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, edited by Barbara A. Crow, 113-116. New York: New York University Press, 2000. In Echols, Alice. 1989. *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967—1975. American Culture Series*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

³ Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Tran. and Ed. H.M. Parshley (London: Picador, 1988).

characters in *Of Mice and Men* has been cursory in comparison to that devoted to his male characters. Critics have categorized women in his other novels, like Lisca, either as 'noble women' (such as Ma Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath*, Juana in *The Pearl*, Rama and Elizabeth in *To a God Unknown*, Mordeen in *Burning Bright*, and most of the women in *The Pastures of Heaven*) or as silly "girls", and the writers are mostly preoccupied with their physical appearance.⁴ The present paper examines the portrayal of the 10 female characters—Curley's wife, aunt Clara, Clara (a sex-worker), Old Susy (a brothel owner) and the five brothels with her and the girl in the Weed in *Of Mice and Men* from a feminist critical stance.

The female characters in *Of Mice and Men* are examined with reference to some key features of feminist criticism like (1) representation of women, (2) men-women relationship within marriage, that is, husband-wife relationship, (3) men-women relationship in the society, or attitude of men towards women in the novel, (4) the amount of attention or space given to the female protagonist compared to that given to the minor male characters in the novel, (5) negative women given more emphasis than the angelic ones, (6) the novelist's own position and attitude—whether he takes a stereotypical, patriarchal, chauvinist position of neglect, contempt and denigration, or a positive, appreciatory and sympathetic one. These aspects of the portrayal of women are discussed in the following section of the paper.

1) Representation of Women

a) Three Types of Women: Steinbeck portrays three types of women in *Of Mice and Men*: (1) ideal woman, a domestic icon and altruistic housewife or, Virginia Woolf's "Angel in the House"⁵, Aunt Clara in the novel belongs to

⁴ Peter Lisca, *The Wide World of John Steinbeck*, New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1958, 206.

⁵ Virginia Woolf, 1931, "Professions for Women". She describes 'Angel in the House' as a woman who should be 'intensely sympathetic', 'immensely charming' 'utterly unselfish' should excel 'in the difficult arts of family life', 'sacrificed herself daily', and "if there was chicken she took the leg; if there was a draught, she sat in it—short, she was so constituted she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all... she was pure. Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty—her blushes, her great grace"

this category; she is the quintessence of femininity, a stereotypical feminine figure, overtly benevolent and caring and contributing to civilization through the age-old much expected feminine functions, childbearing and homemaking; (2) Promiscuous wives, or whores who, “having been paid for,” have “become a commodity”⁶, Whore Susy, who always cracks jokes, sex-worker Clara, the five prostitutes working for Clara, and the girl in the Weed belong to this category; (3) Women sandwiched between the first and the second categories, Curley’s wife belongs to this category. The novel is mostly concerned with the last two categories.

According to Momanyi, *Of Mice and Men* is “designed to maintain sexuality as binary opposition”, meaning binaries of the ‘Angel’ and the ‘whore’.⁷ As Curley’s wife does not conform to either of these binaries set by men, the patriarchal society in the novel has zero tolerance for her. She lacks the propensity to be maternal, nurturing, and loving, like the first category, as expected; she leaves the “shell” of a woman with her own desire for self-preservation. She is misunderstood by men because she appears different from the expected binaries and is perched precariously in the middle of the two binaries of women and is dubbed as ‘abomination’ by the ranch hands. She is also a nameless character perhaps because of her failure to neatly synchronize herself into either of the two categories. Her status, between domesticity and prostitution, makes her extremely problematic, and therefore she is a source of anxiety and unrest for the patriarchal society. By acting against the norm of her gender, and refusing to play the part of the angel, Curley’s wife is inevitably transformed into a monster.⁸

b) Objectified: Women are repeatedly objectified in the novel; they are perceived as lowered to the status of petty commodity and are thus robbed of their humanity. Their worth is determined by their physical charm, and sexual appeal which seems a major focus in the novel. Curley’s wife is the

⁶Mimi R Gladstein, “Masculine Sexuality and the Objectification of Women: Steinbeck’s Perspective”, *The Steinbeck Review* Vol. 1, No. 1 (Spring 2004), 115.

⁷C Momanyi, Patriarchal Symbolic Order: The Syllables of Power as Accentuated in Waswahili Poetry. *The Journal of Pan African Studies*. Vol.1, No.8, June 2007, 12-32.

⁸Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics*. 2nd Ed. New York: Routledge, 2002, 57. Print.

object of “yearnings of all men” for warm living contact.⁹ Candy once said, “he’s keepin’ that hand soft for his wife” because Curley wears a “Glove full a vaseline”.¹⁰ This has a sexual overtone suggesting that she is literally treated as an object of sex. It is sickening and unsavoury to learn that he keeps his hands soft for his wife. It is a grotesque physical abuse.

Steinbeck shows woman as overly sexual “BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS” who enchanted men by wearing attractive red attire and led them into hell. She is portrayed as charming vamp or a sensualist who snares and “manipulates the men into lust.”¹¹ George (2005, 65) points out that “Curley’s Wife interprets herself a commodity, an object of sensuality”.¹² The male characters describe her in derogatory and sexist terms which prevent the readers from seeing her as anything but a wicked provocateur. She is referred to as a ‘tart’, a ‘tramp’, a ‘bitch’ etc. all of which sexually charged terms negating her personhood. The men on the ranch stereotypically frame her into the group of whore Susy and her girls, and they consider her a flirt and interpret her gestures in that way without going deep and analyzing the causes of her such behaviour. They have no regard for her as a human being.

Red is the color used to enhance sex appeal; it seems wearing red dress women are calling the men into gambling, or battle of sexes. The colour red, which has a rich association with sex, passion and danger, has been used abundantly in the novel and this casts dark shadows over women’s personalities. The girl in the Weed is known to have worn red dress and it is learnt that Lennie, a male character had a run-in with this girl. She is the first woman who brought panic and worries to Lennie and George, putting both their jobs and lives in jeopardy. They had to leave their former workplace eventually. Before the introduction of Curley’s wife, Steinbeck considers ‘the

⁹In his letter to his agents Steinbeck described the book’s theme as “powerful yearnings of all men.”(John Steinbeck to Lizabeth Otis and Mavis McIntosh, September 1, 1936).

¹⁰ John Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*, U.S.: Covici Friede, 1937, 27 and 32.

¹¹Revelation 17, The New Testament, 175, *The Holy Bible*, Authorized King James Version, World Bible Publishers and Richard E. Hart, "Moral Experience in *Of Mice and Men*" *The Steinbeck Review*, Volume 1,2004, 31-44.

¹² Bashar, et al. “Stereotyping of Curley’s Wife in Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men*: From Derridean Perspective” *Linguistics and Literature Studies* 7(3): 95-99, 2019.

paradise' as unattainable by referring to Lennie's rape incident in Weed. Curley's wife also is seen in red dress which is interpreted as a tool used to enhance her sex appeal which she maintains even in the hostile ambience of the ranch. She has "full, rouged lips and wide-paced eyes, heavily made up her fingernails were red... She wore a cotton house dress and red mules, on the insteps of which were little bouquets of red ostrich feathers".¹³

Women are not worth more than their sexual attributes; they are valued not for the intrinsic worth/dignity of their personality but for their physical charms. None wants to see what women with their capabilities can do or be. "Gosh, she is purty", comments a fascinated Lennie.¹⁴ Moreover, her facial expressions and eyes are presented as tools to attract men. Slim once says: "Hi Good-lookin".¹⁵ Unmistakably, men get tantalized by the appearance of Curley's wife. They consider women as products on display, as either molesters or potential sexual predators lurking everywhere. Candy says that Curley's wife has "got the eye" and he has "seen her give Slim the eye".¹⁶ The ranch workers mention her eyes frequently to indicate her faithlessness towards her husband and her sexual readiness with other men. But the fact is she is used inappropriately as an eye-candy or a visual feast. Her miens are eroticized; upon her first arrival, she leans against the pole in the barn and "her body was thrown forward".¹⁷ These postures are misconstrued as amorous desires to be observed and sought after by men; her body languages are hyper-sexualized which send a wrong message to the audience that there is no brain behind a woman's face, but the only way she knows to relate to men is through her sensuality.

Women are portrayed as prostitutes; they are the objects of men's lust. In the vicinity of the ranch, there are a couple of brothels where many women work as sex-workers. These are popular hangouts for men who frequent these whorehouses on their days-off to carouse, and also to have, what Whit calls – 'a flop' of sleep over. It is utterly dehumanizing that women have price and

¹³Steinbeck, op. cit., 31.

¹⁴Ibid., 31.

¹⁵Ibid., 31.

¹⁶Ibid., 28,51.

¹⁷Ibid., 31.

are bought and sold in sex-markets; their bodies are appropriated for the pleasure of men. The fact that men are the consumers and women are the things consumed further fortifies women's objectification. Women are thus shown as objects for gratification of men's lust with money, not for love. These are some examples of the extreme forms of women's objectification, which is bitterly criticised by the feminists.

c) Troublemakers, Destructive Forces or Sources of Evil: Steinbeck portrays woman as a danger to society and its men.¹⁸ Women have been depicted as depraved troublemakers, as "biological traps", obstacles to men's happiness, seducing and robbing them of their money and hope.¹⁹ Both Curley's wife and the girl in the Weed are deemed as evil forces fatal to men's longevity and dreams of "a little house and a couple of acres an' a cow and some pigs" or, "live on the fattathelan'—an' rabbits?"²⁰. Their behaviour is interpreted negatively as destructive, like that of Eve's in the Garden of Eden, in Steinbeck's world of men. Like Eve spoiling Adam's stay in the Garden of Eden, they are presented as ones who spoil the dream of George and Lennie in *Of Mice and Men*. They are misrepresented as the killjoys or the Eve who ruins the halcyon environment of the Eden like pond and the surrounding greenery. Curley's Wife's blatant disregard to be confined to 'her' space – the main house, or more specifically, the kitchen – and Curley's inability to control her "creates chaos amidst the orderliness of the farm" and she is thus perceived as a threat to the calm and stable world of the men around her.²¹ Her existence is perceived as a disruption to the male hegemony on the farm, and her behaviour is regarded as a "corrupting threat to the group".²² In this male world that exists in *Of Mice and Men*, women and feminine traits are considered intruders and threats to the

¹⁸Ibid., 25.

¹⁹John F. Slater, "Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* (novel)," in *The Essential Criticism of John Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men*, edited by Michael J. Meyer. Toronto: Scarecrow Press, 2009, 90.

²⁰Steinbeck, ibid., 14 and 56.

²¹Cynthia Burkhead, *Student Companion to John Steinbeck*. Westport: Greenwood, 2002, 61. Print.

²²Ibid., 61.

men, and the novel seems to suggest that men need rescuing from the dark and destructive grip of women.²³

Curley's wife's existence is perceived as a disruption to the male hegemony, and her behaviour is regarded as a "corrupting threat to the group".²⁴ Women are shown as the instruments of man's as well as their own downfall. They undo the godliness of men through their irresistible charms, for which they also suffer. From the beginning of the novella, Curley's wife poses a threat, as a plague, to the ranch workers; she walks the ranch as an obnoxious disrupter. When playing cards with some other workers, they bring up Curley's wife. George says, "She's gonna make a mess. They's gonnabe a bad mess about her. She's a jail bait all set on the trigger. That Curley got his work cut out for him. Ranch with a bunch of guys on it ain'tno place for a girl, specially like her".²⁵ Terms like 'jail bait' and 'rattrap' clearly suggest her destructive intent on men. Besides, Steinbeck uses light symbol and writes, "The rectangle of the sunshine in the doorway was cut off"²⁶, ominously suggesting the wicked role that she is going to play in the lives of men. After her death Candy says to her corpse, "You God damn tramp...you done it didn't you? I s'pose you are glad. Everybody knowed you'd mess things up. You just wasn't no good... You lousy tart".²⁷ This is how the men blame woman for their failure. In the male world *Of Mice and Men*, women and feminine traits are considered intruders and threats to the men, and the novel seems to suggest that men need rescuing from the dark and destructive grip of women.²⁸ Curley's wife's existence is perceived as a

²³Jean Emery, "Manhood Beset: Misogyny in *Of Mice and Men*." *The Essential Criticism of John Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men*. Michael J. Meyer. Ed. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2009. 128. Print.

²⁴Burkhead, op.cit., 61.

²⁵Steinbeck, op.cit., 51.

²⁶Ibid.,31.

²⁷Ibid.,95.

²⁸Jean Emery, "Manhood Beset: Misogyny in *Of Mice and Men*." *The Essential Criticism of John Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men*. Michael J. Meyer. Ed. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2009, 128. Print.

disruption to the male hegemony on the farm, and her behaviour is regarded as a “corrupting threat to the group”²⁹.

Steinbeck portrays women as inherently evil. He seems to indicate that women are like omens. According to Spilka “Steinbeck calls this woman a ‘monster’ and says he will prove to his readers that such monsters actually exist.”³⁰ That is why the novelist says that when she walks silently she is like an evil spirit; horses are unsettled when she passes by. She has the bedizenment of the harlot, but she is more than just a harlot, she is an evil force, which cannot be resisted. It is because of her that Lennie says, “I don’t like this place... this ain’t no good place”.³¹ One gets the feeling that the male characters in the novella would really be better off without woman. George fiercely warns naive Lennie to steer clear of her in unequivocal terms: “Don’t you even take a look at that bitch... I seen ‘empoison before but I never seen no piece of jail bait worse than her. You leave her be.”³²

d) Poorly Drawn: All the female characters in *Of Mice and Men* are insufficiently drawn. Not much is known about them. Anything that we come to know about them is through the passing references of the male characters. The text offers very limited descriptions and very little or no activities of the women. All the female characters—Curley’s wife, Aunt Clara and her namesake sex-worker Clara, Old Susy and the five prostitutes working for her, and the girl in the Weed testify it. These characters seem to have less relation and importance to the plot and theme of the novella. For example, Aunt Clara is mentioned in George and Lennie’s story and appears only in Lennie’s thoughts. Even the major female character, Curley’s wife, is insubstantial; she has a very short role in the novel. She merely gets a paragraph to narrate her agony of not achieving her dream. Before Lennie kills her, she is actively present only in pages 31 to 32, from 76 to 81, and finally in pages 86 to 98, in a total of 21 out of 107 pages of the entire novel.

²⁹Burkhead, op.cit., 61.

³⁰Spilka, M. Of George and Lennie and Curley’s wife: Sweet Violence in Steinbeck’s Eden. In Michael J. Meyer (ed.). *The Essential Criticism of John Steinbeck’s Of Mice and Men*, Lanham, Maryland Toronto Plymouth, UK: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2009 62.

³¹Steinbeck, op.cit., 32.

³²Ibid., 32.

More space is given to what the male characters think and talk about her. The women in the novel have little action. Women's role in the novella is to highlight men's activities; their activity is meant only to create a variation in the story. From the feminist point of view it is not acceptable. Veteran playwright, George S. Kaufman, who was revising the story for the film adaptation believed that "the girl should be drawn more fully, since she is the motivating force of the whole thing".³³

f) Drawn without Names/ without Distinct Identity: Many of the women characters do not have names which is suggestive of denying them their identity and providing them a marginalized, subordinate position. The nameless women do not have any individual identity, no value, and no substance. They exist in relation to men, for males, and exist because males exist. This idea finds expression in the text through the anonymity of a number of women: Curley's wife and her mother, the girl in the Weed and the five women who manage Susy's business. No one wants to know who they really are; without a name, they are non-entities without feelings and emotions; they are mere play-things to be controlled by their owners. Their namelessness also suggests that the roles they play are insignificant and not as important as that of men.

Cynthia Burkhead argues that Curley's wife's namelessness is significant; it diminishes her importance and fails to elicit sympathy for her in the mind of the reader.³⁴ "Without a name," Burkhead says, "Curley's wife does not seem as real a person as a character with a name, an identifying marker. Thus, her death at Lennie's hands is less tragic than if she were named".³⁵ Emery holds that "by refusing to her name, these men attempt to rob her of her power over them, just as a superstitious and primitive native might refuse to invoke the name of feared spirit".³⁶

³³Elaine Steinbeck and Robert Wallsten, eds. op.cit., 155.

³⁴Burkhead, op.cit., 61.

³⁵Ibid., 61.

³⁶Jean Emery, "Manhood Beset: Misogyny in *Of Mice and Men*." *The Essential Criticism of John Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men*. Michael J. Meyer. Ed. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2009. 127. Print.

The major female protagonist too does not have a name of her own; she is identified by her husband, Curley's name and is called 'Curley's Wife' and 'Curley's girl'.³⁷ Apostrophe is used to designate ownership or possession by someone. The apostrophe 's' with 'Curley' [Curley's] gives her an identity of being in possession of Curley, her husband. This lack of personal identity underscores an antifeminist perspective and is an aspect of feminist criticism. Steinbeck explained that she is "not a person, she is a symbol. She has no function, except to be a foil and danger to Lennie".³⁸ Mark Spilka (1974) holds that "Steinbeck through George and Lennie projects his own hostility towards women in general."³⁹

The namelessness of the many women characters in the novel suggests Steinbeck's bias against women. All the men in the novel have distinct names, but not the women; even an old crippled man Candy, a mentally challenged man Lennie and Whit, who is given only a few lines, also have names, which suggest that even these minor male characters are more important than the female protagonist.

g) Thwarted Dreamers: The women in the novel are drawn as thwarted dreamers. Curley's wife had a dream, but her dream has been thwarted. Her dream symbolizes the dream of every American woman and her death indicates the tragic end of their dreams. She dreamt of an independent life; her sole focus was to "make somethin' of [herself]".⁴⁰ These articulations clearly elucidate that she wanted to be someone with a worthwhile purpose. But her own mother, herself being a woman, poses the first obstacle in her way by restricting her to pursue her dream; she, like a traditional mother of a male dominated society, undermines her by giving her only one option, that is, settlement with marriage "I always thought my ol' lady stole it. Well, I wasn't gonna stay no place where I couldn't get

³⁷Steinbeck, op.cit.,55.

³⁸Bev Sykes, "'Of Mice and Men' a must-see for fans of great theater." The Davis Enterprise Account Service, online version. 2021 Davis Enterprise, February 24, 2020. Web. 18 August 2021. www.davisenterprise.com/feature/arts/of-mice-and-men-a-must-see-for-fans-of-great-theater

³⁹Mark Spilka, "Of George and Lennie and Curley's Wife: Sweet Violence in Steinbeck's Eden", *Modern Fiction Studies* 20, 1974, 174.

⁴⁰Steinbeck, op.cit., 88.

nowhere or make something of myself, an' where they stole your letters, last her if she stole it, too, an' she says no. So I married Curley. Met him out to the Riverside Dance Palace that same night".⁴¹

So, marriage is considered by the mother as the greatest blessing bestowed upon a woman, but her impulse is so overpowering that she decided to escape from her clutches in any way she could. He becomes her ticket out of her desperate life. But, she falls out of the frying pan into the fire, because her husband is even worse than her mother. She used to be governed by her mother before marriage, and after marriage she is tyrannized by her husband. She runs helplessly from pillar to post but nobody supported or promoted her as she was a woman; nobody wants to see her talents to blossom.

She also dreamed to be a movie actress. When she finds Lennie alone in the barn, she begins pouring out her heart about her fractured yearning for becoming a famous actress of Hollywood: "Coulda been in the movies, an' had nice clothes—all them nice clothes like they wear. An' I coulda sat in them big hotels, an' had pitchers took of me. When they had them previews I coulda went to them, an' spoke in the radio, an' it wouldn'ta cost me a cent because I was in the pitcher. An' all them nice clothes like they wear. Because this guy says I was a natural".⁴²

She further reveals that she was even 'discovered' by a man who worked in pictures because of her glamour; she met that man at the Riverside Dance Palace who told her he would "put [her] in the movies."⁴³ This led her to harbour a vigorous longing for the future; she expected the letters promised to her by the man. But she was again demoralized. She was betrayed by the man; she grieves: "I never got that letter".⁴⁴ All these nostalgic reflections illuminate an otherwise shadowy period of her life: the unfulfilled promises and expectations and her fractured dream.⁴⁵

⁴¹Ibid.,88.

⁴²Ibid.,89.

⁴³Ibid.,89.

⁴⁴Ibid.,88.

⁴⁵Lisca , op.cit., 138.

However, instead of achieving fame in movies and being loved by many, she is destined, tragically, to be one that people are frightened to approach. Her dreams and desires are confined to the hopes and wishes of her husband and home. Her efforts to subvert the typical gender roles by innocently imagining more of a life for herself proved futile. She is robbed of her dream by her mother, husband and the man who promised her roles in films. Her disappointment can be justified as being the consequence of those conspiring to keep her from fame and popularity.

It is dreams that keep human life afloat. She dreams, as we all do, of a better life. That is why the readers, without difficulty, identify themselves with her. Her flamboyant dress and heavy make-up are nothing but the manifestations of a colourful dream of– “been in the movies”.⁴⁶ She wears vibrant dresses to emulate the film stars. These are, in fact, the last residues of her shattered dream. But the men she is surrounded by do not understand her. There are times when the female protagonist seems to snap out of the seemingly coquettish character and slips into the vulnerable human persona. Her unattainable dream leads her to voice her honest feelings, disappointments and a sense of desperation for which she appears even more true to life.

This particular facet of her personality makes her a fragile human being and absolves her of any potential for danger to others. This drives away the impression from the readers’ mind that she is a vixen who sports fancy red dress and accessories to lure men to sin. Her flashy dress, glitzy accessories and her voluptuous body language which most men find obtrusive can also be ascribed to her naive exuberance, entrance into adulthood rather quickly and youthful desire to be found attractive as all people in the glamour world do. And her fondness for the colour red which is mentioned many times is nothing but the mark of her youth. So, far from being a trouble-maker, she herself is a victim. Not only she is a victim of murder, but she is also a victim of circumstances, having married to get away from home only to find herself trapped on the ranch where she finds no friends, nothing to do and is allowed one relationship, and that even is a fake one. It can be assumed

⁴⁶Steinbeck, op.cit., 89.

that if she were a male there would not be any human barrier between her and the attainment of her dream.

h) Women's Subordinate Position in Society: Steinbeck pigeonholes women as housewives which directly feeds and promotes the confining nature of women's role. In *Of Mice and Men*, men are providers and defenders, while women are nurturers and caregivers. Men enjoy privileges such as autonomy, mobility, opportunity and power whereas women have to start enduring restrictions. Their husbands curtail their mobility which leads to misdirected masculinity characterized by male sexual dominance and unequal gender attitudes and behaviour. Despite being a potential performer, Curley's wife was coerced to marry a stranger and thereby slipped into the typical homemaker. They had no opportunity to reject their downtrodden position in society. In the text, the society is oppressively patriarchal and made sure women had no opportunity to obtain formal power and had little choice of advancement in society. The fact that Curley's wife dies at the end, shows the absolute dominance of patriarchy, as it is a man who killed her.

Society and its men conspired against Curley's wife and compelled her to disappear into the background of a straight-laced society. She is, like most other female characters in the novella, a captive of a male-centered world and expected to perform typical sets of tasks due to their weak image given by men. She was subjugated and domesticated for the sake of marriage and allowed to live in a poky "two-by-four house"⁴⁷ like a prisoner. Aunt Clara was mentioned wearing "a huge gingham apron", a covering used while cooking.⁴⁸ Curley's wife is delineated as wearing a "cotton house dress" and her hair is hung in "little rolled cluster, like sausages" and also as if these cooking and maintaining household come pre-installed in women's DNA.⁴⁹ Also, as if these were the only important features about her. These images unequivocally suggest that the women's place is in the kitchen and not in the bunk house where she bursts frequently. Society and especially its men

⁴⁷Ibid.,78.

⁴⁸Ibid.,100.

⁴⁹Ibid.,31.

expect her to cook, look after her family members, clean house and raise children. All these clearly show that Steinbeck's female characters are not depicted as self-sustaining, independent in *Of Mice and Men*.

Women are forced to live within the boundaries of their domesticity and relentlessly exploited. Such confinement allows women to "thrive" in passivity, incompetence, fearfulness, docility and the like. Such repression of women was to ensure their subservience to male authority. George once states condescendingly that a woman is not capable of coping with the ranch, "Why'n't you tell her to stay the hell home where she belongs?"⁵⁰ Carlson indignantly tells Curley that he 'ought to drape' his wife firmly round in his home where she has right place. Once Candy indignantly comments that she doesn't have "sense enough in that chicken head" to grasp men's world, indicating the inferiority of women.⁵¹ These observations show the parochial mindset of men to whom there is nothing more offensive than the idea that a wife is not behaving as wifely as she "should".

Women find themselves in helpless situations due to their poor economic status. None of the female characters are found to work side by side with the ranch workers. Curley's wife is fully conscious of her placement at the bottom of the hierarchy in the ranch, she notes that "they left all the weak ones here."⁵² None has any practical skills for ranch life hence they are subordinate to and dependent on men in economy. In *Of Mice and Men*, Steinbeck has portrayed a patriarchal society that has prevented Curley's wife from realizing her creative possibilities and her cultural identification has been merely a negative 'object' or 'other', to men as the defining agents, the 'Subjects' in the society. The harshness of manual labour of the ranch could have been eased to some degree by including women in the workforce. But this has not happened because men think that if women become courtiers and leaders of the world, the world would be destroyed. But that is not the case; feminists argue and it is now proven that women are capable of earning and taking their own, their families' and even men's

⁵⁰Ibid.,62.

⁵¹Ibid.,79.

⁵²Ibid.,77.

responsibilities. Steinbeck's male characters think that women have their own (cocooned) beautiful world and they would not fit into the real world of business which is altogether a social construct, and hence male political ideology. Feminist critics reprimand this while showing both male and female sexes as equal in value as well as in action. It firmly holds that men can be less than men and women can be more than women.

2) Men-Women Relationship within Marriage: Husband-wife relationship has been presented through the married life of Curley and his wife. As a dominating husband, he tyrannizes his wife and has no respect for her, let alone for her dreams. Her husband continually strives to control who his wife talks to and what she can and cannot do. She does not have the free will to choose. Himself culpable of unfaithfulness, Curley is afraid of being disgraced by cuckoldom; he is hypocritically suspicious of her infidelity and spends most of his time looking for her whereabouts, and suspects that she is flirting with the ranch people, especially with Lennie. Seemingly busy with running the ranch, he does not give time to his wife. Unsurprisingly, she feels very lonely, though married and has her husband. Candy observes: "...Curley is cockier'n ever since he got married"⁵³

Curley often visits brothels which is an act of serious moral turpitude, a breach of trust with wife. His perversion leads him to con his wife by visiting "cat house" just after weeks of their marriage.⁵⁴ He is thoroughly inconsiderate and swindles his wife without any qualms of conscience. She once says stoically, "Think I don't know where they all went?"⁵⁵ Obviously, she is well aware of it, but is not potent enough to correct her husband's misdemeanor. She has no other choice but to accept it, and it was because of women's powerless and dispossessed nature that she could not do anything about it except enduring.

Curley's wife is deserted by her unscrupulous husband immediately after marriage without any logical explanation of why she is so gratuitously shunned. This makes her suffer from a chronic and debilitating loneliness.

⁵³Ibid.,50.

⁵⁴Ibid.,11.

⁵⁵Ibid.,77.

She is thrown in a stagnant pool of dejection and pronounces her agony unambiguously: "Why can't I talk to you? I never get to talk to nobody. I get awfully lonely".⁵⁶ She needs company like any other human being, which she does not have. From her conversation with Lennie, it is learnt that she does not like her husband. She bluntly declares, "I don't *like* Curley. He ain't a nice fella".⁵⁷ In another place she says, "Sure I got a husban'. You all seen him. Swell guy, ain't he?"⁵⁸ Being a victim of husband's maltreatment, she regrets her decision to marry him. She lets him use her because he has power and she doesn't know how to get out of this life. This turns her into what she is.

3) Men-Women Relationship in the Society

Steinbeck paints a negative men-women relationship in the novel. Failing to find meaningful connection with her husband, the female protagonist seeks contact with the ranch hands. These men avoid Curley's wife, ignore her, and constantly reject her attempts at friendship by giving her icy responses. They send the subtle message that she is unwelcome with "scowling" looks.⁵⁹ These men believe that they must be constantly on defense against her quasi-flirtatious ways. George tells Lennie after meeting her for the first time, "Well, you keep away from her, cause she 's a rat-trap if I ever seen one".⁶⁰ She knew well that Lennie was mentally challenged and that he killed a puppy by mishandling it, but she was so starved for attention that she was blinded to the signals which would have made another woman cautious. Candy furthers her isolation in Crooks' quarters: "You ain't wanted here. We told you ain't".⁶¹ Subsequently, in Crooks' quarters she tells Crooks, Candy, and Lennie, "Well, I ain't giving you no trouble. Think I don't like to talk to somebody ever' once in a while? Think I like to stick in that house alla time?"⁶² Their reaction is one of immediate and abject detestation. Even to the casual readers these are repeated fuss

⁵⁶Ibid.,62,86.

⁵⁷Ibid.,89.

⁵⁸Ibid.,78.

⁵⁹Ibid.,21.

⁶⁰Ibid., 32.

⁶¹Ibid.,79.

⁶²Ibid.,77.

and histrionic over-reactions. The way they recoil from her looks seems exaggerated. She reveals her desire unabashedly for companionship in the barn scene, "I get lonely. You can talk to people but I can't talk to nobody but Curley. Else he gets mad. How'd you like not to talk to anybody?"⁶³ Then in another place she expresses her deep mental anguish to Lennie: "What's the matter with me? Ain't I got a right to talk to nobody? Whatta they think i am, anyways? You are a nice guy. I don't know why I can't talk to you I ain'tdoin' no harm to you".⁶⁴ This suggests that her looking for people to talk to is not erotic but simply to find company to avert the loneliness caused by a sadistic and intimidating husband who pays attention to her only when he is jealous.

Raw and toxic masculinity manifests itself when the male characters call Curley's wife, and by inference women in general, ignominious names to trivialize her. She is contemptuously referred to as a "Lulu,"⁶⁵ / "looloo"⁶⁶ - the same name for Slim's hideous dog, which has "got no teeth, damn near blind, can't eat" and "Stinks like hell, too"⁶⁷. Through this dehumanizing comparison men transfer their disgust felt towards the animal to a woman. "She'd be better off dead", is the opinion about Candy's dog and, patently, this attitude is mirrored towards the lonesome woman too.⁶⁸ Characterized by underlying anger and belligerence such utterances are destructive form of communication intended to chip away women's self-esteem, make them feel inadequate and undermine their worth. Such odious bad mouthing is highly suggestive of unhealthy relationship between men and women.

Like others, she also seeks different ways to find comfort as Candy finds it through his dog. When she confronts Lennie, Candy and Crook, she admits to feeling unhappy with her life. She wants to talk to Lennie only because she needs a friend to listen to her past experiences and aspirations. It's

⁶³Ibid.,89.

⁶⁴Ibid.,87-88.

⁶⁵Ibid.,35.

⁶⁶Ibid.,51.

⁶⁷Ibid.,36.

⁶⁸Leighton Meester, "I'm Not a Tart: The Feminist Subtext of Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*", www.huffpost.com/entry/im-not-a-tart-the-feminis_b_5587422

deeply ironic that she puts on dazzling accessories that scream 'look at me', but most men, like George, prefer to 'look away'. The men do not try to understand her situation; they only look at her external manners, regard her as a woman of loose morals, a man hunter. She is unworthy of male sympathy. Sadly enough, these are the only equipment she has to quell her overwhelming boredom and ease her stifling and suffocating existence. These are a sort of antidote to her malaise. Her bearings which are misinterpreted by the ranch men and her husband are the only means she possesses to get someone's attention. Despite all her attempts to get attention, she remains invisible. However, this aspect of her character is neglected, overlooked, and underemphasized, which is an object of criticism from feminist point of view.

4) Less Attention to and Sympathy for Curley's Wife than even Minor Male

Characters: The author is more occupied with male characters □ George, Lennie, Curley and Candy but the forlorn Curley's wife is hardly given any notice as she comes and goes, flitting in and out of the bunkhouse, the stables and crooks' room. She is portrayed less sympathetically than even the most degraded male character, which suggests that woman's position is even much lower than the worst men. Crooks, an African-American, leads an ostracized life on the ranch due to his dark colour, but even his character is painted with more compassion than Curley's Wife, the female protagonist. It is true that she threatens Crooks but these empty threats seem more like an act of self-preservation. The black man's isolation is referred to as tragic. Contrarily, Curley's wife's loneliness is made to seem natural. Curley's wife is lonely like Crooks, but, unlike the black man, she neither gets any sympathy nor any favours; his agony of deserted life is never sympathized by the narrator.

Crooks is shown to have a purpose in life, intelligence, and a certain level of skill, he is allowed to voice the discrimination against him and stand up for himself. He does not appear a victim—he is discriminated against simply because of his colour. Curley's wife, on the other hand, is shown as vacuous, and dressed in a ridiculous way for life on a farm. She is made by the author to come across as she is described by his characters, and is mocked for his

ridiculous notions of being in the movies. Steinbeck has portrayed her as 'got it coming to her'. Steinbeck has not highlighted her social plight sympathetically. Even her demise is hardly made poignant, though the author praises her beauty a bit after her passing away, saying: "And all the meanness and the plantings and the discontent and the ache for attention were all gone from her face. She was very pretty and simple. Her face was sweet and young".⁶⁹

Her tragic death has been morbidly justified for bringing stability in men's world. Men do not spare the deceased from vituperation and disdain even after her death. Candy spits misogynistic insults at her corpse, saying, "You God damn tramp, ...you wasn't no good".⁷⁰ Curley's wife's death is seen simply as something unfortunate for Lennie. It is as if it were her own fault that she is dead, and she only got herself murdered out of spite so that Candy's dream could not come true. It is as if she got herself murdered on purpose. He further berates, "You done it, didn't you? I s'pose you're glad" and we are left with no doubt that Candy sees her as entirely responsible for the destruction of his dream.⁷¹ These outrageous male reactions remind us of men's callousness to women even when she is brutally murdered. Leaving Curley's wife's body where they found it, the men take off, none of them apparently affected by the loss of human life; instead each sees her death as an obstacle to his own happiness.⁷² Women, evil and monstrous in life, become virginal and pure only in death, they can reach sainthood only if they are dead, only then can the whore be transformed and redeemed.⁷³

Violence against women surges whenever the patriarchal status quo or the traditional mode is challenged. Curley's wife is throttled to death by a "big son-of-a-bitch", Lennie.⁷⁴ This blood and gore happened simply because she strives to stand against the norm and men felt threatened by her. Since she is the sole

⁶⁹ Steinbeck, op.cit., 92-93.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 95.

⁷¹ Ibid., 95.

⁷² Burkhead, op.cit., 62.

⁷³ Jean Emery, "Manhood Beset: Misogyny in *Of Mice and Men*." *The Essential Criticism of John Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men*. Michael J. Meyer. Ed. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2009. 132. Print.

⁷⁴ Steinbeck, op.cit., 62.

female character who exuded some amount of strength, she is effectively removed by male-dominated world. Through her death one gets the feeling that her life, which was full of prospects, is a complete and tragic waste. As she lived without a name, she dies without it too. The reader has every reason to question Steinbeck's motives in giving us such an unsympathetic view of this woman and, by association, women in general. There is indeed little or no attempt to show that she is more sinned against than sinning.

5) Whores are Emphasized more than 'Angels': Steinbeck is more occupied with the 'whores' than the 'Angels'. The novel has a mention of Aunt Clara as an 'Angel, or a 'pure woman' among the whores. She is the sole wholesome lady in the novel; she represents a different category from the rest of the female characters Steinbeck portrays in the novel. She had been the caretaker of Lennie before George took over. She was kind, loving, and motherly. At the beginning of the novel, Lennie flashes back to a memory of Aunt Clara who took care of his needs. She pampered him by giving him indulgence, offering both real and rubber mice to pet when he was younger because she was alive to his peculiar inclination. Aunt Clara upholds high-standard qualities of a woman, which is why Lennie reverently refers to her as "Ma'am". However, she immediately recedes into the background. She is a dead character. She is only briefly mentioned by others. It seems that the author is not really interested in this character. Her virtuous and angelic domesticity is only a facade.

She is contrasted with a character of the same name (Clara) who is a whore. The novelist gives more attention to the whore Clara than Aunt Clara. This other Clara is a brothel owner. She also is not seen in the story, but is mentioned as the rival to another brothel owner Old Susy. It is noteworthy that they share a common name. But they are found on opposite sides of the personality spectrum. Aunt Clara is pure whereas brothel owner Clara is corrupt and sexually enticing. In addition, Aunt Clara is dead but the brothel owner Clara is alive. Steinbeck's intention behind identical naming of these two polarized women is evident: he wants to demonstrate that females are incapable of being nothing more but lewd and wanton while being alive.

6) Novelist's Own Position and Attitude Towards Women: Steinbeck had, in his mind, the prevailing stereotypical socio-historical image of an ideal woman in portraying women. For any departure from that model, he, like the society of his time, boxed them into the category of 'whores'. Curley's wife is a complex character who does not strictly conform to either of the categories, but society superficially interprets her external behaviour and unfairly pigeonholes her into the category of a whore, which she is not. Steinbeck shows considerable apathy to Curley's wife whom he portrays as a soulless animal and reduces and mocks her by likening her to a lowly animal which is unfair and unjustified. It seems the novelists' deliberate intention is bashing of women. Steinbeck's negative portrayal of Curley's wife can be considered authorial negativity towards women in general⁷⁵.

Moreover, none of the female characters in the novel is sufficiently constructed. Bashar, Alam and Khan hold that Steinbeck "deliberately portrays negative features of female character in the novel" and leaves out all good things of women.⁷⁶ Robert Morsberger finds "a degree of misogyny" in the novel.⁷⁷ Magny holds that there is "scarcity of women and abundance of prostitutes".⁷⁸ The novelist's derogatory attitude to women is seen through George, Lennie and Curley; their gender bias is obviously Steinbeck's bias.

Conclusion: It is thus clearly seen that the women characters in *Of Mice and Men* are portrayed negatively as malicious temptresses or whores who exert their baneful influence in the Garden of Eden by enticing men with their beauty, looks and gestures; they are presented as eyesores, blights or curses. The novelist has not given enough space for the women characters; they have even been denied their distinct identities and voice by effacing their names from the text. The society presented in the novel is a patriarchal one that views women as impure femme fatales and offers them only a subordinate position both in

⁷⁵Burkhead, op.cit.,61.

⁷⁶Bashar, et al. "Stereotyping of Curley's Wife in Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*: From Derridian Perspective", *Linguistics and Literature Studies*, 7/3:95-99, 2019.

⁷⁷Robert Morsberger, "Steinbeck and the Stage," in *The Short Novels of John Steinbeck*, ed. Jackson J. Benson. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990, 272-73.

⁷⁸Bashar, et al."Stereotyping of Curley's Wife in Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*: From Derridean Perspective". *Linguistics and Literature Studies* 7(3): 95-99, 2019.

the family and in the society. It is an abjectly male-centric society that allows its men to visit brothel houses but women have to be 'Angel in the House'. The men on the ranch as well as the husband deem her a lousy nuisance, and interact with verbal abuses, and renounce her company when she is alive and do not feel pity for her even after death.

All the women in the novel are, socially speaking, marginal and they serve the interests of men. Even a minor character like Crooks is seen to threaten Curley's wife when she visits Crooks in the barn. He says: "you got no rights comin' in a colored man's room. You got no rights messing around in here at all. Now youjus' get out an' get out quick. If you don't, I'm gonna ask the boss not to ever let you come in the barn no more."⁷⁹ Steinbeck, undoubtedly, presented them as pawns in the games of men. The feminist critics have detested it. Jean Emery rightly says that the novel is not merely a tragic story of a failed economic dream, but rather, "the achievement of a dream – that of a homogenous male fraternity not just to repress, but to eliminate women and femininity. ... [It] depicts the rescue of men from women"⁸⁰. A progressively genuine, admirable and unbiased portrayal of female characters is absent in the novel. Finally, it can be said that *Of Mice and Men* is not appreciable from the feminist point of view.

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⁷⁹Steinbeck, op.cit., 80.

⁸⁰Jean Emery, "Manhood Beset: Misogyny in *Of Mice and Men*." *The Essential Criticism of John Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men*. Michael J. Meyer. Ed. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2009. 125. Print.

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Towards Selfhood: Reading Shashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows*

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Abstract

Roots and Shadows shows the predicament of women in a patriarchal society. It mainly focuses on Indu, the novel's protagonist, who endeavors to discover her inner self to assert her individuality. She leaves home at the age of eighteen for higher study purposes and vows never to return because of her hatred for the orthodox family environment. After finishing her studies, she becomes a journalist, marries the man she falls in love with against the consent of her family members for a happy life. She belongs to the generation that analyses everything rationally and takes decisions accordingly. She reveres the idea of detachment, freedom, complete happiness in love and tries her best to achieve them but fails. She understands that her freedom is all but an illusion and experiences the agony, suffocation, and identity crisis in a patriarchal and tradition-bound society. When she is perplexed with her life, she gets a call from her great-aunt Akka who is on her deathbed. Before dying, Akka wills her assets in Indu's name, which stuns everyone in the family. Thus, Indu is suddenly brought back into the family vortex of her ancestral house where different members are entangled with various problems to which only Akka's money could bring solutions. During her stay at the old house, she gets time to reflect on what was happening to her personal and professional life and goes through various dilemmas regarding what to do with her new role in the family. This paper will show how Indu goes through various challenging situations, fights with different stereotypes and pressures of family and society, and finally emerges as a self-confident individual through self-introspection.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Dilemma, Identity, Custom, Stereotype.

Roots and Shadows (1983)¹ is Shashi Deshpande's first written,² fourth published,³ and Thirumathi Rangamal Prize-winning⁴ novel. The book is divided into a prologue and eleven chapters, and the flashback technique has been applied with a first-person narrative. As its setting, the author has used a large old house⁵ in a small town near Bombay⁶ in India. The idea of the novel came to her from "Mrs Gandhi and the Emergency, and what happened, not only to the country, but to her as well, as a result of her craving for absolute power."⁷ Though she got the idea from the then political scenario of her country, it is not a political novel. She says, "It became, instead, a story of power within a family. I do believe a family is a microcosm of a society. Put it under a microscope and you will see the same things – greed, ambition, envy, dishonesty – that you see in the politics of a nation."⁸ Dedicating the novel to her parents, Deshpande has presented a family of four generations in it.⁹ It shows the predicament of women in a tradition-oriented patriarchal society, focusing on Indu, the protagonist and narrator of the novel, and her psychological and moral struggle to assert her individuality.

¹Shashi Deshpande, *Roots and Shadows* (Pune: Sangam Books, 1983). All references to the text are from this edition and indicated in this paper only by respective page numbers within brackets.

²She finished writing *Roots and Shadows* in 1978 but the publication got delayed. See Lakshmi Holmström, "Interview: Shashi Deshpande Talks to Lakshmi Holmström," *Wasafiri* 8, no. 17 (March 1, 1993): 22–27, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02690059308574305>.

³ First, second and third published novels are *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980), *Come Up and Be Dead* (1982) and *If I Die Today* (1982) respectively.

⁴S. Prasanna Sree, "An Introduction to Women and Women Writing in English," in *Indian English Poetry and Fiction: Critical Elucidations*, ed. Amar Nath Prasad and Rajiv K. Mallik (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2007), 137.

⁵Deshpande acknowledges that she has drawn the picture of the old house keeping in mind her mother's home in Pune, she calls it the Pune wada, for this novel. See, Shashi Deshpande, *Listen to Me* (Chennai: Context, 2018), 152.

⁶Bombay officially became Mumbai in 1995. As 'Bombay' has been used by the author, it has been retained in the present paper. For an overview of how Bombay became Mumbai, see, "What's in a Name? Mumbai 20 Years on from Bombay," *Hindustan Times*, November 13, 2015, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india/what-s-in-a-name-mumbai-20-years-on-from-bombay/story-8WiPZO0gfHD0le6WptGaGO.html>.

⁷Deshpande, *Listen to Me*, 153.

⁸Deshpande, 155.

⁹ A family chart has been given by the author at the beginning of the novel.

The novel opens with Indu participating in her cousin – Mini's traditional wedding in her ancestral house. She was away from this house for more than 10 years¹⁰ and sworn never to come back but returns on the call of her great-aunt Akka who was on her deathbed. Indu already had major challenges in her personal and professional life, but another major difficulty awaited her here, in this house. Akka dies the day after Indu's return, and, before her death, she informs Indu that she has made a will making Indu the owner of all of her property. This shocks Indu and, later, everyone in the family. She ponders, "What Akka was doing? *Making sure I would never get away?*" (21, emphasis mine). Indu's family members think that what Akka has done is "damned unfair" (102) because Indu does not qualify, according to Indu's cousin Sunil, to be considered as "a part of the family now" (102). This remark stuns Indu, but what is done cannot be undone, and the will, according to the family lawyer Shyamrao, stands whether anybody accepts it or not. Thus, Indu is, all of a sudden, brought back as the owner of Akka's property by Deshpande, into the family vortex of her ancestral house where different members are entangled with different problems to which only Akka's money could bring solutions.

As Indu has now stepped into "Akka's shoes" (160), she has a role to play. Her decisions would affect everyone, including herself. It was not an easy task for her, and she was not in a situation like this before. She is in a dilemma—"Where do we go on from here? Where do I go on from here, burdened by what Akka has done to me?" (23). Besides, she had had her own crises to deal with as an individual. Her husband, Jayant, advises her, "Surely you don't have to get involved with the problem of every Tom, Dick and Harry in the family . . . Shake the dust of that place off your feet, my dear, and come home soon" (156-157). However, she stays there for the rituals after Akka's death. In her three-week sojourn at the old house, Indu gets time to revisit her past and reflect on what was happening to her in the present. She broods over the inner conflicts she was entangled with in her married life with Jayant, confusions regarding her professional life, and goes through various dilemmas in deciding what to do with Akka's property. In this process, realizations of

¹⁰ The mention of this duration of absence of Indu from her ancestral house is to some extent confusing. In some pages it is mentioned that she has been away from the house for 10 years, for example— p.31, p. 37, p.81, p.94, p.141, p.157 and in some pages it is 12 years— p.20, p.25, p.106

various levels come to her. She overcomes her confusions and emerges as an individual, but that was not an easy task at all.

Indu left her ancestral home at the age of 18 to pursue higher studies in Bombay and deliberately kept herself away from the old house because of her resentment for the conservative environment¹¹ that prevailed here and mainly because of her hatred towards Akka, who, according to her, was "ruthless, dominating, bigoted and inconsiderate" (24). It is Akka, Indu thinks, who is responsible, directly or indirectly, for her past and present situations. Akka returned to her brother's house after her husband's death¹² as "a rich childless widow" (24) and, here, in the old house, "she had maintained an absolute control over her brother's children. Kaka,¹³ even after becoming a grandfather, could be reduced to a red-faced stuttering schoolboy by Akka's *venomous tongue*" (24, emphasis mine). Everyone except Indu was scared of Akka. Was it because she was the senior-most person of the family after Indu's grandfather's death or because she had economic power in her hands and almost everyone needed the money to survive and for various reasons? However, she was the guardian and ruled the house accordingly. She was not educated, but it was tough to deceive her. Despite being a clever one in family affairs, she was very conservative and a patron of age-old superstitions, traditional views, and cultures. Caste-system has been present in India for over three thousand years,¹⁴ and Akka was one of its worshippers. In her introduction to Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste*,¹⁵ Arundhati Roy has mentioned— "Caste was implied in people's names, in the way people referred to each other, in the work they did, in

¹¹ It was an orthodox Brahmin family

¹² From the information given in the text, it can be assumed that Akka became a widow when she was past 30 and was past 90 when she was on her deathbed.

¹³ Indu's paternal uncle, Anant

¹⁴ See, "What Is India's Caste System?," *BBC News*, June 19, 2019, sec. India, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-35650616>.

¹⁵ *Jat-Pat Todak Mandal* (Forum for the Break-up of Caste), a militant Arya Samaj faction, formed in Lahore in 1922 to combat caste, invited Dr. Ambedkar to deliver its presidential address for their annual conference to be held in Lahore in 1936. He prepared the speech titled "Annihilation of Caste" and submitted it to the organizers but after reviewing the speech, the organizers canceled the conference, saying Dr. Ambedkar's views were provocative. Ambedkar, later on, got his undelivered speech published as a book on 15 May 1936 at his own expense, which became an immediate classic.

the clothes they wore, in the marriages that were arranged, in the language they spoke."¹⁶ Akka was so much an adherent to the caste system that she refused to go to the hospital when she was severely ill, saying, "God knows what caste the nurses are . . . Or the doctors. I couldn't drink a drop of water there" (24). When Akka heard that Indu was marrying someone from a different caste, she expressed her view regarding inter-caste marriages as, "Such marriages never work. Different castes, different languages . . . it's all right for a while. Then they realise . . ." (74), whereas, Dr. Ambedkar believes that intermarriage is the real solution—the fusion of blood can only generate the sensation of being kith and kin, and until this sense is prioritized, the caste-based separatism will persist.¹⁷ Akka was a follower of customs like this and wanted everyone to adhere to it. She was so concerned about maintaining the family honor that she prohibited Saroja, Indu's cousin Naren's mother, from learning music. Akka was always like this and never had welcomed any change in her attitude with the progress of time. She rebuked the teenaged Indu for just chatting with a boy in her college! From her childhood, Indu observed Akka closely and resented this kind of conservative attitude in her and her dominating nature. Seeing all this, she had grown a rebel in her with time.

Patriarchy has firmly maintained its control over Indian society for centuries, and Indu is aware of its prevailing injustices towards women. Scholar Vrinda Nabar reflects on the politics of the patriarchy to maintain the controlling power in its hands:

whatever the religio-cultural framework, a certain common patriarchal ethic sought to relegate women to secondary roles. The increasing exclusion of women from the public sphere was subtly achieved by buttressing such exclusion with seductive images of the alleged essence of womanhood. Implicit in all this was the virtue of self-denial, indeed of self-obliteration.¹⁸

Like other houses in India, the patriarchal spirit was also present in this house, and the women of this house, unaware of the injustices, accepted their places as secondary to the male members and acted accordingly.

¹⁶Arundhati Roy, "The Doctor and the Saint," in *Annihilation of Caste: The Annotated Critical Edition*, by B. R. Ambedkar, ed. S. Anand (New Delhi: Navayana, 2014), 17.

¹⁷See, B. R. Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste: The Annotated Critical Edition*, ed. S. Anand (New Delhi: Navayana, 2014), 285.

¹⁸Vrinda Nabar, *Caste as Woman* (Haryana: Penguin Books, 1995), 177.

Simone de Beauvoir pointed out the eternal thankless role of cooking and cleaning assigned to women saying, "Few tasks are more *like the torture of Sisyphus* than housework, with its endless repetition: the clean becomes soiled, the soiled is made clean, over and over, day after day."¹⁹ This tradition of women having their meals only after the men have finished theirs is still continuing in many families in India, and this practice is sanctified by the Indian mythological texts that are considered sacred. As the family-head, Akka had the power to reform the oppressive androcentric codes in the house as she herself was a woman, but she chose not to, rather, helped its continuation.

Society has given a husband the prerogative of changing his wife's name, surname, and sometimes even the first name after marriage. Such a practice that gives the husband the right to "obliterate his wife's identity, if he so wishes, and give her a new one of his own choice"²⁰ can be compared with the handover of the "feudal ownership of the woman from father to husband."²¹ When Indu utters her husband's name, Sunanda-Atya says, "Akka would have had a fit if she had heard you say it like that. Shows disrespect, she would have said. *They* also say it shortens your husband's life" (35, emphasis mine). Though hearing this Indu reacts impatiently, "They, they, they . . . Who are they?" (35), this invisible 'they' is very much powerful indeed. Behind the making of the 'they,' the forming of the collective unconscious of women as a secondary being, many factors have played role cleverly to position men as a superior class to women, and with the help of the Indian mythological texts, the idea of *pativrata*²² or the virtue of self-denial in a wife has been elevated to a sacred status.²³ P. V. Kane has shown that all of the smritis, Puranas, and digests have dedicated

¹⁹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, ed. H.M. Parshley (London: Vintage, 1997), 470 (emphasis added).

²⁰ Nabar, *Caste as Woman*, 121.

²¹ Nabar, 121.

²² A married woman who is loyal to her husband. For a detailed definition: "Pativrata, Pativrata, Pati-Vrata: 15 Definitions," May 1, 2017, <https://www.wisdomlib.org/definition/pativrata>; Sadhu Mukundcharandas, "The Pativrata," BAPS, accessed June 28, 2021, <https://www.baps.org/Article/2011/The-Pativrata-2153.aspx>.

²³ For an overview about the duties of a wife and rewards for a pativrata mentioned by the shastras, see, Pandurang Vaman Kane, *History of the Dharmasāstra*, vol. 2 (1) (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1941), 561–68.

significant space to the responsibilities of a wife and all of them agreed that "the foremost duty of a wife is to obey her husband and to honour him as her god."²⁴ The mythological stereotypes and ideologies of ideal women propagated by the patriarchy are deeply embedded in the psyche of Indian women, and this project is still going on, along with other mediums, through the projection of stereotyped images in Indian films and televisions. Films play a very powerful role in influencing the collective unconscious of a nation. Except for very few, most Indian films are hero-centric or androcentric, and the women, including the heroine, are given submissive and parasitic roles. The audience consumes the product, unconsciously takes the images for granted and acts accordingly in their real life. Vrinda Nabar cautions, "This kind of stereotype, which is embedded deep in the creative consciousness, is one of the most dangerous among cultural prejudices because it is the most difficult to eradicate."²⁵

The female members of the old house were in no way different from the common mass. They also had these stereotypes and ideologies installed in them and, in their turn, had tried to implant the same in Indu. Since her childhood, Indu was instructed to be submissive. She remembers,

As a child, they had told me I must be obedient and unquestioning. As a girl, they had told me I must be meek and submissive. Why? I had asked. Because you are a female. You must accept everything, even defeat with grace because you are a girl, they said. *It is the only way, they said, for a female to live and survive.* (174, emphasis mine)

She was not only instructed the survival technique for a female but also given real-life examples of lives lived by the women in the old house. Simone de Beauvoir said, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman"²⁶ but Nabar, knowing the reality of Indian tradition and culture, says, "The girl child in India does not 'become' one. She is one even before she leaves the mother's womb."²⁷ From her childhood, Indu, a keen observer, was watching women observe these practices with solemn hearts, and as an educated and modern woman, she understood this politics of patriarchy well and knew that these are the weapons used by the patriarchy "to

²⁴Kane, 2 (1):561–62.

²⁵Nabar, *Caste as Woman*, 124.

²⁶Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 295.

²⁷Nabar, *Caste as Woman*, 43.

frighten the women. To keep them in their places. And poor fools, we do just that" (35).

Indu grew up in an environment where women had always enjoyed a secondary role. The few characteristics the old house upheld were social and religious bigotry, discriminatory treatment of boys and girls, and no opportunity to exercise individual freedom or express personal desires. In a word, more than a thousand-year-old Indian social patriarchal system, a superstitious atmosphere was prevailing in that old house. Indu could not accept this environment from an early age. Gradually she became a defendant, and whenever Akka commanded her illogically, she replied, "I won't" (81). Later, modern education introduces Indu to a new world, and since her going to Bombay at the age of 18, she has not returned to this house on purpose. She knew that the environment of this house would never change. Akka won't let that happen, but she could not accept it either. The influence of this house would never allow her to achieve the life she wanted. She wanted to be complete in life, free from the influence of this house, especially the Akka ring. So, she decides never to return to this house. At the end of her studies, she gets a job. She meets Jayant at such a time in her life. The day she first meets him, she immediately realizes that "it was this man and none other" (50). So, she proposes to Jayant and later marries him against her family's consent. Now Indu is 29, a writer, works in a magazine as a journalist, and married. Indu and Jayant do not have any children yet and lead an upper-middle-class lifestyle. Indu thought her life would be happy and complete by marrying the person she fell in love with. However, that does not happen. Indu's dream of a happy life shatters gradually in her three years of married life. During her stay at the old house, she gets time to review her days with Jayant objectively and remembers how she had "surrendered to him, step by step" (174).

Jayant, despite his modern lifestyle, upholds patriarchal views about the behavioral pattern of women. Though he does not dominate her, he "took it for granted" (174) that his wife, like thousands of women in traditional Indian society, would be meek, submissive, and passive. That is why he becomes shocked when he sees passion in Indu. While talking to Naren about the strained relationship between her and Jayant, Indu shares that her sexual awakening came when Jayant touched her for the first time. Indu says, "my response to him was so natural, so much beyond me and outside

me" (91), but it shocked Jayant. Indu adds, "And now I know . . . it shocks him to find passion in a woman . . . I've learnt my lesson now. And so I pretend. I'm passive. And unresponsive. I'm still and dead" (91-92).

It is not Jayant, the individual, but Jayant, the member of the age-old traditional patriarchal way of viewing a woman installed in him, gets shocked. Finding a deviation in Indu from that inherited view, he gets baffled. He does not know what to do and how to respond to it. So he turns away or runs away from this kind of situation whenever he confronts it. Geethamala rightly observes, "Jayant represents those educated men who accept the idea of the equality of sex at the intellectual level, but when it comes to practicing it, their roots instinctively shadow their behaviour."²⁸ Jayant behaves like a typical male of the traditional Indian society, and Indu, like other traditional women, surrenders. She becomes passive out of her love for Jayant because anything unexpected from her part would have shattered him. So now, she pretends. Her crisis begins here. She is "A woman who loves her husband too much. Too passionately. And is ashamed of it" (92). It was a "crack" (91) in Indu's happy life, and it deteriorates.

Indu did not get support from Jayant when she went through an ethical crisis in her career. She interviewed an influential woman and initially the impression she got of her was very positive but, later on, she got to know the lady's actual background, which was a total opposite. When the editor did not pay any heed to her, she went straight to Jayant but Jayant, like the editor, persuaded her, saying, "That's life! What can one person do against the whole system?" (19). She expected Jayant to understand her crisis and support her in her ethical decision to resign, but that did not happen. Indu compromised and went back to her work quietly but suffered from inner pangs. She was suffering from inside but could not go against her husband's advice out of her love for him. Her compromised professional life becomes a burden on her. She does not enjoy it anymore. Waking up each day, she thinks, "I can't go on." (19). She is in conflict with herself. She writes things that she does not want to, but she has no choice because Jayant said they need the money. By doing this, she was killing her writer-soul day by day.

²⁸Elenore Geethamala, *The Novels of Shashi Deshpande: A Critical Evaluation* (New Delhi: Creative Books, 2009), 95.

Indu was very proud of her "logical and rational thinking" (92) and proposed to Jayant and got married to him, but now she finds her married life a "trap" (92) and finds Jayant "A man like any other. Many others" (92). So, to keep harmony in her family life, she, who hated the secondary, non-existing, self-effacing, and traditional role of Indian wives, starts behaving like them. She even dresses herself up, keeping in mind what Jayant would like. It is as if her only concern were to please Jayant. Now, she follows the best-proven method of a happy married life followed by her predecessors, forgetting her self and acting according to her husband's wishes.

Though Indu becomes passive, she could not accept the fact as a self-conscious individual. A conflict goes on in her mind about what she was doing. She knows what Jayant is doing to her is not fair, but she cannot do anything. Her inability to express and assert her needs and desires to Jayant frustrates her psychologically, and Jayant fails to understand her. She does this to keep harmony in her family, but, at the same time, those conflicting thoughts go on in her subconscious mind, and her protest comes out in the form of a dream uttering, ". . . it's not fair. It's not fair" (140).

Though Jayant did not tell Indu directly to behave in a submissive way, he expected it of her. Indu did not know this Jayant before marriage. Her judgment about him was wrong. It was an extreme failure on her part. By the time she realizes it is too late. It is almost impossible for her to withdraw herself from here because she married Jayant without almost everyone's consent. She cannot even talk about her suffering to anyone because by doing so, she will appear as a failure to everyone, especially to Akka, which she does not want at all. She wants to prove herself successful, not a failure in the eyes of her family members. It was Indu's choice to behave in that way to please her husband, and by doing so, she was losing her self-respect as an individual and going through suffocation with her surrendered self. To find her lost self, she often thought of getting away from Jayant but she hangs on to prove that her marriage is not a failure. She is in a dilemma regarding her identity, past self, and the present. The Indu, who left her paternal home at 18, was very clear about what she wanted. With modern education, the free-spirited, freedom-seeker Indu got liberated from the shackles of age-old superstitions, tradition, and culture of her time and dreamed of her ultimate fulfillment and completeness of life with Jayant, but her dream remains only a dream. To keep the hope of a happy life

together alive, she adjusts, compromises, and plays a role she hated before. Now she does not think of her wants; instead, she always thinks of what her husband would like. Indu had laughed at the instructions to her to be followed to "live and survive" (174) by the female members of her family since her childhood but now she is becoming one of them gradually, and she is terrified of it. She wonders, "Am I on my way to becoming an ideal woman? A woman who sheds her 'I,' who loses her identity in her husband's?" (54). She feels "trapped" (19) and "chained" (19) and gets afraid of her future. It was at that crucial stage of Indu's life, Akka summoned her.

After returning to the old house, she quickly adjusts to its environment. A kind of serenity works inside her, but here too, she misses Jayant. She is not happy with him, yet she wants him by her side when alone at the old house. This duality in Indu is always at work, and she is also aware of it. She confesses, "*This is my real sorrow. That I can never be complete in myself*" (34). K. Sandhu comments: "is it her tragedy never to be free and complete?." ²⁹ Naren realized, through her write-ups, that Indu was going through a crisis in her personal life. When asked, Indu told him about the situations of her married life that she could not tell anyone so far. Naren works as an outlet for Indu's emotional outburst. As long as she stays with him, she can feel her real spontaneous self. She says, "With Naren, I would never have to pretend" (98), and the relationship, at one stage, turns into an affair. Although Indu rejected Naren in his first attempt, later she got into a physical relationship with him. Indu, who had been suppressing her sexual desire for so long, could no longer restrain her from responding to Naren's call. When Naren touched her passionately, she could "no more see or think, but only feel" (167). Her repeated sexual intercourse with Naren does not seem to matter to her. No guilt-feeling or sense of sinning works in her. She sees this move as her self-assertion or self-expression, and she is grateful to Naren for taking the initiative. This act of having sex outside her marriage boosts her courage, and now she thinks, "There was nothing I couldn't do" (169). According to Prasanna Sree, "The sexual emancipation on the part of Indu is evidently an assertion of her individuality, her newly

²⁹Sarabjit K. Sandhu, *The Novels of Shashi Deshpande* (New Delhi: Prestige, 2010), 27.

emerged identity,"³⁰ but Bhatnagar thinks that such a move by Indu is very unexpected. How could, Bhatnagar questions, Indu, who was struggling because her morality was at stake as a writer, do this? He comments: "Indu's casual and matter-of-fact attitude to what she had done is shocking. Have our morals really gone so low that women commit this sin for nothing, just to prove that they do not lack courage? Is this really representative of modern Indian woman?"³¹ No, it may not be a characteristic of modern Indian women; it may be that Deshpande has deliberately portrayed Indu in this way to strike back at the Indian patriarchy. Sunita Reddy analyses it like this: "Perhaps this is Deshpande's answer to the double standards practiced by our society where only men are allowed to take sexual liberties."³² Although almost no guilt-feeling is there in Indu, she sometimes thinks that Jayant is being wronged. However, she uses her rational faculty to justify herself: "But had I not wronged Jayant even before this? By pretending . . . I had cheated him of my true self. That I thought, is dishonourable, dishonest, much more than this" (88). This justification seems to be weak. One reason for this might be that Indu is going through a transitional period. She is in between traditional practices and the advent of modernity— emotional attachment, on the one hand, the tendency to judge everything with rational faculty on the other. It is not unusual for something unexpected like this to happen at such a time.

Indu's generation does not like attachment or living with a joint family. They want detachment. They want to live according to their wishes. That is why Naren's air of detachment fascinates Indu and she wants to be detached like him, but she is craving for attachment and care in other places of the novel, saying, "I wanted involvement, not detachment" (98). It is another example of Indu's dilemma. She is not sure what she wants— on the one hand, the traditional customs and, on the other hand, the effects of modern life. However, even if Indu wants to be detached, the matter is not that easy. It is a big challenge for her to handle the burden that Akka has put on her

³⁰S. Prasanna Sree, *Woman in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande: A Study* (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2003), 36.

³¹Parvati Bhatnagar, "Indian Womanhood: Fight for Freedom in Roots and Shadows," in *Women in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande*, ed. Suman Bala (New Delhi: Khosla Publishing House, 2001), 49–50.

³²Y. S. Sunita Reddy, *A Feminist Perspective on the Novels of Shashi Deshpande* (New Delhi: Prestige, 2001), 43.

shoulders. The challenge includes issues like financing Mini's marriage, the question of survival of the old house and its members.

Deshpande has portrayed Mini as the opposite of Indu. While Indu is portrayed as a rebel, Mini, who was only four years younger than Indu and grew up in the same environment, is portrayed as a submissive character like other ordinary Indian women. Knowing that she has no choice left, Mini accepts her reality and is waiting for her future home. The existing system has made the women feel so insecure that their only want in life is the hope of a bit of security. That is why even though Kaki is a woman herself, she sees her daughter's future amid the groom's father's property without giving any importance to the man with whom her daughter will spend the rest of her life. However, how Mini's marriage will be financed is a big concern for her parents now. Akka said she would finance, but now Akka is not there. Everything is in the hands of Indu. Mini realized that she had nothing to do, so she accepted the reality, and Indu realized that the Mini that she used to think of as "Poor Mini" (75) is not really that much weak, and her acceptance of the reality speaks of her "inner strength" (6). We find this to be similar to Charlotte's decision to marry Collins in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. Sunita Reddy observes, "Charlotte unhesitatingly agrees to marry the ridiculous Collins for the fear of remaining unmarried if she let the opportunity sleep by. It is indeed a tragedy that almost two hundred years later Indian girls echo the same sentiment . . ."³³

Indu's idea about Akka also changes after returning to the old house. Despite her fierce anger over Akka, she discovers a new Akka after her death when she learns about Akka's past from Narmada-Atya. How Akka, the victim of child marriage, went through indescribable hardships at her father-in-law's house, seems to have woken up Indu. Akka had to endure all kinds of violence, including the act of marital rape, in silence, keeping her mouth shut. After 15-20 years of married life, her husband developed a love affair with a woman worsening Akka's crisis. She could do nothing, but gradually a change occurred in her. She understood that if someone wants to survive, s/he will have to be strong and exercise power. The weak have no place on earth. Everyone will exploit them. With this changed attitude, she returned to this house after her husband's death and managed the family with firm hands as the eldest member of the house. Indu now

³³Reddy, 44.

realizes why Akka had to be so harsh and why she donated all her property to Indu even after having so many people in the family. The reason is, Atya tells Indu, "Your shoulders are strong. Akka knew that" (79). Jayant also says almost the same thing that Akka gave her property to Indu because Indu resembles Akka. However, Indu becomes puzzled to get this responsibility all of a sudden. She is not sure how to perform this duty given to her. Almost all of the family members are entangled with various problems. What will Indu do now? Everyone's attention is on her because she can solve many of their major problems with her money.

While others continue to complain, Vithal, a boy sheltered in this house, is trying his best to do something in life by getting an education without any complaint. Seeing him, Indu realizes, "it is the weak, the incompetent, the undeserving who sit and moan. There are others who effortlessly scale the walls of injustice, who overcome barriers by ignoring them" (151). While studying, when he heard from some members of the house that he was wasting electricity, he started studying in the moonlight whenever he could. When Vithal, in response to Indu's question about whether it is troublesome for him to read in the moonlight, replies like Mini, "I have to. I have no choice" (157), life seems much simpler to Indu. The mental disturbance that had been there in Indu for so long for various reasons seems to go away from her slowly, and a kind of conviction is born in her. She understands and decides,

Here, in this house, in this family, was a role waiting for me. A role that I could, perhaps, act out more successfully than the one I had tried until now. For, had I not, so very often, felt myself just a mouthing, grimacing puppet, dully saying the lines I had to, feeling, actually, nothing? Had I not felt myself flat, one-dimensional, just a blurred figure merging into the background? Whereas here, I would stand out, sharp and clear. I would be most emphatically myself. Indu. (158)

Indu reflects on the things she can do. She is worried about making the best decisions, although she knows that the people of this house are so angry with her that no matter how well she thinks about them, their attitude towards her will not change. However, she decides, "I have to carry the burden. And to do that, I have to be hard. If I'm soft, I'll just cave in" (175) and in doing so, she doesn't want to be as stubborn as Akka. Learning from her own experience, she decides, "I would dominate, as much as Akka had ever done, but more discriminately, more judiciously" (158) and, she hopes,

"by doing this, I would (maybe, why not?) free myself of all doubts, all pressures" (159) but whatever decision she would take, she comprehends, "it had to be done with a tranquil spirit and an unperturbed mind" (184). It is a significant development in Indu.

Not only Indu has to come to a conclusion about the problems related to this house, but she herself was also looking for answers to many of her problems— her married life, her career, her relationship with Naren, and her quest 'to be free from all doubts and pressures.' It was a very tough job on her part. However, on the way to reaching a conclusion, she got affected by many catalysts. Old Uncle and Naren were the major two of them.

When Indu gets frustrated by her observation of the family members, Old Uncle tells her that a family is needed even if there are problems. There is no meaning in just being yourself. He inquires, like Naren and Narmada-Atiya, "what do you want?" (115) but Indu could not find any answer. She feels "nothingness in the midst of nothingness" (116). She always wanted to be independent and self-reliant but failed. When Old Uncle tells her that it is impossible to live in isolation because, according to him, "the whole world is made up of interdependent parts" (117). These words of Old Uncle provoke thoughts in detachment-seeking Indu. She, so far, thought that her total commitment to Jayant was shameful. She reflects, "We're always ashamed of our deepest emotions . . . Do I not with Jayant, hide my real emotions and urges behind a facade of caring-but-not-so-terribly-much?" (143-144). She realizes that there is nothing shameful in total commitment, and she should not be ashamed of her love and commitment towards Jayant. It does not make her less of a human being. After interacting with other family members, she begins to realize that there is no such thing as a perfect relationship. People will have faults. Everyone does. Therefore, adjustment is required. So, she no longer wants to think about her "ideal of detachment" (118) because we are all dependent on one another and interconnected. She wanted love and care, but no emotional bond was formed with Naren. Naren only works as the outlet for Indu's physical dissatisfaction and mental anguish. The relationship does not move beyond that. Indeed, she did not have to pretend with Naren, but Naren was not easily affected by anything. It was his nature. On the other hand, Jayant becomes shattered with anything unwanted. On the one hand, she cannot be open to Jayant; on the other hand, she does not need to pretend with

Naren. Indu wants everything in one but is unable to get it. That is one of her major dilemmas, but now she understands that everything cannot be found in one. Now, the most important thing is that she loves Jayant, not Naren. She realizes that Naren could "never be anyone's beloved or husband" (9). He loves detachment, whereas Indu now wants involvement, and that is why, when Naren sees his future with Indu, Indu finally decides to leave him, saying, "No, Naren, I am going home" (189). Indu decides to go back home, that is, to Jayant to give him or themselves a second chance. She decides that she, pretending and hiding her real emotions for so long for whatever the reasons are, will come out of it and present her "true self" (188) to Jayant. She will face him with honesty because, according to her, it is not possible to build a life on the foundation of dishonesty. However, she decides not to tell her husband about her relationship with Naren and justifies it by saying, "For that was not important. That had nothing to do with the two of us and our lives together" (205). In Indian society, having an extramarital affair is an unforgivable social offense. Marriages break up only on that ground, but Deshpande has not given it that much importance! What kind of honesty is that? Is Deshpande here influenced by the western version of a free-sex society? Is she advocating that to modern Indian women? However, this version of the honesty of Deshpande's protagonist is questionable, and it is an unrealistic characterization of Indu in a 1980 Indian social reality. Although he gets rejected, Naren does not drag it any further. Indu did not know what she wanted in her life for so long, but after coming to this house, interacting with different members of the family and situations, she finally realizes what she wants— "To live without fear . . . fear of being unloved, misjudged, mis-understood, displeasing. Without the fear of failure" (191). Her "ideal of detachment" (118) that she nurtured inside for so long, after Naren's death, seeing his dead body, strongly comprehends, she no longer wants detachment because she now thinks, "Detachment . . . it was for the dead, not the living" (205).

Before returning home, after thinking deeply, she decides not to spend any money on this house. She also decides to finance Mini's wedding. Although this house bears many memories of its own, Indu's major point in making this decision is that it has almost expired its lifetime, and the environment or the inter-personal relationships of the family members of the house have already been rotted. Family members' lack of respect for each other, insulting comments about the older members, deceptiveness, and excessive

greed for money have disappointed Indu. They, "this large, amorphous group of people with conflicting interests" (115), only weigh their own pockets without considering themselves as a member of a joint family. She understands that there is no need to protect this house because everyone is busy with their calculations, "So many itching palms" (143). Akka had kept everyone in check so far, and it was a very tough job. Indu now understands why Akka had to be so strict. However, a buyer named Shankarappa buys the house to build a hotel in its place. Along with the house, the "champak tree" (201), reminiscent of Indu's childhood, will also be uprooted. Indu gets very upset to hear that there will be no stumps and remnants of the tree. She then recollects a song sung by Naren, "*If you will do it, o Lord, this dead stump will sprout again*" (202), but, here, there will even be no stump left. So, will everything lose its existence in this way? However, instantly she realizes, "If not this stump, there is another. If not this tree, there will be others. Other trees will grow, other flowers will bloom, other fragrances will pervade other airs" (202). Life appeared to her anew, "It was like being let into a great secret. I felt as if I was watching life itself . . . endless, limitless, formless and full of grace" (202). P. Ramamoorthy observes, "Through the image of the tree, Deshpande suggests that Indu has learnt to see not only her life full of possibilities for growth and grace . . . but the very meaning of Life itself."³⁴ Naren's words helped Indu a lot to make this decision. Naren's words about Akka's actions, decisions, beliefs and leadership qualities influences Indu's views. Observing everything, Indu now understands Akka's behavior and so, she also follows Akka. She knows she cannot be soft. She has to be a strong one and be as firm as Akka in her decision too. So she does not want to think or be upset about this house anymore because, she thinks, this house has served its purpose, and there is no benefit in getting emotional. It is the law of nature. Moreover, she tells herself, "why weep for a house, when so much more is being destroyed every day?" (204). This decision frees her from some of her severe crises.

After deciding on the house, Indu decides to return to her own house, to Jayant. Jayant's home seems to be her home too, and it makes sense for her to return there because, in her words, "To think otherwise would be to take the coward's way again" (205). Although her and Jayant's relationship

³⁴Qtd. in Akhter Banu, *Shashi Deshpande and Women's World* (New Delhi: Global Research Publications, 2011), 48.

seemed to be "restricting bond" (205) and tormenting to her for so long, she now realizes that she was also responsible for creating her torment. From now on, she decides to face all situations with her honest self and will see "if that home could stand the scorching touch of honesty" (205). She also comes to conclusions about other matters, which she decides to tell Jayant in loud and clear words,

That I was resigning my job. That I would at last do the kind of writing I had always dreamt of doing. That I would not, could not enrich myself with Akka's money. That I would, on the other hand, pay for Mini's wedding. (205)

She further decides that she will not spend Akka's money on anyone else in the family. Instead of it, she will establish a trust for people like Vithal though she is well aware that Akka herself would not have wanted that. However, Indu is not Akka. She is Indu, and to her, "It is not the dead who need our loyalty, but the living" (13). This time, Indu also decides that there would be no chance for Jayant's words to change her mind like before. Thus a new Indu is born. Like the Noras of the West, this Indu does not seek a solution by leaving the family; instead, staying within the system, she starts trying to find a solution maintaining her existence and identity intact. Indu, who wanted to adorn her life with the touch of modernity by breaking down the traditional customs, came to know from Old Uncle, the adherent of Indian traditions, "There have to be some rules so that life can have both dignity and grace. We can always find measures of freedom within these rules" (16). At a young age, these words seemed meaningless to Indu, but after the recent death of Old Uncle, Indu can understand the meaning of those words. She is now ready to accept the words of Old Uncle and realizes that one can find freedom even by remaining within the rules of a system. She reflects, "Can't I find freedom within this circle?" (16). She is ready to give it a try. Thus a radical change took place in Indu. Instead of the "theories" (205) that have so far given birth to her "crusading spirit" (16), she wants to build her life by giving priority to reality. She no longer cries out, "I want to be loved, I want to be happy" (14) because she now knows that happiness exists in small moments and things, not in crying for getting things. She learns as her life lesson that all things are interconnected and "Freedom has to be relative" (15).

It may seem that, with this logic, Deshpande made Indu surrender to existing societal practices; through compromise, she made Indu as common as others; but the profound change that has taken place in Indu's psyche is a great achievement for Deshpande's protagonist. It is not possible to change everything overnight as that happens on the film screens. That is also not the purpose of Deshpande. Like her, her protagonists and other characters are also not residents of an ideal state, but are taken from this real social set-up and their changes have been portrayed in line with reality. The system will change when we change ourselves. There has been a significant change inside Indu. The Indu who went to the old house at the time of Akka's death, and the Indu who returns, are not the same. They are two different beings. The first was only a shadow of a nearly non-existent being, whereas the latter was a conscious individual. Jayant, too, now understands and recognizes the existence of a new Indu and adjusts himself accordingly. Jayant admits to Indu, "Indu, when I first saw you, I thought you were a frail, little creature. Now I know you better. You're indomitable" (5), and now he considers her as the "pillar" (12) of her family. In this way, the story of a family changes where the husband and wife start living under one roof, keeping their identity intact. Bhatnagar opines, "The ethos in the novel is neither of victory nor of defeat but of harmony and understanding between two opposing ideas and conflicting selves."³⁵ In the West, where women find their independent existence mostly through a divorce, Deshpande has presented a great outline of how women can have their freedom and identity not breaking the family ties. Bringing a perfect woman-man relationship overnight is a utopian dream. First, change or awareness must come within oneself. In this way, small units will come together one day and make a big difference. That is where the realism of Deshpande comes into play, and thus a new, confident Indu is born.

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Problematic Public Life for Plus-size Women: A Critical Reading of Select Public Experiences of Roxane Gay from *Hunger: A Memoir of (My) Body*

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Abstract

Roxane Gay's *Hunger: A Memoir of (My) Body* examines the external pressure on a fat woman and also criticizes the manner in which an obese body is socially objectified. Besides telling her own story of weight gain, she gravely identifies different problems of plus-size women in a thin obsessed body-intolerant society. Thus, she unmasks the patriarchal fixations in many social institutions and cultural practices which exploit the idea of thinness destroying the normal life of obese women. This paper's basic interest is to discuss the problematic public life of these women who do not possess a culturally defined 'normal' body centering on selected facts that have contributed to Roxane Gay's life. The paper elaborates on strange public reactions, ill-treatments in public spaces and fat shaming in media which are distressful but regularly visible in the life of fat women. Presenting the notion of body positivity as an antithesis to thin obsession, the paper aims to conclude that only by creating a mentality to accept diverse body types, may the social and cultural challenges involved in an obese woman's life be answered.

Keywords: Fat, Fat shaming, Thin obsession, Body-intolerant society, Body positivity

Introduction

Female body → Black Female Body → Fat Female Body → Black Fat Female Body– putting more adjectives of this kind before a female body enhances the level of distress a woman has to experience in a fixed body-intolerant society. Roxane Gay describes her distress in her book *Hunger: A Memoir of (My) Body* putting herself in the last category of the flowchart. Once weighing 577 pounds, she surpasses even the common notion of a 'fat' body in a regular body-intolerant society and therefore, experiences all kinds of sufferings in an

extreme manner. Though she has had Ivy League school education, a Ph.D. from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, professorship in three of the world-famous universities, and an amazing success as a creative and prose writer, ultimately, she is a 'very fat black female body' to the society. Her being raped at a young age, being bullied at school, continuous external pressure on her body development lead her life towards a trauma about which she remains silent before publishing the current book in 2017. The deliberate inclusion of a first bracket in the title is quite crucial as with this she seems to be indicating that the book is not merely a narration of a sad story of her personal life but the story of many who are 'unable' to fulfill the social consideration of a 'normal' body. Most importantly, besides telling her story, Gay critically observes the objectification of a female body and identifies some social and cultural factors which construct the notion of an 'ideal female body'. By "challenging the toxic cultural norms that dictate far too much of how women live their lives and treat their bodies", Gay is advocating the notion of body positivity which breaks the notion of an ideal female body and invites body tolerance (Gay 303).

This paper points out the problem of intolerance in the social and cultural factors such as public communication, public spaces, media machination which, according to Roxane Gay, both establish and practice the notion of an ideal female body stigmatizing the life of those who do not fit into the common standard. The intention is to concentrate on Roxane Gay's public experiences which may give an overall idea about the regular calamities in an oversize woman's life focusing on the notion of 'body positivity' which hopes to build a society that has no fixed mentality regarding an 'ideal body'. Drawing upon the works of Betty Friedan, Naomi Wolf and Megan Jayne Crabbe, the paper first counters 'thin ideal' with 'body positivity'. Secondly, the paper extracts the social and cultural problems in Roxane Gay's life of sufferings because of possessing an 'abnormal' body. Overall, the paper aims to point out why the practice of body-intolerance must be changed.

Thin Ideal vis-à-vis Body Positivity

Female beauty and body standards have not always been the same. It is observed that big and healthy female bodies used to be considered ideal in the older periods keeping fertility and agricultural work involvement of

women in mind (Petty). With the arrival of 'corset' as a part of female garment by the middle of the 16th century, thin waist along with a plump hip as female beauty standard seems to be first identified. However, the corset fashion remains within the boundary of aristocrat women because "beauty as we understand it was not, for ordinary women, a serious issue in the marriage marketplace" (Wolf 14). Till then, having a 'beautiful' face may give ordinary women a plus point but still is not a 'requirement' or a significant factor for marriage. But with the "upheaval of industrialization", and the rise of living standard and literacy, "a new class of literate, idle women developed" who are not expected to tolerate the enforced labor of domesticity for long (Wolf 14). Therefore, 'beauty myth' is introduced as a new form of exploitation. The trick is simple: making women busy with housework is replaced by making them busy with beauty work. In this way, it becomes easy to ensure less or no participation of women in the greater social and political activities. Capitalism succeeds in creating the idea that being beautiful is a necessity to achieve success. The purpose of this establishment is economic. Both fair-skin and thinness have great business possibilities as Megan Jayne Crabbe points out, "What better way to make money than to make half the world feel ugly and then sell them the solution?" (9). Women are pushed to achieve these two (fair skin and thin body) as their most precious trophies through magazines, advertisements, and other platforms ensuring the fall of the second wave feminism. "The image of woman that emerges from this big, pretty magazine is young and frivolous, almost childlike; fluffy and feminine; passive; gaily content in a world of bedroom and kitchen, sex, babies and home" writes Betty Friedan before Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth* (23). Wolf would argue that though women succeed in coming out of home, capitalism hands them the beauty myth that has similar thoughts about the physical beauty of women to the thoughts of Friedan. Women who advanced disobeying patriarchal feminine mystique started following the beauty standard set by the same patriarchal society. Wolf explains, "A cultural fixation on female thinness is not an obsession about female beauty but an obsession about female obedience" (187). Women continue obeying the thin ideal vigorously.

The consequence of the establishment of the myth is the generation of feminine "hallucination" which is the central contention of the paper (Wolf 17). Wolf names two types of hallucinations: "The Iron Maiden" and "The Caricature of Ugly Feminist" (17-18). The Iron Maiden is an old German

torture weapon but it has the look of a “smiling young woman” (Wolf 17). Nowadays, the same torture weapon is worn by women, only it is called the beauty myth. Dieting culture is appreciated among women though “[i]nto the 1930s medical experts stated that nature intended women to be plump” and their overweight is “caused by glands, not by food intake” (Vester 55). Still, a woman lives her days being half-fed, continues a shrinking diet and performs everything to lose weight just to be the ‘best’ version of herself which seems to be a “flawless, unblemished, ideal” thin body (Crabbe 2). No matter that continuous running in the treadmills ‘immobilizes’ their knees or the peculiar low diet starves them, a ‘beautiful thin woman’ must smile outside. The problem is that more than health consciousness the idea of beauty is leading towards such practice. It is like “chasing the impossible” (Crabbe 7). Or one can ‘save’ oneself by being an ‘ugly’ feminist as Wolf portrays their body: “a big masculine woman, wearing boots, smoking a cigar, swearing like a trooper” (18). They are much similar to Lois Tyson’s “violent, aggressive, worldly, monstrous” bad girls (89). The concept also reminds of the story shared in an article by Kathryn Pauly Morgan where “an ugly duckling” morphs into “a Swan” using the ugly duckling as a symbol for a fat girl who is ‘unfit’ for the beauty standard and who has the biggest dream to be like a Swan that stands for thin-figured white women (190). The idea of thinness has, therefore, become a social disease. On top of that, if a fat woman is also black, she must be racially ‘othered’ as Roxane Gay writes, “Fat, much like skin color, is something you cannot hide” (120). Hence, a fat black woman like her is to face a three-dimensional challenge in the entire life: body, gender, and race.

The notion of body positivity, on the contrary, fights against the challenges mentioned above and attempts to establish “broader definitions of beauty that include diverse body types” (Gay 17). Crabbe too gives one such definition that body positivity is “the counter-culture to fatphobia and thin obsession, it was created as an alternative to buying into the messages that keep us small and at war with our bodies” (76). From her definition, it is clear that the root of the movement is in the fat acceptance movement started in 1967 with Lew Louderback’s *Saturday Evening Post* article “More People should be Fat” (Domenico). Body positivity as a theory seems to be one step ahead of fat acceptance as the former includes all body types:

obese, skinny, tall, short, deformed, black, white, brown, yellowish and so on in its radar and tries to introduce acceptance for all of them in an anti-fat or anti-skinny fixed body-intolerant society. The movement tries to encourage the idea of loving one's body just the way it is rather than growing up in shame and not enjoying life. The book "Embody: Learning to Love Your Unique Body" published in 2014 by Connie Sobczak encourages acceptance of diversity and proposes 5 core competencies: reclaim health, practice intuitive self-care, cultivate self-love, declare your own authentic beauty, build community, to help a person 'othered' and 'discouraged' by a body intolerant society ("The Five Competencies"). Lady Gaga's *Body Revolution*, Caitlin Stasey's *Herself*, Tess Holiday's #effyourbeautystandards, Odessa Cozzolino's *My Body Gallery*, Megan Jayne Crabbe's *Body Positive Power*, Sonya Renee Taylor's *My Body is Not an Apology*, Plus Model Magazines #celebratemysize are some of the most influencing sources in contemporary Body Positive movement. Many of these sources are platforms where fat people share their photos which are considered 'shameful' in the fixed body intolerant society. The idea is to eradicate the long practiced taboo and to redefine body and beauty standard regardless of gender, race, sexuality, deformity, etc.

"It's a lot of Weight to Bear": Observing Select Incidents in Roxane Gay's Life

A woman who weighs 577 pounds has to bear both a literal and metaphorical weight in a body-intolerant society. Her body is a public discussion, a thing to be shamed, a problem that needs advice, a thing to be pitied upon, a source of fun, an object to be stared at, an unfit entity in public spaces and so on. This invisible social weight hurts a woman far more than the actual weight she bears. In the following, incidents which produce this second kind of unbearable weight for Roxane Gay are discussed.

Fat and Different Reactions

When someone is fat, people give diverse types of reactions regularly. Getting 'misgendered' and ignorance are common reactions. Some reactions are without words - only expressions, some are sugary words of pretension, some are jokes and some are direct words of humiliation. All these certainly hurt the receivers.

"My fat body empowers people to erase my gender", writes Roxane Gay in *Hunger* (256). She describes how very often she is mistaken as a man and addressed as "Sir" (256). She also gives reasons for which this confusion of gender may happen. She has a six feet tall body that wears mostly men's clothes. Her weight is so visible that most of the people do not bother to notice her face, her plump chest or her stylized hair. Moreover, she is black and "black women are rarely allowed their femininity" (256). People's common reaction is that her fat and black body is "breaking the unspoken rules of what a woman should look like" (171). The rules are of course the rules of the beauty myth discussed earlier and it seems for fat women they have harsher applications. Collectively, the current world is practicing very "narrow ideas about femininity" (256).

The mistake of gender identification is referring to the problems of cultural association. First of all, the regular assumption is that a six feet tall and fat body is a 'masculine' body, a woman cannot have such a body. Therefore, it is not 'necessary' to look at the face to identify gender. It also proves the idea that people see what they want to see. Despite having a very much noticeable body, women like Roxane Gay are not 'visible' enough to get people's attention. People may very easily think that this 'misgendering' is not a grave mistake but the depth of humiliation created by their 'not so grave' mistake is unfathomable. The humiliation is quite revealing when Gay writes, "I am large, but I am a woman. I deserve to be seen as such" (256). Her kind of body "should be treated or considered with care" but unfortunately caring is not a common practice (256).

Fat women are not only misgendered but also belittled. Gay shares one of her experiences of attending an event as the keynote speaker when not many photos of her were available online:

At one event, a gathering of librarians, a man asked if he could help me and I said, "Well, I am the keynote speaker." His eyes widened and his face reddened and he stammered, "Oh, okay, I'm the man you're looking for." He was neither the first person nor will be the last to have such a reaction. People don't expect the writer who will be speaking at their event to look like me. They don't know how to hide their shock when they realize that a reasonably successful writer is overweight. These reactions hurt, for so many reasons. They illustrate how little people think of fat people, how they assume we are neither smart nor capable if we have such unruly bodies. (264)

The stare of surprise reveals the long-practiced fixation regarding fat people. They see fat people as incapable of any achievement. They are physically unfit which is why the common assumption is that they are also mentally or intellectually unqualified. If somebody becomes 'different' which is the case with Roxane Gay, they deserve 'such a reaction' of 'shock'. But it is usually not understood that their 'shocks', their quick assumptions hurt, humiliate and deteriorate the mental health of the receivers.

When it comes to clothing for which fat women can be misgendered, do the oversized women like Gay have many options? Fat people overall (not specifying any gender) have "a mere handful of stores" to buy clothes from though America treats obesity as a major problem which means there is an increasing number of oversize people (Gay 178). It is very sad that a big portion of citizen's clothing, a basic human right, is not ensured. And when only women are concerned, showing good statistics Gay points out that plus size women do not get their desired clothing and are bound to look for options in men's clothing as plus-size men have "a few more choices" (179). Hence an angry voice from Gay appears, "I am angry that the fashion industry is completely un-willing to design for a more diverse range of human bodies" (180). Apart from the lack of options, Gay's being raped at a very young age leads her to wear men's clothes throughout her twenties so that she feels 'safer'. But with time when Gay finally decides not to continue with her body fortress mentality, she can only long for the clothes she truly wants. So, in every sense, Gay is wearing men's clothes not because she wants or enjoys them on her body rather she is bound to wear them. However, this fact of oversize clothe scarcity is never in the mind of people who are misgendering while communicating with a fat woman. The society that does not care about the needs of fat women, also never leaves an opportunity to be harsh on them.

Gay writes about her experience of meeting a young girl and her mother in a store where the girl is very upset because no cloth in the store fits her and the mother treats "her in quite a humiliating manner" because it is the girl's 'fault', not the store's (180). This scenario is very "familiar and painful" to Gay since she and her mother have been in similar situations (181). Identifying herself with the young girl, Gay becomes very emotional because she knows "the world", she lives "in it too" (181). Gay writes, "I've been that girl, too big for the clothes in the store, just trying to find

something, anything, that fits, while also dealing with the commentary of someone else who means well but can't help but make pointed, intensive comments" (181). The young girl and Gay both know that "there's no shelter or safety or escape from the cruel stares or comments" (181). This is not just a story of a bad day for the young girl or Gay. One day, the girl is very much likely to disappear somewhere in the world having no self-confidence and being disallowed to live a happy life. Very few women are as brave as Roxane Gay to embrace pains and be strong enough to make a successful name. Even if they succeed, they are first identified by their body.

Along with the shocking nonverbal reactions from people, there is also the verbal pretensions from others who try to be good by denying the fact of fatness in someone:

They will say things like, "Don't say that about yourself," because they understand "fat" as something shameful, something insulting, while I understand "fat" as a reality of my body. When I use the word, I am not insulting myself. I am describing myself. These pretenders will lie, shamelessly, and say, "You have such a pretty face," or "You're such a nice person," as if I cannot be fat and also possess what they see as valuable qualities. (Gay 201)

It is very insulting for a fat woman to be considered that she is not aware of her physical appearance and it is even more disgraceful to jump into a conclusion that someone fat is ashamed of the reality. These types of pretension also remind of the long-practiced fixation in a body intolerant society: someone fat needs sympathy, someone fat may feel 'good' if they are told that they are not fat or someone fat needs to be emphasized with some valuable qualities which hide the fact that they are fat. This behavior is an example of hypocrisy and of course, does not possess any mental help for a fat woman.

Then, there are those fat jokes which are constant companions for fat people. Gay shares that as "a cultural critic" whenever she writes something on Twitter or anywhere regardless of what she says, her "weight is discussed" (267). In one post, Gay shares her love for tiny baby elephants and immediately, there are "elephant jokes" intending to mean she is the elephant of the joke (267). In another case when she posts that "the Swedes had their own version of *The Biggest Loser*", someone promptly says that Gay is the "American export for the show" (267). The reality that people get sick pleasure while making such jokes is evident here. The joke has many other options to name a fat woman such as "a pig, fat pig, cow, snow cow,

fatty, blimp, blob, lard ass, tub of lard, fat ass, hog, beast, fatso, buffalo, whale... two tons of fun" etc. (Gay 143). How cruel and humiliating they sound when they make such jokes is incredible. There is also an intimate relationship between success and humiliation for the fat people, "The more successful I get, the more I am reminded that in the minds of a great many people I will never be anything more than my body. No matter what I accomplish, I will be fat, first and foremost" (268). This reminder is given because many seem to believe fat people dare not give any opinion, should not raise their voice, and should not behave like a regular human. They are a matter of 'joke' and should remain as such.

Incredibly, there are occasions when people do not give shocking expressions, do not bother to hide their opinions, or do not try to cover the reality with funny intonation, rather directly attack and despise fat people. Gay shares one such incident:

When I am walking down the street, men lean out of their car windows and shout vulgar things at me about my body, how they see it, and how it upsets them that I am not catering to their gaze and their preferences and desires. I try not to take these men seriously because what they are really saying is, "I am not attracted to you. I do not want to fuck you." (188)

In plain hindsight, this is fat shaming at its worst. Forgetting that a fat person is also a human being, they just see a body which must become less to please the 'gazes' of the bullies. This is brutality and insanity at the same time, yet Gay 'tries' not to take these men or these matters 'seriously'. She is expected to be silent when somebody is literally uttering such vulgarities publicly. What else can she do except being silent? Any reaction from her end may bring her more problems and disgrace from those men. This is in no way tolerable, yet these are "real, constant and rather pointed" (Gay 188). Continuous experiences such as these may also lead her to think that she is the problem, not the men who are taunting her. This is how fat persons get broken inside.

Being Fat in Public Spaces

When someone is fat, they get completely strange and sometimes horrible experiences in public spaces such as walking streets, airports, meeting places, seminars or any place shared by common people. The sense of space is traumatic for the fat people as they are always reminded by others that they are taking more space than 'normal'. Therefore, they become

“hyperconscious” in these areas (171). The following discusses Roxane Gay’s experiences in public spaces.

“My body receives no respect or consideration or care in public spaces. My body is treated like a public space” writes Gay after describing how she is “shoved”, “brushed and bumped against”, “run into” public spaces (208). It seems that the people, who constantly remind fat people that they are fat or big, do not keep the fact in mind while walking beside a fat person in a public space. It is a common manner to try to avoid physical contact while walking and usually extra politeness is shown by a male person while walking beside a lady. But a fat body excludes the thought of both gender and politeness from people. Gay writes that her “highly visible” figure gets “invisible” in these situations (208). More horrible is that they seem to be indifferent about the shoving or stepping on a fat person’s feet as if “fat inures” people like Gay “from pain” or they “deserve pain, punishment for being fat” (208). All these very unfriendly and aggressive behavior from people make Gay’s sense of space very nervous. She thinks her taking up space, even when she is not, troubling for others. It seems as if she were taking up spaces in someone’s personal property and thus, inviting angry remarks. The fear and a sense of shame do not let her walk properly, “I walk at the edge of sidewalks. In buildings I hug the walls. I try to walk as quickly as I can” (171). Her broken mental state is clear when she writes, “The bigger you are, the smaller your world becomes” (210). This thought of Gay speaks of fat people’s displacement in public spaces. This displacement is created because she/they is/are constantly being ‘othered’.

Traveling by air may give fat people the most horrible public experience. Gay writes that it starts with the stares which begin right after a fat person enters the airport. Those stares “make it plain that they do not want to be sitting “next” to the fat person and hate the idea of getting touched by an obese body (Gay 210). The impression reminds one of an old Hindu caste system that describes low-caste people as “untouchable: any kind of body-contact may ruin the sanctity of the superior caste” (Subedi and Sultana 19). Here, with Gay, the thinner people’s reactions have similar superior-inferior binary. Getting touched while traveling is undesirable and getting touched by a fat flesh is despicable. Gay also writes about “the visible, palpable, shameless” look of relief in people if they find that they are not seated next to her (210). Nobody is decent when it comes to

situations like these. Both their stares and looks of relief describe the long-exercised fixations in a body-intolerant society.

Sitting arrangements in planes for the plus-size passengers have been a hot topic for debate for quite a long time. "Airlines", as Gay points out, "prefer that obese people buy two tickets" (210). Some airlines are giving "options" to the fat people that they may buy a business class ticket or they are asked to buy two tickets with a compensation policy if there are seats available (Hewitt). In no way, do the fat people have the certainty to be able to travel like any other regular traveler. Hence, every policy clearly promotes the idea that getting fat is a curse, and overweight invites punishments as literally they are paying the 'price' for having extra weight. Also, there is a tendency to shrink seats to accommodate more people in one flight by many airlines (Hewitt). Therefore, airlines as public spaces are curtailing public service and finally, making the public life of fat people miserable.

Buying two tickets too may not be a solution for fat people. Gay shares her experience that most of the airline employees have little idea about what to do if someone has two tickets. It seems that the scan officers get confused when they have to scan two boarding passes for a single person, the crew inside the plane may have similar confusion and have to be told several times that both the seats are for one person. This showcases a clear unprofessional attitude from the airlines that make different policies for fat people but do not train the people involved. Gay also mentions "an unnerving hypocrisy" among people who tend to take up space from the extra seat bought by a fat person (211). The same person swears "hell" if gets touched (211). It is common human nature to try to have "both ways" but many of the aspects in this common human nature (e.g. respect) do not apply for fat people since they are 'not' considered as common people (211). Gay shares her experience of occasional "petty humiliations and nuisances" because she asks for a seat belt extender but the attendants do not pay attention and when they do, she feels humiliating since everyone starts staring (211). It is like forcing everyone to notice that there is a fat woman sitting nearby. A little care from the attendants can be very helpful for the fat people as they are tender in mind. But as mentioned earlier, caring is very often missing even from those whose 'responsibility' is to take care of others.

Gay mentions how she has to struggle with chairs in the seminars, book-talks, or any event where she is invited. Chairs which are trivial things

for many may create unbearable situations for people like Gay. Gay shares her anxiety, “What Kind of chairs will I find? Will they have arms? Will they be sturdy? How long will I have to sit in them? If I do manage to wedge myself between a chair’s narrow arms, will I be able to stand up on my own?” (202-203). Every question speaks of the panic Gay bears constantly. While in her mind all these terrible questions dominate, people who have invited her, simply give a regular size chair because other people just “never think of how” a person like Gay takes up “space differently” than others (204). She describes this struggle with chairs in front of people as an “unspoken humiliation” and the indifference from the organizers as “casual cruelty or willful ignorance” (203).

To understand how inconsiderate people can be, Gay’s New York event for one of her bestsellers *Bad Feminist* is a befitting example. In that event, Gay with some fellow authors is asked to take a seat on the stage. The stage being “two or three feet off the ground and no staircase leading to it” makes a huge difference between Gay and other writers (264). While every other person “climbed onto the stage” without any stress, Gay in no way could do the same (264). She describes those “five excruciating minutes” when she vainly tried to follow others making “hundreds of people” her audience who “stared awkwardly” (264-265). Finally, she could climb with the help of Ben Greenman who was already on stage but the “self-loathing of an intense degree” gives her company “for the next several days” and often the feeling comes back as “flashbacks” (265). The suffering continues when she finds a very small wooden chair given for her which “cracked” and with huge panic and fear of humiliation, Gay “squats” for the “next two hours” (265). She comes back with shredded thigh muscles and sobbed feeling “worthless and embarrassed” (265). She feels angry and “utterly alone” in her battle with constant calamities like this (266). It is, therefore, not very surprising when Gay mentions that she does not go to theatre though she loves theatre having been a part of it from school days, she skips many classes just because she cannot sit on a chair that has an armrest, she avoids many social gatherings because she is unsure about sitting arrangements making people think that she is unsocial which is not true at all, and she has to make long research on the chairs before going to a restaurant and of course she cannot go everywhere because of her negative findings from the research though she is a great food lover (203-

204). All these doors are shut for Gay because she is overweight. Again, the form of 'displacement' from social life is evident.

Fat and Media Machination

Media promotes the idea that fat is a disease, a filthy one as it 'harms' a person's inside organs as well as outside appearance. Some reality shows arrange big prize-money trophies in weight-losing contests which establish the very idea that fat loss is the biggest achievement in a fat person's life. TV commercials continuously promote the idea that happiness lies in losing weight. Gay mentions a number of reality shows and commercials that exploit the idea of weight-losing and shame fat people, especially women, publicly. The focus is on fat people but "that focus is glaring, harsh, often cruel" (Gay 126). The following elaborates on the observation of Gay.

The first reality show, Gay mentions, is *The Biggest Loser* which is "an unholy union of capitalism and the weight-loss industrial complex. On the surface, *The Biggest Loser* is a television show about weight loss, but really, it's anti-obesity propaganda" (126). The pun-intended title itself reveals the tendency of both fat shaming and an intention to capitalize on the idea. Apart from declaring trophies for the successful weight losers, the show is identifying the fat people as the biggest 'losers' in their physical, individual and social life because of being overweight and also the show is 'allowing' all these 'biggest losers' to make their 'miserable' life changed. So, in both senses, this is "a show about fat as an enemy that must be destroyed, a contagion that must be eradicated" (Gay 128). The show makes "the spectacle of the contestants pushing themselves in inhuman ways – crying and sweating and vomiting – visibly purging their bodies of weakness" (127). The screening of the actions is deliberately done to create disgust against fat people. It is also an enforcement of brutal punishment on screen justifying the very idea that fat people 'deserve' the sort of punishment. After watching this show, it will not be surprising if someone nurtures the opinion that fat people are meant to be punished both physically and mentally. This show is justifying all those earlier discussed public harassments Gay has gone through.

Gay also mentions another show titled *Fit to Fat to Fit* which is "hell-bent on exploitation" (131). In this show, "trainers gain weight so they can better empathize with their clients" (131). Then through the period of the show, the trainers lose weight along with their participants. It seems that the

idea is to strengthen the comparison culture by establishing the theory that if the trainers can gain weight and lose, the fat people can at least lose weight. But this idea is vague as the professional trainer's impeccable body and their way of maintaining it has never been the same as those of the fat people. Therefore, how beneficial the effect of the process on two different body types will be is uncertain. Nevertheless, the selling of the weight gain and weight loss narrative to the viewers is a success and there comes the nature of capitalism: the program needs to be sold regardless of people's welfare. Another show called *Revenge Body* is also very disturbing since here "participants get revenge on someone who has wronged them by losing weight and getting into shape" (Gay 132). It feels that the message or cure is self-punishment for the fat people. Then, how is it a revenge? Gay elaborates, "The very premise of the show suggests that if you're fat, the people who have wronged you are probably gloating and reveling in your circumstances" (132). Hence, the show is asking to make a quick reaction to the comments made by the bullies and thereby, justifying their bad words on fat people. Another show called *My 600-lb Life* gives weight-loss surgery as the solution to fat which is "a pitiable spectacle" (132). The show performs the surgery on screen making "gratuitous display" of all the parts of the fat body, all "the mounds of flesh", and as the surgeries are "graphic", the viewers watch "insides, globules of fat being shoved aside by medical instruments" (133). The show is sold by making the surgeries like a performance of a stage drama or a movie. Thus, more disgust against the obese people is created. The show humiliates obese people in the name of healing.

Gay also points out the encouragement of "self-loathing" through the "endless parade of commercials about weight-loss products and diet foods" (135). All commercials have the same message that fat people are not happy in their individual lives and the solution is "satisfying their hunger with somewhat repulsive food" (135). Gay finds the idea of eating "fat-free yogurt and 100-caloric snack packs" as "a powerful lie" since being happy with the kind of food recommended by the commercials is not possible (135). Yet, the lie is "damn convincing" because "the weight-loss industry thrives", everybody has the "hunger" to get rid of their obese body (135). This reminds of Naomi Wolf's concept of 'the Iron Maiden'. Perhaps, no woman is happy in the process of weight-loss and dieting but everyone maintains the smile pretending to be happy just like the Iron maiden. For example, Gay mentions one ad where Jessica Simpson says, "I started losing weight right away. I started smiling right

away” (136). In another commercial, Jennifer Hudson “shrieks about her newfound happiness and how, through weight loss – not, say, winning an Oscar – she achieved success” (Gay 136). In a nutshell, the message is women’s happiness lies in getting slim: a fat woman cannot be a happy woman. The desire for weight-loss is almost being considered “a default feature of womanhood” which is unacceptable and showing an insane nature of patriarchal, body-intolerant, fixed mentality.

Conclusion

Roxane Gay’s memoir is an ideal example to understand the sufferings of an obese woman and the incidents mentioned above clearly indicate that public life means a life of humiliation for a fat woman. The root of her problems lies in the society’s ‘thin obsession’. Just because the culture favors one body type, all these pathetic incidents are regular realities in a plus-size woman’s life. The ‘thin ideal’ is everywhere: in the media, books, commercials, movies, posters, etc. Body positivity is aiming at eradicating the obsession taking measures such as Instagram modeling photos and videos of plus-size women. It is the public eyes which must be changed to give fat people normal life. If the public eyes become body positive, no Roxane Gay will experience the reaction of shock. If the current society becomes a bit more kind, no fat woman will be denied their femininity. If society allows every ‘body’ in its radar of normal bodies, there will be no fat jokes or pretensions of sympathy. There will be no verbal or nonverbal attack on an obese body. There will be the right clothes to wear for fat women. There will be body-tolerant public vehicles. There will be no fat shaming indirectly or directly in public spaces. Nobody will treat a fat woman / person as a liability only if the culture becomes body positive.

In 1967, Louderback boldly wrote against the fat intolerant environment, in 1991, Naomi Wolf firmly objected to the beauty myth, but still in 2017, Roxane Gay had to write the memoir of her body because even 50 years after Louderback’s writing, the society is not changed. Thinness is still a great obsession. The life of fat women or fat persons, in general, is in the same or worse kind of miseries. Body positivity can counter the obsession and bring change to the cultural calamities of fat people. For that more obese ‘body’ possessors like Gay need to show “the ferocity” of their “hunger” and speak aloud to revel in “freedom” (Gay 304).

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Spiral of Violence in Human History and Seamus Heaney's Articulation of it in Terms of the Irish Troubles

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Abstract

Violence has become an inseparable part of Ireland and it has been witnessing violent wars, political conflicts, tribal rituals, etc. since prehistoric time. The violent condition has characterized the present day of Ireland also. Being worried about the present troubled situation of Ireland Heaney gives violence a special space in his poetics. He excavates violence out of the soil of Ireland where violence is deeply rooted. Violence along with the tracing of its roots is represented in multiple forms in his poems. In some poems, it appears with historical roots and in some others it becomes ritualistic. Sometimes it is about the past and sometimes it's about the present troubles but the significant thing to notice is that Heaney draws a link between that past and the present. The link that Heaney creates among diverse categories of violence is remarkable in his poems. He establishes this connection using various poetic devices and techniques. One of the most significant facts about Heaney's articulation of violence is that, he conceals his direct political messages in the guise of metaphor, analogy, parable, allusion, and other artistic methods. This paper aims to discuss the ways and techniques through which Heaney articulates violence in his poetry.

Keywords: Violence, Ritualistic, Metaphor, Poetry

The human cost of violence, the loss of wealth, and the destruction of anything positive in human history have baffled many poets of all ages. The Irish poet Heaney faces difficulty in finding an appropriate way to portray the ever-worsening situation of his fatherland. Exploring history he sets out to paint it through suggestion. He articulates violence with the help of literary devices: giving expression to violence in a poetic way, covering it with figurative language and images. To Heaney poetry has a special purpose and he uses it to dismantle the underlying hegemonies of the social structure. He focuses on and draws his materials from the grief and torments of Northern Irish People but his purpose is to heal not their

sufferings only but the world at large through his poetry. It is also true that in a riot stricken place like Northern Ireland poetry cannot remain just as a source of aesthetic pleasure. It becomes a way of representation of the ongoing turmoil. A poet cannot stay neutral in such a condition rather he stands arraigned before political tragedy, and bound to the collective of 'our predicament'."¹

One of the most remarkable techniques Heaney uses in his poems can be called the moving backward technique. He uses this technique at various levels of his poetic career. Moreover, he uses the analogy of ritualistic sacrifice from ancient mythology and connects it with the atrocities of the present time. Through the use of the ancient mythology and history, analogy, metaphors, and religious controversies he pictures the interrelated issues of the intolerant political atmosphere of the time. The use of these devices gives his poems a universal quality. The poems by Heaney do not only confine themselves in addressing the conflicts of the Catholic community of Ulster rather they become the mouthpiece of the universal human predicaments.

Heaney sees the past as a source of information or in his words "personal helicon" and it also turns into a motif in his poems. The wounds of the past serve as a source of inspiration for his creative writing. The reference to the past brutalities gives Heaney a scope to articulate the present intolerance in a forceful way. Heaney believes that past has its influence on the present and the violent past gives birth to the violent present. Heaney uses history in order to understand the root causes that generate the vicious cycle of violence years after years. Heaney is interested in discovering his roots – the history of his land and his origin. In his poetry, he continues his search for roots and examines the present with the help of the past. He believes that to understand the present it is important to place it in the context of the past.

Violence is present not only in the past history and present days but also in the recesses of the human mind. This is one of the most important factors behind the continuation of violence. Many of Heaney's poems bear the trace of the dark history of violence. Roaming through the passages of dark

¹ David Wheatley, "Professing Poetry; Heaney as Critic," *The Cambridge Companion to Seamus Heaney*, Cambridge: UP of Cambridge, p.122-135;125.

history and its myths and rituals Heaney very craftily shows the ferocity and brutality of that time. The most interesting point that Heaney attempts to establish is that violence has never been stopped fully. It is always being continued in different forms. Therefore, the condition of the present world is nothing but a continuation of past atrocities.

Heaney attempts at finding adequate images, symbols, and techniques to represent the predicaments of Ireland, especially the Northern part of Ireland of which he has direct experience. He chooses a unique way to depict the traumas during the 'Troubles.' He does not just directly talk about the violent activities as they are rather he maintains a certain artistic distance from them. He looks for the historical depth in them. Going away from the ongoing conflicts he attaches historical or sometimes cultural meanings to them. It lays bare the truth that violence has its roots not just in present days but also in the past. Therefore, his poems offer a symbolic rendition of the disordered time, adopting various poetic techniques.

Allegory and metaphor are some of the devices that Heaney uses to present violence in his poems. For example, in the poem "Act of Union" the invasion of Ireland by England is projected metaphorically through an act of erotic force. England is represented as the masculine and powerful whereas Ireland is represented as a feminine figure, to be ravished. The dominance of England over Ireland which Ireland cannot resist is explicitly stated in that poem:

I am the tall kingdom over your shoulder
That you would neither cajole nor ignore²

Heaney uses masculine words like "tall kingdom" while describing England which shows England's power over Ireland. This clearly shows the dominant attitude and pride of England. Heaney uses this sexual metaphor to delineate the aggression of England in the name of colonisation. England and Ireland are presented as lovers but their relation has turned into a forced one, not consensual. The metaphor Heaney uses here is a negative metaphor because the relationship is aggressive as well offensive.

² Seamus Heaney, "Act of Union," *New Selected Poems 1966-1987*, London: Faber and Faber, p.74.

The poem reflects the aggression of England over Ireland and the pain it has left over Ireland. Quite aptly Heaney describes the relationship between England and Ireland like a forced sexual relationship between them. Ireland is presented as a feminine character and England as male, and the two countries were seen as lying together:

Your back is a firm line of eastern coast
And arms and legs are thrown
Beyond your gradual hills. I caress
The heaving province where our past has grown.³

Ireland is shown as a maid being raped by a dominant male. She is forced into the compromise that she never wanted. But England confidently rejects such accusation by saying that "Conquest is a lie". England explains that it was not an invasion and Ireland also wanted it as much as England did. The possessive nature of England is revealed when he calls Ireland "half independent shore" and takes pride in possessing her. This is the tale of the aftermath of the colonization. Irish people have to suffer the tragic consequences alone and England enjoys the full advantage of the process. It does not have to suffer from any loss, as it is in the position to control anything.

Heaney starts using myths in his poems to establish a connection between the ancient days' violence and that of the present-day of Northern Ireland, to give a universal dimension to his country's condition. Bog bodies as symbols become a way of representing the trouble-ridden Ireland in Heaney's poetry. He uses bog images as a metaphor to explore Ireland's history throughout his writings. The bog lands provide the understanding of the nation, Ireland as a whole, and also its people. Heaney was inspired to write about the bogland and bog people after reading the book by the Danish archeologist *The Bog People* in 1969. This book of P. V. Glob contains the picture of the bog bodies of those who were killed in the Iron Age for a ritual sacrifice in Jutland.

The images of the bog bodies offer a perfect symbol for the predicament of the ongoing 'Troubles.' The poet believes that a return to the roots of Ireland might provide a solution to the never ending conflicts that have been continuing in the country for years. The bog also provides Heaney with objects for his poetics. Like the "Grecian Urn" of Keats, the bog

³ Ibid., 74.

bodies become symbolic of many hidden stories carved on them. The bog bodies reveal the past, the history of Ireland. They were static and silent in Glove's picture but they get life in Heaney's poems. Heaney like an archeologist searches for the meaning out of them. He includes six bog poems in his poetry collection *North* and those poems describe various bog bodies found in the bog lands in a graphic way.

The bodies found in the bog are described by Heaney as either the victims of ritualistic sacrifice or as victims of any brutal punishment. There are also a number of poems about the bog people and in those poems Heaney draws parallel between the violence of the Iron Age and that of the present age. The poem "Bogland" is also concerned with the aggression which has a link to religion and history and in this poem also Heaney uses the bog metaphor more directly. The past is full of materials from ancient history and mythology and the bog land invites us to search for that. Each layer of the bog is like hidden chapters of history. The bog stands for history and ancient memory where

Every layer they strip
Seems camped on before
The bog holes might be Atlantic seepage
The wet centre is bottomless.⁴

The bogs work as archives for him where the past histories are stored. The depth of the bog is infinite and inexhaustible. The landscape of Ireland is pervaded with thousands years of history which are organized as layers upon layers. The bogs can be seen as a version of visual history and this history appears "dark and deep" just like the bog. Each layer of the land symbolizes various phases of history and also violence of each period. The bog preserves everything that is put in it. Similarly, Heaney thinks that the history of Ireland is preserved like treasures in the bogs. Heaney by "digging" through his pen wants to reveal the layers of history but it is not possible to find out the centre because it is bottomless. Just like the bottomless centre the search of the poet is also endless but it provides the poet with necessary artifacts.

The images of the bog allow Heaney to look into the past. He gains the insight into ancient rituals and its relevance to modern days. There is the

⁴ Seamus Heaney, "Bogland," *New Selected Poems 1966-1987*, op. cit., p.17.

continuation of inhumanity, violence and killings in the present day also. The bogs like the bank preserve all the memories. In "Kinship" Heaney celebrates the boglands as treasure house. He attaches his emotional bond with this land:

I step through origins
like a dog turning
its memories of wilderness
on the kitchen mat.⁵

The ancient ritual of human sacrifice draws Heaney to the origin. He feels affinity with the land and establishes a strange kinship with the past. The bog, which is the storehouse of past memories works as a link between the past and the present.

The body of the Tollund Man reminds us of the sacrifice to the earth goddess Nerthus to ensure the fertility. This ritual is analogized to the sectarian killing of the Irishmen. Heaney compares the modern Ulster to the "old man killing parishes"⁶ of Jutland and thus places the ongoing crisis of Northern Ireland in a mythological framework. The modern civilization could not replace the superstitious sacrifices rather their practices are inherited and being continued under the deceptive civilized surface.

Heaney shows the ritual of violent love-making between the Tollund man and the goddess which was a common tradition in the Iron Age. The victim is a "bridegroom" to the goddess and she

Tightened her torc on him
And opened her fen,
Those dark juices working
Him to a saint's body.⁷

The Tollund man was killed as a ritual sacrifice for the sake of fertility; similarly, the Irish people were being killed for the sake of so called nationalism. And it seems that religion is unfortunately made one of the most important factors behind all the inhumane activities of the past as well as the

⁵ Seamus Heaney, "Kinship," *North*, London: Faber and Faber, p.45.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁷ *Ibid.*

present⁸. The Tollund man became a victim for the religious ritual: for the earth Goddess' demand of a new "bridegroom" each year to carry on the fertilization. On the other hand, the death and destruction that have been taking place in Northern Ireland were also the result of the religious clashes between adherents of two Christian ideologies, the Protestants and the Catholics.

Heaney relates past and present again in "Tollund Man." He searches for the roots of present violence in the violent history of the past. Interestingly, each time he finds his answer in the past. In most of his bog poems Heaney tries to build this relation between the past and the present and he very successfully establishes this perspective to have clear and broader view of things. By doing this he tries to give the sectarian killing of Northern Ireland a universal dimension where many people had been killed in the name of religion, race, and political affiliation.

The grauballe man is another victim of ritual sacrifice delineated in Heaney's poem "The Grauballe Man." The condition of the victim's body reveals the tortures that have been inflicted upon him as a form of "rituals."⁹ The throat of the victim was slit and he was thrown into the bog after the murder. The hooded victim refers to the techniques of torture at the time of interrogation during the 'Troubles' of Northern Ireland. Here also Heaney uses allusions to the ancient myth to establish its relation with the present conflicts. The slashed throat of the victim shows that like the victims of ancient violence the Irish people have been tortured.

The body of the grauballe man establishes a link with the brutality of the British on the Irish people. Heaney draws the parallel of past and present beautifully in this poem. The body of the man is in a sense dehumanized by the poet to symbolize oppression and subjugation to the men and the country itself. He is described more like an animal. The terror and brutality appear to a lesser degree in this poem when we compare it with the other bog poems. The body is depicted beautifully as an artifact. Heaney presents the body artistically against the background of brutal history.

⁸ Religion never instigates violence. The end of all religion is piece. It is the people who misinterpret religion and cause bloodshed in the name of religion.

⁹ These man-made brutal rituals created by the society are most of the time superstitious and cause so many deaths.

The ancient ritual of the Germans to punish the adulteresses by shaving their heads and drowning their bodies with heavy logs or stones is linked with the punishment of IRA given to the women who had any relationship with the British soldiers. In the poem "Punishment" such brutality is graphically traced. Heaney establishes a direct association of the girl's body with the Iron Age victims. He describes the girl's body thus:

I can see her drowned
body in the bog
the weighing stone,
the floating rods and boughs.¹⁰

Heaney's cyclical view of history is evident in this poem. The violent ritual that was being practiced in the ancient time has been continued till today. The girl in "Punishment" is juxtaposed with the "betraying sisters¹¹" who are "cauled in tar/wept by the railings¹²." "A prehistoric body," says O'Brien, "dug out of a bog 'bruished like a forceps baby,' leads to and merges with the image of a girl chained to a railing, shaved and tarred."¹³ This link between the past and the present reveals the darker chapter of human history and its repetition in the succeeding generations. Violence in this poem is shown as a communal act – "tribal, intimate revenge." Ironically it has turned into an integral part of the Irish identity.

The repetitive history of Ireland is again focused on in the poem "Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces." Heaney becomes so affected by the act of murder and corruption that like Hamlet he can smell the rottenness of the state. He is in a sense also poisoned by that very thought:

I am Hamlet the Dane,
skull-handler, parablist,
smeller of rot
in the state, infused
with its poisons¹⁴

¹⁰ Ibid., 71.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Conor Cruise O'Brien, "A Slow North-east Wind: Review of North", Ed. Michael Allen, op.cit., p.25-29,25.

¹⁴ Seamus Heaney, *New Selected Poems 1966-1987*, op.cit., p.60.

To describe the depth of his plight Heaney draws examples from the famous figures of literature. Heaney unmask the rottenness of Irish tradition and culture but confesses that he is not out of that.¹⁵ He is also infected by that rottenness.

It can be said that Heaney is fascinated with the 'Troubles' of his period and he loves to relate it to the past. Death, destruction, and corruption of the present world linked with the past are frequently found in his poems. Being in a situation surrounded with violence, "Heaney is guiltily preoccupied with events in Belfast."¹⁶ He is also affected by the thought of violence and its origins and aftermath, as it becomes a recurrent theme in his poetry. In the poem "Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces" too he delves deep into history, the Viking past, and links it with the present condition of Ireland. The Vikings are described as

killers, haggars
and haggars, gombeen-men
hoarders of grudges and gain.¹⁷

Description of the Vikings in such a way indicates the violent history of the Vikings. At the same time the description returns to the analogy of present atrocities of Northern Ireland in comparison to the past violence and this time the past refers to the Vikings. Considering the present condition of Ireland death is compared to a neighbourly football match where the number of killing was just like scoring goals.

Heaney gives us a deeper message of a society through various symbols, metaphors and images. The Irish tendency towards violence appears in his poems continuously through these devices. The "Bog Queen" is another poem that reveals the never ending pattern of violence and destruction in Ireland. Heaney's most used device of moving backward to the past is also evident in this poem. He has found a connection between Ulster and Ireland's Viking past.

¹⁵ Culture is made of the people and their lifestyle. The people of different community introduce different rituals and sometimes those rituals generate violence. The human sacrifice is one of the violent rituals of ancient Ireland. In this sense, the culture has become rotten.

¹⁶ Eamonn Hughes, "Representation in Modern Irish Poetry," *Seamus Heaney*, p. 78-94;87.

¹⁷ Seamus Heaney, *New Selected Poems 1966-1987*, op.cit., p. 61.

The cyclical view of history that Ireland has not learned from its past is very important here because it is ultimately leading to the massive destruction in the present days. The cycle of destruction never ends. It continues its patterns through generations. Therefore, the violent nature of Ireland is also not new. It has been continued since the ancient time. The bog queen who is a victim of such nature of Ireland will rise one day and take her revenge against the brutal act perpetuated on her. The implication of it is there in the lines:

I lay waiting
Between turf-face and demense wall¹⁸

She is waiting and gathering her energy to be revealed some days but she is suppressed. She is "barbed and stripped". The body of the bog queen signals to the violent rituals of the past that she had to go through. The description of her body reveals how she has suffered. She survived in order to uncover the violence of the past. She survived like the Irish people. The Queen represents Ireland that has been laid under the oppression for centuries. It also unveils the fact that history never dies. It takes its revenge in some way or other. This is clear at the end of the poem where the Queen ultimately rises:

And I rose from the dark,
Hacked bone, skull-ware,
Frayed stitches, tufts¹⁹

To revive the lost culture and history the Irish people should rise again like the bog queen. They need to look back to the past to regain their strength and dignity. The bog queen rises from the long days' oppressions and now will reveal all the injustices and invasion done to Ireland by taking revenge. Ireland has been exploited by England for ages but now the bog queen will pay it back. She warns that she will avenge all the wrongs perpetuated upon her and her people. This also refers to the fact that violence will be once again reappeared and this cycle is never going to be ended.

Heaney strongly disapproves of the continuation of this kind of violence in modern days. Seamus Deane notes the attitude of Heaney in dealing with this mythology:

¹⁸ Ibid.,66.

¹⁹ Ibid.,68.

The sheer atrocity of the old ritual deaths or of the modern political killings is so wounding to contemplate that Heaney begins to show uneasiness in providing it with a mythological surround. To speak of the 'man killing parishes' as though they were and always would be part of the home territory is to concede to violence a radical priority and an ultimate triumph. It is too much.²⁰

Ritualistic murder as a form of sacrifice is again evident in Heaney's "Strange Fruit." It depicts a girl's body preserved in the bogland who was killed as a ritualistic sacrifice for the sake of fertility. Heaney feels sympathy for the decapitated girl whom he calls "the perishable treasure." The girl is

Murdered, forgotten, nameless, terrible
Beheaded girl, outstaring axe
And beatification, outstaring
What had begun to feel like reverence.²¹

The beheaded body of the victim girl reminds readers of the terrible situation of ancient Ireland where human sacrifices were common rituals. The girl's head becomes a monument and it is no more an object of her executioner's axe. It is neither the object of beautification in art by the poet nor the feeling of reverence by the onlookers in the museum. It now transcends all these things. The head of the girl is itself an accusation. It is not only a symbol of the Iron Age rituals and the present day Irish Troubles but also a symbol of the horror of violent activities and death in general. It also embodies the guilt of the murderers and the conscience of those who did not take any action to prevent it. The girl's head transcends all the emotions and is turned into a holy relic that surpasses any interpretations.

The degree of atrocities has been still the same as it was in 2000 years ago. There are some common stocks of brutalities and inhuman activities throughout centuries and they reappear with a new pattern. Heaney asks the historian to form a report on all these issues intensely. He fervently urges them to

Read the inhumed faces
of casualty and victim;
report us fairly,

²⁰ Seamus Deane, "Seamus Heaney: The Timorous and the Bold," *Seamus Heaney*, Ed. Michael Allen, op.cit., p.64-77;70.

²¹ Ibid.

how we slaughter for the common good
 and shave the heads of the notorious,
 how the goddess swallows
 our love and terror.²²

Heaney refers to the inhuman rituals of his tribe and requests the historians to report fairly about everything that is going on in Northern Ireland. The pattern of the past is not changed. Still people pretend to kill one another in the name of wellbeing of their community. Heaney understands that the violence happening in Northern Ireland is just a continuation of the chain that started thousands years ago.

Heaney suggests an end of the cycle of violence through the historical analogy in the poem "Funeral Rite." He imagines the people who are killed in the sectarian murder; they are buried under the hills and laid there peacefully like Gunnar. Heaney uses the reference of the Icelandic Njal's Saga. Gunnar is one of the heroes of the Saga who was killed by his enemies and buried. His death was unavenged but it is believed that he lies peacefully in his grave in spite of it. Heaney considers the victim of the 'Troubles' suffering like Gunnar,

imagining those under the hill
 disposed like Gunnar
 who lay beautiful inside his burial mound,
 though dead by violence
 and unavenged.²³

The mention of Gunner's unavenged deaths demonstrates the fact that there will be no more violence if the tendency towards taking revenge can be checked. This can finally resolve the common problem of the ongoing conflicts.

Heaney signals to Ireland's ancient violent history when he has to welcome the same thing in Northern Ireland in the poem "Whatever You Say Say Nothing." The situation becomes so worse that he wonders "Is there a life before death?"²⁴ The people of Ireland have no way except suffering and enduring their miseries:

²² Seamus Heaney, "Kinship," *North*, op. cit., p.45.

²³ Seamus Heaney, "Funeral Rites," *New Selected Poems 1966-1987*, op.cit., p. 55.

²⁴ *Ibid.*,80.

Competence with pain,
Coherent miseries, a bite and sup,
We hug our little destiny again.²⁵

The last line again suggests the cyclical nature of history. It indicates Ireland's past history of violence and unveils the fact that this kind of situation is not at all new in Ireland rather it is a continuation of the past. The situation of Ireland has scarcely changed. Pain, sufferings, and miseries have become its ultimate destiny.

Analogy is drawn again in the poem "Mycenae Lookout." Heaney employs the analogy between the aftermath of the Trojan War and the aftermath of the civil conflict of Northern Ireland in this poem. The purpose of juxtaposition of the classical and the modern is to evoke the similarity of the ritual of sacrificing between the two. Iphigeneia, the daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra was offered as a sacrifice to the gods for the sake of having some favour from them. Similarly, the bog bodies like the Grauballe man or the Tollund man are also sacrificed to the goddesses for the sake of fertility.

"Mycenae Lookout," a mini-epic poem by Heaney, portrays the effects of violence in society. This poem shows how violence ultimately creates connivance. Out of silence violence emerges and it continues if it remains unchecked. Through the classical story Heaney presents the poem as a direct response to the IRA ceasefire of Northern Ireland on August 1994. Violence demands silence and this silence is the major cause of further violence, creating the spiral of violence. The watchman in the poem remains silent becoming the witness of all the crimes. His connivance gradually pollutes his mind and in his dreams also violence enters:

I'd dream of blood in bright webs in a ford,
Of bodies raining down like tattered meat
On top of me asleep.²⁶

The watchman is possessed by violence and it is the result of his silence. Everyone in society is affected with this characteristic of violence.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Seamus Heaney, "Mycenae Lookout," *The Spirit Level*, London: Faber and Faber, p.35-46;35.

The second section “Cassandra” of the poem “Mycenae Lookout” embodies the sexual aggression done on Cassandra which reminds one of the victim girl of “Punishment.” Both of them suffered because of having sexual relationship. Sexuality and violence appear interconnected and the connection is exposed in the description of Cassandra who seems “camp-fucked/and simple.”²⁷ The description of the girl in “Punishment” parallels with the description of Cassandra, both reflecting the tragic situation of the (female) victims of pathological hatred and violence. Similar to the portrayal of the victim girl in “Punishment” Heaney examines the violence in “Mycenae Lookout” also. He pictures

Her soiled vest,
Her little breasts,
Her clipped,devast-
Ated, scabbed
Punk head
The char-eyed
Famine gawk –²⁸

In both the poems the women bodies become an object of male gaze as well as assault. Heaney depicts these two women emphasizing their bodies that are exposed. They are murdered brutally for keeping sexual relationship with persons unaccepted by their community and it was considered as crime. The analogy between these two poems is clear enough. Through the suffering of Cassandra Heaney gives the picture of all the victims and prisoners of concentration camps. By using the mythological methods he presents the never ending cycle of violence.

Sometimes, Heaney uses his objects from his childhood memory and relates those with the present. The ordinary object like “whitewash brush” are recollected by him and they work as a symbol throughout the poem “Keeping Going.” The memories of childhood are stirred in him:

The piper coming from far away is you
With a whitewash brush for a sporran
Woobling round you, a kitchen chair
Upside down on your right arm²⁹

²⁷ Ibid.36.

²⁸ Ibid.

All the images that Heaney creates here are merely ordinary objects but the important point to note here is that he deploys the images drawn from the childhood and links them with the present day's violence. Heaney adopts an optimistic approach to the Northern Irish Troubles in "Keeping Going" by showing the attitude of his brother toward the trouble.

Ordinary objects from the ordinary life become the symbol for the poet who comes to terms with the violent present. The childhood memories are free from any conflicts and bloodshed but the memories are stained with blood in the present day. The cottage could be colored again with the whitewash brush whenever it gets old and dirty but the country now smudged with blood cannot be washed off so easily to become as it was in his childhood days. The white is turned into "grey" with the merciless killing due to sectarianism.

Heaney juxtaposes the white days of the past with the dirt and darkness of the present. He slightly sounds like Auden here in his comparison of past-present days. Like the contrast between past and present in Auden's "Shield of Achilles," Heaney contrasts the two periods. The youthful days of the speaker in "Keeping Going" were pure but the present days are stained with murder and bloodsheds. Though Heaney in most of the poems shows violence as a continuation of the past, in this poem he presents the good memories of the old days. Like Auden he presents the past in this poem as glorious and pictures the present as full of violent activities. Auden's modern world is characterized by horror and sadism. People harm each other and get pleasure from that. The aimless, illogical violent acts are leading the world to be an uninhabitable place. The modern world is pictured by Auden as

A plain without a feature, bare and brown,
No blade of grass, no sign of neighborhood,
Nothing to eat and nowhere to sit down

Today's world has become so terrific that there is hardly any sign of life. Everyone seems to be in a spell and waiting for the order to start a war again. Heaney also portrays the modern world in this light in the poem "Keeping Going."

²⁹ Seamus Heaney, "Keeping Going," *The Spirit Level*, op. cit., p.12.

To avoid articulating the political troubles directly Heaney conceals his messages under the cover of artistic devices like analogy, parable, archeology and other techniques. He wishes to evade the explicit responses but at the same time he does not want to remain silent. That is why he has adopted the unique stance of addressing violence and conflicts of the society that doesn't sound extreme. The metaphoric representations of conflicts have become a common characteristic of his poetry and they allow Heaney to create indirect political statement in response to the troubles of Northern Ireland. The messages Heaney wants to convey through his poems are not relevant to the limited territory of Ireland only; they reflect the universal human predicament.

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Getting Rid of Translation's 'Guilt': Contrastive Mapping of 'Eastern' and 'Western' Approaches

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Abstract

By the advent of the recent translation theories there is a significant paradigm shift in the ways we used to perceive the act of translation and its significance. One recent development is the keen interest in translation theories that transcend Eurocentrism. The old notion of condemning translations “as second-best, as somehow lacking in some vital way” or as a secondary act has received a strong reaction as well as re-evaluation especially by postcolonial translation theorists who envision that any so-called ‘original’ text too is already ‘reconstructed’ because it has already gone through construction. Even many of them have asserted the fact that no text is ‘original’ as language itself is a translation. Hence, in the first part, this paper offers a contrastive study of ‘Eastern’ and ‘Western’ approaches to translation. Western conceptualizations of translational activities have swung back and forth between the notion of close fidelity or utter freedom to the original. As far as the Western metaphysics of guilt is concerned, it is so natural that translated works have hardly been considered as having the similar status of the ‘original’ work. They have been taken as poor copy of the original and many Western scholars have often considered it as an unfortunate necessity in the post-Babel world. In the process, the translational projects have badly suffered ontological uncertainty about its exact placement within the complicated polysystems of any given literary tradition. This paper, therefore, problematizes the hegemonic processes which operate, almost in an unquestioned and unchecked manner, within Western translational discourses. To investigate into this phenomenon, this paper naturally explores some possible reasons behind the creation and continuation of this Western metaphysics of guilt. On the other hand, this paper alternatively shows that in the East (unlike the West) translation was considered as an autonomous free-standing creative

work of the first order. Contrary to the Western vision, it was rather always believed that translation is desirable and possible.

Keywords: Translation, Metaphysics of Guilt, Eurocentrism, Postcolonialism, Hegemonic Processes

In Western metaphysics translation is an exile, a fall from the origin; and the mythical exile is a metaphoric translation, a post-Babel crisis. Given this metaphysical precondition of Western aesthetics, it is not surprising that literary translations are not accorded the same status as *original works*.¹

“Translation is the wandering existence of a text in a perpetual exile.”² This statement by Muller explicitly refers to the traditional Biblical myth of the fallen, wandering existence of mankind and consequently becomes one of the finest specimen statements that refers to the Western metaphysics³ of translation which has long been considering any translated text as an exile, an unavoidable fall from the original. For a long time, the dominant Western translation paradigm saw the act of translation as nothing more than an unfortunate/unexpected post-Babel catastrophe. Lefevere encapsulates the metaphysics of guilt mentioning the prevailing impression that: “the impression that there is a ruthless, unprincipled, and excessively cunning band of translators... ‘out there’, snickering as they systematically ‘betray’ whichever work(s) of literature they are dealing with.”⁴

¹ Ganesh Devy (1999), *Translation and Literary History: An Indian View*, *Post-colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*, Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi [eds.], London and New York: Routledge, p. 182. Italic is in the original.

² Qtd. in Ibid. p. 183.

³ Western metaphysics is the superstructure of Western philosophy, a system of thinking constructed on an unchallenged initial premise or basis. Such a philosophy often assumes that the original and translated work can only have sentiments of mutual rivalry, insecurity, or distrust. In the past, such a consensus could have been useful for a short while, but in a postcolonial (rather, neocolonial) environment when the object of inquiry has become much more multifaceted and complicated, such biased metaphysics is destined to become uncomfortable, stagnate, and finally collapse.

⁴ Andre Lefevere [ed.] (1992), *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, op. cit. p. 13.

Steiner, therefore, pinpoints:

In the history and theory of literature translation has not been a subject of the first importance. It has figured marginally, if at all. The exception is the study of the transmission and interpretation of the Biblical canon. But this is manifestly a special domain, within which the matter of translation is simply a part of the larger framework of exegesis.⁵

Hence, we usually see a rejectionist and a reductionist tendency in this dominant Western metaphysics of guilt. This includes the total downgrading of every translated text's literary stature in order to overreach and weaken it as a creative project. Nothing really expressive, nothing touched by the Muses, can be transferred over into another language without losing its essence or harmony, according to this logic. It is also frequently considered that translation is a nearly unwelcome and impossible effort. It is considered that translated writings are constantly in need of the "purity and creative essence of the original," simply because they are not springing from the hand of a "creative writer," but are just repeating something that already exists. Nabokov depicts such a notion in his poem "On Translating *Eugene Onegin*":

What is translation? On a platter
A poet's pale and glaring head,
A parrot's screech, a monkey's chatter,
And profanation of the dead.⁶

Translators, according to this conceptual framework, are merely "those in the middle"; the people who do not/cannot write 'authentic/true' literature, rather barely can only manage to reproduce it.⁷ And it is supposed that these are the types of reproductions that cannot help but be "a flagrant betrayal of the original's tone and spirit."⁸ Such guilt ridden metaphysics not only contradicts the polyvalency of ideas across languages, but it also overlooks the hegemonizing and depoliticizing effects of conventional translation.

⁵ George Steiner (1998), *After Babel*, op. cit. pp. 269-70.

⁶ Qtd in George Steiner (1998), *After Babel*, op. cit. pp. 239-40.

⁷ Andre Lefevere [ed.] (1992), *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, op. cit. p.1.

⁸ Thomas R. Palfrey (1933), Literary Translation, *The Modern Language Journal*, 17 (6), p. 410.

There are countless references to this guilt evoking philosophy in diverse Western discourses dating back to ancient Greece and continuing to the present day. Steiner makes a significant observation:

The perennial question whether translation is, in fact, possible is rooted in ancient religious and psychological doubts on whether there ought to be any passage from one tongue to another. So far as speech is divine and numinous, so far as it encloses revelation, active transmission either into the vulgate or across the barrier of languages is dubious or frankly evil. Inhibitions about decipherment, about the devaluation which must occur in all interpretative transcription substantively each and every act of translation leads 'downward', to one further remove from the immediate moment of the logos...⁹

Steiner continues by stating that in the past, translational actions were even labelled blasphemous. One glaring instance is the definite taboo that can be found in Judaism. In first century A.D, there was a belief that "three days of utter darkness" fell on the world when the Law was translated into Greek.¹⁰ Even today, when compared to the complexity and significance of the profession, translation and translators have a shockingly low position. Many theorists and translators, if not actively expecting it, at least accept the notion that "something gets lost" in the translation.¹¹ Their sheer emphasis is on the translators' inability to "feel the fact."¹² Broadly speaking, from past till date the point has remained almost the same: "ash is no translation of fire."¹³

Consequently, the fundamental dispute throughout the ages has been on the 'how' of translation: word for word, sense for sense, accentual for syllabic. The author's goal, the spirit of the work, and the emotion created in the minds of the readers have all been more or less examined. But almost in all of them, the translator's function seems to have been obliterated entirely, with just the all-too-brief translator's preface remaining. It can easily be discerned that "perhaps this is the traditional modesty of the translator, translation being widely regarded as a

⁹ George Steiner (1998), *After Babel*, op. cit. p. 239.

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 239.

¹¹ Andre Lefevere [ed.] (1992), *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, op. cit. p. 99.

¹² George Steiner (1975), *After Babel*, op. cit. p. 177.

¹³ Ibid. p. 241.

secondary art.”¹⁴ Hence Lefevere asserts sarcastically that “the archetypal faithful translator” tends to be very much conservative in both ideological and poetological terms. S/he translates, Lefevere argues, out of reverence for the cultural prestige the original work has already acquired. Hence, “the greater that prestige, the more ‘grammatical and logical’ the translation is likely to be.”¹⁵

In this era of mechanical reproductions, translation is likely to be the single most telling instrument in the battle for knowledge yet the translator himself is often “a ghostly presence”.¹⁶ On the back of the title page, he often makes his modest and almost undetectable entry. Very few remember his contribution in the way it should be. Steiner points out that the postulate of untranslatability has “a purely secular basis” in most situations, notably towards the end of the fourteenth century. It is based on the formal as well as pragmatic belief that perfect symmetry or appropriate mirroring between two semantic systems is impossible. This perspective, like the previously stated religious and mystical viewpoints, ascribes to translation “a sense of waste,” claiming that the “vital energies, luminosity, and pressure of the original text have not only been diminished by translation; they have also been made tawdry.” According to such Western metaphysics of guilt, the process of entropy seems to be inescapable and unrecoverable in all translational acts.

This guilt of being unoriginal or just a duplicate of the original has saturated the majority of Western views on the act of translation. The translator and his work have been burdened with a feeling of inadequacy and shame. Even before starting to translate the first word, s/he is consumed with the shame and frustration of not being able to seek and reach that long-gone ‘original’ as it is. His/her creative self is automatically victimized by all of the pre-existing guilt-producing systems. Undoubtedly such undermining perceptions conditioned the reception of translations in the West. Needless to say, as West has long been (mis)understood as the supreme harbinger of knowledge and civilization, naturally those Western demeaning translational discourses to a considerable extent had gradually exerted its influence in the Eastern

¹⁴ Prasenjit Gupta (1998), Post- or Neo-Colonial Translation? Linguistic Inequality and Translator's Resistance, *Translation and Literature*, 7 (2), p. 175.

¹⁵ Andre Lefevere [ed.] (1992), *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, op. cit. pp. 49-50.

¹⁶ George Steiner (1998), *After Babel*, op. cit. p. 270.

thought pattern and how it takes the translator and his/her work. In this regard, this researcher agrees with Satchidanandan's startling comment that "it was the influence of the West that made us look down on translation as only second to creation."¹⁷

Otherwise, "the Indian tradition has always acknowledged translation as a creative activity."¹⁸ Aside from that, "the Indian tradition has always recognized translation as a creative activity." Most of our great poets, whom we revere as the inventors of our languages, were translators, yet we usually refer to them as 'poets.' Tulsidas, Sarala Das, Kamban, Chaitanya, Pampa, and Ezhuthanchan are known to us as poets. The Eastern/Indian metaphysics, in essence, is diametrically opposite to the Western understanding. Here, we must not forget the historical fact that the concept of translation as is prevalent today in our part of the world is the result of the Indians coming in contact with the European epistemological concept of translation. The advent of the British in India marks the coming in of a translation practice which brought with it concepts of the 'original' and the anxiety of authenticity. Otherwise, originally Indian metaphysics believed in an unhindered migration of the soul from a particular body to another. In the process, it never loses any of its "essential significance" as this essential significance is supra-temporal in nature. That is why "significance, even literary significance, is ahistorical in Indian view."¹⁹ Hence, in Indian literary theory undue emphasis on 'originality' is not given. Indian literary traditions are essentially traditions of translation, observes Devy.²⁰ Similarly Mukherjee remarks that "until the advent of Western culture in India we had always regarded translation as new writing."²¹ As texts may have different adaptations in diverse cultures, translators are considered the 'co-authors' in case of representing that text. Mukharjee also gives instances of the Pampavarata and the Pandava-vijaya, both of which are self-contained works that may be read independently of their original sources.

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 13.

¹⁸ K. Satchidanandan (1999), *Reflections: Rethinking Translation, Indian Literature*, 43 (5) (1993), p.13.

¹⁹ Ganesh Devy (1999), *Translation and Literary History: An Indian View, Post-colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*, Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi [eds.], op. cit. p. 187

²⁰ Ibid. pp. 187-188

²¹ Sujit Mukherjee (1994), *Translation as Discovery*, op. cit. p. 77.

Even the differences between Eastern and Western metaphysics of translation are found on their etymological levels. The word for translation in Sanskrit is *anuvad*, which etymologically and primarily means “saying after or again, repeating by the way of explanation, explanatory repetition or reiteration with corroboration or illustration, explanatory reference to anything already said.”²² It is interesting to notice that the underlying metaphor in the word *anuvad* is temporal (to say after, to repeat), whereas the English/Latin word ‘translation’ connotes spatial meaning (to carry across).

Furthermore, Indian techniques have greatly diverged from Western practices not just on an etymological level, but also in the actual practice and understanding of the process of translation. It is clearly evident in the fact that in India imitation in the neo-classical sense was a form of translation as being a repetition of something already written, and formed the foundation of the pre-colonial literary tradition with those two great source-books of Indian culture, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, being worked and reworked again and again by numerous writers in Sanskrit itself as well as in other Indian languages, with various shifts of emphasis and ideology through which “gaps in the original were inventively filled in”, silences were rendered poignantly articulate, and even some of the great heroes turned into villains and villains into heroes.²³ In translation, there was no fear of the ‘original’, nor of ‘betrayal’, nor of the sense of loss. Here lies the great strength of Eastern translational practices.

So, it is evident that in the East (unlike the West) translation was considered as an autonomous free-standing creative work of the first order. Contrary to the Western vision, it has rather always believed that “translation is desirable and possible.”²⁴ For instance, Tulsi Das (1532-1623) is “still regarded as the greatest poet ever in Hindi for having (re)written the *Ramayana*.”²⁵ So, in the East significance of a work was not diminished only because of its being a translated one, rather translations or translators have had their own significance and their works were never considered by default inferior to the original.

²² Qtd. in Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi [eds] (1999), *Post-colonial Translation*, op. cit. p. 9.

²³ Ibid. p. 9.

²⁴ George Steiner (1998), *After Babel*, op. cit. p. 252.

²⁵ Bassnett and Harish Trivedi [eds] (1999), *Post-Colonial Translation*, op. cit. p. 10.

In the contrary, Western conceptualizations of translational activities have swung back and forth between the notion of close fidelity or utter freedom to the original.²⁶ Though the 'modern' Indian practice also, to some extent, swings between these two by the influence of West, still it does not maintain that type of sharp distinction. Rather being empowered by the sanction of traditional Indian practices, Indian writers often have employed a kind of translation which creatively assimilates a foreign text so well that it is transformed into a strange and "new representation" thus does not actually represent an original rather it represents that which is already represented.

In this relation Derrida's claim is noteworthy. He propounds the notion that there is no primordial "presence" that is then represented. He argues, "the 're' necessarily does not befall the original. It is the concept of representation that suppresses the difference that is already there in the so-called origin and grounds the whole of Western metaphysics."²⁷ Niranjana pushes Derrida's claim even further by asserting that "the sign of origin, for Derrida, is a writing of a writing that can only state that the origin is originally translation."²⁸ From another general sense also, Lefevere suggests, "...for readers who cannot check the translation against the original, the translation, quite simply, is the original."²⁹

However, as far as the Western metaphysics of guilt is concerned, it is so natural that translated works have hardly been considered as having the similar status of the 'original' work. They have been taken as "poor copy" of the original and many Western scholars have often considered it as an unfortunate necessity in the post-Babel world. 'Unfortunate' because translators are considered betrayers and translation (they assume) unavoidably bound to falsify to various extent by adulterating the original with a view to flattering the audience. It was believed by many that ideal translation "does not read like translation" and even the readers were influenced to such an extent that they too often had cherished the illusion of "unmediated closeness to the original." Very often a vein of nostalgia was lurking behind their mind, a sense of lament was omnipresent for past certainties and for a lost golden age of clarity and activism. In the process, the translational projects

²⁶ Sujit Mukherjee (1994), *Translation as Discovery*, op. cit. p. 79.

²⁷ Qtd. in Tejaswini Niranjana (1992), *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context*. op. cit. p. 39.

²⁸ Ibid. p. 40.

²⁹ Andre Lefevere [ed.] (1992), *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, op. cit. pp. 109-10.

have badly suffered ontological uncertainty about its exact placement within the complicated polysystems of any given literary tradition.

Such automatic guilts³⁰ and uncertainties propounded by Western theorists (especially in the past) have rendered translational act as a haphazard activity which for long have anxiously wavered between the crudely generalized binaries of fidelity and freedom. 'Original' was taken for granted as the only touchstone to weigh the success of the translated text; "the more fidelity and proximity to the original, the better" was really on the verge of turning into an undisputable truth in the field of translation studies. That it may have its own creative, productive and transformative capacities have hardly been addressed in the past. Here, some illustrations from diverse theorists and critics of past may clarify these claims of this researcher. Naturally the question will arise why such inferior status has been imposed upon the act of translation by them. To investigate into this phenomenon, this paper now explores some possible reasons behind the creation and continuation of this Western metaphysics of guilt.

To start with, we may remember the widely spread myth of Babel which indoctrinates into our mind the idea of a supposedly lost paradisiacal language. This myth perpetuates the vision that translation had been originated because of the absence of the sacred and pure language. In *Genesis*, it is mentioned that after the Tower of Babel was built, the Lord said:

Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.³¹

As a result, it portrays our post-Babel predicament as just disorienting and perplexing, the result of a 'irrecoverable' linguistic disaster. From such a high vantage point, nothing after that disaster will ever be able to achieve the distinction of uniqueness. In this sense, translation is twice as far removed from

³⁰ That is to say, being translated means being automatically inferior to the original. The overall discussions were particularly structured around two texts or authors in conjunction or opposition or one text or author as given and the other as mere supplement.

³¹ *The Bible*, Genesis 11:6, <https://www.biblegateway.com>. (Accessed 03 August, 2018)

the original, and has therefore been seen as twice as bad as the 'original' for a long time.

But Derrida who throughout his career frequently returned to the topic of translation aptly dismantles such binary by arguing that the so-called "sacred text" would be "nothing without translation, and translation would not take place without the sacred; the one and other are inseparable."³² In his essay "The Problem of the Text", Bakhtin also makes reference to translation. He distinguishes between language as a system of signs which can always be translated into another language (as a system of signs), thus subscribing to interlinguistic, if not intersemiotic translation, in Roman Jakobson's terms; and the "text (as distinct from the language as a system of means) [which] can never be completely translated, for there is no potential single text of texts."³³

Furthermore, a belief was prevailing there in Western academic premises (especially because of the groundbreaking Romantic Movement in the eighteenth century) that only people who are unable to produce originals, translate! S/he was deemed to be "a parasite upon literature" who is none other than an "unsuccessful creative writer in hiding."³⁴ Also, it has been assumed that the existence of translation is a "relative one" as it is preceded by an already existing text where the "...one of the two can flourish only after the other has preceded it and prepared the environment for it."³⁵ This coming after the original and being relatively dependent on that was one of the reasons the Western metaphysics of guilt believed the translated text as customarily inferior and secondary activity. Rarely do they admit the fact that though their flowering belongs to different times, nonetheless, as far as their capacity to bloom is concerned, both are beautiful in their own ways and in their own rights.

³² Jacques Derrida (1985), *Des Tours de Babel*, *Difference in Translation*, Joseph F. Graham[ed.] [trans.], New York and London: Cornell University Press, p. 204.

³³ Qtd. in Karine Zbinden (2006), *The Bakhtin Circle and Translation*, *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 36 (1), p. 166. Here it is relevant to note that, as Leon Robel contends that Bakhtin had to turn around his theoretical position on translation when he studied the European novel, in other words had to accept that the utterance (the text) could be translated.

³⁴ Sujit Mukherjee (1994), *Translation as Discovery*, op. cit. p. 30.

³⁵ Kimon Friar (1971), *On Translation*, *Comparative Literature Studies*, 8 (3), p. 197.

Another significant factor is that Europe was seen as the great Original, the beginning point, throughout the colonial period. Europe was seen as the main source, and it was assumed that everything outside of it was primarily to serve, nurture, and be a slave to it. In the same manner, colonies were nothing more than replicas, or 'translations' of Europe. The colonies were designed to replicate the original, which was Europe. Moreover, because of being copies "translations were evaluated as less than originals and the myth of the translation as something that diminished the greater original established itself."³⁶

Again, the strong sense of individuality that is systematically taught to the Western individuals easily prepares them often to perceive translation nothing but as an intrusion of the 'other' which is sometimes pleasurable yet "always undesirable." Ganesh Devy in this regard rightly remarks that "the philosophy of individualism and the metaphysics of guilt, however, render European literary historiography incapable of grasping the origins of literary tradition."³⁷ Western metaphysics, which has always been torn between "the vexed question of fidelity and freedom in translation"³⁸ could not grasp this long reaching significance for a long time.

As Devy points out:

Post-colonial writing in the former colonies in Africa and other parts of the world has experienced the importance of translation as one of the crucial conditions for creativity. Origins of literary movements and literary traditions inhabit various acts of translation.³⁹

However, with such preconditions it is natural that the language of 'loss' has featured so strongly in numerous Western comments on the act of translation as if the only focus of a translator should be to reduce the 'loss' of the original text as much as possible. Keeping these dominating Western perceptions, students of translation almost all start out with the assumption that

³⁶ Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi [eds] (1999), *Post-colonial Translation*, op. cit. p. 9.

³⁷ Ganesh Devy (1999), *Translation and Literary History: An Indian View*, *Post-colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*, Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi [eds.], op. cit. p. 182.

³⁸ Andre Lefevere [ed.] (1992), *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, op. cit. p. 51.

³⁹ Ganesh Devy (1999), *Translation and Literary History: An Indian View*, *Post-colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*, Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi [eds.], op. cit. p. 183.

something is going to be 'lost' and consequently the text will be diminished and rendered inferior. Seldom have they considered the huge possibility of 'gain' that underlies the act of translation. S/he is always under pressure to efface himself/ herself or to keep his/ her own creative genius outside his work. S/he is rather intoxicated with the traditional belief that his work is of a slavish kind. The more accurately he can extract the 'content' from the original and transfer it to another linguistic system, the more he will be appreciated. With such traditional preconditions, a translator will have to meet resistances at numerous stages of his enterprise. First of all, he encounters the presumption of non-translatability. In his anguish of beginning, the foreign text looks like a lifeless block of resistance to translation. That premeditated idea haunts him as he is inwardly aware of the most serious 'flaw', that is "not being the original" but a duplicated original. It seems to them that, in Ricoeur's phrase, "being translation, the translation will only be bad translation, by definition as it were."⁴⁰

However, the Western metaphysics of guilt gained such a stranglehold that even translated literature often did not have the translator's name, rendering him/her completely invisible. Kimon Friar observes that even if rarely the voice of the translator must be heard, it was expected that in that case also "the translator's voice should be there, but overheard, not heard, subordinated to the primary strength of the original creator."⁴¹ S/he is deemed to be "entirely passive" and always at the mercy of their source as if their journey is a kind of "travelling out and returning again and again" to its original source.⁴² Thus when Umberto Eco states that "translation is the art of failure",⁴³ here an already superstitious mind will automatically put emphasis on the word 'failure' instead of the suggestiveness immanent in the word 'art'. Such misconceptions find its echo when in the similar vein Jakobson resolutely believes that poetry is by definition untranslatable.⁴⁴ With this mind setup we find nowadays in India a general hesitation to use

⁴⁰ Paul Ricoeur (2006), *On Translation*, op. cit. p. 5.

⁴¹ Kimon Friar (1971), *On Translation, Comparative Literature Studies*, op. cit. p. 206.

⁴² Christine F. Cooper (2006), But algates therby was she understode': Translating Custance in Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*, *The Yearbook of English Studies*, op. cit. p. 38.

⁴³ Umberto Eco. Quotes. <https://www.brainyquote.com>. (Accessed 7 Jul. 2018).

⁴⁴ Qtd in George M. Hyd, *Literary Translation, Hungarian Studies in English*, op. cit. p. 44

translated texts in a literature course on the supposition that “no true literary study is possible except with the original.”

So, a skilled translator who is ready to negotiate between the source and target texts/cultures must have courage and capacity enough to go beyond what comes naturally in order to “re-create” something original which in its very newness does justice to the original impulse. In this regard Rabindranath's comment is really arresting. He, about the translation of *Gitanjali* wrote: “I was possessed by the pleasure of receiving anew my feelings as expressed in a foreign language. I was making fresh acquaintance with my own heart by dressing it in other clothes.”⁴⁵

So, if we look beyond the Western metaphysics of guilt tagged with translation, we may soon discover that by the advent of postcolonial translation theorists and the deconstructive mode of analysis the situation began to change. Lefevere comments aptly, “deconstruction has, indeed, knocked away the very foundations of Western Metaphysics...”⁴⁶ He adds that “whereas the conservative translator works on the level of the word or the sentence, the ‘spirited’ translator works on the level of the culture as a whole, and of the functioning of the text in that culture.”⁴⁷ Francis Jones sees the translator rather as an ambassador who mediates between various nations, representing the interests of his or her own country (the source text), but in a manner which is always consonant with the understanding and outlook of the host country (the target culture).⁴⁸

It is evident that the old scenario is changed now and the role of translation in bringing languages, communities and cultures together has begun to be acknowledged. Satchidanandan thinks that “translation is being recognized as a cultural activity involving not merely literary texts, but cultural codes and practices.”⁴⁹ Here translation is seen as a primary activity, far from being marginal. We have come a long way from thinking that a translation might not be able to stand up to the original, or that the translator should

⁴⁵ Qtd. in Sujit Mukherjee (1994), *Translation as Discovery*, op. cit. p. 528.

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 3.

⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 51.

⁴⁸ Qtd in Allan Turner (2006), *Translation and Criticism: The Stylistic Mirror*, *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 36(1), p. 168

⁴⁹ K. Satchidanandan (1999), *REFLECTIONS: Rethinking Translation*, *Indian Literature*, op. cit. p. 12.

automatically constitute a source of horror to the original creator. Steiner asserts,

As the Fall may be understood to contain the coming of the Redeemer, so the scattering of tongues at Babel has in it, in a condition of urgent moral and practical potentiality, the return to linguistic unity, the movement towards and beyond Pentecost. Seen thus, translation is a teleological imperative, a stubborn searching out of all the apertures, translucencies, sluice-gates through which the divided streams of human speech pursue their destined return to a single sea.⁵⁰

It underlies the subtle exaltation in Walter Benjamin's view of the translator as one who elicits, who conjures up by virtue of unplanned echo a language nearer to the primal unity of speech than is either the original text or the tongue into which he is translating. This is "the more final realm of language", more integral discourse which waits between and behind the lines of the text. Only translation has access to it.⁵¹ Lefevere also casts light on another important aspect of translational activities. He holds that translation naturally holds greater extents of readership:

In the past, as in the present, rewriters created images of a writer, a work, a period, a genre, sometimes even a whole literature. These images existed side by side with the realities they competed with, but the images always tended to reach more people than the corresponding realities did, and they most certainly do so now.⁵²

Great translations, using the "life-giving, life-determining powers of language"⁵³, help to break down the barriers of time, place, and language, of unique customs and traditions. Translation can bring transformation in the space of literary criticism by shading new lights upon it. In the past little has been said about what translation offers critics beyond "a further supply of texts." It also has the advantage of making the translated author appear immediately relevant and, perhaps more significantly, of "opening up new perspectives in the original work, enriching it, contesting it, revitalizing it."⁵⁴

⁵⁰ George Steiner (1975), *After Babel*, op. cit. p. 244.

⁵¹ Ibid. p. 244.

⁵² Andre Lefevere [ed.] (1992), *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, op. cit. p. 5.

⁵³ George Steiner (1975), *After Babel*, op. cit. p. 82.

⁵⁴ Karine Zbinden (2006), The Bakhtin Circle and Translation, *The Yearbook of English Studies*, op. cit. p. 157.

Thus,

Good translations are thus blood transfusions, often giving life to what was on the point of dying; but these transfusions must be given repeatedly as languages and cultures change from generation to generation. The work itself remains beyond time or place, like a Himalayan peak, rising serenely in its abstract embodiment above the stormy waves of history, enshrouded in its own particular place and time, monolithic and enigmatic, a cryptogram to be solved into different values and meanings at different times and places. It can never be carried across integrally as it once was, but only as it has been reinterpreted by new eyes, new spirits, new insights.⁵⁵

That is why Edith Grossman, in her incisive little book *Why Translation Matters*, shows how the very notion of literature would be inconceivable without translation: “translation asserts the possibility of a coherent, unified experience of literature in the world’s multiplicity of languages.”⁵⁶ Some critics conceive translation as “the circulatory system of the world’s literatures.”⁵⁷ They perceive translations as an effective tool to bridge the gap between ‘educated’ men and everyone else.

Every translation, urged Franz Rosenzweig when announcing his projected German version of the *Old Testament*, “is a messianic act, which brings redemption nearer.”⁵⁸ In the current scenario, it is widely accepted that translation has the capacity to “update the original.”⁵⁹ More freedom is allowed on the part of the translator now. Simply put, the current translational discursive practices accept the notion that “one conquered when one translated”, as stated by Nietzsche.⁶⁰ Translation and the search for equivalence have undergone serious change nowadays. It is widely accepted now that translation is a process of interpretation rather than a mere reproduction of the original meaning. Virginia Woolf too was well acquainted with the conventions of translation and her view was “far from

⁵⁵ Kimon Friar (1971), On Translation, *Comparative Literature Studies*, op. cit. p.199.

⁵⁶ Edith Grossman (2010), *Why Translations Matter*, Yale UP. P.17

⁵⁷ Ibid. P.5

⁵⁸ Qtd. in George Steiner (1975), *After Babel*, op. cit. p. 244.

⁵⁹ Andre Lefevere [ed.] (1992), *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, op. cit. p. 50.

⁶⁰ Qtd. in George Steiner (1975), *After Babel*, op. cit. p. 247.

thinking of translation as secondary or derived.”⁶¹ Rather she was enthusiastic to see “the re-creation of the sign as it occurs during the act of translating....”⁶²

Hence, it is vain to insist, like Robert Frost, that poetry is that which is lost in translation.⁶³ We need to take note of the fact that even the poetry itself, from the time it is written, does not exist as an immutable entity. If it is read and understood differently by the poet, his friends, and his contemporaries, it is not difficult to imagine the metamorphoses it goes through (when read after centuries, if not millennia) of an incredible diversity of civilizations in unceasing change and revolution. The *Oedipus the King* we read or understand today, whether in the original or in translation, is not the same play Sophocles and his contemporaries heard or interpreted. Because, now our minds are laden with all the accumulated details of historical knowledge that has intervened since then, and with minds, in this particular instance, oriented by Freudian, Lacanian and other modern psychology.

We must not lament, therefore, that translations are betrayals of the original text. The original vision may never be regained; yet this situation is not tragic, but simply irrevocable, and even magnificently exhilarating. A fine translation not only reshapes the body of a work, striving to attain to a reasonable and recognizable likeness. It does much more. It infuses new life into the body of the original by injecting into it the warm, living blood of its own time, place, and language. It brings it back into life, gives the phantom shape in such a way that it becomes meaningful again for our own time and place, and continues to contribute to the ever shifting multiformity of life and its evolution.

Moreover, the view of translation as being inevitably ‘flawed’ and distorting is politically disempowering.⁶⁴ Instead of striving for an unattainable ‘correct’ translation, translation must seek to confront premature closure by

⁶¹ Emily Dalgarno (2006), Virginia Woolf: Translation and ‘literability’, *The Yearbook of English Studies*, op. cit. p. 147.

⁶² Ibid. p. 147.

⁶³ Qtd. in Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi [eds] (1999), *Post-colonial Translation*, op. cit. p. 4.

⁶⁴ F Smith (1996), Problematising language: limitations and possibilities in ‘foreign language’, *Area* 28, pp.163-64

bolstering up the undecidability and indeterminacy of critical translation.⁶⁵ The conceptualization of the translation act as a *fait accompli* in most research masks translation as “a seemingly neutral exercise which merely needs to be managed.”⁶⁶ So, Lawrence Venuti rejects the notion that a translator should even aim for “impartial intentions”. The ‘faithful’ reproduction of the original text is, he says, not only an unreasonable goal but an undesirable one. Venuti is in agreement with Spivak and de Beaugrande when he underlines the essentially political nature of translation: an intercultural linguistic act such as translation never takes place in a political or ideological vacuum. Further, he explains, “institutions... show a preference for a translation ethics of sameness, translating that enables and ratifies existing discourses and canons, interpretations, and pedagogies...if only to ensure the unruffled reproduction of the institution.”⁶⁷ If we are to resist this ‘domestication’, we must first bring the urge to domesticate to the surface. For this reason, Venuti calls for a translation practice that would retain and lay bare the “difference” between the source text and the target language; that would account for what Lecercle calls “the reminder”—the “minor variables” of a language that are held in check by the dominant metaphysics. Rather than aiming for ‘impartial’ renderings of an ‘original’, then, the translator’s task is to allow the ‘remainder’ to surface in the translation. Therefore, such observation arises:

...thick translation can correct contemporary Translation Studies’ easy but often self-serving assumption that whatever translates as translation *is*[sic] translation, and of their eagerness to rush into generalizations, laws and universals at the expense of the complex nesting of concepts and practices of translation in their environment and history.⁶⁸

These new views of translation take into consideration the dynamic and fluid aspects of every language and that is why they tend to be more elastic, comprehensive, holistic and relaxed views of language and translational activities related to it:

⁶⁵ M Müller(2005), Lost in translation: development politics in between the spaces of ‘the cultural’, *Geographische Zeitschrift* 93, pp. 121–33

⁶⁶ Ibid. pp. 206-213.

⁶⁷ Qtd. in Joyce Tolliver (2002), Rosalia Between Two Shores: Gender, Rewriting, and Translation, *Hispania*, op. cit. p. 36.

⁶⁸ Theo Hermans (2003), Cross-Cultural Translation Studies as Thick Translation, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 66(3), p. 387

...ordinary language is, literally at every moment, subject to mutation. This takes many forms. New words enter as old words lapse. Grammatical conventions are changed under pressure of idiomatic use or by cultural ordinance. The spectrum of permissible expression as against that which is taboo shifts perpetually.⁶⁹

The rejection of Western metaphysics of guilt becomes urgent if we really explore the history of various literary canons and the significant role translational activities play behind it. We have many instances to allude in order to substantiate this point. It is obvious, Steiner asserts, “when one stops to think of it, that intellectual history, the history of genres, the realities of a literary or philosophic tradition, are inseparable from the business of translation.”⁷⁰ He argues, “indeed, one might even assert that, without translation, there is no history of the world. Consider the rise of certain civilizations: the Roman world, the Italian, French, English, German, and Russian, and contemplate the role of translation in the development of those cultures.”⁷¹ Goethe wrote in a letter to Carlyle in July 1827: “say what one will of the inadequacy of translation, it remains one of the most important and valuable concerns in the whole of world affairs.”⁷² Alan Titley argues “...the history of translation in Irish is almost as old as literacy in the language.”⁷³ Pushkin, speaking out of the isolation of the Russian condition, defined the translator as “the courier of the human spirit.”⁷⁴ Everything in this world, as we know it, is an approximation, whether from God to Adam, from vision to poet, from poem to reader or translator. Even in our approach to understanding we must read between the lines to discern the spirit and not simply to transliterate the letter.⁷⁵ Kimon Friar asserts that “a translator often must be a greater craftsman than the poet himself, for he tries through the letter to reach the spirit.”⁷⁶ That is why Bassnett nicely

⁶⁹ George Steiner (1975), *After Babel*, op. cit. p. 18.

⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 271.

⁷¹ For details see Lynne Long (2007), *History and Translation, A Companion to Translation Studies*, Piotr Kuhiwczak and Karin Littau [eds.], Toronto: Multilingual Matters Lt, p. 63.

⁷² Qtd. in George Steiner (1975), *After Babel*, op. cit. p. 248.

⁷³ Alan Titley (2005), *Turning Inside and Out: Translating and Irish 1950-2000*, *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 35, p. 312.

⁷⁴ Qtd. in George Steiner (1975), *After Babel* op. cit. p. 248.

⁷⁵ Kimon Friar (1971), *On Translation, Comparative Literature Studies*, op. cit. p. 200.

⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 197.

comments, "I still feel it is my duty to preach the gospel of the importance of translation, in hopes that some of the monolingual unconverted will hear it and respond."⁷⁷ She believes that "...translation plays a major role in shaping literary systems, that translation does not take place on a horizontal axis, that the translator is involved in complex power negotiations (mediating between cultures, as it were), that translation is always a rewriting of an original..."⁷⁸ Steiner points out particularly successful translations, becomes "in many ways indispensable to the original".

Almost in the similar spirit, Rabindranath Tagore also noted that 'originality' in the West is often confused with novelty, which is its cheap substitute, for "the things that are original are as old as the hills and as simple as the morning breeze."⁷⁹ The frustration of being trapped by culture and language that incites postmodern criticism did not trouble him. He was receptive to any worthy influence, even from poets of imperialist England: "only mediocrities are ashamed and afraid of borrowing, for they do not know how to pay back the debt in their own coin."⁸⁰ So, it is now widely accepted that "...the creativity required of a literary translator is no less than that required of a monolingual writer."⁸¹ In translations, works find "an unprecedented 'second life'—a life they soon found to be more enduring, more exhaustive of meaning", Steiner opines.⁸² Lefevere also comments, "when the image of the original is no longer uniformly positive in the target culture; more liberties are likely to be taken in translation, precisely because the original is no longer considered a "quasi-sacred" text..."⁸³

In fact, current translation theorists conceive of the project of literary translation not as a pristine repackaging of a monumental 'original', but as

⁷⁷ Susan Bassnett [ed.] (2011), *Reflections on Translation*, op. cit. p. 31.

⁷⁸ Susan Bassnett (2007), *Culture and Translation: A Companion to Translation Studies*, Piotr Kuhiwczak and Karin Littau [eds.], Toronto: Multilingual Matters Lt, p.14.

⁷⁹ Qtd. in Kenneth R. Stunkel (2003), Rabindranath Tagore and the Aesthetics of Postmodernism, *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 17 (2), p. 245.

⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 245.

⁸¹ Susan Bassnett [ed.] (2011), *Reflections on Translation*, op. cit. p. 51.

⁸² George Steiner (1975), *After Babel*, op. cit. p. 22.

⁸³ Andre Lefevere [ed.] (1992), *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, op. cit. p. 91.

what Lefevere calls a “rewriting”,⁸⁴ in which translators as well as the readers of the target language work together to recreate new versions of the source texts. Theo Hermans offers us a glaring example in this regard:

There are plenty of more modern examples from which to draw inspiration. Heidegger’s fifty-page exploration of one tiny fragment of text by the pre-Socratic Philosopher Anaximander eventually yields a sentence that challenges the German language and is intelligible only if one makes the effort to read the forty-nine pages leading up to it. Heidegger mistrusts dictionaries, and takes his time, slowly circling around each individual word in Anaximander’s fragment, interrogating both the Greek words and tentative German equivalents.⁸⁵

Finally, the historicity of what we call the ‘original’, like that of the ‘translation’, is subject to complex variables because the history of any literary text does not stop with a given translation, which is itself just one possible version of a text which has generated a large and for the most part unstructured range of previous translations and will keep on generating more in the future. As Susan Bassnett succinctly puts it, “There can no more be the ultimate translation than... the ultimate poem.” In their guest editorial, Caroline Desbiens and Sue Ruddick draw our attention to the situatedness of languages and the way they are structured and, in turn, structure concepts and experiences making it difficult to translate them from one language into another.⁸⁶ Translation is ‘impossible’ concedes Ortega y Gasset, but so is all absolute concordance between thought and speech. Somehow the ‘impossible’ is overcome at every moment in human affairs.⁸⁷

In fine, the status of translation has undergone a significant change after the end of the colonial period: “at this point in time, postcolonial theorists are increasingly turning towards translation and both re-appropriating and reassessing the term itself.”⁸⁸ So, with the passage of time the traditional

⁸⁴ Lefevere fully develops his concept of translation as rewriting in *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*.

⁸⁵ Theo Hermans (2003), Cross-Cultural Translation Studies as Thick Translation, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, 66 (3), p. 387.

⁸⁶ Qtd in Martin Müller (2007), What’s in a Word? Problematizing Translation between Languages, *Area*, op. cit. pp. 206-213.

⁸⁷ George Steiner (1975), *After Babel*, op. cit. p. 251.

⁸⁸ Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi [eds] (1999), *Post-colonial Translation*, op. cit. p. 5.

Western metaphysics have been challenged vehemently and new perceptions that see translation as a very significant and equally prestigious creative work like the original have emerged in the field of Translation Studies. Considering all these, this paper holds the opinion that it is high time we freed ourselves from carrying the intellectual baggage of our colonial masters and their perpetuated metaphysics of guilt and restore new and liberal approach towards the act of translation which will never customarily consider the act of translation as “a flagrant betrayal of the tone and spirit of the original.”⁸⁹ Translation is the urge to go beyond and over, beyond lands and nations and times and languages, proceeding under a million, guises and disguises toward that ideal realm, that universal language longed for but never attained, a spiritual if not a physical communication. Only when man develops an instantaneous sense of communication, such as telepathy, will translation become obsolete; but even then, the imperfect embodiment of a work in translation imparts a meaning and a manner, transfuses something of its own cellular structure to the essence and becomes something else again, gains something of the wounded, imperfect, human, and thus becomes “lovingly mortal” and fills us with an enriched compassion.

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Womanhood in Transcultural Perspective: Reading Ruth Praver Jhabvala's *A Backward Place* and *A New Dominion*

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Abstract

Women around the world, irrespective of their age, class, race and culture, suffer from patriarchy. Ruth Praver Jhabvala in her novels *A Backward Place* and *A New Dominion* explores the lives of women of two different cultural backgrounds to show how women share their lot in case of sufferings. She integrates Indian women and Western women in the postcolonial Indian society where they face problems like poverty, lack of education, social discrimination, sexual violence and so on. Though the first world women are more competent in their struggle to overcome these problems, in the third world society of India they are as helpless as the third world women. They may enjoy freedom in the first world but in the third world society they are forced face the identical situations with the third world women. This paper aims to understand how Jhabvala's depiction of transcultural womanhood brings forth the tensions between the first world women and the third world women. It also attempts to comprehend the grounds where the first world and third world women consolidate their identities and where they differ. The scopes of the integration of first world and third world women in Jhabvala's novels are also examined here. Moreover, the western feminist discourses create some stereotypical picture of the third world women. This paper attempts to clarify some of these misconceptions of the first world feminists about the third world women.

Keywords: First world feminists, Third world feminists, Stereotypes, Transcultural womanhoods

Ruth Praver Jhabvala is an author with extraordinary insights who delves deep into the lives of women of different cultural and national backgrounds. She visited three continents in her lifetime: Europe, Asia and America which gave her rare insights into the lives of women from diverse backgrounds. In *A Backward Place* and *A New Dominion* she shows her skill in delineating the particular struggle of women in a third world society. She tries to unearth the connections between the first world women and third world women by placing them side by side against the backdrop of postcolonial Indian society.

In her attempt to consolidate the centre and the periphery, she brings into light the impacts of cross-cultural meeting between the first world women and the third world women. The multi-dimensional consequences of the merging of first world and third world women will be studied here in the light of two novels of Jhabvala: *A Backward Place* and *A New Dominion*.

In the novels under consideration, Jhabvala presents the typical third world women who are deprived of freedom and basic rights. Though there can be seen some resistance from certain characters like Asha from *A New Dominion*, yet “[l]ike colonialism, patriarchy exists in the midst of resistance to its authority (McLeod 174). Consequently, we find Indian characters like Shanti and Bhuaji in *A Backward Place* and the murdered girl in *A New Dominion* who are trapped in the double confinement of colonial legacy and patriarchy but they also try to overcome those confinements. On the other hand, the first world women portrayed in these novels are somewhat liberated from those restraints. They belong to a place where they can enjoy the fruits of century-old feminist struggles. In *A New Dominion*, Lee, Evie and Margaret come to India alone to fulfill their desire to merge in the spiritual realm of India. Unlike Indian women who are confined by family and social relations, they can decide their own way of life. Same thing happens in *A Backward Place* where Judy, Clarissa and Etta follow their own inclinations and end up in India. Their freedom to choose their own way of life is sharply contrasted with the restrictions Indian women face if they want to live their life according to their own will. Hazel V. Carby has rightly pointed out this discriminatory situation of first world and third world women in her essay “White Woman Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood”, where she puts forward the argument that the third world women are denied many facilities which the first world women enjoy (389). The vast distinction between the social, cultural and political mechanisms creates entirely different situations for the first world and third world women. While the first world women can assert themselves, the third world women can barely talk. They have no utterance in the society or even in the family.

An obvious contrast between the first world women and third world women exists in reference to social, cultural, political, economic contexts. This may be described in terms of imperialistic or colonialist relation between first world and third world women. Like the once colonial masters, the first world feminists posit themselves in the place of champions of the miseries of the third world women. In doing so, they forget to take into account the particular socio-political and economic backgrounds of the third world women. Like the

once colonized people, the third world women are represented by the first world feminists. They become the object of someone else's discourse. Chandra Talpade Mohanty brings this fact into light in her essay "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses":

What happens when this assumption of "women as an oppressed group" is situated in the context of Western feminist writing about Third World women? It is here that I locate the colonialist move. By contrasting the representation of women in the Third World with what I referred to earlier as Western feminisms' self presentation in the same context, we see how Western feminists alone become the true "subjects" of this counterhistory. Third World women, in contrast, never rise above the debilitating generality of their "object" status. (39)

Whenever the third world women try to navigate their own story, they get trapped in the Western feminists' representation of them. This representation of the third world women overlooks the social, cultural, economic and political frameworks of particular class and race. The Western feminists homogenize the kind of oppression that women face all over the world. But it should be remembered that the condition of women vary from class to class even within same country. So ignoring the particulars of social class is a great mistake on the part of Western feminists. Chandra Talpade Mohanty addresses this problem thus:

The assumption of women as an already constituted, coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic, or racial location, or contradictions, implies a notion of gender or sexual difference or even patriarchy that can be applied universally and cross-culturally... a homogenous notion of oppression of women as a group is assumed, which, in turn, produces the image of an "average Third World women." This average Third World woman leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being "Third World" (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc). (21-22)

Here it is evident that the doubly marginalized women whom we call the Third World women belong to a space where they fail to articulate their own rights. They become subservient to the multi-dimensional oppression of both patriarchy and colonialism. They are forced to exist in the periphery of torture and negligence. This is why Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak contended:

[B]oth as object of colonial historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the

contest of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow. (41)

Subalterns are “defined as those who did not comprise the colonial elite—such as the lesser rural gentry, impoverished landlords, rich peasants and upper-middle class peasants” (47). Subaltern woman is she who is suppressed both by colonialism and patriarchy. The marginalization of subaltern women is not adequately understood by the first world feminists. Stephen Morton draws attention to this matter while discussing Spivak:

Spivak’s ongoing discussions of disempowered subaltern women serve to highlight the limitations of applying European theories of representation to the lives and histories of disempowered women in the ‘Third World’. Unless western intellectuals begin to take the aesthetic dimension of political representation into account, Spivak argues that these intellectuals will continue to silence the voice of subaltern women. (58)

The representation of the subaltern women will only be authentic when they will represent their own story or when the western feminists will clear their preconceived ideas and see the actual social, cultural and political aspects of their lives.

In *A New Dominion*, Jhabvala introduces a rebellious Indian woman, Asha who tries hard to overcome the limitations and restrictions imposed by the third world society. Asha is a widow and in Indian society a widow has to maintain certain rules such as cutting her hair short, eating only vegetarian foods, and avoiding social programmes. The Indian housewife is expected not to leave her husband’s home no matter how oppressive her husband gets and after the death of her husband she is expected to follow the rigorous lifestyle decided for a widow by the society. It should be remembered that Indian society once proclaimed ‘sati’ (An old Indian custom where the wife sacrifices her life at her husband’s pyre) as the criterion for chaste and sincere wife. A society with the history of such custom can hardly allow the audacity Asha displays. Despite being a widow she doesn’t leave her sensuous pleasures which alone can make the society condemn her as a bad woman. When her husband was alive, she was tortured by him, and after his death she is tortured by the society. Her narration of her husband’s treatment of her is enough to disgust any first world feminist:

He was a rotter. I can’t tell you. He was a rotter through and through. It wasn’t only other women- but with boys too...For him I was only an object- less, less than an object- for an object you can have some

respect, you don't want to break it for nothing, it has some value. But for him I was only there to be ill treated and crushed, the way he wouldn't do to a paid woman. But I was his wife and the only pleasure he took in me was to be able to humiliate me, to bring me lower than the dust under his feet. (Jhabvala, *Dominion* 44)

But Asha, unlike the typical Indian housewives is courageous enough to forget her widowhood in search for a better life. But it should not be forgotten that in the patriarchal Indian society a woman is repressed by manifold restrictions whenever she tries to assert her own freedom. Hence, Asha's attempt to live a better life is also repressed. She is constantly looked down upon as a frivolous and unstable woman because of her choices like having male friends, travelling alone, and drinking alcohol. She admits to Lee in a dismal voice, "But they are so ashamed of me. They are always terrified I shall do something to disgrace them" (28). As an Indian woman, she is not allowed to make these choices. Even she is not allowed to love someone. When she falls in love with Gopi, she is again exploited by both the society and her lover. The society makes her feel guilty because of loving a boy who is much junior to her. Out of this guilt she takes refuge to the 'ashram' of Banubai and devotes herself to religious rites. Though for a few days she finds relief from her turbulent thoughts, she again immerses herself in that affair. But this time, she becomes the victim of the patriarchal society where a man can do whatever he wants but a woman can't. Gopi decides to marry some other girl selected by his family who is suitable for his social status. It becomes too much for Asha and she attempts to commit suicide. When Raymond tells her that Gopi is getting married she apathetically answers: "What do you want me to do? Should I lie down and die? Oh I wish I could. If only I could" (194). Though Asha is conscious of her rights, she fails to achieve those rights. Her rebellion becomes futile as in the third world all attempts of gaining freedom are nipped in the bud. The patriarchal Indian society is still confined to the legacy of imperialism which worsens the condition of women. Here, women do not have the liberty to live let alone achieve freedom. According to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak:

Between patriarchy and Imperialism, subject-constitution and object formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the "third world woman" caught between tradition and modernization, culturalism and development. (61)

As cultural difference is not easily accessible, it is difficult for the western feminists to understand such multi-faceted complexity of the lives of third world women. Much of their understanding is based on grossed assumptions. They are only aware of the stereotypes of gender oppression and overlook the local socio-cultural and political context of the third world women. The relationship between the first world women and the third world women is parallel to the relationship between the once colonial masters and indigenous people because the western feminists take the responsibility to represent the predicament of the third world women. In doing so, the western feminists occupy the place of subject and the third world women are reduced to the state of the 'other.' In other words, the western feminists draw a binary distinction between them and the third world women like the distinction between self and other. The binary opposition perpetuates the mechanisms of colonial legacy in a way. Hazel V. Carby understood this problem and claimed to write her own story:

The herstory of black women is interwoven with that of white women but this does not mean they are the same story. Nor do we need white feminists to write our herstory for us; we can and are doing that for ourselves. However, when they write their herstory and call it the story of women but ignore our lives and deny their relation to us, that is the moment in which they are acting within the relations of racism and writing history. (398)

The individual identities of women are smothered under the pressure of patriarchy which creates a unified identity for all women as a repressed soul. In other words, the shared miseries of the suffering women generate one singular identity for all. As a result, the predicament of the third world women appears similar to that of the western women in the eye of the first world feminists. They forget to take into account the individual sufferings and struggles of the third world women. So their discourses about third world women become partial and incomplete. That is why the third world women have to write their own story. Only then the exact state of their lives will be explored.

In *A New Dominion*, Lee's encounter with the murdered girl during her exploration of India brings out another dark facet of male domination. The girl was poisoned because her father failed to give dowry: "She was young, she had only been married seven months. But her dowry had not been very big; her father had not been as generous to the son-in-law as he might have

been" (Jhabvala, *Dominion* 20). This girl is the embodiment of the 'subaltern' woman who is forcefully silenced in the repressive Indian society. The ruthless indifference of the people around is more shocking. They concluded the murder of the girl in one sentence "Such things happen" (20) revealing such destiny is common to many girls. Most women silently suffer without any resistance. Ania Loomba is conscious of such condition of women, "In patriarchal society, women are split subjects who watch themselves being watched by men. They turn themselves into objects because femininity itself is defined by being gazed upon by men" (162).

On the contrary, the three western girls- Lee, Margaret and Evie are free individuals who can decide their own way of life. These three girls, bored of western materialism, come to India in search of spiritual enlightenment. Lee is a free bird who travels alone on buses and trains to explore India, "She was happy travelling this way. She felt she was no longer Lee but part of the mass of travelers huddled and squashed together" (Jhabvala, *Dominion* 9). Though she enjoys the privileges of being a western girl, she also falls prey to the extremist Indian society. She is a naive girl and fails to cope up with the repressive third world society where women are considered merely as products. Hence, she is sexually dominated by Gopi without being able to resist. Gopi's conception of Lee parallels the stereotyped conceptions of the western people about the third world women as Jhabvala narrates:

What to make of her? A girl who had been brought to a hotel room -- had been led upstairs in full public view- and now she said she had been thinking of something else. And this was... a Western girl who was travelling all round the world by herself. Everyone knew that Western girls were brought up on sex, lived on sex. She must have slept with many, many men, over and over again. This thought suddenly excited and infuriated him. (53-54)

This presumed conceptions both of the westerners and of the Indians about one another is a great barrier to mutual understanding. It is the reason why the cultural differences of the western society and Indian society are hard to be reduced. As "cross-cultural sexual contact was certainly transgressive" (Loomba 159) Lee understands this difference in their thoughts, "She wished they could be closer together in understanding that she could explain herself better to him. But perhaps it was not possible by means of words" (Jhabvala, *Dominion* 54-55). This difference in understanding exposes the age-old miscommunication between the European and the

Indian. However, despite her reluctance she gives in to the sexual advances of Gopi thinking that it would help her know India better. But in doing so, she unknowingly submits herself to the patriarchy that is more prevalent in the third world society of India.

At a later stage, Lee again falls prey to the patriarchy of India. This time the embodiment of the patriarchy is Swamiji who lures Lee to the spiritual realm only to fulfill his sadistic enterprise. Lee, beguiled by the Swamiji's words, decides to stay in his ashram and serve him. But as time passes, she is exploited by various means and at last the Swamiji rapes her violently. "In colonial situations Asian women have frequently been forced into prostitution to sexually service the white male invaders" (Carby 392) but in postcolonial situation white women are also sometimes forced to sexually serve the Asian males. This shows how the men, no matter whether he is an Indian or a European, are tools of women exploitation: "Although men on both sides of the colonial divide engaged in bitter strife, they also often collaborated when it came to the domination of women" (Loomba 168). Women are exploited in the postcolonial era regardless of their age, nationality and ethnicity.

Not only Lee, Evie and Margaret are also exploited by the Swamiji in the name of spiritual freedom. They come to India as independent individual but become chained by the tricks of Swamiji. The hypocritical Swamiji, who represents male domination, by dint of his charming words hunts naive and innocent western girls for fulfilling his own sadistic desire. The result of the submission of Margaret and Evie is grim enough to repel the feminists. Margaret dies without proper treatment and Evie turns into an insensitive and apathetic human being.

Ruth Praver Jhabvala in *A Backward Place* also mixes up western and Indian women to visualize both the similarity and dissimilarity of their condition. In many cases, they often share the same lot as in the case of Shanti and Judy. One is Indian and another is European but they live in the same situation. Shanti is a typical Hindu housewife who lacks individuality. Her whole life is limited in her household as she says, "With us it's like that. Only to sit at home day and night, cooking and cleaning and looking after children" (Jhabvala, *Backward* 13). The lives of average Indian housewives are represented by Shanti. She lives far from the outside world and is destined to live her whole life in the confinement of her home, "For Shanti the outside world was so totally unknown a quantity that she had no trouble at

all peopling it with wild and beautiful imaginings" (12). Sumita Ashri's encapsulation of the whole life of an Indian girl is worth quoting here:

Indian woman marries into a family, into a community. Once married she is expected to strangle all her personal ambitions and goals so that the ambitions and goals of her husband become her goals and she looks through the eyes of her husband. She has to find her happiness and fulfillment within the family and not outside it, because, a woman's happiness lies only with and in her husband and children. (126)

Though Judy is not an Indian, she lives her life like an Indian housewife. She came to India after her marriage with an Indian—Bal and adjusted herself with the Indian society. She wears saree, cooks food for her children and husband, washes clothes, cleans her home like a typical Indian housewife. Virginia Woolf aptly depicted the place of such women:

Imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction; in fact she was the slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger. Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could hardly read, could scarcely spell, and was the property of her husband. (49-50)

Besides maintaining her household, Judy also financially supports her family by doing a job because her husband is a vagabond and can't provide family's needs. In Clarissa's words, "She's (Judy) doing very nicely. She had the good sense to realize that the only way to live here was to turn herself into an Indian wife" (Jhabvala, *Backward* 28). But despite her such dedication she is nevertheless condemned by her husband for being a working woman. She faces the confinement any other third world woman faces:

When she had first got a job, it was Bal who made the most fuss. He said it was humiliating for him that his wife should go out to work, and he even said—though he knew he didn't mean it—that he would not allow her. For the first few days of her job (this was when she was with the motor-car agency) he made many scenes, sometimes acting great anger and sometimes great sorrow, and once he even cried. (33)

Bal's such response is typical of the patriarchal male who resents to see empowered women. From the earliest period of history till now, men cannot easily accept women's entrance into productive labour. In Simone De Beauvoir's words, "Even within the working class the men endeavored to

restrain woman's liberation, because they began to see the women as dangerous competitors" (22). Bal's hypocrisy comes forward when after a few days he stops all complains as he himself is unemployed and Judy's job is necessary for his survival. He hides his male chauvinistic mentality under the veil of liberalism, "Only a week or two later he was extolling the virtues of female independence and what a wholesome advance it was to see woman going out into the world and taking their place side by side with men" (Jhabvala, *Backward* 33). Here Bal is not subverting the traditional gender roles but actually using the feminist discourse for attaining his own purpose because "[A]t the present time, when women are beginning to take part in the affairs of the world, it is still a world that belongs to men" (Beauvoir 20). Bal's mentality is the product of century old convictions on gender roles. Traditional gender roles actually affect both male and female. Lois Tyson has explored this problem: "[p]atriarchal gender roles are destructive for men as well as for women" (87). Bal, the product of patriarchy thinks it derogatory to allow his wife the role that he should play in the family.

Judy is always undermined by Bal. She conforms to the feminine role of the meek, modest and frail girl assigned to her by the society. In most cases she accepts Bal's decisions though sometimes with reluctance and objection. Despite her unwillingness, she finally departs for Bombay with Bal which denotes her submission to the masculinity of Bal as "woman has always been man's dependant, if not his slave; the two sexes have never shared the world in equality" (Beauvoir 19).

Jhabvala envisages the possibility of cross-cultural relationship through the bond between Shanti and Judy. Shanti is the wife of Bal's elder brother Mukand. Though the relationship between the two brothers is not so good, Judy and Shanti are very good friends. Their friendship cannot be obstructed by their difference in language and culture. Both the women have to tolerate the whims and domination of their husbands which makes them partners in sufferings. This is the reason why these two women are so close to each other's heart despite their different cultures. Again the friendship between Lee and Asha also testifies to the possibility of cross-cultural friendship because of their shared lot. Jhabvala, through these relationships, opens up the possibility of united protest of first world and third world women against patriarchy. The western women will learn the actual condition of the third world women by coming close to them and in this way a comprehensive struggle will emerge throughout the whole world keeping in view the particular conditions of women across races, classes and cultures.

Etta, another western character who lives in India depending on the financial support of rich Indian men is also an embodiment of subservient woman. Though she speaks of freedom and power, she does not practice the same in her own life. Apparently it would seem that she is an independent woman who cares nothing about social rules and regulations. But at the end of the day, she cannot escape the patriarchal mindset that is instilled in everyone from the very childhood. She preaches to Judy the significance of living a free colourful life but indulges herself in petty tantrums to gain favour of the rich Indians. Though she thinks herself an articulator of female rights when she accuses Bal for not bringing Judy to the picnic, soon she behaves like a perfect specimen of patriarchal society when she taunts Bal for letting Judy work:

‘Of course, no one,’ she (Etta) said, ‘can accuse you of being a reactionary husband. You don’t keep her locked up at home—oh no, you are a modern man with advanced ideas. You send her out to work...Naturally, someone in the family has to go out to work and earn some money to feed those darling little mouths. And if she doesn’t, then who will? She looked up at Bal with amusement, smiling at him in such a friendly way, ‘Not you, surely?’ (Jhabvala, *Backward* 229)

Etta’s hypocritical behaviour shows how women or even western women are reduced to self-deception by being the victim of the engulfing patriarchy of third world society. This is where Jhabvala displays the solidarity of the sufferings of women of both third world and first world.

Clarissa, who came to India “out of conviction and idealism” (27), can partly keep her individuality. She wears Peasant skirts and frequently interacts with Indian people. She earns her own living and explores India. Unlike Judy and Etta, she doesn’t succumb to the superiority of men. She is the example of the European women who has at least the freedom of living her own life. She brings into mind the speculations of Dr Sumita Ashri: “The European women enjoy better conditions. They are healthier and happier than the Indian women. They enjoy greater social and cultural freedom, and are financially much better off than their Indian counterparts” (119).

Jhabvala, as a European by birth, also nourishes some preconceived ideas about third world women which are manifested by her portrayal of characters like Shanti, Bhuaji and the murdered girl whom Lee encounters. Most of her Indian female characters are lost in the chaos of a despotic society and fail to pronounce their own desires. Jhabvala does not portray radical women who emerge as the symbol of liberation from the

confinement of oppression and subjugation rather her characters are common Indian women chained by the multiple forms of domination. If there appears any rebellious woman like Asha, the rigorous society of India involves all its might to paralyze her. Even the western women characters are also shown as marginalized and helpless in the midst of such an intolerant and reactionary society. India may be a place for kinship, hospitality and spiritual enlightenment but it is only for men. Women are deprived of such experiences only for their being women.

Ruth Praver Jhabvala combines the third world and first world women in her novels to show the variegated sufferings to which they are subjected to regardless of the difference in their race, culture and nationality. The conjoining of these women of two different regions opens up a possibility of creating a better environment for women. The experience of subjugation of white women in the third world countries will bring them closer to the understanding of the sufferings of the third world women. The stereotypical conceptions of the western feminists about the third world women will undergo radical changes to make them aware of the particular social and cultural mechanisms of domination. As a result, they will accept the representations of third world women about their own predicament and will also be able to add more.

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The Question of “Writing Back” in Adib Khan’s *Seasonal Adjustments*

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Abstract

The postcolonial writers have resisted the colonial power through the creative and critical tool of “writing back”. This anti-colonial tool has given the voiceless periphery a power to heal from the wound of humiliation of the colonial past by challenging the self-ascribed superiority of the Western world and by representing themselves with their own words and experiences. Writing back is relevant even in this post-colonial period as the ex-colonised are still victims of the colonial stereotypical, generalised representations. This paper takes into account Adib Khan’s *Seasonal Adjustments* to examine Khan’s representation of “homeland”, religion, culture to point out his endeavour to write back against the so-called “centre” and critically analyses the text’s writing back quality acknowledging that this novel is not a conscious endeavour in the “writing back” paradigm.

Keywords: Diaspora, Home, Multiculturalism, Writing back

In the Postcolonial discipline, “writing back” is used as a post-colonial, anti-colonial tool for the writers of this time to engage in writing not for the so-called “centre” but against the assumption and representation of the centre. This term, “writing back” is used by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in their book *The Empire Writes Back*¹ to define an ironic, satirical and subversive tool, concerned with the alternatives to reductive stereotypical, colonial representations. It helps in “decentring” by “intersecting ‘peripheries’ as the

¹ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989).

actual substance of experience”, thus, playing a liberating role as the periphery, former colonised shares her own experience as an individual by positioning herself in the centre of thoughts. Through “writing back”, post-colonial writers challenge the very idea of “centre” and by representing the periphery, ex-colonised, they recreate the “centre”. In this post-colonial world, writing has become an instrument of communication between worlds by self-assertion and reconstruction of the world by rejecting the colonial binary representations. The post-colonial voices thus respond to the literary canon of the colonial centre by writing and sharing the experiences and ideas of the periphery. Edward Said, the postcolonial giant, has proposed “voyaged in”, a Saidian “intellectual weapon of resistance”² for the former colonised to “write back” to the “colonizer masters”. Said has insisted on writing and recording of the peripheries’ experiences to acknowledge the forgotten history of the marginalised or the suppressed. Said’s “voyaged in” too determines to break down the barriers that exist between different cultures, not to resist or oppose others but to enrich and acknowledge oneself. He stands against the wholesale rejection of the West or the Western culture and approves of “a critical use of the language to permit a decolonizing of mind”³ as he believes the coloniser’s language and culture can be used to help in decolonisation of minds in the former colonies by breaking the stereotypical oriental representations through writing. However, this post-colonial, anti-colonial tool has faced some criticism on the ground that most of the post-colonial writers do not belong to the periphery, but belong to the Western world. Most of them are Western educated diaspora who live far away from the reality of the periphery and write about the marginalised, former colonised while living in the West. Another concern is raised by Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong’o, who has rejected English language in order to write in Gikuyu as “an oppressor language inevitably carries racist and negative images of the conquered nation, particularly in its literature, and English language is no exception.”⁴ Coloniser’s language is used as the medium of resistance to target the world audience, whereas using native language will only appeal to small

² Muktadir Ahmed, “Edward Said and Articulating Resistance”, *Praxis*, Vol. 8 (2016): 37-53, 43.

³ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, (London: Vintage, 1994), 370.

⁴ Ngugi wa Thiong’o, “Imperialism of Language: English, a Language for the World?” *Moving the Centre*, (Portsmouth N.H.: Heinemann, 1993), 35.

audiences at home. Still some may think that the writers using other languages rather than their own native ones “are simply betraying their own culture and linguistic prejudices”⁵. In this regard, the writers of *The Empire Writes Back* have suggested “appropriation” of the English language like Rushdie’s “chutnification” or Achebe’s “Africanized” version of English as “the English language is nobody’s special property. It is the property of imagination”⁶. Therefore, the task of the postcolonial writer is to use an appropriate, hybridised form of English to write back. Appropriation, or restructuring or hybridising of the ex-coloniser’s language is important to narrate their own subjectivity, to tell the peripheries’ stories. By using the language of the ex-colonisers, the postcolonial writers portray their realities while rejecting Western generalised representations of the former colonised. They modify English to a medium of resistance to voice the voiceless subaltern so that they can be capable of expressing their own thoughts and ideas as Caliban did in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*⁷. As Prospero forces his language on him, Caliban learns to curse him in that language. In this post-colonial era, the English language has given the silent subaltern a tool of resistance to write back to the West and a power to successfully resist the neo-colonial subjugation.

Adib Khan’s debut novel *Seasonal Adjustments*⁸ is basically a celebration of Khan’s own multicultural, plural identity which is significantly a fragmented one too. Jessica Mudditt has penned down, “*Seasonal Adjustments* is a poignant, sometimes painful account of a middle-aged man coping with loss and struggling to identify with a nation, culture and family he is no longer familiar with”⁹. In this novel, Khan observes that “human strengths and failures are global constants” and draws attention to the homogenous

⁵ Salman Rushdie, “Introduction”, *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing*, Ed. Salman Rushdie and Elizabeth West, (Great Britain: Vintage, 1997), Introduction, xi.

⁶ William Baer, *Conversation with Derek Walcott*, (Jackson, Mississippi: University of Mississippi Press, 1996), 109.

⁷ William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Ed. Stephen Orgel, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), I, ii, 362-364, 121.

⁸ Adib Khan, *Seasonal Adjustments* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1994).

⁹ Jessica Mudditt, “A Review of Adib Khan’s *Seasonal Adjustments*”, *The Daily Star* 10 April 2010, 27 Nov. 2021, <<https://jessicamudditt.com/2010/04/23/a-review-of-adib-khans-seasonal-adjustments/>>.

humanity that exists behind the trappings of cultural differences in the world. Though this novel is not particularly anti-colonial in nature, it takes into account the neo-colonial world of the former colony and portrays how the ex-colonised, independent nation falls victim to neo-colonialism and “internal-colonization”. To know whether Khan’s novel *Seasonal Adjustments* is successful regarding the issue of “writing back” or not, one has to examine how various issues are dealt with in this novel, also the writer’s own diasporic condition, his intentions, perspectives and views should be taken into account. Khan, like many diaspora writers is blessed with a “double vision”, that is “a unique perspective as outsider-insiders, from which certain significant critical perceptions about homeland become possible”¹⁰. For diaspora writers promote “a very disrupted, non-essentialist in betweenness” in their hybrid identity, thus disrupting the fixity of coloniser-colonised binary which helps in “writing back”. However, often, these postcolonial, diaspora writers are accused of failing to ‘write back’ about the reality back “home”. Most of these writers, like Khan himself, live far away in the Western metropolitan centers and often their home narrative may seem like exaggerated, “oriental” representation or “mere prefabricated generalizations”. In *Seasonal Adjustments*, Khan’s protagonist, Iqbal Chaudhary returns to his homeland after decades with almost an outsider’s perspective and attitude. His portrayal of Shopnogonj, his native village, is filled with orientalist stereotypes as he sees the countryside as “steeped in superstition and quaint customs” with no positive changes. He thinks the only “successful invasion of modernity” is the “pucca roads” of Dhaka city, otherwise there is only “impenetrable depths of an ancient way of life”¹¹. He feels restless experiencing the “grim expression of poverty” in his native village and thinks Shopnogonj is the “replica” of the other Bangladeshi villages which proves the “primitivism of Bangladesh”. Kaiser Haq observes that the portrayal of the village in *Seasonal Adjustments* is “in

¹⁰ Maswood Akhter, “Bangladesh Revisited: A Monograph on Adib Khan’s Fiction.” *Musing Post Colonies*, Ed. Maswood Akhter (Rajshahi University: Chinno, 2012): 227-318, 233.

¹¹ Khan, *Seasonal Adjustments*, op. cit. 11. All subsequent references to the text are from this edition and afterwards indicated in the paper only by respective page numbers within brackets.

line with orientalist stereotyping” and Iqbal can only see Bangladesh in terms of “prefabricated generalizations, stereotypes, caricature.”¹² He condemns Khan for showcasing “pure Orientalist fantasy” as on his return to his village, Iqbal muses that if he had sent a message, his cousin Mateen would have prepared a “formal welcome” for him which includes “musicians with harmoniums and *tablas*, dancing girls sprinkling me with rose-scented water and scattering flowers at my feet, special prayers in the mosque followed by a feast for the entire village” (3). This description of the “celebration befitting the return of the wayward Chaudhary” is nothing but an orientalist, exotic representation of the Eastern tradition to “spoon-feed” the Western audience. Maswood Akhter observes that Khan’s treatment of “‘home narratives’ participate either voluntarily or unconsciously, in the contemporary hegemonic politics of the publishing industry in the West that thrives on exoticisation and commodification of (ethnic) culture.”¹³ Many diaspora, postcolonial writers are accused of this problem as when they write back about the former colonies, their homes, they present a “homeland” which is a wasteland, a place to dwell in the memory but never a safe, secured place to live in. The socio-economic life portrayed in the novel fails to project the authentic Bengali life and experience and gives a grim expression of “Third World iniquity and grotesquerie” to validate leaving the country for good. Iqbal positions himself as a superior being than his native people, thus excluding himself from them and at the same time knows that he will always remain an “other” in his adopted land Australia. On his return to his village, Iqbal feels like a superior being as he is honoured for not only his “Chaudhary” surname but also for his living among “White *shahebs* and *memshahebs*”. The villagers still maintain “subservient politeness” towards the Chaudharies and are full of superstition. His cousin, Mateen who is the new baronial chief of the village is a “devout Muslim” and is represented as a corrupt, tyrannical and “deeply disturbed personality”. His devotion to his religion is satirically presented,

¹² Kaiser Haq, “Jumping Ship: Three Bangladeshi Diaspora Novels in English”, *Daily Star* 5 Feb. 2005, 1 May 2020, <<http://www.thedailystar.net/2005/02/05/d502052102119.htm>>.

¹³ Maswood Akhter, “Bangladesh Revisited”, op. cit. 228-229.

believed for only winning “a permanent place in Heaven”. When Iqbal visits their renovated village mosque, he once again indulges in orientalist narration by portraying “a manicured garden, graced with gushing fountains and sparkling streams, surrounded by fruit-laden trees and bashful virgins in servile attendance” (15). Writing back involves writing about the former colonised’s culture, tradition and religion by rejecting Western generalisations and negative stereotypes though Khan’s protagonist Iqbal’s representation of his culture and religion is similar to those Western, oriental ones. His negative, stereotypical representation continues when he later exposes the practice of religious opportunism and superstition in the society through the satirical portrayal of *Moulana* Khawaja Rahmatullah Azad. The Moulana is a fake *pir* who exploits people’s religious faith for his own financial gain. To Iqbal’s utter disgust, he is forced to visit this charlatan who is a “self-appointed communicator with Allah” and claims to have a “hot-line to Allah” to solve his devotees’ problems. Hearing the “holy bullshit” of this man, he remembers another *Moulana*, who used to wait for him and his brother upon their return from English medium school education to teach them the Koran with a “waxed cane”. From the very childhood, Iqbal has been resentful towards religious men, not only for the *mullahs* who try to make him submissive to the Will of Allah, but also the Catholic brothers from his Catholic school who have imposed their religion on him and mentally tormented him about sins and their painful consequences. His fearful exposure to religion has made him reject any kind of religion altogether and he argues with both his parents and Catholic in-laws to not to raise his daughter, Nadine under any religious influence but in an environment of multiculturalism and heterogeneous existence. Iqbal’s resentment for religion is further stated by an incident in his childhood which has left a scar in his mind involving killing of red ants in the name of “a holy war against infidels” (37). Khuda Buksh, the family servant is a fanatical Muslim who initiated this *jihad* by describing the red ants as “disciple of *Iblis*” and Iqbal and his brother Hashim poured stolen kerosene on red ant hills. However, their holy struggle turns into “a miserable state of dark guilt” which keeps haunting him all his life. This incident has made

Iqbal stand against any kind of war, bloodshed and destruction in his life afterwards.

Khan's projection of the neo-colonial era shows how the former colonies are still victims of colonialism through neo-colonialism or internal colonisation. His acknowledgement of the perpetuation of colonialism through neo and internal colonialism is "writing back" as it suggests the importance of the on-going anti-colonial struggle of the disillusioned former colonised for decolonisation of minds even after achieving freedom from the colonisers. Khan's protagonist, Iqbal is a flawed character who shares the same "orientalist", stereotypical, generalised views about his homeland like the colonisers; however, his "orientalist" perspective can also suggest his colonised mind that still upholds everything Western as superior. Like Khan himself, his protagonist is a migrant, whose diasporic guilt may initiate his negative perception of "home" as he tries to validate his leaving the country for good. However, Khan has presented his character with diverse, multiple selves by breaking the colonial self-other dichotomy. Khan shows how still the ex-colonised are stereotyped. Iqbal is disliked by his White in-laws for refusing to fit into their "uniform view" of him as an Indian and vocally responding to their every absurd and stereotypical assumption. The Westerners expect a "mythical oriental passivity" from everyone from the East and as Iqbal has "scowled, refuted, contradicted and corrected" every one of them, their feeling of "safe and superior" being is crushed. Khan's diaspora protagonist upholds a dual identity because his identity back home is not sufficient for his existence in the West. However, the dualism in his identity is never enough for the West to accept him, he always remains "nons..Outside the human race" (149). The colonial tool of marginalising the non-Western population through dehumanisation and otherisation is still going on in the post-colonial era and Khan challenges these colonial tools in his writing through portraying diverse, multicultural characters. Through the character development of Iqbal, Khan has presented the non-belonging state of diasporic individuals. This character does not belong to a "clearly definable categorization" of identity however, his representation is ambiguous. The non-belonging state of diasporas challenges the "fixed, static and inflexible" ideas of identity and belonging and as "the postcolonial migrant can only speak 'alongside' the Other, the Centre, because both are

existing in combination with each other.”¹⁴ Thus, they blur and move the borders, break the moulds and help gapping the bridge between “the Other” and “the Centre”. Thus, Khan writes back as his protagonist challenges the self-other dichotomy and breaks aggressive, singular notions of identity through their multicultural selves. Khan has written from his first-hand experience of cultural fragmentation and yearns for multicultural society. Mahatma Gandhi has said, “No culture can live if it attempts to be exclusive” and that’s why in this post-colonial era the importance of multiculturalism is felt more than ever. Mhetre explains the term multiculturalism as “the coexistence of different ethical, racial and cultural groups in the society”¹⁵. The term celebrates the cultural diversity in the society and it expects peaceful coexistence of different groups as a syncretic society. It is used in “writing back” to “decentre” the superiority of European, White culture by standing against the monopoly of single culture. Khan’s *Seasonal Adjustments* foregrounds, “‘perceived irreconcilable polarities’ between two vastly different cultural contexts, namely Catholic/Muslim, insider/outsider, Australian/migrant”¹⁶. Mhetre writes that Iqbal faces the “conservative parochialism expressed by his family on several occasion, such as the racial intolerance for having the burden of a foreign wife, the demand of instilling Islamic values in his daughter, and the enforced family tradition of the Chaudhary lineage dominated by patriarchal male figures”¹⁷. Iqbal blends in with his home culture and traditions but also rejects any attempt against homogenisation that may change his hybrid, heterogeneous, multicultural, individual identity. He returns to his homeland with his daughter Nadine to introduce her with his culture and traditions back home. Nadine faces cultural conflict for being a child of mixed marriage; however, she too adjusts herself and even enjoys Bengali and Islamic culture such as her “aqeeqa” programme. Nadine who is raised in a Christian, White country shares her desire to be a Christian like others

¹⁴ Sabina Hussain, “Label and Literature: Borders and Spaces in Postcolonial Migrant Literature in Australia”, vol. 3, 2004, 12.

¹⁵ Jaywant Ambadas Mhetre, “Multiculturalism in Adib Khan’s *Seasonal Adjustments*”, *Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies* 5.1(January 2017), 207-208, 207.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

in her society though Iqbal wants Nadine to be identified as a human being first. He does not want her to be “poisoned by inbred prejudices” against any religion. He wants to “bring her up to respect religions and different beliefs” and also wants her to grow up in a multicultural environment respecting and celebrating every culture and religion. When Iqbal’s father-in-law insists on Nadine’s baptism, he refuses to impose Christianity on her, however, in Bangladesh, his family arranges “aqeeqa” programme for her and he reluctantly agrees to that, which shows his acceptance of his home culture and Islamic traditions. However, his reaction to the food served to him at his cousin’s house which he eyes with “some apprehension” or his ‘revulsion at the slaughter of animals following the *halal* requirements’ which makes him feel like “an accomplice to a heinous crime” are symbolic of his rejection to some of his birth culture. Khan has portrayed a multicultural Bengali society that observes religious festivals and at the same time nurtures Bengali culture. In *Seasonal Adjustments*, Iqbal’s daughter Nadine is introduced to Bengali culture like putting “mashed henna leaves” on her palms or the *dhobi ghat*, the place for washing and drying clothes, which fascinate her very much. The Bengali culture of gathering of friends and family is shown through Nadine’s “aqeeqa” programme. Though Nadine enjoys this programme, Iqbal feels disgusted with the display of extravagance in the programme as this gives him “a fleeting vision of the multitudes of despairing faces wallowing in abject poverty” (136). The “abject poverty” of the third world country shocks him to the core and thus he feels revulsion against the “*decorative luxury*” of the “aqeeqa” programme. Khan can be accused of being a classist for writing about the elite, “Macaulayan class” by ignoring the marginalised, subaltern population. Iqbal belongs to zamindar, elite family; however, he is conscious of his privileged background and does not exploit his privileged position. Maswood Akhter opines that there are “marginal and peripheral groups within the ex-colonies themselves. There are margins within the margins”¹⁸ and in “writing back” it is important to represent the experiences of these people. Though these “double marginalized” are not excluded from Khan’s

¹⁸ Maswood Akhter, “On Doing Postcolonialism Or, How Shall We Negotiate Post-Colonial Colonialism?”, *Literature, History and Culture*, Ed. Abdullah Al Mamun and Maswood Akhter (Department of English: University of Rajshahi)

writing, he has mostly portrayed them negatively. Through nostalgic recollection, Khan not only portrays the age-old family traditions and Bengali culture, but also the history of this former colony. In the post-British Raj time, the Bengalis fall victim to neo-colonial oppression of the West Pakistanis and thus the former-colonised became colonised again. So, the Bengalis fought back to bring the freedom they were not offered after the end of colonialism in the subcontinent. However, Khan has displayed that the former colony is still struggling to achieve the real freedom and development that the people desired. This time the former colony falls victim to internal colonisation and the subaltern of the former colony become powerless and voiceless as now they are victims of “internal colonization”. However, Khan has depicted changes taking place in the country too. In the novel, Khan talks about a newspaper, *The Voice* that works as the voice for the people and talks against the oppression of the neo-colonial, native coloniser rulers. Even after facing backlash for its work, it keeps on working for the sake of the people.

Khan writes from his own ex-colonised, diasporic perspective that may seem like an inauthentic representation of the neo-colonial world of the former colony and thus not a “writing back”. Many diaspora writers are accused of portraying “homeland” negatively as most of them write about “home” depending on their past memories and represent the present in the light of those memories and their imagination. So to question the authenticity of these “creative reconstruction” of “home” is futile. From another perspective, it can be said that Khan’s negative “home” narrative is the reflection of his protagonist, Iqbal’s colonised mind that sees the world with colonial lenses and perceives his “home” through colonial, generalised, orientalist representations. However, what Khan has represented is “writing back” from his own perspective as this novel shares the story of a diasporic being who lives a marginalised life in his host country and at the same time feels like an “other” in his homeland, Bangladesh for his amalgamated identity. *Seasonal Adjustments* shares the experience of an ex-colonised in the West and shows how the ex-colonised are still targets of the West’s aggressive generalisations and stereotypical representations even in this post-colonial era. Despite that the protagonist prefers the West which can suggest his colonised mind that considers everything Western as the best. His colonised mind secretly admires

British culture and its institutions; however, he is conscious of it too. He despises the British for their discrimination, exploitation and the political mess they had created before leaving the subcontinent. Iqbal's consciousness paves the way for his journey towards "decolonization of mind" as he is guilty of the "worst kind of hypocrisy" of his generation as they publicly display their contempt for everything Western and at the same time, look for opportunities of "a bursary or a scholarship" in the West. Through Iqbal's realisation, Khan writes back against the cultural domination of the West which damages the native culture and colonises the minds of the native. He writes about the history of this subcontinent and shows how the Bengalis fell in the hands of another colonial regime after achieving freedom from the British colonialists. He also sheds light on the newly independent country which then falls victim to internal-colonisation, thus writes back to acknowledge how hard it is to get rid of colonialism and the importance of the on-going vigilance towards colonial threats. In the "writing back" paradigm, appropriation of the English language is very important as this coloniser's language plays an important role in colonising the minds. However, the postcolonial writers use this very language to decolonise the minds too. R Kalpana has suggested that "postcolonial writers have manipulated and played around language to express the nativised thought process and to bring out cultural and emotional essence"¹⁹ and these can be found in Khan's writing too. To reflect the native culture and emotional experience and to deconstruct the coloniser's language, the postcolonial writers have to 'recreate, transform, abrogate or appropriate' the English language and in many cases, have to use native words or expressions and even sentences to keep both the nativisation of the text and the cultural context intact²⁰. In *Seasonal Adjustments*, Khan has used many Bengali words and phrases throughout the novel, phrases like: "*Hai Allah...Kee hobbye?*" (4), "*Touba! Touba!*" (15), "*chamcha giri*" (142) or words like "*achol*", "*pruris.. bhaji.. jelabis*" to introduce his audience to Bengali culture and expressions. Khan has used these Bengali words, phrases and sentences without any explanation or

¹⁹ R. Kalpana, "The 'Writing Back Paradigm' and the Relevance of Postcolonial Stylistics", *CSCanada*, 14.1, 26 January 2017, 13-17, 13.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 15.

translation or gloss to accommodate the native readers and to convey the cultural distinctiveness by introducing the world audience with Bengali culture and language. “Writing back” is about bridging the gap between cultures and with the use of native language and expressions in English literature, postcolonial writers like Khan force or invite the Western readers into an active engagement with the horizons of other cultures and languages.

An African proverb says: “Until the lion learns how to write, every story will glorify the hunter”; this line stresses on the importance of “writing back” and postcolonial literature. Without the periphery’s writing back, the age-old colonial, orientalist perception will not cease to exist. Polina Levontin opines that “writing back” presupposes writing from the periphery as it promotes the idea of resistance; however, if the text does not promote resistance against colonial power, it may contribute to the “falsehood” that the West breeds²¹. To survive in the hegemonic market policy, the postcolonial writers present a narrative similar to Western, orientalist perception to increase “the marketability of their narratives”²². As most of these writers are West-centric, their urge to blend in with the Western world makes them represent the East and its culture and religion in negative, stereotypical, oriental ways to be accepted by the Western audience. Levontin also suggests that the promotion of “exoticism” or “primitivism” limits the ability of the text to “write back” and Khan has failed in this issue as in the text, some attempt of “exoticism” can be seen which promotes the West-centric narrative of the East. Though in this regard, Stephen Slemon claims that it would be on a safer theoretical ground if “resistance” is not located in the text but it emerges in the process of reading²³. Postcolonial writers may or may not “intentionally ‘write back’”, thus it is up to the readers to perceive the text as an act of resistance. He also claims that even the possibilities of conflicting

²¹Polina Levontin, “‘Natural’ Truth and Post-colonial Theory”, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/277889945_On_the_question_of_'writing_back'_in_postcolonial_theory/link/5575c9b008aeacff1ffe5926/

²²Maswood Akhter, “Bangladesh Revisited”, op. cit. 279.

²³Stephen Slemon, “Unsettling the Empire: Resistance Theory for the Second World”, *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, 2.1 ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 102-106.

interpretation are part of resistance. Slemon defines “writing back” as any text that is able to insinuate a conflict in the mind of a reader with a dominating discourse, participating in a struggle against the colonising power. According to him, it is the reader’s choice to freely use the text to decolonise herself. It is not important that writing back should be addressed to the “centre” but it can be a writing back to find one’s own voice and to use that voice to challenge the “centre”. In Khan’s writing it can be said that there is no conscious agenda of “writing back” as this novel is not particularly anti-colonial in purpose; however, it imaginatively captures the reality back home, the diasporic situation, addresses the humane issues, celebrates humanity, hybridity, syncretic co-existence and promotes multiculturalism. It represents both East and West creating an interaction between cultures and thus enriching and bridge making by depicting both worlds and challenging cultural domination of the West.

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Anil's Ghost: An Apolitical Novel?

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Abstract

Having the different facets of our life and society embedded into it, a piece of literature is the representation of our lived or imagined life. Therefore, the political dimension of lived life and the author's political agenda can be traced out of a text as it is always shaped by a particular context. Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* is, according to an apparent perception, an apolitical novel. Although the novel is set against the timeline of Sri Lankan civil war and talks about inhuman sufferings resulting from the civil war, it, with some rare exceptions, does not name any of the political or fighting sides or never does discuss their political agenda and stand regarding the war. On this ground, some critics assert that Ondaatje has attempted to avoid the contemporary political debates and made the novel completely apolitical. This paper aspires to reconsider the apolitical understanding of the novel and attempts to evaluate Ondaatje's approach critically. Finally, it establishes a view that Ondaatje's approach is a deliberate political decision through which, rather than succumbing to the existing power structure, he has brought the defocused reality into fore and thrown some uncomfortable questions to the status quo.

Keywords: War, Civil war, Violence, History, Political stance

Can a text be apolitical? The answer to the question is the concern of this paper – a concern that this paper attempts to investigate with reference to Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*. In fact literary texts such as *Anil's Ghost* are representations of our lived or imagined life. As a result, multiple facets of our lived life remain embedded into it. Of course, it is the writer's choice to select the setting, story and the way of presentation in a literary text; but a text is not complete there. It is the readers or the audience who are to

complete the text. According to the Reader Response Theory¹, meaning is not something about finding in a text rather it is a process of making. Therefore, there always remains a scope of subjective reception and thereby subjective interpretation of the text. It has already been mentioned that a text contains different facets of our lived life. Effective translation and interpretation of those embedded issues demand a proper and detailed understanding of the context within which the text is produced. So, a text, as Cultural Studies observes, can be context specific as the contextual elements remain multifariously present in the text which shape the text to a considerable extent. Again, all these contextual elements which can contribute in shaping a text are encapsulated and affected by politics as it is one of the most significant determining factors of a particular time. So, of course, there remains a political dimension of a literary text either in an overt way or covertly.

Anil's Ghost has received varied responses from critics of home and abroad. It is one of the significant fictional pieces which has broadly been set against the timeline of Sri Lankan civil war; to be specific, between mid 80s and early 90s of last century. It is possibly the timeline of the novel, equally with the story, which has excited and invited the responses from different corners of the world and those responses reflect the diversity in its reception and interpretation. The contextual elements, although not very prominently, are present in the novel and the readers have responded with their varied subjective understanding. Therefore, the responses are distinctive and diverse. Some critics are of the opinion that this text is apolitical which, in fact, brings the humanitarian issues into fore. Critics of this opinion observe that Ondaatje, with his subtle craftsmanship, has deliberately avoided the in-name presence of any political group or fighting side in the novel. The novel also does not contain any political narrative or agenda as people commonly understand in terms of the word – politics. Ondaatje's deliberate attempt to avoid the in-name presence of the fighting sides also gives passage to bring the human rights violation issues into fore

¹ It is a theory that focuses on the reader or audience reaction to a particular text, perhaps more than the text itself. Reader-response theory can be connected to poststructuralism's emphasis on the role of the reader in actively constructing texts rather than passively consuming them.

and accumulate the world interest into it which the text has successfully managed to do. On the contrary, there are critics who condemn the novel for being a mild expression of the dominant Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism² in Sri Lanka and they negate the apolitical stance of the writer. But most critics celebrate the novel as a humanistic text which is devoid of any political issue. The verdicts from both the groups are going to be critically analysed in this article.

To analyse whether *Anil's Ghost* is a political novel or not, it is important to understand to what the word 'political' actually refers. In traditional literary perspective, the novels that directly deal with the political events, themes and issues are marked as political novels. These novels overtly picture the political polarities, tensions and conflicts while, covertly, negating or supporting certain political ideologies or agenda. As a result of this overt dealing with the political events or issues, the actants and thereby, the developments of the story are directly influenced or even shaped by the political issues and so is the case for this novel. This view rejects *Anil's Ghost* as a political text as this novel does not support or negate any of the contemporary political narratives. Kertzer comments that this text "is not a political novel in the traditional sense" (131). Some critics also condemn Ondaatje for his attitude in presentation while the backdrop of the text is the Sri Lankan civil war. One of them puts it in a way that Ondaatje's "apolitical gaze seems irresponsible when there is so much politics to see in Sri Lanka" (LeClair).

However, *Anil's Ghost* opens with the arrival of Anil Tissera – an expatriate Sri Lankan who has been educated and trained in the West. She has been assigned with the charge to conduct an investigation against the claims of human rights violation in Sri Lanka. The story revolves and develops around identifying the whereabouts of a skeleton – 'Sailor' – through which the brutal inhuman reality of the battlefield is exposed. Although this novel never does mention any of the fighting sides by their names and does not

²A militant, reactionary and supremacist nationalism with the flavor of Buddhism that tries to negate the existence of all other ethnicities and their diversities. It aims at establishing a monopoly of the Sinhala people in the power structure of the island and thereby homogenising the country.

uphold or condemn any particular political agenda, at least in the surface level, in its author's note, the writer himself acknowledges that the novel is contextualised in a time which involves three groups. The author's note is so important, especially in understanding the text in terms of contemporary Sri Lankan politics, that it needs to be put here:

FROM THE MID-1980S TO THE EARLY 1990S, Sri Lanka was in a crisis that involved three essential groups: the government, the antigovernment insurgents in the south and the separatist guerillas in the north. Both the insurgents and the separatist had declared war on the government. Eventually, in response, legal and illegal government squads were known to have been sent out to hunt down the separatist and the insurgents.

Anil's Ghost is a fictional work set during the political time and historical moment. And while there existed organizations similar to those in the story, and similar events took place, the characters and the incidents in the novel are invented.

Today the war in Sri Lanka continues in a different form.

Here, the author has specifically mentioned that the turmoil of the time was dominated by three groups – the government, the insurgents in the south and the separatist guerillas in the north – each of which has its own political agenda and policy to establish a particular narrative negating and erasing other narratives. Even the government has used illegal armed groups to take the hold. All these three sides have been so ruthless that a craftsman like Ondaatje, although having a motive to avoid their presence, has to mention them in few places of the story. The novel is broadly presenting the inhuman condition of mass people because of the civil war. And to express the war-stricken situation, Ondaatje could not help mentioning the fighting sides. One of the main characters – Sarath Diasena tells Anil, “[e]very side was killing and hiding evidence. *Every side*. ... The government was not the only one doing the killing. You had and still have three camps of enemies – one in the north, two in the south – using weapons, propaganda, fear... (13). Elsewhere the narrator says,

“[t]here had been continual emergency from 1983 onwards, racial attacks and political killings. The terrorism of the separatists guerilla groups, who were fighting for a homeland in the north. The insurrection of the insurgents in the south, against the government. The counterterrorism of the special forces against both of them” (38).

In the story, two doctors have been abducted by two different armed groups. One of them – Linus Corea – has been taken to “the camp of the insurgents” (118) and Gamini has been taken away by the northern guerillas. In the meantime, Sirissa, Ananda’s wife – for whose absence Ananda has lost his mental stability – has been abducted by the government forces as a sympathiser to the rebels. Again, in the process of the investigation with which Anil is assigned, Anil suspects and later manages to prove that the skeleton which they nicknamed ‘Sailor’ has been taken away, killed and disposed by the government forces or at least by the government patronised groups. Accusation and documentation against the government in a country like Sri Lanka, in the particular context, can be troublesome which, in third person narrative, has been said, “[f]orensic work during a political crisis was notorious” (24) and Anil has to face the harsh reality through her forced departure from the country without the documents she managed to collect. Elsewhere the narrator says, “[t]here was too much political turmoil and it was unsafe” (297). In fact, Sri Lanka was the land “where Buddhism and its values met the harsh political events of twentieth century” (296). It is “the civil war among the government, terrorists and insurgents” (286) which is responsible for the catastrophic reality.

Anil’s Ghost is a fictional literary piece set against a particular timeframe so, there might be chances that the text is influenced or even shaped by the political turmoil of that particular time. Although the novel does not uphold, support, satire or criticise any political ideology as the prominent political novels like 1984, *All the King’s Men* often do, the author’s note of the novel can play a significant role in interpreting the text in terms of contemporary politics. Again, in the story, there are presences, although not by names, of the political groups who are responsible for the civil war and the resultant sufferings of mass people. Therefore, critics who assert that *Anil’s Ghost* does not contain any trace of political activity are partially correct. Obviously, *Anil’s Ghost* does not deal with or focus on the armed political groups, their agenda and activities. As Qadri Ismail puts it, “the text, amazingly enough, scrupulously avoids staging a direct encounter with Sri Lankan politics” (25). Still, there remains a scope, through the marginal presence of the armed political groups, where *Anil’s Ghost* can be presented

as a political novel as the armed political groups are the principal actants of the war and the resultant inhuman sufferings and consequently, Ondaatje cannot avoid mentioning them. Therefore, the novel might not be political in the traditional sense but it is, no doubt, a novel which is politically charged. Carroll comments, “[s]ome political fictions are explicitly political but there are other writers whose works has managed to be politically charged – if not outright livid – in subtle, strange ways” (Carroll).

It is true that *Anil's Ghost* does not support or condemn nor does it encounter Sri Lankan politics but for the enthusiasts, it keeps the door open for an interdisciplinary study encapsulating history, ethnicity and social elements of the island like – language, religion etc. To deal with the critical question of the text's being apolitical or not, it is necessary to decipher and interpret the actual reasons behind the war – the backdrop of the text and in fact, to make a comprehensive meaning of the text, to look through the “disnarrated” (Prince 3) issues is as important as what the text narrates. It is also important to unpack the “sub-text” (Eagleton 155) which runs through the text. Eagleton explains the concept of sub-text –

a ‘sub-text’ for the work – a text which runs within it, visible at certain ‘symptomatic’ points of ambiguity, evasion or overemphasis, and which we as readers are able to ‘write’ even if the novel itself does not. All literary works contain one or more sub-texts, and there is a sense in which they may be spoken of as the ‘unconscious’ of the work itself. The work’s insights, as we all writing, are deeply related to its blindness: what it does not say, and *how* it does not say it, may be as important as what it articulates; what seems absent, marginal or ambivalent about it may provide the central clue to its meanings (155).

The evading absence or rather presence of the armed political groups, their movements and the ‘disnarrated’ (hi)story of the socio-political reality of the island work as the sub-texts of *Anil's Ghost*. Without consulting these issues, the interpretation and reception of the text might be partial and it is nearly impossible to decide whether or not the text is apolitical.

The very name Sri Lanka is a Sanskrit word which means colourful island. Ironically this island has been turned into a dark abyss of human rights violations after it got independence in 1948. Basically two ethnic groups –

Sinhala and Tamil, along with some other numerically minor communities, comprise the population of the island and there had been lack of trust and understanding and attempts to dominate and even erase the existence of the other between the two communities which gave birth to the conflict and war. The Sri Lankan civil war and the resultant humanitarian crises cannot be interpreted only through this ethnic difference. Rather there are issues which, in their collaboration, create a complex web and these issues are socially, culturally and politically motivated. Several episodes like The Official Language Act No. 33 of 1956³, rehabilitation of the landless Sinhala farmers in the Tamil area, quota system in the university admission, the burning of the Jaffna library and the sixth amendment in the Sri Lankan constitution⁴ had fueled the already existing tension and accelerated the devastating end. The Official Language Act No. 33 of 1956 announced that all government activities throughout the island, irrespective of Tamil or Sinhala areas, must be conducted only in Sinhala language. Therefore, this act negated the existence of any other language in the country and concurrently, it imposed a new language upon the people, especially upon the civil service holders, speaking another language other than Sinhala. This short-sighted decision, made out of chauvinistic zeal, negated the linguistic diversity of the country and at the same time, spoilt the ground of communication among the communities as English was also excluded and Sinhala was made the sole official language of the island. The exclusion of Tamil and English was a significant move for the coming decades as this decision, in a sense, shut the door of mutual communication between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. In reality, this act made a large number of Tamil speaking civil service holders resign from their office as they were not comfortable with and fluent in Sinhala. This forced mass-resignation had its other socio-economic effects also.

In the early 70s of the last century, a quota system named Statistical Standardisation was introduced in university admission system. Although it was said that the new system was introduced to push forward the students of the backward areas; in reality, it became a weapon to hinder the Tamil youths from entering into universities and pursuing their higher education

³ <https://tamilnation.org/srilankalaws/56sinhala.htm> (Accessed on May 4, 2021)

⁴ <https://www.lawnet.gov.lk/sixth-amendment-to-the-constitution-2/> (Accessed on May 27, 2021)

and better future. A situation was created that the Tamil youths either had to choose Sinhala as their medium of study or will be considered only for the 15% seats as per the percentage of the Tamil population in Sri Lanka. This quota system frustrated the Tamil youth as they found that the Sinhalese dominated government was treating them with animosity and they had no real, better future in the existing structure of the country.

The burning of the Jaffna library in 1981 by the government patronised mob and forces in retaliation for the death of two Sinhala soldiers mounted up the Tamil rage against the Sinhala dominated government. The Jaffna library was the storehouse of ancient Tamil literature and religious scriptures. Thousands of ancient manuscripts written on palm leaves were burnt into ashes. The Tamils considered the incident as an attempt to erase the enriched past and legacy of Tamil tradition.

Farmers in the north zone, also called the wet zone because of ample rain, were also disturbed by the Sinhala dominated government. The northern areas were basically Tamil inhabited, and hence, most of the farmers there were Tamils. The government introduced an irrigation project in this area and rehabilitated a huge number of landless farmers from the south who were mostly Sinhala in their ethnicity. So, the rehabilitation of the Sinhala people in the Tamil area created a sense among the Tamils that their lands had been distributed to the Sinhalese by the government. Therefore, anti-government sentiment among the farmers came into being.

Again the sixth amendment of the Sri Lankan constitution made the elected Tamil representatives resign from their positions as the amendment was made to suppress the Tamil narrative and resistance against the dominating and state-sponsored Sinhala narrative. The resignation of the Tamil representatives was a big step forward towards the situation of civil war as the amendment clearly reduced the Tamil space in parliamentary politics in the name of sovereignty and integrity of the state. This incident marked the end of Tamil representation in the mainstream Sri Lankan politics and they were made to look for an alternative.

It is a fact that the Sinhalese people form the majority of the Sri Lankan population but after independence, the Sinhala leadership failed to take the Tamils into confidence and an environment of unhealthy competition was there rather than pursuing compassion and co-operation. The suspicion and lack of trust between the two communities increased quite rapidly than

what it was in the colonial period. The Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism, with its chauvinistic zeal and broad majority, attempted to make the country solely their own land. There had been a tendency to view the Tamils as outsiders in their own land, and consequently, the Tamils were viewed as the 'other' whereas the Sinhala nationalism played the role of 'self'. The psychological setting of considering the Tamils as the 'other' manifested through the actions of the Sinhala dominated government of Colombo – 'Only Sinhala Act of 1956', statistical standardisation system, burning of the Jaffna library, rehabilitation of the Sinhala landless farmers in the Tamil area, systematically barring the Tamil leaders from taking part in parliamentary politics. Consequently, the Tamils felt insecure, helpless and alienated in their own place. The authority that was supposed to govern them in consideration with their consent, attempted in numerous ways to suppress them and alienate them from the mainstream of the country. The Tamils found that their language, literature, culture, access to higher education, job opportunities, political rights and voices, their earning sources were under attack by the government itself. Therefore, on their part, to protect, practice and sustain their language, culture, religion, political rights and to ensure lawful opportunities for higher education, job and earning sources, in short, to protect the ethnicity from the aggression of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism, they had to demand a separate homeland and take up arms.

On the other hand, the government in Colombo took the southern insurgents not politically, rather it viewed their uprisings as a terrorist act nothing different from the activities of the Tamil separatists. This wrong assumption provoked the government to take military steps against them and rather than dealing with a political organisation in a political way, the military approach of the government placed it into a position of at war with its own population. The insurgents also viewed the Tamil problem not as a political one but one that is to be solved by military actions, and the government in Colombo was not doing enough to teach the Tamils a proper lesson. Thus, situations turned into a complete mess.

All these issues have worked as the backdrop of the bloody civil war and the text is presenting the sufferings of the war. Although these issues are not presented or narrated in the text, interpreting or critically viewing the text without consulting these sub-texts might affect the proper understanding.

Therefore, *Anil's Ghost* is politically charged if not outwardly political in the conventional sense.

Another functioning factor in deciding whether or not the text is apolitical is its approach in subscribing to or discrediting a particular group with particular agenda. Critics are divided in their opinions here also. Qadri Ismail condemns that this text has served the purpose of the dominant majoritarian narrative – Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism as the Tamil actants of the text are very insignificant in their contribution to or influence upon the text. He puts,

Since the cardinal actants are all Sinhala and Buddhist, since it minoritises the Tamils by denying them effective voice in a story explicitly set in Sri Lanka, since it cannot even name its Tamil actants, since it denies therefore the multi-ethnicity of Sri Lanka, since it presents the JVP sympathetically but not the LTTE, since it depicts the state's brutalities in the south not in the north, since the only Lankan history it presents is Sinhala history, ... the work performed by *Anil's Ghost*, whether the author intended it or not doesn't really matter, is to whitewash the criminal record of Sinhala nationalism (27-28).

But most critics opine that this text has attempted to avoid any favoured presentation of any of the groups. It maintains a neutral stance in its portrayals of the groups and presents “no clear demarcation between opposing forces, allies and enemies” (Gray) but there remains a gap in considering or understanding the political intention of the author. It is, without any doubt, reluctant to comply with any of the existing narratives but the frequent portrayals of the hospital scenes, the endless wave of the wounded persons to the hospitals and the ceaseless efforts of the doctors along with the images of threats, fear, terror and abductions support and prove that the author is primarily concerned with the frequent violations of fundamental human rights. The dark atmosphere of the novel that reflects the Sri Lankan reality attempts to bring the humanitarian issues into the domain of discussion. It is probably a deliberate political decision of the author that he has kept all the events what people commonly mark as political aside to focus the humanitarian crises in the island and to throw some uncomfortable questions to the status quo. Another consideration might function here that the presence of political groups or events and ideologies might split or at least distract the attention of the world audience from being accumulated into the humanitarian issues. Teresa

Derrickson comments, “the text self consciously engages in an extended discussion about one of the most highly contested topics to be raised in the wake of economic globalization: the United Nations’ universal mandate on human rights” (131). So, the novel, through the journey of Anil to establish the human identity of a murdered person, has attempted to highlight the brutal reality of the island to defend and ensure basic rights of every individual which s/he is supposed to enjoy for being a member of humankind. On that note, the novel stands against the violations of the basic human rights and thereby stands for upholding and ensuring those rights to every individual rather than standing against or for any particular group or its narrative and it functions as a form of resistance. To quote Edward Said, this humanistic stand is “the only and ... the final resistance we have against the inhuman practices and injustices that disfigure human history” (Said). The novel consciously takes the side of humanity and there remains a very narrow space against the statement that it is Ondaatje’s deliberate politics that he, through the fictional piece of art, stands for human rights and thereby humanity.

Qadri Ismail comments that “[n]ovels like all other texts take side” (24). Taking side or rather standing for or upholding a particular stance is a political act. Here, *Anil’s Ghost*, keeping all elements and events what people generally consider as political aside, stands against the visible inhuman activities by focusing on them and bringing them to light and takes the side of humanity. Besides, the text instigates the critical and enthusiastic readers to investigate and consider the historical, ethnical and other related issues which are commonly perceived as political to make a proper understanding of the actual reasons of the war – the root cause of all sufferings. In this process, the critical readers discover the issues of tyranny of the majority upon the minority, the issue of self-other functions as the backdrops of the war which are not less than political or at least are motivated and driven by politics. In addition, the text is not completely devoid of the presence of the fighting groups; there are mentions of them in the author’s note and in the story as well. Considering all these issues, there remains a considerably narrow space where the text can be claimed as an apolitical one rather the text is uniquely political as it, being politically motivated or charged, performs for ensuring fundamental human rights for the individuals in the war-torn island.

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A Critical Probe into the Precarious Locatedness of Humanities in the Science and Technology Universities in Bangladesh

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Abstract

This paper aims at exploring the status of humanities in the science and technology universities (STUs) in Bangladesh in the backdrop of an inflated attention to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) globally. As a South Asian case, Bangladeshi STUs have been established primarily to respond to the market ideals. As a result, a subtle bias finds its way against humanities here. Due to this pervasive attitudinal impediments to humanities, in the long run, societal attainment may suffer in terms of building and sustaining a creative, reflective, prudent and democratic citizenry. This paper will focus on the inevitable interrelation between the idea of a university and humanities following a candid focus to their normative principles. In this regard, all the nine Bangladeshi STUs have been explored to map out the number of subjects they have been running. On the basis of our findings some policy guidelines have also been drawn so that all universities seizing a reconciliation with interdisciplinary contents and pedagogy can contribute to cater comparatively well-endowed human beings for the days to come.

Keywords: University, Humanities, STEM, Interdisciplinary, Market ideals, Human accomplishments

Introduction

With the emergence of neoliberal economy, there has been an ascent assiduity to STEMs in the global academia where humanities fall behind in terms of availing resources and esteem (Costa, 2019) since there has been a consideration that the latter scarcely contributes to maximize material

* The author died in a road accident on 13 October, 2021.

benefits the age is opted for. Hence, the question of the existence of humanities has been brought under challenge in the public mind. In the like manner, as a South Asian context, it is a commonplace in Bangladesh that students scoring low grades in the secondary level education are encouraged to pursue humanities-stream for upper standards. Most indoctrinating agencies have also contributed to make it a widespread attitude in the society. Teachers and social leaders assert in public that 'least-meritorious' learners should take on humanities and social sciences. Thus, humanities as a discipline of study has been deeply inferiorized and seen feeble in the public perception of Bangladesh (*The Daily Star*, 2017). This outlook caters to induce an immense sense of disparity among learners as well as teachers of that discipline. This social tilt is further reinforced in the job ring also. Consequently, students of the humanities, as experientially observed, suffer from lack of confidence that tends to shake their self-dignity and affects their level of potential.

Admittedly, tertiary educational institutions, in other ways identified as universities are generally considered to be the preeminent place of human culture and accomplishments. That is why, our endeavor would like to track the locatedness of humanities in those tertiary educational institutions, particularly in STUs in Bangladesh. For this we have decided to explore the stature of the subjects relating to humanities in the newly established STUs. We would like to navigate the degree of compatibility of STUs with the essential idea of a university *per se*.

In this regard, first of all we would try to gauge the idea of a university philosophically, second, draw a comprehensive sketch on humanities, and third, will find the scale of dependence between them. Afterwards, the current status of humanities in various STUs of Bangladesh will be put into investigation. In concluding remarks, we would like to put some recommendations for the further progress of university education in Bangladesh.

Literature Review

In the journey of figuring out the stature of humanities in the newly established STUs in Bangladesh, four academic papers have been consulted mainly. The first one, *What are universities for?* is written by Geoffrey Boulton and Colin Loucas (2011) from the University of Edinburgh and University of Oxford respectively. This paper draws on the classical western ideas of a university and its functions for the greater accomplishments of

humans in a civilization by reflecting on the thoughts given by Wilhelm Von Humboldt (1810) and John Henry Newman (1852). How their idea-driven universities with the pragmatic expectations of modern states were performing with considerable success in the western society appeared in the discussions of the authors. However, this paper also sheds light on the recent market provoked shifts as well as skill-based compartmentalization of the tertiary education in the western world which has, at the same time, paved the way to the academia of southern countries. As a result of the market impetus, the ideals of a university have been reduced to conform to economism (Brody, 2013). In addition, authors have talked about the importance of resuming the status of humanities in academe if it is to play the expected emancipating as well as practical roles in the society for an eternal period of time, as they reiterate – “Research in the humanities and social sciences is concerned with issues that are essential to stability, good order, creativity and inspiration in society (2011).”

Second, our research has approached an essay written by Noam Chomsky (1969), *The Function of the University in a Time of Crisis*. Here the author passionately and logically has put forward the idea of a free university necessary for making an emancipatory world. He thinks that university is a very crucial institution which needs to enjoy autonomy and intellectual freedom in all spheres to lead a society to any suitable end. That is why, universities should inculcate among learners the spirit of challenging the *status quo*. Chomsky thinks that a university needs to be subversive and rebellious where the radical issues for human holistic emancipation would be brought into beings. This paper concentrates on the question of freedom as he asserts that, “The university will be able to make its contribution to a free society only to the extent that it overcomes the temptation to conform unthinkingly to the prevailing ideology and to the existing patterns of power and privilege. In its relation to society, a free university should be expected to be, in a sense, subversive (Chomsky, 1969).”

Third, we have also examined *The place of the humanities in today's knowledge society* penned by Rosario Couto Costa (2019). This paper from the global south has brought into consideration the systematic devaluation of humanities from universities. The author has shown the declining trend of this discipline in the OECD countries while also projecting subtle growth for market-oriented business and IT related subjects; he mentions,

“Financial expertise has become the privileged form of knowledge, trumping other kinds, because it is embedded in the operation of the institutes that ensure profit maximization (Couch, 2016).” In addition, how the World Bank and global economic leaders are contributing in downsizing the humanities has also been shown in Costa’s research. Finally, he acknowledges the significance of reinvigorating humanities with interdisciplinary inclination in the academic arena for a sustainable and progressive evolution of a society.

Finally, *Neoliberalism, Policy Reforms and Higher Education in Bangladesh (2013)* authored by Ariful Haq Kabir seems to us a very relevant and significant paper that largely presents historical backdrops and the aftermaths of introducing neoliberal economic policies in the higher education sector in Bangladesh. The author, in particular, has shown the impacts of market imposed shifts in Bangladeshi educational sectors which have been serving the interests of business, civil and military elites primarily. In this regard, he has mentioned the Strategic Plan for Higher Education (SPHE) (UGC, 2006), a policy reform initiated by University Grants Commission, Bangladesh which has been designed, financed and steered by one of the dominant IFIs, the World Bank. According to this SPHE, the author unveils, public universities have started turning into merely service providers to the education-consumers. He substantiates, “By explaining various public university acts, which were established in 2005 and 2006, I argue that the neoliberal policy agenda encourages the government to set up public universities following the private university model.” He also shows that under this model, market responsive subjects are given more importance rather than valuing the question of human liberating knowledge practices. As a consequence, humanities have marked very low enrollment in various universities as opportunities and career futures have shrunk in this discipline.

As a matter of fact, above discussed all the four papers have arrayed issues regarding the classical ideas of universities, humanities while also channeling, in general, discussions to the importance of ensuring transdisciplinary education in the academia so that learners can get prepared to lead a society graced with freedom, ingenuity and other essential aspects of human fulfilment. Also, they have brought into consideration the abrupt shifts that engulfed academia under the thrust of

utilitarian market models. These papers thus have contributed immensely in understanding the broader ongoing enigma of global education circumgyration. However, those papers barely brought discussions on the status of humanities in the context of what outwardly identified as specialized universities as a whole, let alone Bangladeshi ones. At this juncture, our attempted paper would tend to analyze the condition of humanities in what popularly identified as specialized STUs in Bangladesh. Our study also aims at finding out the present state of humanities in relation to STEM in those universities in Bangladesh. It will also shed some light on the question of the harmony between STEM and humanities towards making tertiary education a holistic one inducing a balanced commixture of both the streams so that deeper creativity and skills among generations can be ensured. It is because “The combination of deep, personal understanding and technical skill is a powerful alchemy thus sustains a creative and innovative society. All universities, and their stakeholders, should be committed to its support (Boulton & Loucas, 2011).”

University

The word, *university* ontologically, in general, is self-explanatory. This draws an image of an educational institution which is supposed to deal with the issues available in the ‘universe’. In that sense, it is a global, pluralistic and interdisciplinary academia for the aspirants of knowledge. To add, a university is an institution, chiefly by spirit, which may hold up geographical space, infrastructural makeup, students, teachers and administration and so on. However, above all these, there has to be an inner soul which contributes to other components so that altogether they can make the university in harmony. In fact, human beings are mysterious, they are born with the desire of fulfilment. In this regard the comment of Abraham Maslow is worth mentioning.

Human life will never be understood unless its highest aspirations are taken into account. Growth, self-actualization, the striving toward health, the quest for identity and autonomy, the yearning for excellence (and other ways of phrasing the striving “upward”) must by now be accepted beyond question as a widespread and perhaps universal human tendency (Maslow, 1954).

Institutions, in general, barely can entertain human tendency towards fulfillment since those are the microcosmic forms of the state itself whereas states, in true sense, are the combination of ideological and repressive

apparatuses (Althusser, 1971) to maintain its supremacy over the individuals. However, the scale of their control varies in accordance with the diverse practices structured by any particular state's politico-economic orientations and circumstances. On the contrary, universities are classically perceived to be evolved so that they, at least, can offer the maximum possible opportunities for the holistic accomplishments of human beings. At this juncture, Drew Faust's presidential speech at Harvard University is of pertinence – "A university is not about results in the next quarter; it is not even about who a student has become by graduation. It is about learning that moulds a lifetime; learning that transmits the heritage of millennia; learning that shapes the future (Faust, 2007)."

In that sense, universities are the cure homes of any society. In the long history that very kind of services has been rendered from universities as evidence shows from ancient India to modern Europe. In 1810 on the eve of the establishment of Berlin University, Wilhelm Von Humboldt placed three foundational doctrines of a university: "1. unity of research and teaching, 2. freedom of teaching and 3. academic self-governance (Humboldt, 1810)."

In the mid of the 19th century, Cardinal John Henry Newman (1852) also brought some key propositions about the idea and functions of a university. To his conviction, university is a place that offers intellectual accommodation for learners from diverse walks of life. Here they would interact and circulate thoughts in an unhindered manner while they would also be able to contribute to the greater domain of epistemology by toiling their speculative and creative faculty and thus inquiries will be encouraged, discoveries brought to debate, errors to be corrected through the knowledge based dialectical process and so on. In this manner, universities arrange the scope for reciprocal learnings.

On the basis of Humboldt and Newman's ideas, western universities have been evolving with considerable success (Boulton & Lucas, 2011). Those higher education institutes, with their highly interactive academic aura and administrative freedom, to a greater extent, have not merely contributed to the immediate entrepreneurial benefits of the society; at the same time they catered the necessary wisdom for the future world. They have also played a significant role in inducing rebellious thoughts which ultimately paved the way to ensure social progress in those countries. Since

universities are financed by public taxes, they also have been providing pragmatic benefits turning into national-research-bases for many countries.

Prior to the emergence of western universities, researchers have found, ancient Indian universities from 10th century B.C. had marked a very well-heeled position in human civilization. Takshashila, Nalanda, Vikramashila and Valabhi are the names among many old universities of the Indian subcontinent. Those institutions managed to ensure academic freedom and interdisciplinary knowledge with a democratic zeal in the field of teaching, research and governance (Apte, 1961). Those universities bequeathed scholars like Chanakya, Panini, Jivaka, Nagarjuna, Padmashambhava, Shantarakshita, Aryadeva to name a few. These pundits, if not systematically obscured to some generations, laid many foundation-stones in the global knowledge paradigm.

Furthermore, Rabindranath Tagore (2011) has seen university as the sanctorium of knowledge while to him this institution is to offer optimum freedom of cultivating, contradicting and nourishing thoughts of multitudinous cultures and backgrounds. It is the citadel, to him, of humane pursuits towards the fulfilment. He also raised the question of decolonizing universities in the Indian subcontinent as he has believed that the modern form of a university is a byproduct of the colonial rule which is why, he reiterates that university would respond to the big questions any particular society grapples with, and also disseminate the respective discoveries across the continents.

Like Bertrand Russel, Probhat Patnaik of Jawaharlal Nehru University considers university as a revolutionary institution (Patnaik, 2017). It is revolutionary in a sense that universities will divulge the radical questions hovering over any particular generation under the rule of constricting authorities, and at the same time, will seek for the solutions. Thus, a society will be able to trod on the path of progress. In this context Russel's remark appears to be very relevant—"Without rebellion, mankind would stagnate, and injustice would be irremediable. The man who refuses to obey authority has, therefore, in certain circumstances, a legitimate function, provided his disobedience has motives which are social rather than personal (Russel, 2004)."

On the basis of the above discussion, the functions of a normative university can be discerned as follows. Accordingly, these tertiary educational institutes are to-

- inspire students to confront uncertainties.
- feed and nurture learners' instincts to wisdom.
- invoke radical concerns of any society.
- extract deep underlying issues related to the world.
- serve students to think and contemplate.
- question the prevalent interpretations of any issue and reorder the chaos of information into analytical arguments.
- teach learners to seek relevant resolution to any problem.
- encourage creativity and speculative faculty.
- help them identify problems by themselves and find compatible solutions.

Humanities

Humanities are concerned with what is essentially humane including the big and abstract questions regarding truth, reality, religion, existence, ethics, aesthetics and so on. They also venture to discern, praise and question human enterprises in all their possible manifestations. Thus, they tend to offer solutions to the challenges oozed in any specific period of time. As a matter of fact, humanities follow interpretative, reflective and analytical approaches primarily, unlike the laboratory or social modeling experiments of natural and social sciences. As a whole, they seek to enhance wisdom which helps one to go beyond the seemingly apparent 'truth' into the deepest world of any issue or subject. Hence, it helps to yield judicious as well as pluralistic views that are necessary to outweigh the parochial outlook so that one is able to enjoy global citizenship. "The humanities [also] help us wrestle with the meaning of life, understand our relationship with our government, and pass on the stories of our hometowns (Masshumanities, 2019)." They put emphasis on our myriad heritage, history and tradition. They also seek to introspect into the present aspects of citizens' lives.

In the discussions on humanities, Homi Bhabha's remarks on an Indian television interview (Bhabha, 2011) mark immense relevance. He thinks humanities are associated with a certain set of disciplines like literature, religion, philosophy, classics, art, languages and cultures. They, as disciplines of study, provide a climate of opinion and a culture of knowledge which allow learners to nourish three important things in particular; first, humanities give emphasis on interpretation in the current chaos of information flooded in public spaces triggered by information technology. To illuminate the question of interpretation, Nietzsche's claim would be

vital as he says, “There are no facts, only interpretation (1901).” Through the very interpretation, human beings create what they identify as knowledge. Second, humanities reflect on values in the diversity of cultures and ideologies offering a wider outlook for life. Third, they are important in wiring connections with other disciplines of knowledge, to say in particular, between the human sciences, natural sciences and the like. In this respect, humanities appear to be interdisciplinary from its essence.

Another American philosopher and author, Martha Nussbaum has contributed substantially for the revival of humanities in the 21st century. Her seminal book, *Not For Profit: Why Democracy Needs Humanities* (2016) is a great testimony of her erudition and commitment for humanities. In an interview with William D. Adams (2017), she has mentioned the functions of humanities. Accordingly, humanities equip students with necessary qualities to become responsible citizenry, and simultaneously aid them to deduce understandings from a complicated and intertwined world. The humanities also enhance learners with the abilities of critical thinking, show ways of analyzing arguments, and inspire them to perceive life from someone else’s point of view. She also finds great utilitarian value of humanities which contributes with profundity for the creativity, innovation and other attributes necessary for an efficient business executive. In addition to those, she adds, humanities help nourish the traits of value judgement in the case of criticism, dissent and even in business behaviour. Finally, she thinks that life is not merely living for earning and consuming, rather it demands a contemplative quest for meaning, otherwise it would certainly turn into a labyrinthine meaninglessness; humanities give the impetus to reflect on the purpose and meaning of life (Adams, 2017).

However, with the inflated advent and rocketing rise of market culture and its systematic over-attention to science, technology and business, humanities have been pushed nearly to the edge of extinction. There have been structural and ideological shifts that have preyed on the dignity and prodigiousness of humanities in academia. To add, the World Bank (WB), with its rigorous political agenda, has been pushing policy reforms for universities in many countries, especially in developing ones (Johnstone et al, 1998). This initiative has radically brought a shift in the regulatory dynamics of the higher educational institutes. Admittedly, the policies basically follow an alignment with neoliberal market ideology. Reduction of public investment got an impetus there, and which is why universities have become more accountable to the market, not to civilization. For that reason

disciplines related to economic utility and efficiency have been geared up and gradually they became the pivotal concern of academia. This again has been reinforced by Michael Gibbons (1998), the then counsellor to the WB. According to him, the core purpose of the university is to boost the economy and this would be materialized through training human resources and focusing on skills. In this line, OECD's policy (2001) promoted ICT and managerial education in those countries. As a result of this entrepreneurial outlook, humanities have been indirectly or to some extent directly thrust to the margin again. From then on a discriminatory discursive formation has also found its way against humanities. These systematic as well as inequitable inclinations to humanities follow curtailing of resources for research, teaching and study, reducing spatial and physical structural access, cutting down courses and departments, constraining career scopes, devaluing learners dignity and so on (Costa, 2019).

This culture of utility-hegemony over humanities is also pertinent in the discussion regarding higher education trends in Bangladesh. With the higher education restructuring prescription promoted by the WB, Bangladesh Government has undertaken a twenty year Strategic Plan for Higher Education (SPHE) in 2006 (UGC, 2006). Initially, the WB funded 100 million USD for this reformation project in tertiary education (Kabir, 2013). Accordingly, in the name of enhancing the knowledge economy, the WB also granted 91.5 million USD in 2009. As a result, "public universities are systematically encouraged to follow private university models (Kabir, 2013)" which are proven to be pursuing merely profit maximizing ventures. After the strategic policy, universities have launched neoliberal market desired programmes which predominantly focus on applied sciences, ICT and business related courses (Kabir, 2013). Even though a few humanities related subjects are there, however, their pedagogical orientation has been scheduled towards serving chiefly the market interests. Further, in private universities, student enrollment in Arts and Social Sciences decreased unprecedentedly (UGC, 2010b). Thus, universities *de facto* turn into retail service providers while learners are the clients. As a whole, starting from the 1990s the governments, time to time, limiting the space of humanities studies, have assimilated the neoliberal policy for tertiary education in Bangladesh where market has become the deciding factor (Kabir, 2013). Ultimately, a redefined model of public universities has been developed where state investment tends to turn down gradually.

To cripple humanities discipline further, there are structural, attitudinal as well as ideological arrangements not only from the market, but the government also played their part (Kabir, 2010). Therefore, the countries are turned into corporate states (Shiva, 2018) where the concerns of ruling parties and market lords converge on the same interest contour.

At this juncture, a frightening report of the Freedom House, a US based organization is of crucial importance. It shows a trend of declining democracy across the continents (2021). According to its report, authoritarian actors and right wing political populists are on the upswing in many countries. Public critical minds are amputated there through imposing draconian laws against freedom of expression, human rights etcetera. These countries have subtly managed to incision subjects from academia which are thought to be stimulating human freedom, critical faculty and democratic spirits. As a result, students' enrollment in humanities is on sharp decline in many countries (Kabir, 2010). Here, there seems to appear an underlying correlation between these two phenomena. To elaborate, again Nussbaum's assertion is of relevance – “Radical changes are occurring in what democratic societies teach the young, and these changes have not been well-thought through. Thirsty for national profit, nations and their systems of education, are heedlessly discarding skills (humanities) that are needed to keep democracies alive (Nussbaum, 2010).”

Interdependence of the Notion of Humanities and the Idea of a University

If we bring into account the grounding features of universities and humanities, a very close affinity between them can be traced out since they, to a large extent, complement each other. To illustrate, first, tertiary educational institutes are supposed to orient learners to the world of uncertainties which, in general, are also imbued by humanities through philosophical big questions, to say the least. Second, humanities essentially inculcates among learners an interdisciplinary approach to knowledge, whereas in tertiary education, teaching, learning and research are encouraged to be transdisciplinary. Third, in higher education critical thinking, creativity, analytical aptitude and contemplative insight are immensely significant; in the same way, humanities can contribute substantially in all these fields via the subjects it carries under its umbrella. Fourth, if anyone considers the pursuit of enhanced education in universities, three major criteria have to be entertained, thematic, proficiency based and experiential learning (Green School, 2017); likewise humanities tend to foster all these areas of knowledge. Fifth, universities are supposed to create international citizens who would uphold respect and tolerance for the heterogeneity of people and places

belonging to a myriad of cultures by analyzing, evaluating and appreciating the diversities; in this particular regard, the role of humanities in helping learners to become the normative cross national citizens cannot be cast aside (Nussbaum, 2010). Furthermore, humanities deal with the issues related to knowledge, truth and ultimately wisdom (Idaho Humanities Council, 2021); these three paramount aspects of epistemology can no way be separated from the vocation of any university. In fact, this list projecting imminent correlation between humanities and universities can be stretched longer; at least, the mentioned ones are the testaments of the *interdependence* between them. At this point, Terry Eagleton's comment can be put in relevance, "... just as there cannot be a pub without alcohol, so there cannot be a university without humanities... neither can there be a university in the full sense of the word when the humanities exist in isolation from other disciplines (Eagleton, 2010)."

However, some may claim that if universities are run by public taxes, they are to take care of the utilitarian demands of the people, corporations and states. They are expected to maintain a sound relationship with business conglomerates (Dan, 2013). This claim has been advanced in an unprecedented manner recently, in the era of globalization which, in other words, is the project of the neoliberal economy. Triggered by this market push, universities, primarily in the western world, have started to mould themselves so that they can fulfill the demands of the government-corporation nexus. Accordingly, the role of a university has been redesigned by market driven think tanks. For example, like some others, the European Commission came up with a new maneuvering triangle for tertiary education in this new era, research-education-innovation (Boulton & Lucas, 2011). This triangle metrics has immensely ushered the market leaning emergence of universities across the global north first, and the south later. Therefore, these higher institutes have been pushed for immediate market gratification. Putting over-emphasis on STEM in tertiary education can be seen as the byproduct of this neoliberal shift in the academia which twisted the previously prevalent Indian, Newmanian and Humboldtian notions of liberal universities.

Economism

With the emergence of the market economy, there has been a widespread tendency of economism (Brody, 2013) in almost all the societies of the world for at least a couple of decades. This economism is directly or indirectly linked with market triumphalism which has paved the way to penetrate every sphere of human life. Economism, to illustrate, is a *signifier* to denote gross-material-outlook or consumerist attitude putting emphasis on coarse utility

ideals of any human action. It, hence, denies all intrinsic and abstract values that are inseparable from human life. As a consequence, the market economy turns into a market society where the market appears to be the guiding force of socio-political affairs of human beings (Sandel, 2012). In the midst of this profit-loss paradigm everything material or abstract is commodified; education is not an exception. Here to mention, education which is the indicator of human civilizational progress and accomplishment has been under severe sway of this economism. For this reason, disciplines directly not contributing to boost market profit are structurally and systematically marginalized from academia. With that zeal, universities have been contributing to downsize subjects belonging to humanities disciplines as they, to the most market loyalist, rarely bear any utility value whereas questionably the value is assessed merely on extrinsic features of any study subject denying the long term and intrinsic aspects of it (Brody, 2013). To illustrate further, Homi Bhabha's remark can be cited, "It (humanities) is underfunded now with the dominance of STEM (Bhabha, 2011)."

With the triggering of this profit based design, of late, universities have merely become the service providers in a true business sense. Here students are service seekers while the teachers and administration service providers. This is the spin-off of market triumphalism (Sandel, 2012), otherwise defined as neoliberalism or market fundamentalism which, on the other hand, has been reinforced by this kind of attitude of academia. This appears to be a vicious cycle that permeates every inch of academic space nowadays.

The Scenario of Science and Technology Universities in Bangladesh

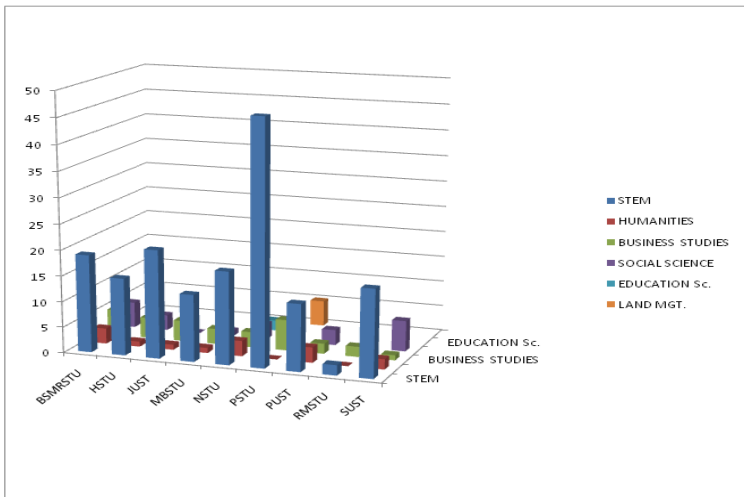
In the epoch of market-rule, the current status of humanities in the STUs in Bangladesh seems very appalling. Its causality-root may take readers back to the neoliberal shift of the state policies in recent years. With the funding of International Financial Institutions (IFIs), particularly the WB, the Bangladesh government has pursued a programme SPHE (UGC, 2006) under which many STUs have been established. Now the number of Bangladeshi STUs is nine, where humanities exist meagerly with an intense academic apathy as the extracted data show in the following. Under our research exploration, we accessed the websites of these universities on 30 June, 2021. Admittedly, our findings barely show any inspiring evidence regarding the status of humanities in those universities. All these nine tertiary institutes, as projected in the following table and bar-graph, altogether run 165 STEM departments. However, they have seated only 14 of Humanities, 30 of Business Studies, 21 of Social Sciences and 7 of others like Land Management and Education Sciences. To

note, since English as a language is revered in this country, its market incentives are also emanant. Therefore, most of these universities hold English departments under humanities discipline as perhaps, Hasan and Rahman (2012) have pointed out, English apparently bears an exalted power stratum in once colonized countries like Bangladesh. Even with the availability of English in almost all STUs, a simple question cannot be ignored– whether the pedagogy and attitude towards this language-literature subject follow ‘standard’ philosophical principles of humanities, or it is merely treated as a get pass to this neoliberal market-society. However, some may insist that these universities are specialized ones where STEMs have been the baseline. Here, however, the question appears whether knowledge particularly in higher education is something to be rigidly *compartmentalized* or needs to be interdisciplinarily approached. To answer, education is assumed to be the means of human wellbeing through committing to the welfare of the environment and all other species. John Dewe’s (2012) conviction is of vital importance as it goes– “Education is a social process; education is growth; education is not preparation for life but is life itself.” In a nutshell, if insight about comprehensive potentials of humans is cut short propelling only constricting technological and skill based learning, it might produce a more deficient generation than the one existing world system seems suffering from.

University	Year of Establishment	STEM*	HUMANITIES	Social Science	Business Studies	Education Sci.	Land Mg mt.
BSMRSTU	2010	19	3	5	5		
HSTU	1999	15	1	3	4		
JUST	2007	21	1	0	4		
MBSTU	2001	13	1	1	3		
NSTU	2005	18	3	3	3	2	
PSTU	2002	47	0	0	6		5
PUST	2008	13	3	3	2		
RMSTU	2011	2	0	0	2		
SUST	1986	17	2	6	1		

*STEM= Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics

N.B. These data were collected on 30 June, 2021 on the basis of the information provided by the websites of the universities concerned.



Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, the significance of conserving humanities in universities seems very crucial since this domain of knowledge inspires transdisciplinary analysis for almost all the streams of study. Humanities are also valuable because they deepen humane understanding of any issue relating to big questions of life and its surroundings. They also contribute to nurture a pluralistic worldview among pupils and people; thus, they help make felicitous citizenry for a world of heterogeneity. As a matter of fact, tertiary education is supposed to equip learners with all the necessary qualities that comprehensively accord to mould holistic human beings with the combination of skills and wisdom. On that appeal, it would not be non-judicious to claim that, in true sense, universities have barely found their way in Bangladesh. That is why, existing humanities-scanty universities need to reassess their policies and priorities as well as their long induced causantum in that context. If they want to remain loyal to the ideal attributes of a university belonging to the civilization, they are to try to ensure an equitable attention, in pecuniary and attitudinal precincts, to humanities. If universities tend to produce purely skilled graduates with merely some degree of professional and technical knowledge, that would barely assist, in the long run, to create a peaceful and prudent world

system. This exertion would find justification since people have been experiencing a market driven world order especially from the emergence of industrialism and consumerism (Hodge, 2019). In that consumerist world 'knowledge as skill' supersedes 'knowledge as science' (Gramsci, 1971).

In the context of Bangladesh, STUs are in dearth of what has been mentioned earlier, interdisciplinary nature of studies where existing disciplines are following the utilitarian motto of markets in pedagogy, content and philosophy. Here the number of humanities and social science related subjects, as shown in our survey, is very necessitous now. However, one of the central objectives of establishing the science and technology universities in Bangladesh was to develop creative and skilled human resources to fulfill the Bangladesh vision 2021 (CPD, 2007). Only isolated study of any discipline can rarely ensure building up a creative 'human-resource' sensed in the vision. That is why, it is high time we thought about the curricula as well as pedagogy of tertiary education especially that of specialized universities, or else the institutes identified as universities would emerge as mere paradoxes in the days to come.

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Evaluation of the English Language Courses for the Learners of the Arts Faculty of Rajshahi University

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Abstract

This study attempts to explore the relevant and available literature on syllabus evaluation as an essential component and phase of the ELT syllabus design procedures. It also concentrates on course design in ESP as a prime and promising stream of ELT now-a-days. In the light of the theoretical concepts and criteria, effectiveness, appropriacy, function, and utility of the English language teaching programmes currently used to nurture the proficiency of the tertiary level students in English are to be assessed. Specifically, this study focuses on analysis and evaluation of the presently used English language courses in the various departments of the Faculty of Arts at Rajshahi University in Bangladesh, which may ideally serve as microcosms of the different disciplines of knowledge of the universities and higher educational institutions functioning in the country. Ultimately, this paper aims to suggest the necessary means and measures to develop effective, well-organized and needs-oriented English language syllabi for the higher level learners of our country.

Keywords: Syllabus design, Syllabus evaluation, the Tertiary level learners, Needs analysis, the ESP movement, EAP Courses, EOP courses

1. Introduction

In the non-English setting, Dubin and Olshtain advocate, it would be beneficial for the whole education system to assess the effectiveness of the existing language courses. They argue, "Often a new program is required because there is a serious gap between the results of the existing one and the needs of the learners for English as a language of study. Policy decisions will have to be made in order to find ways to close this gap" (1986, pp. 10-11). In Bangladesh, the necessity of the evaluation of the existing English language course/s, particularly at the higher level deserves utmost

importance and deliberation. The various departments of the Public or Private universities in Bangladesh as well as other higher educational institutions, as perceived from the procedures of syllabus design, intend to offer future needs-based English language course/s to the tertiary level/university students. To be more specific, the departments under the Faculty of Arts at Rajshahi University offer English language courses to learners to improve their competence in the English language, the most popularly used foreign language in the country, to cater for learners' future needs in various work settings. However, the tertiary level learners are commonly not consulted about whether they perceive such a need for the knowledge or skills in using English as these English courses provide them with. Their needs have been decided for them by those concerned with their long-term welfare. An informal assessment, which may not be very systematic and consistent in format and procedure, of the English language needs of the undergraduate learners was made by the teaching body with the aid of the external experts when each of these disciplines of knowledge was established. Initially, a focus on English for General purposes was adopted for developing the English language courses. Since then, various English language courses have been offered by the teachers working in these disciplines of knowledge and attended by the learners. However, there has been no formal assessment of the learners' needs. Sometimes, a few initiatives have been taken to modify and modernize these courses in response to changing needs of the learners.

2. Statement of the Problem

Reflecting on the standard of English education at the higher level in Bangladesh, Nurul Islam regrets the piteous fact that despite the constant concerns and initiatives of the government (Boards of Education of Bangladesh and UGC) "there has not been any change in the increasing deterioration of the standard of proficiency in English in our schools, colleges and universities" (1986, p. i). Hence, T. A. Chaudhury emphasizes the necessity of the evaluation of the effectiveness of the current English courses at the higher level,

In Bangladesh, English Language experts design English Language courses for both the private and public sectors. ... Once implemented, the courses are never evaluated by the authorities concerned. Constraints, problems, limitations of students and teachers have never been acknowledged or explored (2001, p. 61).

Therefore, English language course planners and developers working at different departments of the universities of Bangladesh need to take into account the changed situation and adopt appropriate measures to elevate the standard of English language education at the tertiary level. Siddiqui maintains that the standard of English of majority of the undergraduates of Bangladesh appears barely 'adequate'. Hence, he suggests, "we should devise some means for helping them. New courses, new approaches, of remedial and/or specific purpose English should receive our urgent attention" (1986, p. 12). Furthermore, S. Ahmed (1986) has detected aimlessness of the course structure at the higher level (University). These observations appear to be relevant concerning the English language courses offered and delivered in most of the Departments under the faculty of Arts at Rajshahi University.

Hence, we need to thoroughly consider how effective the current English language courses are for the higher level learners. This study particularly purports to discover and determine whether the English language courses presently delivered in the eleven departments under the faculty of Arts at Rajshahi University are appropriate and effective for furnishing the tertiary learners with required level of competence in English or not and whether major reorientation of the syllabi as well as a newly defined role of these departments is needed or not.

3. Literature Review

Breen views syllabus designing as a 'creative' process which concerns not only syllabus 'construction' but also 'reinterpretation' of the existing syllabus. He theorizes, "Even a predesigned plan, however, is inevitably and continually reinterpreted by ourselves and by our learners. Both the original construction and the reinterpretation of the plan are creative activities. Such creativity will be shaped by the particular frames of reference – the experiences, attitudes, and knowledge – of the designer and the users of the plan" (1983, p. 47).

3.1 Approaches to Syllabus Design and Categories of Syllabi Developed for English Language Teaching

The incessant pursuit of discovering a suitable, practicable and effective syllabus for second or foreign language teaching has led ELT experts and researchers to devising and presenting a good variety of syllabus types. In

this regard, Dubin and Olshtain recognize the structural-grammatical syllabus, the semantic-notional syllabus, the functional syllabus, and the situational syllabus as the four major types of syllabi. They further specify that these syllabi are based on a discrete approach to organization because all four of them “illustrate different realizations of an organizational approach based on discrete units” (1986, p. 37). Conversely, they point out, the communicative approach to curriculum and syllabus design, a recent development in the ELT course design, is based on an integrative approach because the communicative syllabus upholds “the idea of presenting an organizational concept which is not based on separate units but rather on a continuous process of communication and negotiation in the target language” (1986, pp. 37-38). Additionally, the synthetic syllabus, the analytic syllabus, the product syllabus, the process syllabus, the Lexical Syllabus, the Competency-based Syllabus, the Skills-based Syllabus, the Task-based Syllabus, the Text-based Syllabus, and the Multi-syllabus or the Eclectic Syllabus are some worth mentioning categories of syllabus devised for English language teaching. On the whole, “In the process of syllabus design, the choice of syllabus is a major decision in language teaching, and it should be made as consciously and with as much information as possible” (Agustina, 2014, p. 51).

3.2 Importance of Developing an Appropriate, Practicable and Effective Syllabus

Yalden highlights that an apposite syllabus may produce two kinds of efficiency. The first kind of efficiency is ‘pragmatic efficiency’ that involves maintaining economy of time and money. She puts forward, “The setting of instruction has to be planned. Not all learners will be given the same treatment, and so syllabuses differ according to the practical constraints present in any given situation” (1984, p. 14). The second kind of efficiency is ‘pedagogical efficiency’ which is ingrained with economy in the management of the learning process. She clarifies, “Instruction provided in an institutional setting is assumed to be a more efficient method of dealing with learning than allowing the learner to proceed in a non-structured environment” (1984, p. 14).

Moreover, Dudley-Evans and St. John uphold the idea that an effective syllabus must attempt to “overcome the deficiencies of the educational system under which they are operating” (1998, p. 95). Similarly, Candlin

propounds that “it was felt that any syllabus for language learning and teaching ought to be premised as much on learning principles as it was on the arrangement of subject-matter content” (1984, p. 38). Furthermore, he argues that traditional syllabuses as well as some of the recently introduced syllabuses which were “ostensibly designed to replace (the previous/old ones), aided by a methodology equally unchanged in its transmissiveness, merely required learners to learn what was set before them, asking no questions” (1984, p. 38). Candlin claims to uphold “the second type of syllabus” which must be “characterised by a set of problem-solving tasks” that can mold “conditions for value-identification, meaning-negotiation and comprehensible input by the learner” (1984, pp. 42-43). Additionally, Candlin lists the advantages of an innovative and interactive syllabus. In his opinion, such a syllabus would be ‘social and problem-solving’ in its orientation rather than one which transmits ‘preselected and often pre-digested knowledge’. Besides, he maintains that the model should be ‘productive rather than merely reflective’ that will allow and, even, encourage learners and teachers to ask questions from the outset about any component or aspect of the syllabus and, thereby, it can offer the opportunity to create ‘new knowledge’ and ‘modify the entire syllabus process’.

3.3 The Principles and Procedures of Designing a Language Syllabus

Harmer believes that “every syllabus needs to be developed on the basis of certain criteria” (2001, p. 295). Course development, Richards and Rogers theorize, “requires needs analysis, development of goals and objectives, selection of teaching and learning activities, and evaluation of the outcomes of the language program” (1986, p. 156). Regarding language course planning and syllabus design Richards maintains, “A number of different levels of planning and development are involved in developing a course or set of instructional materials based on the aims and objectives that have been established for a language program” (2001, p. 145). He argues that these processes may not proceed inexorably in a linear order because some of them may take place simultaneously. Besides, many aspects of a course can be considered as subject to ongoing revision each time the course is taught.

3.4 ESP and EOP Syllabus Design

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in contrast to General English (GE) or English for No Specific Purposes or English for General Purposes (EGP) is regarded as a dominant approach to English language teaching. The ESP

movement, in the opinion of Johns and Price-Machado, is founded on the “proposition that all language teaching should be tailored to the specific learning and language use needs of identified groups of students” (2001, p. 43). In the same line, Unueshotse illuminates, “ESP, an outgrowth of the age-long ELT, is a crystallization of the communicative approach and communicative language teaching method” (2017, p. 75). “In the recent years ESP has become a major developmental focus in the area of...communicative syllabus design and materials production” (Munby, 1978, p. 1). In the area of syllabus design, predominantly in the communicative syllabus design, Munby thinks, the communication needs of the learner, especially the derivational relationship of syllabus specification to such needs deserve more systematic attention. In addition, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) argue that though traditionally the target situation analysis exerts a direct determining influence on the development of syllabus, materials, methodology and so on in ELT, the factors concerned with learning must be properly addressed at every phase of the course design process in ESP and its’ two major branches, namely teaching English for Academic Purposes or EAP and teaching English for Occupational Purposes or EOP, as well as in implementing the designed course.

The proponents of the ESP movement uphold that an ESP syllabus is usually devised to serve a multi-functional purpose. As ESP courses intend to cater for various language needs of diverse learners, the syllabus designers must take into consideration the different functions the syllabi aim to fulfil to ensure that the course could be appropriately developed and effectively used for teaching a target language. A number of ELT scholars and specialists including Munby (1978), Hutchinson and Waters (1987), Nunan (1988), Brindley (1989), Robinson (1991), Brown (2009), Seedhouse (1995), West (1997), Graves (1999), Richards (2001), and Long (2005) propound that NA plays a crucial role in ESP as well as general English course design. In fact, NA can help course developers to produce a focused course. Basturkmen (2010) propounds a scheme of ESP course design in which she puts need analysis in first place before organizing/reconstructing an ESP course. In addition, for ESP course planning and development, Paltridge and Starfield (2013) put forward a paradigm of syllabus design. The scheme conceptualized by Paltridge and Starfield is presented in the following figure:

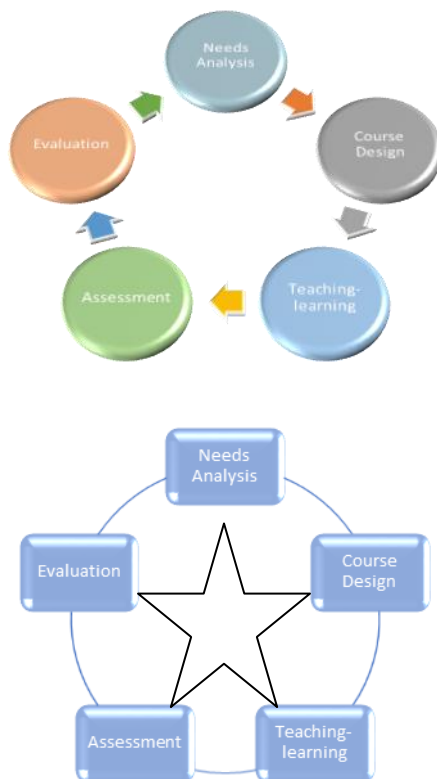


Figure.1: Scheme of Course Design by Paltridge and Starfield

The above figure demonstrates that the outcome of the learners' needs analysis, which must be conducted before developing an ESP course, will form the core information to substantiate and materialize ESP course design. Additionally, it will serve as guidance in teaching and learning process so that the teacher is able to conduct an assessment of the learners' achievement and, finally, an evaluation of the language course (Paltridge and Starfield, 2013, p. 326).

In fine, Dudley-Evans and St. Johns argue that the stages of the syllabus design procedures should not be considered separate, "linearly-related activities, rather, they represent phases which overlap and are

interdependent” (1998, p. 121). Thus, from the dynamic interactions between these elements will ensue an effective EOP course.

3.5 Syllabus Analysis and Course Evaluation

Breen suggests, “A syllabus is a shareable plan – by definition – and therefore open to inspection and evaluation. Perhaps we would require our syllabus to be accessible and meaningful to anyone who is directly or indirectly concerned with its use” (1984, p. 48). Course evaluation, Richards explicates, “focuses on collecting information about different aspects of a language program in order to understand how the program works, and how successfully it works, enabling different kinds of decisions to be made about the program, such as whether the program responds to learners’ needs...or whether students are learning sufficiently from it” (2001, p. 286). The procedures which are generally employed for conducting course evaluation include language tests, interviews, questionnaires, case study, observation, audio or video-recording, teachers’ written evaluation, teachers’ records, diary study, student evaluation and comparison of two approaches to/versions of a course. “Since the 1960s, curriculum evaluation has become of increasing interest to educators and curriculum planners” (Richards, 2001, p. 287).

Similarly, Allen argues that decision-making for language course design “must be subject to some form of evaluation, in order to check that the results of our decisions are meeting their stated objectives, and so that knowledge about curriculum processes can accumulate in a systematic and responsible way” (1984, p. 70). Allen further adds, “Administrative decision-makers have to take into account not only the general principles which emerge from concept formation, but also a wide range of practical factors such as the size of the budget, the number of students in each class, the amount of time available for language teaching, and the teachers’ level of proficiency in the target language” (1984, p. 62).

In addition, Dubin and Olshtain propose two ways of collecting required information concerning the effectiveness of the existing language course/s. One way of course evaluation could be by examining the official documentation available on the course/s. Another way of course assessment would demand an investigation into the English course itself. “In addition to consulting the official documentation”, they counsel, “it is usually advisable to conduct a survey of the English program itself

containing evaluative mechanisms” (1986, p. 11). For this purpose, course developers need to discern a) the results of language achievement test, b) the overall curriculum, c) the existing textbooks, d) the existing teaching methods, e) teacher-training programs, both in-service and preparatory, and f) opinions and perceptions expressed by teachers, students and parents. Thus, “The combination of the two paths of investigation, official documentation and careful evaluation of the existing program, provides a picture of the effectiveness of the English instructional program at any point of time” (Dubin and Olshtain, 1986, pp. 11-12).

In fine, Hewings and Dudley-Evans (1996) highlight that the scope of program evaluation has shifted from a concern with test results to the need to collect information and assess all the aspects of a language course, from planning to implementation.

3.5.1 Types of Course Evaluation

ELT scholars and professionals presume that type of course evaluation may vary due to the difference of purposes for evaluation. According to Weir and Roberts (1994), language course evaluation is generally undertaken for two major purposes, a) Program accountability and b) Program development. They propound that ‘Accountability’ signifies the extent to which those involved in a language course are answerable for the quality of their work. Accordingly, ‘Accountability-oriented evaluation’ usually examines the effects of a program at significant end points of an educational cycle. This kind of evaluation is commonly conducted for the benefit of an external audience or decision maker. On the contrary, ‘Development-oriented evaluation’ is devised to improve the quality of a program while it is being implemented. This kind of evaluation may embrace a teacher-development focus (Weir and Roberts, 1994, p. 5). In addition, Richards identifies basically three categories of course evaluation procedures, namely a) Formative evaluation, b) Illuminative evaluation, and c) Summative evaluation (2001, p. 288).

a) Formative Evaluation

Formative evaluation “is an integral part of the materials development process” (Allen, 1984, p. 70). Formative evaluation generally concentrates on the ongoing development and improvement of a language course. Richards expounds, “Evaluation may be carried out as part of the process of

program development in order to find out what is working well, and what is not, and what problems need to be addressed. This type of evaluation is generally known as formative evaluation” (2001, p. 288). Various methods of data collection are employed in formative evaluation. “Formative evaluation includes pilot-testing, interviews with teachers and consultants, classroom observation and validation of the subject-area content” (Allen, 1984, p. 70). The information gathered from a formative evaluation is ultimately utilized to address the detected problems and to improve the quality of delivery of the course.

b) Illuminative Evaluation

Illuminative Evaluation, Richards clarifies, “seeks to find out how different aspects of the program work or are being implanted” (2001, p. 289). Unlike formative evaluation system, illuminative evaluation system does not necessarily intend to modify a language course. Its focal purpose is to offer a deeper understanding of the processes of teaching and learning that take place in a language programme. In Block’s (1998) opinion, illuminative evaluation could be beneficial in discerning learners’ interpretations of the language course they attend and how they make sense of their language lessons. He emphasizes that it would be illuminative for the teachers to interview learners regularly to discover learners’ interpretation of how the course is proceeding and what will ensue in the course. Richards discerns that “classroom action research or teacher inquiry can be regarded as a type of illuminative evaluation” (2001, p. 291).

c) Summative Evaluation

The third approach to course evaluation is known as Summative Evaluation, which is popularly used by most teachers and course administrators. This kind of evaluation aims at making decisions about the worth or value of different aspects of the curriculum. “Summative evaluation”, Richards illuminates, “is concerned with determining the effectiveness of a program, its efficiency, and to some extent with its acceptability” (2001, pp. 291-292). Generally, it takes place after implementation of a language course. Summative Evaluation, Allen asserts, is usually “carried out after the materials have been published and are in use” (1984, p. 70).

For assessment of the effectiveness of a language course, course planners need to identify the criteria for effectiveness. “There are many different

measures of a course's effectiveness and each measure can be used for different purposes" (Richards, 2001, pp. 291-292). Some measures of a course's effectiveness are: i) Mastery of objectives, ii) Performance on tests, iii) Measure of acceptability, iv) Retention rate or reenrollment rate, and v) Efficiency of the course. Weir (1995) emphasizes the importance of ensuring appropriate measures of summative evaluation. He recommends that progress-sensitive performance tests could be developed to be used during the course to evaluate effectiveness of a language course.

d) Longitudinal Evaluation

According to Rossi and McLaughlin, 'Long-term' or Longitudinal evaluation refers to a study which involves the direct relating of program participation to ultimate criteria by using a design which "allows for the same individuals to be followed up for a period of years" (1976, p. 1). It is opposed to 'Short-term' evaluation system that involves 'minimal delay between program participation and evaluation data collection'. It aims at the assessment of ultimate treatment effects by the measurement of performance judged to be predictive of some ultimate criterion. Researchers and course evaluators may use either a short-term or a long-term evaluation procedure on the basis of practical and conceptual considerations. They uphold that a longitudinal programme evaluation system could be found more beneficial than a 'short-term' evaluation procedure for the assessment of the effects of a language course. Furthermore, its results can be utilized for the development and validation of any short-term evaluation procedure for the evaluation of the same course.

A longitudinal study is observational and researchers do not interfere with their subjects. Course developers as well as users could set up a longitudinal analysis to evaluate effectiveness of a language course. In a longitudinal analysis, evaluators should repeatedly examine the same selected participants to detect any changes that might occur over a period of time. They are required to observe and collect data on a number of variables without affecting those variables. Any set amount of time can hardly be determined for conducting a longitudinal evaluation of a language course. It may range from as short as a few weeks to as long as several years or decades.

A longitudinal evaluation enables evaluators to follow their subjects in real time and, thereby, they can better establish the real sequence of events,

allowing them insight into cause-and-effect relationships. Additionally, evaluators get opportunity to detect developments or changes in the characteristics of the target population at both the group and the individual level. However, a longitudinal evaluation is usually time-consuming and often more expensive than other types of course evaluation procedures, so it necessitates significant commitment and resources to be effective. Moreover, any potential insights from a longitudinal evaluation can take a while to be discovered because it requires repeated observations of subjects over a period of time.

3.5.2 Issues and Factors Involved in Course Evaluation

Weir and Roberts (1994) suggest that there are some issues and dominant factors of which course planners and evaluators must take account while conducting evaluation of a language course. They theorize that an ideal course evaluation system ought to incorporate a number of significant factors and concerns, like i) a need for both insider and outsider commitment and involvement to ensure adequate evaluation, ii) a central interest in improvement and the demonstration of the “product value” of a program as well as its components, iii) an associated commitment to a deeper professional understanding of the processes of educational change, as well as the results of that change, iv) systematic documentation for evaluation purposes both during implementation and at the beginning and end of a program’s life, and v) a willingness to embrace both qualitative and quantitative methodology appropriate to the purpose of the evaluation and the context under review.

Besides, “In language teaching, there has been a comparative neglect of systematic curriculum development. In particular, there have been few attempts to apply, in any systematic fashion, principles of curriculum development to the planning, implementation, and evaluation of language programmes” (Nunan, 1988, p. 3). There may be several disparities and setbacks which frequently occur in these procedures. For instance, Stenhouse (1975) observes, course developers and users confront constant disparity and conflict between ‘intention and reality’, between ‘theory and realization’. Candlin highlights two possible effects of this conflict, “If the syllabus is sensitive to this disparity, then it can allow for formative experiment and evaluation and consequent changes in both content and direction”. On the other side, “If it is not sensitive, then both teachers and

learners become alienated and incapacitated servants of a set of requirements at odds with their individuality and with the realities of the classroom” (1984, p. 32).

Additionally, deprivation and alienation of learners can be marked as a dominant setback in the scheme and procedure of syllabus design. In this context, Breen regrets the fact that learners’ needs and ability to contribute to the syllabus design procedure have long been overlooked. He contends, “In the past, we may have ‘deprived’ learners and classroom groups of worthwhile responsibilities by endeavouring to draw such plans on their behalf” (1984, p. 59).

4. Research Methodology

The study necessitated empirical investigation of the type, feature and function of the current English language courses used at the tertiary level in Bangladesh. Considering the nature and purpose of this study, the document analysis method has been chosen for the empirical study. For empirical investigation, the English language courses taught in the different departments of the Faculty of Arts at Rajshahi University in Bangladesh have been chosen by the researcher. The chosen samples would ideally serve as microcosms of the various disciplines of knowledge of the universities and higher educational institutions functioning in the country. Accordingly, a check list has been carefully designed and employed. In due course, data have been collected and analyzed through study and examination of the documents available from the pertinent sources to investigate the propriety, extent and effectiveness of the presently offered English language courses at the various departments of the Faculty of Arts of Rajshahi University.

5. Document Analysis of the Syllabi of the English Language Courses

For document analysis of the English language courses, the syllabi of the courses delivered to the learners of the various departments of the Faculty of Arts of Rajshahi University have been selected. Among the twelve Departments of the Faculty, eleven Departments offer English language courses. However, one Department, the Department of Islamic History and Culture, does not include any English language course. Ten Departments include one English language course each whereas one Department incorporates three English language courses. In total, thirteen courses

devised to teach fundamental elements and basic skills of the English language to the tertiary level learners have been collected and examined. Results of an overall analysis of the English language courses are presented in the following segments:

5.1 Type of the Syllabus

Investigating the features and components of the selected syllabi of the English language courses currently used at the tertiary level, 55 % courses are found to characterize the Traditional/Mixed type of syllabus. Among them 46% courses are of the Grammatical/Structural and Vocabulary types with a focus on teaching reading, writing, and translation in the conventional way, whereas 9% courses partly follow the Text-based syllabus type.

Moreover, 8% courses feature the Content-based type of syllabus.

In addition, 37% courses are framed on the Skill-based type of syllabus. Among the Skill-based type of syllabi, 19% courses are purely Skill-based type, 6% courses partly combine the Text-based syllabus type, 6% courses partly assimilate the Grammatical/Structural syllabus type, and 6% courses moderately integrate the Content-based syllabus type.

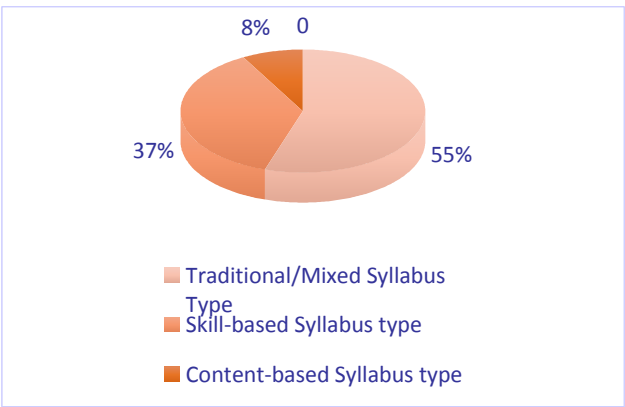


Figure.2: Types of Syllabus Employed in the Evaluated Courses

5.2 Objectives of the Course

A close study of the selected syllabi of the English language courses reveals that 62% courses aim at imparting knowledge of English grammar. 38% courses focus on enriching knowledge of English vocabulary. 31% courses seek to develop the four basic language skills in English. 38% courses intend to focus on teaching the reading and the writing skills only excluding the practice and development of the listening and speaking skills. 77% courses purport to develop learners' ability to read in English. 85% courses intend to develop learners' ability to write in English. 23% courses concentrate on introducing the English pronunciation system to learners. 31% courses seek to develop the speaking skill of learners. And 23% courses aim to help learners acquire the listening skill in English.

5.3 Appropriateness and Adequacy of the Contents of the Syllabus

The analysis shows that out of the selected eleven English language courses, 31% courses offer highly appropriate and adequate contents for teaching the English language to the tertiary level learners. 23% courses cover considerably appropriate and adequate contents in the syllabi. 46% courses cover scarcely appropriate and adequate contents in the syllabi.

5.4 Components for Practice and Development of the Basic English Language Skills

In the selected courses, 31% syllabi integrate components for practice and development of the four basic language skills in English. 8% syllabi include contents for practice and development of the reading, writing and speaking skills. 30% syllabi contain items for practice and development of the reading and writing skills. 8% syllabi incorporate components for practice and development of the speaking and listening skills. 15% syllabi encompass items for practice and development of the writing skill for specific purposes, specifically for professional purposes. 8% syllabi comprise contents for practice and development of the reading skill.

5.4.1 Components for Developing the Reading Skill

A skill-wise analysis of the syllabi indicates that 77% courses incorporate components for developing the reading skill. All these courses are intended for fortifying learners' reading skill for academic purposes. Contrariwise,

23% courses do not cover any item for nurturing the reading skill of the advanced level learners.

In the courses that include contents for teaching the reading skill, 39% components of the syllabi are considerably devised for practice and cultivation of the reading skill of the advanced level learners. 23% components of the syllabi are found mostly appropriate and adequate for teaching and learning of the reading skill. 15% components of the syllabi are discerned moderately appropriate and adequate for teaching and learning of the reading skill. 0% components of the syllabi are observed to be barely appropriate and adequate for teaching and learning of the reading skill.

5.4.2 Components for Developing the Writing Skill

Analysis of the syllabi indicates that 85% components of the selected courses concentrate on developing the writing skill of the learners. 54% components of the selected courses cover both academic and professional writings. 31% components of the selected courses concentrate on developing the writing skill for academic purposes only. 15% components of the selected courses do not include the writing skill.

In the courses that integrate items for developing the writing skill of learners, 55% components for academic writing and 6% components for professional writing of the syllabi can amply facilitate practice and development of the writing skill of the advanced level learners. 12% components for academic writing and 6% components for professional writing of the syllabi are detected mostly appropriate and adequate for teaching and learning of the writing skill. 12% components for professional writing of the syllabi are discerned moderately appropriate and adequate for teaching and learning of the writing skill. 6% components for academic writing and 18% components for professional writing of the syllabi are found scarcely appropriate and adequate for teaching and learning of the writing skill.

5.4.3 Components for Developing the Listening Skill

Analysis of the syllabi indicates that 38% courses incorporate contents for teaching listening for academic purposes. Whereas 62% syllabi do not include any component for teaching and learning of the listening skill. Besides, no course contains any item for teaching listening for professional purposes.

In the courses assimilating items for developing the listening skill, 15% components of the syllabi can highly facilitate practice and development of the listening skill of the tertiary level learners. 15% components of the syllabi are found mostly appropriate and adequate for developing the listening skill. 8% components of the syllabi are perceived to be moderately appropriate and adequate for cultivation of the listening skill.

5.4.4 Components for Developing the Speaking Skill

Analysis of the syllabi indicates that 54% courses cover contents for teaching speaking for academic purposes. Conversely, 46% syllabi are found to offer no content for teaching and grooming of the speaking skill. While 0% course contains components for teaching speaking for professional purposes.

In the courses incorporating items for teaching the speaking skill, 9% components of the syllabi are devised to substantially promote practice and development of the speaking skill of the higher level learners. 18% components of the syllabi are found considerably appropriate and adequate for developing the speaking skill. 18% components of the syllabi are found moderately appropriate and adequate for cultivation of the speaking skill. 9% components of the syllabi are found hardly appropriate and adequate for teaching and grooming of the speaking skill.

5.5 Elements for Teaching Grammar

Analysis of the syllabi discloses that 76% courses cover contents for teaching English grammar. However, 24% components of the selected syllabi do not cover any element for teaching grammar.

In the syllabi integrating elements for teaching grammar, 46% components are discerned highly appropriate and adequate for teaching English grammar to the advanced level learners. 15% components of the syllabi are found considerably appropriate and adequate for teaching grammar. 15% components of the syllabi are noticed to be moderately appropriate and adequate for teaching grammar.

5.6 Elements for Teaching Vocabulary

Analysis of the syllabi reveals that 62% courses include elements for teaching English vocabulary. Whereas 38% components of the selected syllabi do not cover any content for teaching vocabulary.

In the selected English language courses for the tertiary level learners, 8% components of the selected syllabi are discerned substantially appropriate and adequate for teaching English vocabulary to the tertiary level learners. 15% components of the selected syllabi are found mostly appropriate and adequate for teaching vocabulary. 39% components of the selected syllabi are perceived to be moderately appropriate and adequate for teaching vocabulary.

5.7 Appropriateness and Adequacy of the Recommended Textbooks and Supportive Teaching Materials

Any well-developed syllabus for teaching the English language is expected to enclose a list of necessary textbooks and other supportive teaching materials. The recommended teaching materials must be appropriate and sufficient for the target group of learners so that they can succeed in learning the course smoothly and fruitfully. Analysis of the syllabi indicates that 77% syllabi recommend necessary textbooks and supportive teaching materials. Conversely, 23% syllabi do not provide any list of the textbooks and supportive teaching materials.

In the courses that attach recommendation/s of the textbooks and supportive teaching materials, 32% lists of the textbooks and supportive teaching materials appended to the syllabi are discerned amply proper and sufficient for teaching the English language courses. 8% lists of the textbooks and supportive teaching materials attached to the syllabi are considerably proper and sufficient for teaching the English language courses. 15% lists of the textbooks and supportive teaching materials enclosed with the syllabi are found moderately proper and sufficient for teaching the English language courses. 23% lists of the textbooks and supportive teaching materials affixed to the syllabi are detected scarcely proper and sufficient for teaching the English language courses.

6. Suggestions and Recommendations

On the basis of the study and assessment of the English language courses, I would like to recommend some measures which, I believe, would be helpful in bringing about effective changes and improvements in the development and implementation of the English language courses at the tertiary level.

First and foremost, course planners and designers working at the tertiary level in Bangladesh need to consider and concentrate on modification,

reconstruction, and upgradation of the English language courses employed to teach the tertiary level learners in the universities and other higher educational institutions of Bangladesh. Particularly, they should take initiatives to develop and implement Needs-based English language courses at the higher level in Bangladesh. It is high time we changed the scenario of the higher educational institutions in our country and focus on upgrading or reconstructing the English language courses to attend to the English language needs of the advanced level learners. On the basis of the findings of needs analysis, decisions can be made to develop or redevelop any English language course in accordance with the learning objectives, teaching materials selection or development, the teaching system, and evaluation.

Similarly, tailoring proper and fruitful English language courses necessitates identifying and incorporating EOP contents and elements as well as EAP components and items in the courses. To meet this end, course developers should not only focus on the academic needs of the tertiary level learners of Bangladesh but also attach equal importance to catering for learners' professional needs.

Moreover, the English language courses designed for the advanced level learners should contribute to fostering pragmatic efficiency and pedagogical efficiency. To ensure pragmatic efficiency course designers need to maintain economy of time and money. Accordingly, the setting/environment of instruction has to be planned. As learners' requirements often vary, they can plan and devise syllabuses considering the practical constraints present in any academic setting or educational institution. Additionally, it has to be established that the courses are able to produce pedagogical efficiency by maintaining economy in the management of the learning process.

Additionally, it is very essential to follow all the steps and procedures of syllabus designing, implementation and evaluation. Particularly, we should pay proper attention and attach importance to effective implementation and accurate assessment of an English language course. In this connection, Ahmed counsels that "we must seriously consider the utility of a course before we offer it to the students. This is vitally important in the case of English since it is a foreign language and the learners have to take it compulsorily" (1986, p. 54).

Furthermore, to be applicable and fruitful a syllabus ought to be interactive, problem-solving and productive. We ought to ensure these qualities in

designing English language courses for the advanced level learners, who are expected to serve and lead our country to its' future prosperity and progress in the world.

In addition, the developers of a syllabus should also take into consideration the various parameters and environmental constraints that may affect the pedagogical and procedural criteria to devise an appropriate and practicable syllabus for the tertiary level learners of Bangladesh.

Besides, to avoid any peril of biased or predisposed application of the syllabus design procedures, syllabus designers working with course planning, implementation and evaluation at the higher level of education in Bangladesh must attempt to interpret the concealed elements or variables that may affect these procedures and try to restrain them from imposing any opinionated influence on the projected syllabus design scheme.

Above all, our course planners and developers must remember that innovation in syllabus design at the tertiary level cannot be brought about by just adopting any innovative theoretical conception about language and language learning. Rather innovation should be sought from the relationship between the learners and their practical needs on the one hand, and the syllabus on the other hand.

Thus, course developers, education policy makers, members of course planning committee, and other stake holders must take necessary initiatives to design English language courses that can train the advanced level learners properly, and facilitate their acquisition of the required competence in English for their academic excellence as well as future professional uses in Bangladesh.

7. Conclusion

In this paper, I have investigated into the forms, features and functions of the English language courses offered to the students taking the B. A. (Honours) programmes in the eleven departments of the Faculty of Arts of Rajshahi University. In the study and analysis, the currently used English language courses are found adequate, suitable and effective to a certain extent with a scope for some necessary and vital modifications and reconstructions. Majority of these courses concentrate on teaching English grammar, the writing and the reading skills of the tertiary level learners. In fine, in the different departments of the Faculty of Arts at Rajshahi

University, there is, I deduce from the findings of the research, a need for modifying and restructuring the syllabus of most of the presently used English language courses.

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Appendix-A

Document Analysis Scheme for Evaluation of the Syllabus of the Current English Language Courses

1. Type of the Syllabus:
2. Objectives of the Course:
3. Appropriateness and Adequacy of the Contents of the Syllabus:
4. Components for Practice and Development of the Basic English Language Skills:
 - a) Components for Developing the Reading Skill:
 - b) Components for Developing the Writing Skill:
 - c) Components for Developing the Listening Skill:
 - d) Components for Developing the Speaking Skill:

5. Elements for Teaching Grammar:
6. Elements for Teaching Vocabulary:
7. Appropriateness and Adequacy of the Recommended Textbooks and Supportive Teaching Materials:

Appendix-B

Details of the Departments under the Faculty of Arts at the University of Rajshahi Selected for Course Analysis

1. Department of Philosophy
2. Department of History
3. Department of English
4. Department of Bengali
5. Department of Islamic History and Culture (N. B. It does not offer any English language course.)
6. Department of Islamic Studies
7. Department of Music
8. Department of Drama
9. Department of Persian Language and Literature
10. Department of Sanskrit
11. Department of Urdu
12. Department of Arabic

Correlation between Reading Strategies and L2 Text Comprehension

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Abstract

The prime objective of the study was to understand the level of relationship between the use of different reading strategies and second language text comprehension, in addition to finding out the reading competence level of the tertiary level learners. To attain the objectives, 'The Survey of Reading Strategies' (SORS) developed by Mokhtari & Sheorey (2002) and a reading comprehension test were conducted among the English majors of Jashore University of Science and Technology, Bangladesh. The results revealed that there is no significant relationship between the learners' overall use of reading strategies and second language text comprehension, namely English. However, among the three types of strategies, i.e. Global, Problem-solving and Support, the last type of strategies is significantly negatively correlated with English text comprehension. It is noteworthy that the learners showed to be 'high level' users of strategies but they used them indiscriminately and haphazardly; and there has been no significant gender-wise difference in the use of the reading strategies or English language comprehension capacity.

Keywords: Reading strategies, English as a second language, Second language comprehension

Introduction

Reading, a receptive language skill, is of supreme importance in the academic sphere (Grabe, 1991; Huckin & Haynes, 1993; Anderson, 1999), where the learners have to read different types of academic texts, become exposed to various types of linguistic inputs, and apply, and develop at the

same time, critical and creative faculties (Fairbrain and Fairbrain, 2001 as in Roomy & Alhawsawi, 2019). Reading is a complex and active process and this process involves the reader and reading materials at the same time (Anderson, 1999). As adult learners receive most of their inputs in 'written form' (Macaro, 2003), they have to apply different strategies for comprehending the messages encoded in those inputs. "Good readers use lots of strategies to help themselves make sense of text" (Tovani, 2000, p. 5).

Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) cited Paris and Jacobs (1984) that "skilled readers often engage in deliberate activities that require planful thinking, flexible strategies, and periodic self-monitoring." The L2 learners of English should engage the strategies to help them understand the meaning of the text and to ease the complexity of many of the aspects. For success in the academic field, ability to read and comprehend is an essential quality (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkinson, 1985) and the difficulties in reading comprehension can be handled successfully by using reading strategies (Pressley & Wharton-McDonald, 1997).

Reading is of high importance for ensuring sufficient language inputs, which is a prerequisite for successful learning of an L2. In ESL countries where the learners do not have enough exposure to listening, reading is the best means of getting exposed to English. Reading comprehension includes a two-fold process: recognizing the words and understanding the meaning. For comprehending a reading text, the readers interact with the text to get the intended meaning and try to match it with their interpreted meaning.

However, reading strategies develop out of the practice and exposure the learners have experienced. Some of these strategies are innate and some are acquired through formal instructions (Tong, 2015). There are different perspectives of reading strategies. Learners use those strategies both subconsciously and consciously. For effective reading to take place, the readers have to wield various reading strategies like inferencing, skimming, canning to make reading an active and critical process (Wallace, 2007). Students learning English as an L2 have been found using different reading strategies to a large extent and a positive relation has been found between motivation towards reading and reading strategies (Roomy & Alhawsawi, 2019). Indeed, reading involves a multifarious cognitive and metacognitive process that requires more than just deriving meaning from the text (Lai et al., 2008).

In Bangladesh, English is taught, learnt, and used extensively in tertiary education. In most of the universities, it is used as the language of instruction. The tertiary level students have to read most of the academic books and materials in English. Unfortunately, the overall proficiency in English here is ineffectual (English language proficiency, 2020) and they lack different language skills (Haque, 2006; Mamun, 2016). Reading as the primary language skill contributes to this deplorable situation largely. Thus, for comprehending the texts and materials, the most important thing for them is that they develop and utilize reading strategies effectively (Lai et al, 2008). They also hold that “teaching comprehension strategies, both explicitly and directly to language learners, helps them become more thoughtful and proficient readers” and cited Booth and Swartz (2004) that “proficient readers are aware of the strategies involved in making the most possible meaning with print; they make predictions, make inferences, see images in their minds, draw conclusions, and revise hypotheses about the text.”

Whatever the purpose of reading is, studies show that learners utilize some strategies to overcome the difficulties. Bashir (2016) found that the learners used both cognitive and metacognitive strategies. The results showed that the learners also used retrieval strategies, comprehending and monitoring strategies highly and evaluating strategies moderately and proved that the learners are ‘high-level’ strategy users. Sultana (2016) has found similar results. Suchona and Urmy (2019) have found that the private university tertiary level students of Bangladesh use different reading strategies like reading aloud, visualizing the textual information, discussing with others, but many of them hardly use scanning and some other important strategies.

Thus, having understood the importance of unravelling the reading strategies, reading competence and the relationship between the reading strategies and L2 comprehension, this study would like to unveil them in the context of Bangladeshi tertiary level. For this purpose, the Jashore University of Science and Technology, a public university of Bangladesh was selected, which represents all the public universities in the sense that the students of this university had the same academic and environmental background. The results will help the students and teachers be aware of the reading strategies and if they can master diverse reading strategies, it will allow the students to be proficient and independent readers (Booth & Swartz, 2004). In the course of understanding the relationship between the reading

strategies used by the learners and their level of comprehension of the text, the study has tried to answer three research questions:

- 1) To what extent do the tertiary level learners in Bangladesh use reading strategies?
- 2) What is the present reading competence level of the tertiary level learners in Bangladesh?
- 3) How much is gender an affective factor for reading competence and reading strategy use?
- 4) How, and, to what extent do the reading strategies affect English language comprehension?

Literature Review

Reading Strategies

Scarcella and Oxford (1992, p. 63) has defined learning strategies as the “specifications, behaviors, steps, or techniques ...used by students to enhance their own learning.” Oxford (2017) also states, “L2 reading strategies are teachable, dynamic thoughts and behaviors that learners consciously select and employ in specific contexts to improve their self-regulated, autonomous L2 reading development for effective task performance and long-term proficiency”. Reading strategies may include planning, deciding the purpose for the reading and the selecting what to read before reading, monitoring of understanding during reading, and evaluating the reading experience (Meniado, 2016 as in Roomy & Alhawsawi, 2019). Therefore, reading strategies are the steps or techniques the learners use to understand the reading texts and get the information conveyed through the texts. Primarily these strategies are mental and ‘intentional’ plans and they are used, flexibly and as per the contextual necessity, by the proficient readers (Tovani, 2000). Reading is a complex activity of decoding the meaning from the written texts and reading strategies are the negotiating techniques (Alexander & Tamara, 2000). How to approach a text, understanding the purpose of reading, how to use the first language to understand the text, how to tackle any difficulty regarding unknown lexical, syntactic and semantic elements, applying critical faculty to evaluate the information are some of the reading aspects which need effective strategies to handle. Reading strategies include these techniques and the relevant implicit and explicit processes.

Types of Reading Strategies

There have been a number of attempts of classifying learning as well as reading strategies. The first comprehensive classification was proposed by Oxford (1990, 2003). She has specified two types of strategies: direct and indirect and each of them consists of three strategies. Direct strategies include memory strategies, cognitive strategies and compensation strategies. These are at play when the learners work with the language in a variety of specific tasks. The memory strategies are used for remembering and retrieving information. The cognitive strategies comprise note taking, summarizing, predicting and utilizing context clues. These strategies are very important for manipulation or transformation of the L2 and they are the most popular strategies. She mentions four sets of cognitive strategies: practicing, receiving and sending messages, analyzing and reasoning, and creating structure for input and output. Compensation strategies are composed of strategies for using the language despite knowledge gaps and overcoming language limitations. For reading, a set of comprehension strategies termed 'guessing intelligently' has been proposed with two strategies: using linguistic clues and using other clues. Guessing helps the learners to bridge the gap in understanding and process new information.

On the other hand, indirect strategies include metacognitive, affective and social strategies. Indirect strategies are used for general management of learning. These strategies are especially important because they support the functioning of the direct strategies. Metacognitive strategies allow learners to control their own cognition—that is, to coordinate the learning process by using functions such as centering, arranging, planning and evaluating. O'Malley and Chamot (1990 as in Roomy & Alhawsawi, 2019) viewed metacognitive strategies "as higher order skills that involve planning, monitoring and evaluation while having specific goals for reading." Emotions, motivations and attitudes are managed with the help of affective ones. Lastly, social strategies help learners to learn through interaction with others. For each of these three indirect strategies, three sets of strategies are proposed.

These direct and indirect strategies cannot work separately. Efficient language learners or users use the relevant strategies simultaneously.

Zhang (1993) has divided reading strategies into four general categories: cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, memory strategies and test-taking strategies. Cognitive strategies include activating prior knowledge,

previewing, prediction and self-questioning. Compensation strategies are like those of Oxford's one like drawing inferences. Skimming, scanning, summarizing, synthesizing and evaluating are some of the memory strategies while test-taking strategies consist of pre-reading questioning and elimination of previous question's answer in case of multiple-choice-type tests. Rice (2009 as in Qanwal & Karim, 2014) has divided the set of strategies into before or pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading strategies.

Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) divided reading strategies into three categories:

- a) Global strategies (GLOB) are the intentional, carefully planned techniques by which learners monitor their reading, such as previewing the text;
- b) Problem-solving strategies (PROB) include the actions and procedures used while reading, which are localized and used when any difficulty arises in understanding textual information; and,
- c) Support strategies (SUPP) which aid the readers in comprehending the text. These three categories combine almost all the important reading strategies.

To understand how often the learners use different reading strategies, they proposed and developed a questionnaire termed 'the Survey of Reading Strategies Questionnaire (SORS)'.

Reading Comprehension

We write with a purpose and read too with purposes. These purposes are achieved if the information or messages are understood as completely as possible. Comprehension is the process of getting hold of the writer's intention, text context, and information coded in the written text. The comprehension also depends on the reader's experience with the language, linguistic, discourse and semantic competence. Dechant (1982, p. 288 as in Qanwal & Karim, 2014) explains 'word identification' and 'comprehension' as the two stages of the process of reading. It is the process of decoding the linguistic units.

Method

This exploratory study used both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. The study was conducted at the department of

English, Jashore University of Science and Technology, Bangladesh. The students were selected from different batches through a purposive sampling procedure. Of the total sample consisting of 95 students 58 were female and 37 were male.

Instruments

To understand the reading strategies used by the learners, this study used 'The Survey of Reading Strategies' (SORS) developed by Mokhtari & Sheorey (2002). This survey questionnaire was validated by them (overall Cronbach alpha .93) and has been used in different studies throughout the world (Suchona, & Urmy, 2019; Roomy & Alhawsawi, 2019; Aziz et al, 2011; Yüksel & Yüksel, 2012, Poole, 2005).

The questionnaire has three sections: Global Reading Strategies with 13 items, Problem Solving Strategies with 8 items and Support Strategies with 9 items. The responses were rated based on a five-point Likert-scale ranging from one to five; 1 means "never" or "almost never", 2 means "rarely", 3 means "sometimes", 4 means "often", and 5 means "always" or "almost always".

To understand the comprehension competence, a reading test was developed following the IELTS reading test. A reading comprehension was selected from the IELTS practice book, questions were modified to a little extent, and measures were taken to ensure representation of the most important question patterns including multiple choice, filling in the gaps, true-false and short questions. A pilot study was conducted with 20 students. The test had 20 marks in total.

Procedures

The data collected from the respondents was computed and analyzed using the SPSS 25. Individual scores from the questionnaire were grouped together according to their sub-scale category namely the Global Reading Strategies (GLOB), Problem Solving Strategies (PROB) and Support Strategies (SUPP). The statistical procedures used in this study were descriptive statistics, correlation and regression. Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) report that the mean results of 3.5 or above denote high frequency use, 2.5 to 3.4 represents moderate strategy use, and 2.4 or below indicates low strategy use.

As the nature of the study is correlational, correlational paradigms were used but initially substantiated through descriptive statistics. The

correlations were tested through applying standard correlational tests on the variables involved. However, besides Pearson correlation, regression analysis was done to see the inter-variable strength along with its integrated Anova measures to understand individual difference in case of using different strategies.

Results and Discussion

To answer the research questions, the data has been analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, one way Anova and Linear Regression.

Learners’ use of the reading strategies

Table 1 shows that the learners used reading strategies at a high level (mean 3.89). Among the types of strategy, PROB has been used more than two other types. It shows that the learners tackled the comprehension difficulties by using all the strategies. The coefficients beta measured through regression analysis shows that Global strategies have been more important while Problem-solving strategies the least in terms of contributing to overall use of reading strategies. T-test results (mean difference and t scores) show the differences among the learners in terms of their use of the strategies.

Table 1. Overall reading strategy use

Type of Strategies	Mean	Std. Deviation	Coefficients Beta	Level of use	Mean Difference (t)
Global Reading Strategies	3.80	.5732	.529	high	.004(.079)
Problem Solving Reading Strategies	4.13	.5381	.307	high	.006(.114)
Support Reading Strategies	3.81	.5322	.340	high	.003(.066)
Overall use of the Reading Strategies	3.89	.4688		high	.005(.112)

The means of the strategies (table 2) prove that the learners have not used all the strategies equally (mean range 3.05 - 4.51). Furthermore, the t-test results show that there is no significant differences among the learners regarding the use of the strategies (Mean difference .005 and t .112.

Among the thirteen global strategies, four (I try to guess what the content of the text is about when I read, I think about what I know to help me understand what I read, I check my understanding when I come across new information, I check to see if my guesses about the text are right or wrong.)

have received the highest means. This result proves that the learners of the tertiary level are knowledgeable of the strategies and can consciously apply the general strategies for text comprehension. Among the eight problem solving strategies, five (I read slowly and carefully to make sure I understand what I am reading, When text becomes difficult, I re-read it to increase my understanding, When text becomes difficult, I pay close attention to what I am reading, When I read, I guess the meaning of the unknown words and phrases, and I adjust my reading speed according to what I am reading.) have got the highest means though the learners have used all the problem-solving strategies highly. These strategies are capable of helping out the learners when they face any difficulty in comprehension. Among the nine supportive strategies, only two (I underline or circle information in the text to help me remember it, and When reading, I think about information in both English and Bangla) got the highest means. This is somewhat unusual that the learners used the support-strategies less than the problem-solving ones. It shows that they used their first language to understand the text. The results showed (table 3) not much gender wise difference in the use of the reading strategies. However, Female students have been found using the reading strategies more than their male counterparts have.

Table 2. *Preferences of the strategies*

Strategy	Mean	Strategy	Mean	Strategy	Mean
GLOB 12	4.35	PROB 1	4.44	SUPP 3	4.51
GLOB 2	4.21	PROB 7	4.35	SUPP 9	4.00
GLOB 11	4.18	PROB 4	4.28	SUPP 4	3.99
GLOB 13	4.15	PROB 8	4.28	SUPP 8	3.94
GLOB 1	3.99	PROB 3	4.16	SUPP 5	3.92
GLOB 8	3.93	PROB 2	3.99	SUPP 1	3.87
GLOB 3	3.71	PROB 6	3.81	SUPP 6	3.58
GLOB 10	3.65	PROB 5	3.76	SUPP 7	3.47
GLOB 6	3.62			SUPP 2	3.05
GLOB 9	3.59				
GLOB 4	3.52				
GLOB 7	3.36				
GLOB 5	3.22				

Table 3. *Gender wise use of reading strategies*

Gender of the learners	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Female	3.9791	58	.39032
Male	3.7641	37	.55118

Reading comprehension competence

The mean (table 4) of the reading comprehension score (11.82) has been an obvious evidence that the students are not much proficient in reading skill in spite of their high use of the strategies. Furthermore, the range of the scores and the variance showed that they are a heterogeneous group concerning the reading skill competence.

Table 4. *Reading competence*

	Min	Ma	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Reading comprehension score	5	17	11.82	2.601	6.76

The study has also tried to understand if there is any relationship between gender and the reading comprehension competence (table 5). No significant relationship was found between the learners based on their gender. The Anova score (sig: .067) shows that the difference between the female and male learners regarding the use of the reading strategies insignificant ($p > 0.05$). This Anova result is substantiated by the Eta squared score (.036) which proves that the use of the strategies was not affected by the gender of the learners. Still, from the mean it can be concluded that there is little difference between the gender wise use of the strategies and the male learners are more dependent on the use of the strategies than the female learners.

Table 5. *Gender and reading comprehension test score*

Gender	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Variance	Eta squared	ANOVA Sig.
Female	11.43	58	2.630	6.916	.036	.067
Male	12.43	37	2.467	6.086		
Total	11.82	95	2.601	6.766		

Use of the reading strategies and English text comprehension

To realize the main objective of the study i.e. the level of relationship between the use of the reading strategies and L2 text comprehension, both Pearson Correlation and Anova were conducted. The correlation score shows (table 6) that there is no significant (.109, $p>.05$) relationship between the overall use of the strategies and the text comprehension. The Anova sig. score (.350) supported the correlation result. However, the level of correlation is insignificant but negative (-.165). It means that the use of the strategies to some extent had a negative effect on the score, that is, higher the use of strategies lower the score and poorer the text comprehension. Most interestingly, the text comprehension is significantly negatively correlated with the use of SUPPs (-.006, $p<.01$). It means that the learners were highly dependent on their use of the support strategies, which in turn, affected their text comprehension level.

Table 6. *Correlation between use of reading strategies and reading comprehension*

		Average of the GRSs	Average of the PSSs	Average of the SUPPs	Overall use of the Strateg ies	ANOV A F	ANO VA Sig.
Reading Comprehension Test Score	Pearson Correlation	-.129	-.008	-.280**	-.165	1.128	.350
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.213	.938	.006	.109		

In order for understanding the effect of individual reading strategies, a regression analysis was run. It showed that only one strategy (I try to picture or visualize information to help remember what I read) had a significant effect (.003, $p<.05$). It is noteworthy that out of 30 strategies, 16 had negative, though at an insignificant level, impact. The learners used almost all the strategies indiscriminately.

Table 7. *Regression analysis of the reading strategies*

Type	Strategies	Mean	SD	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
Global Reading Strategies	I have a purpose in mind when I read.	3.99	.905	.033	.256	.799
	I think about what I know to help me understand what I read.	4.21	.910	.044	.325	.746
	I take an overall view of the text to see what it is about before reading it.	3.71	1.157	-.111	-.865	.390
	I think about whether the content of the text fits my reading purpose.	3.52	1.110	.002	.013	.990
	I review the text first by noting its characteristics like length and organization	3.22	1.290	-.077	-.618	.539
	When reading, I decide what to read closely and what to ignore.	3.62	1.306	-.164	-1.301	.198
	I use tables, figures, and pictures in the text to increase my understanding.	3.36	1.344	-.003	-.020	.984
	I use context clues to help me better understand what I am reading.	3.93	1.223	.053	.332	.741
	I use typographical features like boldface and italics to identify key information.	3.59	1.505	.066	.488	.628
	I critically analyze and evaluate the information presented in the text.	3.65	1.019	.005	.040	.968
	I check my understanding when I come across new information.	4.18	.967	-.180	-1.435	.156
	I try to guess what the content of the text is about when read.	4.35	.896	.002	.010	.992
	I check to see if my guesses about the text are right or wrong.	4.15	1.139	.169	1.146	.256
ng Read	I read slowly and carefully to make sure I understand what I am reading.	4.44	.821	-.114	-.887	.379

Supportive Reading Strategies	I try to get back on track when I lose concentration.	3.99	1.189	.016	.120	.905
	I adjust my reading speed according to what I am reading.	4.16	1.114	-.029	-.200	.842
	When text becomes difficult, I pay close attention to what I am reading.	4.28	1.145	-.029	-.204	.839
	I stop from time to time and think about what I am reading.	3.76	1.118	-.020	-.159	.874
	I try to picture or visualize information to help remember what I read.	3.81	1.205	.416	3.114	.003
	When text becomes difficult, I re-read it to increase my understanding.	4.35	.931	.203	1.480	.144
	When I read, I guess the meaning of the unknown words and phrases.	4.28	.895	.079	.592	.556
	I take notes while reading to help me understand what I read.	3.87	1.034	-.149	-.756	.452
	When text becomes difficult, I read aloud to help me understand what I read.	3.05	1.525	-.128	-.556	.580
	I underline or circle information in the text to help me remember it.	4.51	.824	.000	.001	.999
	I use reference materials like a dictionary to help me understand what I read.	3.99	.984	-.293	1.715	.091
	I paraphrase (restate ideas in my own words) to better understand what I read.	3.92	1.059	-.063	-.291	.772
	I go back and forth in the text to find relationships among ideas in it.	3.58	1.037	-.239	1.098	.276
	I ask myself questions I like to answer in the text.	3.47	1.236	.042	.232	.818
	When reading, I translate from English into Bangla.	3.94	1.137	-.162	-.908	.367
	When reading, I think about information in both English and Bangla.	4.00	1.021	-.149	-.756	.452

The results showed that the learners are high-level users of strategies, which substantiate the findings of Suchona and Urmey (2019), Bashir (2016) and Roomy

and Alhawsawi (2019). However, this study has found in addition to their findings that the learners are not aware of the importance of using particular strategies and probably they use some strategies which are redundant to understand specific type of text. The insignificant, to some extent negative, relationship between the use of strategies and the text comprehension is the obvious proof of the indiscriminate use of the strategies. It is also obvious that the learners do not differ among themselves regarding the use of different strategies (table 1). One possible reason behind this may be the lack or absence of teaching of the reading strategies directly.

The significant and mortifying finding is that the SUPPs are significantly negatively correlated with the L2 text comprehension. It means that they could not use these strategies to approach the complexity of the text. This is a common picture disregarding gender and span of their use of English as English language user especially as English majors. The findings also support the findings of Meniado (2016) that the learners to a moderate extent could 'plan, monitor, and evaluate their reading performance when reading an academic text', they seem to have problem with integrating metacognitive strategies.

Another noteworthy fact is the heterogeneous competence level among the learners. If analysis on what types of questions the learners had the most difficulty with could be done, it would be possible to delve deeper into their inefficiency in handling text comprehension. Though there have been some studies which found a positive relationship between metacognitive strategies and text comprehension, this study disapproves of their results. The causes may lie among the learners with their particular contextualized affective factors and the proportion of the exposure to the L2.

Conclusion

The study results revealed the importance of using reading strategies and their relationship with L2 text comprehension, which imply and suggest that the learners in an L2 context should be taught different reading strategies explicitly as they do not naturally develop a clear understanding of the use of the strategies to ameliorate their reading competence level. The resulted awareness may not guarantee a satisfactory reading comprehension as there are other factors which affect the total reading process (Alsamadani, 2009 as in Meniado, 2016). Furthermore, these strategies do not naturally help develop knowledge of linguistic aspects of the text. However, with English

majors, the scenario is supposed to be somewhat different as they have to deal with English texts throughout their academic life and awareness of the strategies will act as a catalyst in understanding the texts, but the learners of the lower academic levels and non-English disciplines need to be made conscious of the reading strategies for understanding an L2 text.

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Kumaravadivelu's Key Ideas of "Postmethod Condition": An Appraisal

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Abstract

Kumaravadivelu's "Postmethod Condition" brings in new insights into English Language Pedagogy. It implies attributes which are indicative of the demise of the methods and search for an alternative to methods. Its "Principled pragmatism" empowers teachers by entrusting them with the responsibility of devising personal theories based on their pedagogic knowledge and practice that fits learners' needs and objectives while learning English in ESL/EFL contexts. In fact, it plays the vital role to form the bed-rock of the three pedagogic "parameters" of Postmethods which are namely the parameters of (i) Particularity, (ii) Practicality and (iii) Possibility. Since Postmethods entails a consideration of the limits of methods and a keen desire to go beyond those limits in order to be aware of the intricacies of language teaching and contexts, the parameters are supposed to help teachers take initiatives to develop context-sensitive and culture-specific language pedagogy. But critics and experts around the world in the field of education have raised the feasibility of the ideas of "Postmethod condition". The current paper is an attempt to appraise its key ideas in brief. It tries to argue that the search for a substitute of method for teaching language is futile. It also sheds light on the fact that Postmethods is not theory neutral and so to bridge the gap between what is theorized and what is practised in classrooms is not always practicable as it has been claimed by the Postmethodologists. The paper also critically looks at the immense responsibility that "Postmethod Condition" thrusts upon teachers by overlooking their socio-political-cultural realities and restrictions within which they are bound to operate.

Keywords: Postmethod pedagogy, Postmethod Condition, Language Pedagogy, Principled Pragmatism, Teacher Autonomy, Parameters of Particularity, Practicality and Possibility

Prelude

The term 'Postmethod' is a recent development in English Language Teaching which was initially coined by Pennycook (1989) and then was taken up by other renowned scholars and critics in the field including Prabhu

(1990), Allright (1991), Stern (1992) and Kumaravadivelu (1994, 1999, 2001, 2003, 2006) (as cited in Huda,2013). The “Postmethod condition”, as proposed by Kumaravadivelu(1994) is a justifiable state of affairs that basically makes an attempt to remould and redefine language teaching as well as teacher education in ESL/EFL contexts. It emphasizes the need to appraise the nature and content of classroom environment of teaching and learning language in the light of local knowledge, experience and practice and thereby relate it to ideological and pedagogical insights of a particular context. It compels language pedagogues to refigure the reified rapport between “theory and practice.” Kumaravadivelu(1994:18)defines the “Postmethod condition” in the following terms:

As conceptualizers of philosophical underpinnings governing language pedagogy, theorists have traditionally occupied the power centre of language pedagogy while the practitioners of classroom teaching have been relegated to the disempowered periphery. If the conventional concept of method entitles theorizers to construct knowledge-oriented theories of pedagogy, the postmethod condition empowers practitioners to construct classroom-oriented theories of practice. If the concept of method authorizes theorizers to centralize pedagogic decision making, the postmethod condition enables practitioners to generate location-specific, classroom-oriented innovative practices.

The three core interrelated attributes of the “Postmethod condition” can be encapsulated as follows:

- i) It indicates a quest for an “alternative to method rather than an alternative method.”(Kumaravadivelu,2003:32-33). Whereas methods are basically the constructs of “top-down procedures”, substitutes of methods are the outcome of “bottom-up procedures” for language pedagogy. So, in applied terms the “Postmethod condition” suggests the plentiful options for rethinking the connection between the “Center and the periphery.” It authorizes teachers to the extent that they become capable of producing innovative teaching strategies or methodologies based on local knowledge and their day-to-day classroom practice (Kumaravadivelu, 2003:33).
- ii) At the heart of “Postmethod condition” is teacher autonomy which is highly overlooked in traditional pedagogy. The typical notion of

method ignores the deposit of experience and tacit knowledge about teaching that teachers bring with them in classrooms (Freeman,1991:30, cited in Kumaravadivelu,2003:33). But “Postmethod condition” acknowledges “the teachers’ potential to know not only how to teach but how to act autonomously within the academic and administrative constraints imposed by institution, curricula, and textbooks (Kumaravadivelu, 2003:33).” This is assumed to aid teachers and practitioners to grow as critical thinkers who will be able to theorize from their own pedagogical knowledge and experience pertinent to their specific language teaching contexts.

- iii) “Principled pragmatism” is the third key feature of Postmethods. Unlike “eclecticism” which advocates for putting together practices from different recognized methods, it puts emphasis on how language pedagogy can be moulded and remoulded by teachers as a result of self-observation, self-analysis, and self-evaluation (Kumaravadivelu,2003:33). The third condition hints at the relationship between theory and practice, ideas and their actualization which can only be understood within the domain of application which could be feasible through the abrupt activity of teaching (Widdowson, 1990 cited in Kumravadivelu 2003:34). In this case the teachers’ “subjective understanding of the teaching they do” can be of immense help which is thought to arise from their own experience as learners and teachers and through specialized education and expertise in pedagogy and peer discussion (Kumaravadivelu,2003:34).

The aforementioned three major attributes of “Postmethod condition” play the crucial role in founding the base on which the three pedagogic parameters of Postmethods are built. The three parameters of Postmethod pedagogy as Kumaravadivelu recommends are: (1) 'The Parameter of Particularity', (2) 'The Parameter of Parcticabilty' and (3) 'The Parameter of Possibility.' The first one takes into consideration the "situational understanding" of language teaching. The second on puts emphasis on teachers' reflection and action in language teaching and the last one helps students achieve a critical mindset while learning the language which helps them to mould their individual identities inside and outside the classroom in ESL/EFL contexts.

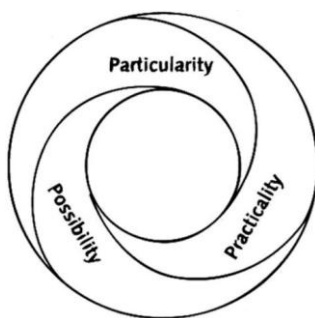


Fig-1: The Parameters of Postmethod pedagogy (Kumaravadivelu.2003:37)

Although Post-method has taken the World of English Language Teaching (ELT) by storm, it is not free from disparagements. The present paper is an effort to appraise the ideas of “Postmethod condition” as proposed by Kumaravadivelu (2003, 2006) which is the pivot of Postmethod pedagogy.

From the mid-90s a major shift began to take place in English language pedagogy with the declaration of the “end” or death of “Methods era”. “Methods era” was conspicuously based upon a major hypothesis that “one size fits all” (i.e., the same idea and practice will work out with all teachers and learners in all contexts). So, the very concept of method started to gain back lash from practitioners and experts in language education. Following the backlash an argument developed asserting that the same method does not work with all, in all contexts, and so emphasis should be laid on devising culture and context specific language education or pedagogy. Researchers and experts like Allwright (1991), Kumaravadivelu (1994), Stern (1996), Pennycook (1989), Prabhu (1990) and Brown (2002) began to question the very notion of method and reflected on its theoretical legitimacy and practical utility and endorsed the idea of “anti-methods” or alternative to methods (i.e. *Postmethods*) for teaching language in ESL/EFL context.

Although Kumaravadivelu (1994) puts forth his ideas of “Postmethod condition” pondering on the shortfalls of the concept of methods and upon the death of the methods, many critics of ELT around the world still feel the presence of methods in the Postmethod Era and so they just cannot accept that methods are gone or dead for good. As Bell (2003) says: “Indeed, postmethodologists have done such a wonderful job in killing off methods that one wonders if the methods bogeyman really existed (Bell, 2003:328).” Block

(2001:72 as cited in Bell, 2003:328) while doing an investigation into the approval of the recognized teaching methods of the foreign language teacher Michel Thomas has put forth his remarks to this end. He says that while method has been disgraced at “an etic level” which refers to the ideas and terminology used by scholars, it definitely holds a lot of strength at “the grass-roots, emic level” which denotes the terminology used by layman and language teachers.

Liu (1995 as cited in Hashemi, 2011:141) discards the view of the “futility/demise of the search for better method.” He puts stress on discovering “an alternative to method” and also explains why Postmethod cannot be taken for a substitute for methods since at the level of practice they both demand achievable measures or “Principled Pragmatism”. Hence, Liu claims that “Postmethod without method” is likened to “theory without practice or an alternative thinking but not an alternative form of doing... (as cited in Hashemi,2011:141)”. This is likely to challenge the second parameter of Postmethods which is “Practicality”. Liu also upholds that the expression “principle” is more fitting in contrast to “macro-strategy” and so he opposes that “macro-strategies should not and cannot replace methods (cited in Hashemi,2011:141).” Additionally, they seem to have some pre-packaged generalized theories or ideas prescribed for practitioners. Therefore, they are also top-down imposition, not “bottom up” or context-sensitive or practice driven. To put in other words, the ideas of “Postmethod condition” seems to be the old stuff put in a new bottle. Bell (2003:328) attacks Postmethodologists when they contend that it is quite impossible to grab methods in their cleanest form in the classroom according to the theoretical propositions of their originators since methods are thought not to be derived from classroom actualities (Bell,2003:328). He also comments that second or foreign language teaching professionals are aware of the fact that what is understood as method in the classroom ripens over time as a result of the collaboration of certain factors of language pedagogy for instance teachers, learners, the materials and activities and so on (Richards, 1990 as cited in Bell, 2003:329). So, the concept of the social structure of method in lots of different language classrooms across the globe, as he adds to his point, suggests that what is termed as method is frequently “a posteriori rationalization of many similar teaching practices rather than an a priori set of prescriptions emanating from one source. Even seemingly monolithic methods like grammar translation and the audiolingual method owe much of their apparent prescriptive coherence to

the rationalizations of methods historians (Howatt, 1984; Pennycook, 1989 as cited in Bell, 2003:329)."

Bell (2003:329) also questions the necessity to get obsessed with such prescriptive nature of methods taking into account the vast trouble of comprehending "a set of a priori methodological outcomes in classrooms." So, he remarks that Postmethod pedagogy can therefore be regarded as both an attempt to understand the "paradigm shift" that second or foreign education has been undergoing for the last forty years and also an effort to merge pedagogical practices of language teaching in an all-inclusive way. He also explains how the so-called traditional methods of language teaching of 1970 can be taken as inadequate attempt to usher in the new "paradigm shift" in language pedagogy. Postmethods, hence, rather than surpassing the imposed method-based pedagogies, might be considered as an amalgamation of diverse methods under Communicative language teaching approach (CLT) which in itself is an umbrella term. Bell (2003:329) counters this argument which disdains the massive impact that the main theories of "designer methods" such as community language learning, silent way, suggestopedia and etc. have had on language pedagogy (Bell, 2003:329). He cites the example of the development of CLT which has partly been driven by "the co-option of the humanistic, student-centered principles of designer methods." Therefore, the principles and approaches of Postmethodologists seem to have resemblances with the very core elements of the 1970s "designer methods (Bell, 2003:329)."

Larsen-Freeman (2005a as cited in Hashemi, 2011:142) startles the Postmethodologists when she asserts that she is not willing to throw out the concept of methods as for her methods cannot be absolute in "practice (p.22)." When teachers gain experience over time, they begin to recognize a certain method in a different way (Larsen-Freeman, 2005 b, p.11 as cited in Hashemi, 2011:142)." While probing teachers' beliefs about the claim regarding the demise of methods in English language teaching, Bell (2005) reports in a paper that methods are not at all dead in the minds of teachers. Bell's (2005) survey clearly shows that teachers still consider methods as beneficial and so he concludes that Postmethod pedagogy does not essentially need to indicate the decease of the methods but rather an apprehension of the limitations of the concept of method as it has been hardly defined till date and a craving to transcend those limitations

(Bell,2007:143). Thus, the critics of Postmethods keep on emphasizing their claim of the tangible existence of methods even in the Postmethod era.

II

One of the basic problems of the “Postmethod condition” is that it has mostly neglected the actualities of teaching-learning situation and also teachers’ lives and thereby it has made the application of pedagogy of “Practicality” for language pedagogy (which is, to put otherwise, the applied culmination of other two parameters of Postmethods) quite challenging. This is why Akbari (2008) says that the application or negotiation of Postmethod pedagogy (i.e., the macrostrategies) requires the development of an appropriate “Teacher Education Infrastructure.” Besides the acknowledgement of the restrictions that teachers face in their day-to-day life in classroom practice is also important for the feasibility of “Postmethod condition” for language pedagogy in any ESL/EFL situation.

Kumaravadivelu (2006:215-223) himself mentions two vital sources of problems that must be addressed to implement Postmethods effectively in any ESL/EFL context. The first one he terms the “Pedagogical barriers” and the second one the “Ideological barriers”. While the former deals with pre-set and imposed top-down modes of teacher education that relies mostly on “a transmission view of knowledge” and treats second or foreign language Teacher Education as the process of transferring a set of pre-fixed, preselected and presequenced form of knowledge from teacher educators to the potential teachers (Kumaravadivelu, 2006:216), the latter denotes the politics of representation and what counts as valid knowledge. Through a course of “marginalization” and “self-marginalization”, teachers’ practical knowledge does not find the space and scope to be regarded as perceptible, and as a result it fails to get access to the accepted knowledge community. Consequently, the exertion of teachers’ autonomy in language pedagogy gets greatly impeded. This is why Akbari (2008:645) remarks that Kumaravadivelu does not offer any effective and orderly resolution regarding the ways these barriers could be overcome. Even he does not provide any apparatuses which could be used to generate the necessary context for promoting the autonomy or boosting up their growth based on the new ideas of “Postmethod condition.” Akbari (2008:645) also says regretfully that a proper recognition of the confines within which the teachers have to accomplish their pedagogic tasks is also vague in those

proposed ideas of Kumaravadivelu. Subsequently, “by assigning extra roles of social reformers and cultural critic of teachers”, the “Postmethod condition” is taking language pedagogy out of the domains of likelihood and “practice” which is, indeed, thought-provoking for language educators and practitioners (Akbari:645).

According to Akbari (2008:645), the profession of language pedagogy is entirely aware of the strict administrative frameworks within which teachers have to carry on their pedagogic activities. Again, they have to consider textbooks and materials and also assessments in the arrangement of tests. The constraining and imposing role of the textbooks and curriculum has received just a shallow acknowledgement in Kumaravadivelu’s (2003, 2006) writings and primarily in the background of the imperialist agenda and not in the specific context of real-life dilemmas of teachers. So, when Kumaravadivelu critically comments about textbooks and curriculum and their veiled agendas, it has been mostly done in relation to socio-economic-politico-cultural environment in which language pedagogy operates. Still, he does not give any reference to the unbending framework that even locally formed resources for teaching can impose on practicing teachers and consequently hinder their autonomy and critical thinking capacity. Akbari (2008:645) also remarks that nowhere Kumaravadivelu suggests as to “...how teachers can negotiate the administrative system that fix their standards of performance or income since these are controlled by the authority of the state where teachers usually do not have access.” This is one of the challenges that “Postmethod condition” can throw at the practicing teachers and practitioners while implementing the ideas of Postmethods in ESL/EFL situations.

The macrostrategies of Postmethods are also not immune to criticisms since they pose implementational hurdles in language pedagogy for practicing teachers and practitioners. Akbari (2008:645) says that the macrostrategic framework of Postmethods is decent for only “in-service teachers.” Although Kumaravadivelu provides reflective procedures for “prospective practitioners” in order to implement them in classrooms, he offers no systematic outline as to how prospective teachers can be familiarized with the “discourse and practice” of Postmethods. The model classroom, where teachers can according to their freewill exercise autonomy, unfortunately rarely exists. So, the predicament of Postmethod teachers is aptly pointed

out by Akbari (2008:645) when he says: “The problems that political ideologies and the academic world could not solve— problems of injustice, marginalization and representation, voice and inclusion, effective design and delivery of the instructional materials are now —assigned to the lone Postmethod practitioner.” He sounds really thoughtful when he remarks that if Postmethods is truly a “bottom-up” approach of language teaching-learning, it should cease to formulate “abstract speculations” and frame its hold on “empirical data” assembled from the pedagogical knowledge, experience and practice of teachers. Akbari (2008:645) also warns that in doing so teachers’ professional development can be put at risk by compromising teachers’ potentials to grow as “reflective practitioners” in the sense encouraged by the discourse of Postmethods.

Therefore, in order to negotiate or implement a context-sensitive bottom up Postmethod pedagogy in ESL/EFL situations based on the ideas of “Postmethod condition”, as Akbari (2006) explains further, the pedagogues must get its incentive from the reflections of teachers and their classroom actuality based pedagogical facts and not from any so-called postmodern theory or academic discussion in the relevant field. Or else, the claim of Bell (2003) as he critically comments on Postmethods, “Yet in the rush to bury methods, Postmethod pedagogy has obscured the positive aspects of method (Bell, 2003:332)” will prove to be true. This is one of the serious concerns of “Postmethod condition” which must be addressed carefully. Otherwise, the vision of Postmethod pedagogy to empower teachers by transforming them into “reflective practitioners” and “transformative intellectuals” will be null and void.

III

The mainstay of Postmethods is that it is neither knowledge driven nor theory motivated. Rather it is supposed to be practice and context driven. But a close scrutiny can show that it is still largely theory inspired. When Kumaravadivelu (2003:38) claims that Postmethods is theory neutral, this also suggests that it is not guided by any principles but one of the important conditions of “Postmethod Condition” is “Principled Pragmatism.” The word “Pragmatism” here refers to practical actions according to classroom realities, but the word “Principled” reminds one of theory and the principles themselves are theory driven. Hence, Kumaravadivelu’s assertion seems to be self-contradictory. Although the Postmethodologists claim that methods are dead, actually

methods were never applied properly, and so without proper application they are blamed as futile which has been subjected to criticisms.

Kumaravadivelu (2003) claims that his macrostrategic framework of Postmethods is “theory neutral.” Yet the question that promptly pops up here is “whether any framework can ever be theory neutral (e.g. Pennycook, 1989 as cited in Hashemi, 2011:141).” It should be noted that the very edifice of Postmethods is built on the references to the accessible literature of language pedagogical research which by no means can be devoid of theory. In fact, Kumaravadivelu’s stance regarding the role of theory in methods and Postmethod pedagogy seems to be vague. A good many prominent applied linguists do not find any differences between Communicative language teaching (CLT) and Postmethods. For instance, Bygate, Skehan, and Swain (as cited in Hashemi, 2011:142), contend that CLT was evidently a Postmethod style of teaching language that upholds principles which ensure the employment of numerous classroom procedures that were enormously significant in comparison with a readymade package of teaching resource materials. In line with the same argument, Bell (2003:332) points out that a lot of Kumaravadivelu’s macrostrategies that relate to “strategies-negotiated interaction, integrated language skills, learner autonomy” and so on unusually correspond to Communicative language teaching, so he cannot help commenting that the constraints of methods that “Postmethod condition” poses threat to teachers’ “sense of plausibility” by “deconstructing methods” (as cited by Kumaravadivelu, 2006).

Apart from that, the argument of Postmethods for emphasizing teachers’ “Sense of Plausibility” and “subjective understanding of the situation” propelled by “Principled Pragmatism” is anticipated to make teachers skilled to observe, analyse and interpret what works and what does not work in their classrooms and thus assume the role of theorizers. But in order to do that the practitioners or teachers will require to shoulder responsibilities beyond their grip. This is why Hashemi (2011:142) warns that Postmethods may put aside experienced practitioners who have got less experience in teaching by compelling them stepping into “an isolated frame of mind and create an unbridgeable gap between the teacher’s fantasy and the reality of the moment”. Pondering on this dilemma of teachers, Bell says (2003:54) that in an effort to “deconstruct the methods,”

Postmethods has regrettably tried to “cut teachers off from their Sense of Plausibility” and also overlooked their passion for and active participation in teaching profession, which Grundy (1999) has labelled “going from model to muddle.” Hence, the “Postmethod condition” and its high-sounding ideas of putting too much emphasis on teachers’ “Sense of Plausibility” or “Principled Pragmatism” and thereby empowering them seem way too much idealistic and non-feasible for English language pedagogy.

Another assertion made by Kumaravadivelu (2003) is that methods fail to help teachers, in any course to make decisions in classrooms since methods, by nature, are made following means to make them (vaguely though) universally pertinent to a wider range of contexts. In fact, the “Postmethod condition” has claimed to embrace these concerns in its very construction. The dimension of education that it proposes ostensibly “encompasses both matters of practice and politics (Akbari, 2008:643).” It is the third parameter of Postmethods, the parameter of “Possibility”, as Kumaravadivelu (2003:37) calls it, relates language pedagogy to the progression of “social transformation” by tapping the socio-politico-cultural awareness that students bring with them to classrooms. This is a huge thing as the top-down methods of language teaching have never pondered on connecting language pedagogy to socio-cultural realities of learners before. Akbari (2008) specifically alludes to this point where language pedagogy recognises the critical dimension of the teaching profession. Critical language teaching practice is “about extending the educational space to the social, cultural, and political dynamics of language use (Kumaravadivelu, 2006:70 as cited in Akbari, 2008:644).” Nevertheless, to many critics and experts, the broader acknowledgement of context in Postmethods and the critical dimension of it is quite idealistic in terms of its application into EFL/ESL contexts where teachers are not properly conscious of or familiar with these new ideas of “Postmethod condition”. For them it is quite a problematic task and therefore in this regard too the negotiation or the implementation of the ideas of “Postmethod condition” appears to be challenging for language experts and teachers.

Conclusion

The current paper makes an attempt to appraise the key ideas of “Postmethod condition” that aim at empowering and enlightening teachers and practitioners to devise context-sensitive and culture-specific language

teaching methodologies on their own. The theoretical review shows that the ideas of Kumaravadivelu (2003, 2006) are new and are not free from implementational challenges or hurdles and hence they have been subjected to disparagements from critics and experts in the area of language education. In order to implement these new ideas of “Postmethod condition”, experts and teachers should bear in mind that any language teaching-learning theory devoid of local understanding and knowledge cannot help them embarking on a paradigm shift in language pedagogy. So what Postmethodologists can do is to seek help from the “academic discourse community” which sets the fundamentals for Teacher education and certification programmes, standards of practice and language tests and which also helps ascertaining rules and policies for hiring and firing teachers in a particular pedagogical context (Akbari, 2008:649). With the help of the “academic discourse community (Akbari: 649),” the language teachers of a given context might be able to dissect the challenges of and potentials for negotiating or implementing the key ideas of “Postmethod condition” in ESL/EFL situations.

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Item Analysis of English Language Test: A Study of Higher Secondary Certificate Examination (HSC), Rajshahi Education Board in Bangladesh

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Abstract

The study focuses on difficulty level and discrimination index of the eleven question items of English First Paper of Higher Secondary Certificate Examination of Rajshahi Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education. It majorly analyzes the weaknesses and strengths of aforementioned items which have already been administered to students of higher secondary level, who participated in the (HSC) public examination in 2017. The researcher has taken this question paper as main test instrument to apply it to the examinees of 2018, who had already passed the test examination. A total of 204 students have responded to questionnaire served by the researcher. In the process of the research, the students have taken part in the examination conducted by the researcher with the help of English teachers of five separate-institutions and administrations of concerned colleges under Rajshahi Education Board (REB). The attempts have been made to demonstrate the validity and reliability of aforesaid items of English First paper in terms of construct validity and reliability in the field of English language test. The study involves difficulty values and discrimination index of the said items so that the question setter and moderators can ponder over the issues while they design question items of English First paper. In fact, the results of study will definitely pave the way to the concerned people to construct standard question items while question setting and moderation.

Keywords: Difficulty level, Construct validity, Reliability, Test, Assessment, Public examination

1.0 Introduction:

Item analysis is a procedure which leads the researcher to judge the items individually or as a whole to examining strengths and weaknesses of items or revealing the distinguishing features of a particular item. This process

also demonstrates the role of each item in a question paper or it helps determine each item's position in a cluster. Checking the strengths and weaknesses of each item is one of the major issues in the English language testing and evaluation with regard to the high-stake public examination. This matter demands a huge analysis so that the question setter and moderators find proper guidelines for the construction and revision of question authentically. Appropriately designed question paves the way to the concerned people to create the items as per need of the students and apply to them, and they can see how much skill these students are gaining from these items. The framing of strong, reliable and valid item entails considerable amount of standard feature of difficulty and discrimination level based on an item that attains the ability to differentiate between not only weak or strong students in terms of merit but also stimulate creative faculty of students. The study attempts to identify the incongruities among the items, find the level of vagueness of each item and suggest for improving quality of particular items to fit it in a set of question paper. In addition, item analysis serves two purposes: firstly eliciting sufficient information and secondly pointing out the expertness of the learners. Moreover, the question setters and moderators should design the items with such difficulty level and discrimination index focusing on the age and cognitive level of examinees in the high-stake public examination so that the items can have the ability to judge the examinees properly.

It is urgent to mention that a large number of students who appear in the aforementioned examinations in each year have English as their compulsory subject. Hence, checking validity and reliability of the question items, specifically in English language, requires a considerable attention.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

English language test plays a crucial role in judging competence, finding hidden qualities, promoting students in higher class, igniting the students' ability and placing candidates in the right positions. It is commonly seen that though CLT puts emphasis on communicative performance. We still notice that our students are found to be busy with preparing answers to the probable questions and memorizing them in order to get pass marks; this inclination is ever increasing as our test items are too predictable. The predictable nature of the examinations renders them useless in terms of

reflecting the standard of communicative language testing. Therefore, the rationale of the study is justified.

A sincere effort has been made to look into the relevant characteristics of Higher Secondary Certificate Examination (HSC) in English language Test. The question items applied to the high stake public examination require proper assessment so that the faulty and erroneous items can be discarded, removed or revised from well constructed items. If the testing does not match with the communicative teaching or having low level of validity and reliability while framing of the question, it can have an adverse effect on the huge student population in Bangladesh. Due to development of scientific procedures, data representation and interpretation, research can be carried out to showcase level of validity and reliability of each item applied in a question paper with regard to designing and evaluating of a particular item. Moreover, the research is further important in a sense that if one or more items in a question paper are poorly formed, study can show the extent to which the particular item/ items can affect the entire question paper. Keeping all the above issues in mind, the researcher has done an empirical study under the parameters of applied linguistics by selecting the topic “Item Analysis of English Language Test: A Study of Higher Secondary Certificate Examination (HSC), Rajshahi Education Board in Bangladesh.”

1.2 Importance and Rationale of this Study

The main purpose of the communicative approach is to learn language through real life situation activities. In this case it is important to prepare questions keeping in mind about the features of communicative testing. However, just as there is a big gap in what is being taught, there is no provision for testing all language skills. Simultaneously, failure to adopt proper methodology and analytical approach in the process of designing question paper and evaluation, many question items in a question paper are suffering from lack of aspects of validity and reliability.

However, out of 100 marks 43% weightage is covered by MCQ, open-ended, flowchart and summary writing and appreciating poem from themes and topics of the prescribed English textbook. The other 57 % weightage is covered by the rest of the 6 items which are not based on themes and lessons of prescribed textbook. This process itself creates a lack of huge content validity. Hence, the students do not show their natural interest in reading the textbook. However, in case of subjective question items students tend to find

out answers from the help of books and guidebooks which provide them the ready-made answer. Hence they have no alternative means unless memorizing these readymade answers. This is how the objectives of communicative approach remain a far cry. Moreover, this study has illustrated the testing patterns in comparison with the communicative teaching and learning characteristics. Furthermore, it explores the gaps between the curriculum guidelines and the teaching-learning outcome with regard to the testing and assessment. The testing system prevailing in Rajshahi Education Board (REB) stresses on the reading and writing base test methods leaving aside the listening and speaking skills untested. Research questions in this study have been designed to evaluate and assess the strengths and weaknesses of English question items of HSC level of REB in order to explain the causes of misconnection that prevails among the curriculum guidelines, prescribed textbook, evaluation procedures and the language testing question items in the exams.

1.3 Objectives of this Study

The present study aims to focus on the items set in English first paper of REB. Since it is a high stake system oriented public examination, it calls for the thorough investigation of the question items employed in English first paper of board examination. The objectives of this study are to explore validity and reliability of each item of English first paper of the HSC level public examination. It further examines the strengths and weaknesses of each items of English first paper. The study would look into the contribution of each item in overall question paper. Moreover, attempts have been made to see the total strengths and flaws of a question paper in terms of different sheds of validity. Given this background the research questions have been designed to examine the validity in terms of framing question items, question construction and assessment.

1.4 Research Questions

- To what extent the English first paper is applicable in the HSC level Public Examination in terms of content, construct, concurrent and ethical validity.
- To analyze the level of reliability in terms of score assessment and evaluation procedures.

- To what extent are the items of the test able to elicit difficulty index and discriminating power?

1.5 Review of Literature

In order to do proper research in this selected topic, it is necessary to have a detailed discussion about the history of testing, process of evaluation and its gradual evolution. This research paper includes historical background, works done on this subject matter in the past and in the recent period in the national and international arena. But so far it is seen that very few researchers in South Asia have contributed to what is being discussed in this paper. The review of literature in this field of study has provided ample opportunity to learn about standard parameters, necessary features of testing and evaluation and overall knowledge of the said issue. The studies that have made significant contributions to testing have been instrumental in accelerating the research of others. Besides, it is important to note that the criteria that are essential for testing and evaluation are summarized and articulated to make the study more relevant. In the case of this study, a full understanding of some issues related to testing and evaluation has to be considered and comprehended necessarily and meticulously. The aspects of validity, reliability and item analysis are such issues that are briefly and subtly described here so that this research can be advanced properly.

However, there are several private and public examination development centres such as American Educational Research (AERA), Educational Testing Service (EST), National Council on Measurement in Education (NCME), National Language and Literacy Institute of Australia (NLLIA), University of Cambridge Language Examination Syndicate (UCEES), West African Examination Council and so on, which have been developed across the world to assess the strengths, quality and weaknesses of question items. Furthermore, these centres evaluate the question paper by carrying out researches on the effects of testing on teaching which is called washback. Either positive or negative effects of testing on teaching leave a huge impact on the society in context of high stake-examination. Moreover, questions which trigger the students to merely memorize and reproduce answer will have negative washback on their learning. Hence Durairajan, (2015, p. 99) explains that “subjective type and multiple choice questions will suffer from same problem since they (students) start focusing on tricks to answer these questions and not really learn concepts. With high stake examinations, the

teacher in the classroom cannot decide on paper patterns. Those who are responsible for these (the experts who design the paper) must be aware of negative washback and do something about it. On the contrary, the question items which create opportunities for students to compare, contrast or evaluate concepts have positive washback.” Therefore public examination such as SSC and HSC which are called high-stake examinations where a huge student population is involved matter a most for the analysis of each items in a question paper. With this end the review of literature has taken into consideration on the basis of validity, reliability, difficulty level and discrimination power to examine the items incorporated into the English First Paper of HSC level public examination.

It is urgent to mention that clubbing together the validity and the reliability has rationale in arena of language testing. Bachman & Palmer (1996) is of the view that “validity is firstly ensured and then reliability. Reliability is also considered an aspect of validity.” Moreover, it is commonly believed that validity and reliability play a complementary role in the language testing and score assessment procedures.

1.6 Validity:

Validity is a crucial factor in testing and measurement. It deals with two questions which are very much pertinent when it assesses high stake achievement test. They are - what precisely does the test measure? And how well does the test measure?

However, in course of content analysis for a high stake achievement test, validity, reliability, and practicality are seriously taken into account. A valid test is a tool, on which we depend much to achieve sound judgment. Therefore, some of the views by the experts are as follows - “A test is valid when it measures what it claims to measure (Garret, 1964: 30)”. Similarly, “a test is valid when it measures what it ought to measure (Ebel, 1972: 463).” Hughes (1989, p. 22) states that “a test is said to be valid if it measures accurately what it is intended to measure.” Besides, the validity of a test deserves special attention. Validity can be defined as the suitability or the appropriateness of a test for its purpose. The validity of a test has different aspects. The major aspects are content validity, construct validity, ethical validity, consequential validity, concurrent validity, predictive validity and face validity. In a high stake achievement test, all aspects of validity play crucial roles to ensure a successful examination. The process of validation is

a combination of logical argument and empirical validation. One validates the usage to which a measure is used; not the instrument itself. Each unique usage must be, specifically, documented and validated. Tests that are valid for one use may not be valid for another one. They are often validated after being used. However, one should conduct at least one appropriate validation study during the developmental phase of a test or validation process. There are content, construct, concurrent and ethical aspects of validity, which get special attention in this research purpose. Therefore, these aspects of validity are precisely dealt here.

1.6.1 Content Validity

The aspect of content validity is ensured by teacher who incorporates the representative samples of all areas she/he teaches and accordingly wants tests after a certain period of time or in the academic year, particularly in the achievement test. In this respect, question setters and moderators should be fully aware of designing the question items which have been taken from entire areas that have been taught throughout the entire year. Kaplan. R.M (2009, p. 135) is of the view that “content related evidence for the validity of a test or measure considers the adequacy of representation of the conceptual domain the test which is designed to cover.” Hence it is essential that content validity requires the items which are a fair sample of total potential content. So establishing a content validity evidence for a measure calls for good logic, intuitive skills and perseverance.

1.6.2 Construct Validity

Durairajan, G. (2015, p. 89) explains that “this is the most difficult aspect of validity for us to understand, because it links to the ability in the students’ mind (that we want to find out about) with the questions we set, the answers students write and the judgment (or inference) we make about that capability.” It is a kind of ability, task, problem or activity which can be included into a question item to be solved by the students. Moreover, in construct validity evidence, a researcher simultaneously describes some construct and develops the parameters to measure it through a continuity of actions. This process of action is necessary when no single criterion is accepted as entirely adequate for defining the quality of measurement (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955, p. 282; Sackett, 2003). Hence, it is a potential ability by which learners move further to resolve any problem or get the answer right or wrong in a question paper.

1.6.3 Concurrent Validity

To ensure concurrent validity in the high-stake public examination through measuring the appropriate level of difficulty and discriminating power is pivotal issue in the test validity. Durairajan, G. (2015, p. 93) makes it clear that the test having too high or low degree of problem or task does not convey proper idea to work out. She further explains that these two possibilities, of the paper being too easy or difficult, and therefore not matching with our instinctive ongoing evaluation of students, is a concurrent validity problem. Therefore the test where a large number of students are involved concurrent validity can be established through meticulous process. In fact, setters and moderators should lay more emphasis on to follow the steps and instructions put forward by the board authority.

1.6.4 Ethical Validity

In a system oriented high-stake public examination the question papers should be designed in such a way that students from every social stratum can get equal access in answering to the question item. An ethically valid test item should not entertain malign against any cast, creed and religion. In this respect, the test designer should be careful of creating the construct or problem of the test which will not carry any biased attitude against any community, group and faiths. So, Durairajan, G. (2015, p. 92) is of the view that “we make sure that a test is ethically valid, the testers must keep three things in mind that – (i) it is not biased against any particular group of students, (ii) everyone gets a fair chance to study for and write the examination, (iii) all the students have financial and educational access to that examination.”

1.7 Reliability:

By definition, reliability is the consistency of test scores. A test is unable to measure anything alright unless it measures steadily. To ensure the stability of a test it is necessary to be certain that approximately the same results are to be gained from a test that has been administered within a reasonable period of time. Harris. P. D (1974, p.14) views that “(i) if we tested a group on Tuesday instead of Monday; (ii) if we gave two parallel forms of the test to the same group on Monday and on Tuesday; (iii) we scored a particular test on Tuesday instead of Monday; (4) if two or more competent scorers scored the

test independently.” It is evident that reliability involves two features: test reliability and scorer reliability. Therefore, it is clear that reliability, in terms of score and test, is one of the most prominent traits of language test in general. With this respect, Nunally further (1982) emphasizes that “reliability is concerned with the extent to which measurements are repeatable if all items being studied were included. In other words, reliability can be described as the extent to which a test measures what it purports to measure consistently and accurately.” In the same way, Maduekwe (2007) points out that “test reliability refers to the idea that a good test should give consistent results.” Hence, a good test is able to measure whatever it intends to measure smoothly under any situation. However, the test reliability involves a few issues: if the number of samples is more, the test results will assure more reliability in terms of participants’ knowledge and ability. In this regard, experts implore the need for objective items in the examination instead of essay type of examination, in which the test items are limited in number. Moreover, reliability affects negatively if the condition under which the test is administered fluctuates unexpectedly. Besides, students’ eagerness towards the test affects the reliability of a test. Apart from these situations, if the test fails to produce consistent results, the test cannot stand on reliability factor. Furthermore, Bachman and Palmer (1996) explained that reliability is “the consistency of measurement.” It means that it can be termed as reliable so long it measures consistently. In the same way, Jacob (1991) described that “reliability is an essential characteristic of a good test, because if a test doesn’t measure consistently (reliably), one could not count on the scores resulting from a particular administration to be an accurate index of students’ achievement.” In addition to reliability, other features like temporal stability of the test which is associated with the day-to-day fluctuation of test performance and scorer or rater reliability deals with the stability or consistency.

In the high-stake public examination, scorer reliability is a crucial issue where examiners (Evaluators), scrutinizers and head examiners (Head Evaluators) are appointed by the competent authority, education board. The reliability of scores of single answer script is evaluated by the said evaluators. With a view to ascertaining scorer reliability the study focuses on stability and consistency of scores of the examinees evaluated by multiple examiners. In this context if the replication of test scores remains at a close approximation of scores given by several examiners, the scorer reliability can be ensured a lot. Furthermore,

inter-rater reliability and intra-rater reliability are the two ways of scorer reliability. In the inter rater reliability checking, consistency of the scores can be measured by two or multiple raters. On the other hand, for the case of intra-rater reliability consistency of the scores of same answer scripts can be examined by the same rater for the second time after his first evaluation. About the scorer reliability Haertel (2006, p. 65) has made the matter clear that “any of these possible scores would have served the purpose of measurement equally well, but they would not all be identical. Taken together, this hypothetical collection of scores represents the general, enduring attribute of interest. Thus, it is important to determine the extent to which any single result of the measurement procedure is likely to depart from the average score over many replications. Other things being equal, the greater uncertainty associated with the results of the measurement, the less confidence should be placed in that measurement.”

Furthermore, there is another way of assessing reliability which is conducted by utilizing the alternate or parallel form of tests. In other words, it takes into consideration several versions of the same test that are equivalent to different aspects covering length, difficulty, time limits, format and so forth. Besides, there is a third way of evaluating reliability which focuses on the evaluation of a single form of test which divides the items into two equally distinct parts and obtains two individual scores as outcomes. From such procedure, the common means of the Spearman-Brown (2010) formula, one obtains two parallel forms, the results of which may be compared to provide a measure of the adequacy of sampling. The fourth method often applied to determine the test reliability is that of rational equivalence, the most familiar procedures that are developed by Kuder and Richardson (1937). Like the third approach to assessing reliability, this method estimates from a single administration of a test format. It concerns itself with the inter items consistency as determined by the proportion of persons who pass each item and the proportion who do not.

In order to implement the objectives of validity and reliability, it is imperative to judge the level of difficulty and discrimination power which are the essential components of each item or an overall question paper. Moreover, difficulty level and discrimination power are the major aspects of item analysis in the field of testing and evaluation.

1.8: Item Difficulty

Allen & Yen (1979) are of the view that Item Difficulty (also called the p-value) is a measurement of the proportion of people who score correctly on a particular item. The greater value of item Difficulty in fact does not prevail at the “difficulty” level of item; rather it is the marker of the “easiness” of the particular item. Higher is the Difficulty level of an item; easier is the item. Moreover, in this connection, Priya, S. (2016, p. 157) explains that item Difficulty value can range between 0.0 and 1.0. If an item is too easy or too difficult it is not considered to be a good test item and revisions of such items are advisable.

1.9 Item Discrimination

Priya, S. (2015, p. 157) points out that Item Discrimination is a measurement which determines whether the people who have done well in the whole test have also done well in a particular item. In other words, Item discrimination is a measurement of how well a particular item discriminates between people who are high scorers from those who are low scorers in a particular test. Therefore, Ebel and Frisbie (1986) have clarified that theoretically it can be in the range from -1.0 to 1.0. However in practice, Discrimination Index rarely exceeds 0.5. Index above 0.4 are very good, from 0.3 to 0.4 are classified as reasonably good, from 0.2 to 0.3 as marginal items which may need some revision, and those below 0.2 as poor requiring major revisions or eliminations. Hence researchers and experts in area have set the above mentioned range and criteria to examine items developed for language tests. Moreover, for academic achievement tests Aggarwal (1986) is of the view that items with any discrimination Index above are considered satisfactory.

2.0 Methodology

The study is a part of applied linguistics which calls for empirical research that claims both methods, quantitative and qualitative procedures of data collections and interpretation. Attempts have been made to interpret and analyze the data based on primary data collected from the students of five separate colleges under Rajshahi Education Board.

The participants are the students from twelve class covering both genders. The researcher has conducted an English language test with the logistic support from the authority of five colleges both from rural and urban areas

under Rajshahi district in Bangladesh. The test conducted by the researcher for 100 marks in English first paper was taken from the Rajshahi Education Board (REB) in 2017 as the main test instrument which administered to the 204 students of these selected colleges affiliated to REB.

However, it is obvious to say that evaluation of previous question paper is a crucial and popular matter in the arena of testing. In addition, item analysis of a question paper is recognized and customary issues across the world. There are renowned testing agencies and enterprises working in Europe, Australia and North America to evaluate question items in the post administration period when they have turned up to the public domain. Hence the researcher has taken the year-2017 HSC English First Paper question as the main test instrument to administer it to the current students with a view to drawing out its overall strengths, quality and weaknesses and to show individual performance of each item in a group.

The researcher has developed fascination for the area of this study since he has a pretty long experience teaching and evaluating answer scripts of HSC level English language. Apart from these responsibilities, he has been carrying out the responsibilities of being setter and moderator appointed by REB for one decade. Hence there lies a valid reason for examining the answer scripts and evaluating scores by the researcher himself along with one of his competent colleagues to demonstrate the level of validity and reliability of the items through the statistical measurement.

With this end statistical analysis has been represented through tables in order to analyze the collected data. Moreover, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software has been used to determine the internal consistency value of each item under scrutiny. This SPSS software also provides the strengths and weaknesses by using the validity and reliability measurement of the 11 question items applied to assess the language abilities and attributes of the students, the examinees of HSC English first paper.

2.0 QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE ANALYSES

2.1 Validity

The present English first paper deserves to be checked in terms of **construct validity**. Besides, it is imperative to look into a measure of construct and need to be checked whether they are correlated with each other well. In

any well-designed test, the value should be preferably in the range of +0.3 to +0.5. On the other hand, correlations between each subtest and the whole test should be higher and the overall score of the whole test should always be high preferably around and greater than +0.7 (Alderson, Clampham & Wall, 2000, p. 183-185). The Pearson Correlation values of each question item to the whole test ranged from 0.730 to 0.841. All values were greater than +0.7 which pointed out that the test was well designed in terms of question items wherein all items contributed to the total test score and hence the high correlation value (Priya, S. 2016, p. 130). With respect to the report on the correlation between individual test score as compared to total one, those with a single asterisk are statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level whereas the $p < .01$ level has double asterisks. The correlation coefficient r quantifies the strength and direction of a linear relationship of two variables on the table of a correlation coefficient. The value of r ranges always between 1 and +1. In order to interpret the Pearson correlation table, the following values usually indicate the closest relation to r and the status of relation is also assessed.

Pearson Correlation Table

Exactly -1	A perfect downhill (negative)
-0.70	A strong downhill (negative)
-0.50	A moderate downhill (negative) average
-0.30	A weak downhill (negative)
0.	No linear relationship
+0.30	A weak uphill (positive)
+0.50	A moderate uphill (positive) average
+0.70	A strong uphill (positive)
Exactly +1	A perfect uphill (positive)

According to the Pearson Correlation statistical measurement shows that “** asterisk with values” (** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level, 2-tailed) means 99% statistically significant association with one item to another and the total as well. Similarly, “* asterisk with values” (* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level, 2-tailed) stand for 95% significant correlation with one item to another and the total as well. The result reveals that each item correlates with all items along with the total based on ** asterisk and * asterisk with their values which indicate that they are statistically 99% and 95% significant correlations respectively.

Table No.: 1

The following table projects the strengths and weaknesses of the items in the English first paper-2017 of REB.

Question no.	Question type	Values	level they hold	Comments
q1A (A)	MCQ	0.587**	moderate	The above mentioned questions with values project that they stand at an average or moderate level. Hence the correlation values of these question items suggest that they require a minor or slight restructuring or modification.
q3	summary writing	0.544**	moderate	
q4	cloze test	0.565**	moderate	
q6	rearrange	0.521**	moderate	
q7	paragraph writing	0.521**	moderate	
q10	describing bar graph or chart	533**.	moderate	

Table No: 2

The following table also presents strengths and weaknesses of the rest of the items of the aforementioned question paper.

Question no.	Question type	Values	level they hold	Comments
q1B	open ended	0.619**	moderate	The values with these question items signify that they are better designed items than that of above ones.
q2	flowchart	0.647**	moderate	
q5	cloze test without clues	0.658**	moderate	
q8	story writing	0.436**	weak uphill (positive)	The values with these items project that they are assumed to be poorly constructed items. It is important to note that none of the items are found to be weakly designed.
q9	letter writing	0.496**	weak uphill (positive)	
q11	appreciating poem	0.429**	weak uphill (positive)	

Table: 3 The following table demonstrates the values of the difficulty level and discrimination power based on which the researcher would show each item and its strengths and weaknesses.

Item Analysis parameters with special references of MCQ (Difficulty and Discrimination)

Values	difficulty level	Values Discrimination level	Discrimination Index
0.90	extremely easy item	0.5	hardly goes above
0.80	very easy item	0.4	very good
0.70	easy item	0.3 to 0.4	reasonably good
0.4 to 0.6	Normal easy item	0.2 to 0.3	marginal item
0.20 below	difficult item	0.2	extremely poor

Based on the above parameters the following table provided the difficulty level and comments. Moreover, the difficulty levels and the comments for each question items exhibit the level of difficulty in terms of construct validity.

Table: 4

MCQ Analysis of 2017 REB English First Paper:

Item no.	Normal P Value	difficulty Level	Suggested Comments
1. A (a)	0.4 to 0.6	0.74	this question with a range of 0.74 has exceeded the normal difficulty level which infers that this is a very easy item for the students and hence, a large portion of students did not feel hesitation to choose right answer.
1. A (b)	0.4 to 0.6	0.8	With such high values of (0.8) difficulty, it indicates one of the easiest item for the students, therefore, students find the answer without much thinking.
1. A (c)	0.4 to 0.6	0.74	the values indicate that it is an extremely easy item for students' considering the current level of understanding.
1. A (d)	0.4 to 0.6	0.71	exceeded the normal level of P Value, hence students find the answer very easy.
1. A (e)	0.4 to 0.6	0.65	It carries a slightly high difficulty level; therefore, it is presumed that this item is not easy.

Comments of the table no. 4: In terms of difficulty level, research finds that four out of five items of MCQ- (a), (b), (c) and (d) are designed so weakly that students do not need to apply any sort of effort to answer them. These questions containing high difficulty values are highly detrimental to excite the creative faculty of students. These sorts of questions not only frustrate them with respect to creativity but also prevent them from solving problems. The question item A (e) carries a slightly high difficulty value which would have a little strength to compel students to think and answer to the question.

In the same fashion, the discrimination indices of each MCQ item have been projected through the following table in terms of construct validity.

Table: 5: Item discrimination is the power of individual test item or whole test which differentiates between the proportion of the high total scorer or upper group who scored item correctly and proportion of the low total scorers or lower group who scored the item correctly (Priya, S. 2016, p. 157-158).

Item no.	Discrimination values	Discrimination Index	Suggested Comments
1. A (a)	0.145	vulnerable item	Does not have sufficient power to differentiate students from high and low scorers: either discarded or majorly revised.
1. A (b)	0.290	marginal item	Does not have the said power, calls for immediate modification.
1. A (c)	0.181	extremely marginal item	Does not have ability to discriminate, revision is required.
1. A (d)	0.345	reasonably good item	Does not need modification, can be retained.
1. A (e)	0.4	good item	Having ability to discriminate between high and low scorers.

Comments on the table on 5: Based on Discrimination Index mentioned in the Review of Literature, the research finds that the question items A (d) and A (e) are classified as reasonably good and very good respectively, having the discriminating power to differentiate between high scorers from low scorer ones. On the contrary, due to the low discriminating power of

the items A (a), A (b) and A (c), the research suggests that either discarded or majorly revised, require for immediate modification and revision respectively.

2.2 Reliability Test

Reliability deals with the consistency of a particular test. A test is reliable when it produces the same result while administering in different time and situation. In other words, it is the overall consistency of a measurement. Moreover, reliability is a measurement scale to which an assessment tool produces the outputs steadily and consistently. It further suggests the stability of measurement over time. Furthermore, for a good test, reliability measurement is one of the most important elements to check the quality of a test and also it concerns with the consistency of scoring and precision of the administering procedures of the test. Hence, tests in general or particularly a language test deserve reliability a lot; otherwise an unreliable test does not mean anything to its testers. However, Brennan (2001) argues that "the notion of replications is central to an understanding of reliability because reliability is a measure of the degree of consistency in examinees scores over replications of a measurement procedure (Brennan, R. L. 38, 4, 295-317)." For reliability measurement, many ways have been tried for years together. Cronbach's alpha (1951) is one measurement for estimating internal consistency reliability in language testing and elsewhere. It can be measured through the use of SPSS, for example, when the researcher has the item scores (dichotomous or polytomous) for each test taker. Inter-rater methods examine the consistency between the ratings given by two or more raters to a set of test performances, typically using a correlation. Observed reliabilities are affected by the manner in which the reliability was calculated. When the two testing events are separated by time, as in test-retest coefficients, they tend to be lower than when all samples of performance are obtained in a single testing event (Gronlund, 1985). More importantly, applied linguists has scope to carry out an argument of reliability and instructions for calculating reliability in any current introductions to language testing, but Bachman (2004) and Brown (2005) provide the most thorough treatment. Reliability, consequently, shows a range on which test scores are free from flaws. Consistency can be extracted by four ways – Test-Retest Method, Equivalent or Parallel Test Method, Split-Half Method and Inter-Item Consistency Method. Reliability

can be called to question by the three ways-weaknesses in items, gross flaws from students and shortcomings from examiners.

2.3 Cronbach’s Alpha and Internal Consistency for 11 Test Items

The researcher in his attempt has found out internal consistency amongst the 11 items of the main Test instrument, English first paper-2017 of REB which has been administered to 204 students of five colleges in Bangladesh. The students’ scores against each item have been estimated by the parameter of Cronbach’s Alpha to see the values which project how individual items are internally consistent. The SPSS calculation by using Cronbach’s Alpha theoretical tool has been able to show reason if any item needs to be removed or retained to ascertain internal consistency. The following table containing Cronbach’s Alpha values attempts to show what would happen to reliability analysis if one or two items are deleted or corrected from the scale and also would help identify any items which may not belong to the list of the questions.

Table: 6: Cronbach’s Alpha and Internal Consistency

Cronbach’s Alpha	Internal consistency
$\alpha \geq 0.9$	Excellent
$0.9 > \alpha \geq 0.8$	Good
$0.8 > \alpha \geq 0.7$	Acceptable
$0.7 > \alpha \geq 0.6$	Questionable
$0.6 > \alpha \geq 0.5$	Poor
$0.5 > \alpha$	Unacceptable

The above table projects the level of Alpha values based on which 11 items of English first paper have been judged and each of the items has been categorized with respect to values which lead to the internal consistency they maintain amongst them. Generally, the maximum/excellent level of alpha (≥ 0.90) cannot be expected since it infers that some items are redundant as they are testing the same question but in a different guise. The alpha ranges between above 0.70 to 0.80 have the abilities to exert interrelatedness amongst the items in a good and acceptable manner. On the contrary, a low Alpha value due to the poor correlation between items claims revision or leaving it out from the list. The Alpha ranges- $0.7 > \alpha \geq 0.6$, $0.6 > \alpha \geq 0.5$ and $0.5 > \alpha$ have been considered questionable, poor and unacceptable respectively. In this study, the accepted values of Alpha have been shown in the following table.

Table: 7: Cronbach's Alpha Value

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.759	.786	11

For this test, the above table shows that the value of Cronbach's Alpha is 0.759 and it is acceptable from the statistical point of view. A total of 11 numbers of items have been presented with separate Alpha values in the following table in two columns. The corrected item-total correlation and Cronbach's Alpha if item deleted respectively, then reliability level may increase or may not.

Table: 8: Reliability Analysis on Cronbach's Alpha of English First Paper

Item-Total Statistics					
Item Types	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
q1 MCQ and open ended	31.113	156.234	.577	.387	.716
q2 flowchart	35.346	167.083	.475	.309	.734
q3 Summary	39.088	191.078	.424	.335	.739
q4 cloze test with clues	37.373	195.897	.476	.539	.737
q5 cloze test without clues	34.407	167.260	.495	.487	.730
q6 Re-arranging	32.941	183.570	.342	.190	.753
q7 Paragraph writing	39.115	193.003	.400	.349	.742
q8 story writing	40.593	212.555	.390	.264	.754
q9 Letter writing	39.583	204.584	.425	.346	.746
q10 Describing graph	38.995	193.401	.420	.375	.740
q11 Appreciating poem	40.270	207.210	.352	.269	.751

A reliability analysis has been carried out on the 11 items of the English first paper question -2017. Cronbach's Alpha showed the questionnaire to reach acceptable reliability, $\alpha = 0.759$. Most items appeared to be acceptable and worthy of retention; resulting in a decrease in the Alpha if deleted. Hence, it is not expected that any of the items should be removed from the list. Some of the items like q1 (MCQ and open-ended), q2 (flow chart), q3 (Summary), q4 (Cloze test with clues) and q5 (cloze test without clues) are carrying low Alpha values. If they are deleted, the removal of these questions would not affect Cronbach's Alpha in any radical way and it, in an average, remains the same.

In case of the *Corrected Item-Total Correlation*, the column explicates that each item correlates with the overall test scores. Correlations less than 0.4

and items which belong to that level indicate that they possess less internal consistency values. In this test, the items like q6 (re-arranging), q8 (story writing) and q11 (Appreciating poem) have been found to carry the lowest values 0.342, 0.390 and 0.352 respectively in the table. When these three items are corrected, the Cronbach's Alpha is reported to be at 0.753, 0.754 and 0.751 respectively.

In other words, since the test item q1 is clubbed with MCQ and open-ended, now Cronbach's Alpha values are seen in the following way splitting the q1 into two separate items-MCQ and open-ended.

Table: 9: Cronbach's Alpha Value

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.764	.797	12

The above table projects that the number of items is 12 and the value of Cronbach's Alpha is 0.764 which is acceptable statistically. The following table demonstrates the Cronbach's Alpha values of both columns- Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted and Corrected Item-Total Correlation respectively.

Table: 10: Reliability Analysis on Cronbach's Alpha of English First Paper

Item-Total Statistics					
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
q1 A (a) MCQ	36.722	201.814	.524	.397	.745
Q1 A (b) OPEN ENDED	35.190	175.626	.467	.262	.741
q2	35.320	167.773	.472	.302	.743
q3	39.032	191.094	.430	.346	.745
q4	37.330	196.259	.475	.560	.743
q5	34.352	167.114	.501	.514	.737
q6	32.904	183.972	.341	.191	.760
q7	39.069	193.337	.400	.349	.748
q8	40.554	213.113	.388	.262	.759
q9	39.544	205.062	.424	.342	.751
q10	38.948	193.697	.421	.378	.746
q11	40.219	207.493	.355	.271	.756

Due to splitting q1 into two questions- q1 (a) MCQ and q1 (b) Open-ended, now the number of items is 12 and the Cronbach's Alpha reliability has been

estimated on 12 items. The above table presents the acceptable level of internal consistency of the same English first paper.

In case of 12 items, the Cronbach's Alpha values have reached $\alpha = 0.764$ and the most of the items have hovered around the same level of values except a few items having a little less than 0.764. Therefore, it is presumed that most of the items are good enough and worthy of retention. If any item is deleted without sufficient reason, a decrease of Alpha values will have to be incurred. Hence, it is not desired that any of the items should be removed. The question item q1 B open-ended with values 175.6, q2 flowchart with 167.7, q3 Summary writing with 191.0, q4 cloze test with clues with 196.2, q5 cloze without clues with 167.1, q6 Re-arrange with 183.9 and q7 Paragraph writing with 193.3 are containing low Alpha values. If either of them is deleted, its absence would not contribute to increasing overall internal consistency level or the overall increase would not reach at good level rather they would remain at the acceptable range or would not ascertain that the Cronbach's Alpha value will undergo any severe change or by and large the value will remain the same.

With respect to the Corrected Item-total correlation, each item contributes to maintaining the overall consistency and correlation with the overall test scores. The level of correlation less than 0.4 is termed as the low internal consistency level and the above range 0.4 is taken as satisfactory one. In this question, only three items-q6 (re-arranging sentences) with a value of 0.341, q8 (writing story) with a value of 0.388 and q11 (appreciating poem) with a value of 0.355 remain in the category of less than the satisfactory level. If they are corrected, their Cronbach's Alpha values will reach at 0.760, 0.759 and 0.756 respectively. In fact, Cronbach's Alpha values of all the question items vary from 0.73 to 0.76; hence, it indicates that either deletion or correction of any question item would not bring about any significant change.

Conclusion

The analysis presents that the items like MCQ, open ended, flowchart, cloze test with and without clues and rearrange left no more than one correct answer are well answered by most of the students and that is why students have scored extremely well. Scoring well in public examination does not necessarily reflect the students' competency to using skills for which the items are designed. The analysis projects that especially the MCQs lack

sufficient amount and acceptable range of difficulty level and discrimination power without which mentioned items fail to test students' capability for analysis and creative thought. Apart from difficulty and discrimination level of the MCQs, the open-ended, flow-chart and cloze-test with and without clues, they can claim to suffer from a bit poor standard level of validity and reliability which indicate the weaknesses in terms of construct and content design. Hence deficiency of the proper values consequently leaves a negative impact on overall strength of the question paper. On the other hand, in the items like paragraph writing, story writing, letter writing, describing graph and appreciating poem maximum students have not scored satisfactorily. These items are supposed to bring out analysis, synthesis and facility of expression. Besides, students can get scope to apply their functional information such thinking, comprehension, judgments, work experience, appreciation and social knowledge. In case of construct validity, these items are comparatively designed poorly. The weakly designed items fail to stimulate curiosity of students and also invite boredom to their soft minds. Moreover, they are somehow encouraged to cram the answers to the question without applying their higher order thinking skill and organizational ability as well.

Findings of the Research have Offered the Following Suggestions and Recommendations

1. Need to ensure a proper level of difficulty and discrimination power included into each items while designing the question paper so that the examinees cannot find the items too difficult and too easy.
2. The Setters and moderators should be trained enough to design suitable task or construct or problem in each item; so the examinees strive to resolve them and simultaneously can have the opportunity to explore their potential with process of examination.
3. In case of MCQ, all alternatives (Distractors) and stem should have sufficient level of plausibility and probability so that examinees can think over to pick up the right one. Testing experts are of the view that every distractor/alternative should have minimum

tempting quality to be chosen by at least 5% students or in some cases chosen by 10% students.

4. The setter and moderators should pay the highest attention to designing short, simple, clear and specific instruction for individual item. Ambiguous mislead the examinees and might claim further clarification from the invigilators. Thereby the setters and moderators can maximize level construct, content, concurrent and ethical validity of overall question paper.
5. Bangladesh Examination Development Unit (BEDU) under Ministry of Education can strengthen its capacity by appointing testing and evaluation experts who can train the setters and the moderators in a regular basis with updated knowledge and expertise. Properly trained setters and moderators can develop their ability to minimize flaws related to validity, reliability, difficulty level and discrimination power while designing question items.
6. A committee of expertise should work on intensively to formulate the guidelines and principles of designing test items, test instructions and marks distributions. Moreover, they should develop appropriate construct to extract separate language attributes based skills that they want develop in the students.
7. A national rubric should be designed for each item and provided to the examiners to minimize the range of marking discrimination from teacher to teacher (Evaluators to evaluators).
8. The Education Board authority can conduct seminar on Evaluation of Answer Scripts with the help of testing experts by inviting the evaluators including moderators and setters with a view to minimizing the gap between the evaluators. As a result, scorer reliability level can be enhanced with help of research procedures-intra rater reliability and inter rater reliability.

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Interpreting Texts: The Cultural Studies Perspective

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Abstract

Cultural Studies (CS) has not only occasioned a paradigm shift in our very idea of “Text”, but also unsettled much conventional wisdom surrounding the act of analysing texts. Consequently, reading texts turns out to be a far more engaging activity than it had been during the pre-Cultural Studies times. While interpreting a literary text, we have thus learnt to be aware of a host of paraliterary factors—hegemonic operations of Market, Media, and publication establishments, for example—casting their long shadows on production, propagation and reception. We also try to understand how distinctive cultural contexts influence the shaping of a particular text as also the evaluation of it. Importantly, Cultural Studies appears to play a catalyst too in creating a remarkably inclusive/elastic interpretive category that subsumes critical tools from diverse disciplines to explore texts including those rendered outcasts by high culture.

Keywords: Cultural Studies, Reading Texts, Raymond Williams, Analysis of Culture, Structure of feeling, Selective tradition

The Cultural Studies perspective of reading texts is the subject of my brief discourse here,¹ and my understanding of this perspective of reading is based on an association of quite a few years with the academic site called Cultural Studies and the way I perceive the insights I could gain from my rather inadequate explorations into concerned literatures in the area. I should also humbly mention at the outset that the following narrative mainly addresses concerns of the students/researchers rather than those of the experts.

¹ An earlier version of the paper was published in *The Bangla Academy Journal*. Vols. 2&3 (2021). pp.136-146.

For students of Literatures reading has a special meaning; interpreting texts has been our principal academic task; the common struggle we thus share is a consistent search for perspectives, concepts and theories whereby we may translate plural possibilities of a text; therefore it is important for us to see what sort of interpretive infrastructure CS offers to us the interpreters.

To begin with, its notion of “text” is remarkably inclusive and elastic. Not in written language only, rather a text simultaneously exists in different avatars. Different dimensions and formats of a text traverse diverse cultural categories— from high culture to subculture; and this opens up plural interpretative possibilities of the text, ensuring a comprehensive reading. Now, we may have at least four avatars of *Othello*, for instance, to widen our understanding of it: a book, a theatrical performance or stage production, a Bollywood film, an audio recording. Interpretation of Shakespeare thus becomes possible from the perspectives of high culture to mass culture. Marjorie Garber in the Introduction to her book, *Shakespeare and Modern Culture*, mentions, “Shakespeare in our culture is already disseminated, scattered, appropriated, part of the cultural language, high and low.”² Visual text produces different set of signifiers; cinematic reproduction of a printed bound text generates possibilities for comparative study. Besides, in CS classes we teach pieces like Williams’ “Advertising: the Magic System”;³ John Fiske’s “Shopping for Pleasure: Malls, Power, and Resistance,”⁴ or “How can One be Sports Fan?” by Pierre Bourdieu.⁵ Then remember what Carlyle said in 1842 looking at one of the new locomotives, “these are our poems.”⁶ The indication is that we cannot understand the

² Marjorie Garber. “Introduction.” *Shakespeare and Modern Culture*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2008. p. xvii.

³ Raymond Williams. “Advertising: The Magic System.” *Cultural Studies Reader*. ed. Simon During. London, New York: Routledge, second edition, 1999. pp. 410- 426.

⁴ John Fiske. “Shopping for Pleasure: Malls, Power, and Resistance.” *Cultural Resistance Reader*. ed. Stephen Duncombe, New York, London: Verso, 2002. pp. 267-274.

⁵ Pierre Bourdieu. “How can One be a Sports Fan?” *Cultural Studies Reader*. ed. Simon During. op. cit. pp. 427-440.

⁶ qtd. in Raymond Williams. “Analysis of Culture.” *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*. ed. John Storey. Athens, Georgia: Georgia University Press, second edition, 1998. pp. 48-56. (Excerpts from his book *The Long Revolution* published in 1961 by Chatto & Windus, London).

creative part of a culture without reference to these changes in industry, engineering and institutions which are as strong and valuable an expression of human skill and effort as the major art and thought.

CS appears to be a catalyst in creating an academic space, a critical spectrum where diverse texts and perspectives may come together. Origin of it can be traced in Romantic movement that identified Culture among the non-elite, and reevaluated the status of low culture. Romanticism tells us to reexamine our conventional wisdom about poetic diction, or our conception of literature as exclusively high art. Wordsworth's poet is a man blessed with some additional gifts but still a man speaking to men.⁷ CS discards Arnoldian elite ideal of individual human refinement to be attained through orientations with "the best that has been thought and said in the world" which refers exclusively to high culture and which considers other cultural expressions as "anarchy."⁸

In academic practices as well as in popular imagination it is often the norm to use "universality" as touchstone to measure the ultimate value of a literary text; the classical status or canonicity of a Shakespearean drama, for example, is established and perpetuated through its supposed ability for projecting emotions and situations which humans, regardless of genders, generations and locations, can relate to. Cultural Studies does not have exclusive reverence for canonicity, or for the tendency of standardisation of texts based on a universal, timeless value. It is neither a celebratory project of mass or popular culture. It challenges the monopoly, elitism, narcissistic and supremacist tendency of high culture by accommodating non-canonical texts— even pulp fiction, slapstick comedies and so on— not for mindless celebration but to critique. There is thus a sort of democratisation in cultural spaces, domains of arts, aesthetics and literature.

CS provides a very liberating interpretive infrastructure premised on insights from diverse theories and disciplines. The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham, founded in 1964 by Stuart Hall and

⁷ William Wordsworth's "Preface" to the second edition of the poetry collection, *Lyrical Ballads*, published in 1801, commonly considered as de facto manifesto of the Romanticism or Romantic Movement in English poetry.

⁸ See for detail Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*, published in 1869.

Richard Hoggart and others, that played a “critical” role in developing the field, drew on a variety of influences and approaches to the study of culture, including feminism, Marxism, Structuralism, Sociology, studies of working-class cultures and subcultures, the role of media, the issue of race in social and cultural processes, Cultural Anthropology, Ethnic Studies, etc. Reading methodology is thus both theoretical and empirical, and becomes an extremely interdisciplinary activity that focuses on the social relations and power structures encoded in texts, and denies the independence of art from concrete political and economic circumstances. Although there is no prohibition against close textual readings, they are also not required. The primary assumption is that Literature does not occur in a space separate from other concerns of lives, and so it has to be read in conjunction with a large network of many other life-practices and a wide variety of cultural forms.

CS sees different cultural categories as indicative of inherent social inequality. Its affinity with social, cultural margins is manifest in its accommodation of cultural categories previously considered outcasts. CS exacts a kind of “subversive criticality” as it utilises available critical paradigms or practices of criticism to discard dominant, essentialist perspective of reading. In traditional literary reading two things are very important: autonomy and canonicity; in CS orientation these notions do not fit happily.

Doing literature in CS is related to wider systems of power and control—ideology, class, ethnicity, nationality, gender and so on. Edward Said points out that novels are not the product of lonely genius but arise out of “a regulatory social presence.”⁹ He has also shown how the archive of western texts has contributed to the formation of “Orientalism.”¹⁰ Texts thus can reflect, as well as resist, construct as well as alter cultural reality, identity, and stereotypes. If we take the case of cinematic texts in Bollywood, they claim to project and promote Indian culture but our reading would identify that what this culture industry produces is a culture of its own, the Bollywood culture.

⁹ *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Vintage edition, 1994. p.87.

¹⁰ See Edward Said. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon, 1978.

In our reading in CS we try to recapture what the prominent CS scholar Raymond Williams—son of a railway signalman and professor of drama at Cambridge—terms as “structure of feeling” (henceforth SOF)¹¹ implying general essence of all the elements in a culture embodied in the creativity of a period—from poems to buildings; of actual experience through which a culture was lived; shared values of a particular group, class or society. We also try to understand how desire of deviation from SOF is mediated or negotiated in texts. Williams shows how the 19th century novels appropriate “magic formula” to postpone the conflict between the ethic and the experience, widely used in situations where a hero or heroine is tied to a loveless marriage while true lover waits in the wings; infidelity, breaking the marriage is not an option, so magic formula is evolved for standard use: unsuitable partner not only unloved, but alcoholic or insane; at a given point, after required suffering, there is a convenient death in which the unloving partner shows great qualities of care, duty and piety, then of course the real love can be consummated; In *Jane Eyre* Rochester cannot divorce Bertha but a fire incidence intervenes and reunites Rochester and Jane with the death of Bertha. Examples of magic also show how villains are lost in the Empire, and poor men return from the Empire with great riches and so on. Dominant social character/SOF of the period involves the value of the work, and success gained by individual effort; gentlemanship, moderation are great virtues; family is important, sanctity of marriage is absolute etc. In the fiction of the 1840s the typical hero, however, often is a cultivated gentleman, even the man who finds pleasure a blessing and work a curse. Our reading would thus register processes of change and conflict, identify contradictory social characters operative in the period. It is crucial how texts of a period indicate impossibility of a uniform vision of culture of the given period.

Another major insight that Williams offers is about the “politics of selection” that excludes a lot of texts in order to erect a literary tradition supposedly reflective of high taste and aesthetic standards. We know a handful of Victorian writers to represent the era, for instance. Except Dickens who was widely read at his time if we look at other most widely read writers of the period, they were all obscure names now: James Grant, Miss Sinclair, Mrs.

¹¹ Raymond Williams. “Analysis of Culture.” op.cit. pp. 48-56.

Gaskell, or popular series of novels written by GPR James whose 47 titles were sold in greater number than even Dickens. Excluding these writers from the list can give only a fragmentary understanding of the literary culture of that time. According to Williams, the works we know now from the 1840s are undoubtedly some of the best works of the period, but this representation at the same time is governed by dominant social, historical, political influences: for Disraeli the fact of his subsequent fame in politics; Dickens, Charlotte Bronte survive on literary merit, yet their best works have carried inferior works that in other authors would have vanished; Arnold, Mill, Carlyle we read because they belong to living intellectual tradition. Selective tradition is thus conscious reconstruction of past works in terms of our own growth and by many kinds of interests including class interest. Williams therefore argues that nobody really knows the 19th century novel, even most specialists in a period know only a part. Survival of a periodic culture is governed not by the period itself but by the latter periods that gradually compose a tradition. Theoretically a period is recorded, in practice, this is the record of a selective tradition that involves an aggressive exclusion of considerable areas of what was once a living culture.

Pertinently, Williams outlines three general categories in the definition of culture: in ideal category, the analysis of culture is the discovery of universal human values in the works of art and literature; in documentary category, we try to understand the historical background, details of the language, form and convention of a particular work and how it relates to particular tradition and society in which it appears; social category involves interpretation of the meanings and values implicit and explicit in a particular way of life— it includes analysis of the organisation of production, the structure of family and other institutions which embody or govern social relationships, various forms of communications, general trends of social and cultural formations as well as changes. Ideal definition speaks of general human culture while social definition includes local and temporary systems along with permanent and absolute values. Williams is of the view that any adequate theory of culture must include characteristics of all these categories in the definition of culture; for him, individually each definition is

inadequate. Importantly, this is an acknowledgement of text's universal as well as historical/social significance.

We are aware that art works are not merely by-products of a particular time and living but they cannot be adequately studied without reference to the societies and ways of life in which they were expressed. According to Stuart Hall,¹² textuality is never enough, a text needs to be contextualised while reading. The cultural location from which the text emerges remains important; and then, the text can have different meanings for readers who receive it from different socio-cultural realities. CS privileges contextualist reading of texts, but its ethics of inclusion has saved it from reductionist contextualism. There is an emphasis on the context, but at the same time, there is no endorsement of cultural specificity/universality binary. Insights from Williams help us understand such binary as flawed. Text is recognised both as aesthetic and representational category where specificity and universality are merged. Literary texts are not denied the essential metaphoricity, the symbolic attribute that distinguishes Literature from other human narratives. There will, of course, be culture-specific elements in the language and narration of creative pieces, but at the same time they remain immensely capable of transcending their immediate temporal reality and distinct cultural signatures to connect to the larger human culture.

Williams takes a particular work of art— *Antigone* of Sophocles— to illustrate this: the ideal analysis points out the absolute value of reverence for the dead; the documentary will point to the expression of certain basic human tensions throughout the particular dramatic form of chorus and double Kommos, and the specific intensity of the verse. Individually neither analysis is complete, the reverence as an absolute value is limited in the play by the terms of a particular kinship system and its conventional obligations. Similarly, the dramatic form, the metres of the verse, not only have a artistic tradition behind them, the work of many men, but can be seen to have been shaped by the particular social forms through which the dramatic tradition developed. The learning of reverence has meaning in the context and also passes beyond its context into the general growth of

¹² Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding." *Cultural Studies Reader*. ed. Simon During. op.cit. pp. 90-103.

human consciousness; the dramatic form too passes beyond its context and becomes element in a major and general dramatic tradition in quite different societies. Therefore the play itself, a specific communication, survives the society which helped to shape it, and can speak to diverse audiences at diverse times. Thus we cannot deny the ideal or documentary value of the piece, and also cannot explain it only within the local terms of a particular culture. Thus in a particular example we study a general organisation where no element is separate from the rest.

Situating the discourse closer home, R K Narayan's *Financial Expert* or *The Guide* and many of his other works, despite being replete with culturally nuanced details of an imaginary South Indian town called Malgudi—reminiscent of Hardy's obsession with Wessex—are also profound reflections on universal human predicament, and ironies in life. It is possible to apprehend their trans-historicity and thematic expanse, their larger implications and significance at any point in time or any cultural location.

Now to turn to see how the fate of literary creativity runs parallel with material changes outside: the advent of printing press played a crucial role in the production of literature; with the invention of steam engine we had bookstalls in railway stations that speeded up the distribution of literary texts. Then happens the intervention and ownership of corporate, capitalist market in the domain of art and literature—the institutional development that represents a commercial organisation of the “pop culture.” While critiquing a text CS takes into account such paraliterary factors affecting production, circulation and reception of a literary text. We see publishing houses catering to the taste of select audience: to meet the demands of the “armchair-tourism” market, the Diaspora writers, as a case in point, are expected to come up with particular type of writings—home narratives replete with creative elaboration of preexisting white stereotypes, fetishised symbols of the “distant, exotic cultures.” And this is, in fact, one of the reasons behind hostile receptions of many of these texts by the “home audience” as they suspect that the authors are commoditising their cultures for mass-consumption. In the midst of all these you may lose the book the writer was originally planning for. Neel Mukherjee recounts, for example, how he was advised by a British publisher to include more of India's “heat and dust,” “smells and colours” in his debut novel *Past*

Continuous (2008) so that he could make the book “a fluffy, romantic, weepy Exotica Fest.”¹³ To turn to Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane*— the book was originally called “Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers,” a literal translation of a Bengali idiom used to denote unthinkable distance in fairytales— “the decision to give it a snappier, more happening, less accurate title is the publisher’s.”¹⁴

Relevantly, in her essay, “The Institutional Matrix of Romance” Janice Radway explores various issues behind the immense popularity of Romance.¹⁵ Books are often designed for a target audience with materials that do not disturb the status quo or stir them to think but just entertain them and support their typical ideologies or fantasies and way of life, and justify those for them to continue. In respect of materials often we see the “mechanical reproduction” of popular texts. We also see two or three novellas together in a nicely bound attractive package ready for consumption. There are tags like “bestseller” to attract the readers and ensure more sales. Moreover, literary reviews turn from academic works to advertisements, drawing the attention of readers to a particular book and trying to train them how to respond to it. Our judgement as readers often gets conditioned by the US-UK review machine (of *New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *London Review of Books* and so on). Cultural Studies creates scopes for discussing how the seduction of mass media, the magic of advertisement (Raymond Williams calls advertisements “magic system”¹⁶ that transforms commodities into glamorous signifiers; advertising, for him, is the official art of modern capitalist consumer modernity where selling by any means becomes the primary ethic), and politics of publishing houses influence the content of texts as well as our act of reading, thus providing us with necessary precautions while we critique texts. Monica Ali’s instant celebrity status is a case in point; even before the writing of her debut novel *Brick Lane* was complete, there was a lot of excitement over this first full-

¹³ Neel Mukherjee. “Exile as a choice.” Interview by Aditya Sudarshan. *The Hindu Literary Review*. 6 Sept. 2009. p. 1.

¹⁴ Sandhu, Sukhdev. Review of *Brick Lane*. *London Review of Books*. 9 Oct. 2003. <<http://www.lrb.co.uk/index.php>>.

¹⁵ Janice Radway. “The Institutional Matrix of Romance.” *Cultural Studies Reader*. ed. Simon During. op.cit. pp. 564-576.

¹⁶ Raymond Williams. “Advertising: The Magic System.” op.cit.

fledged fictional portrayal of the Bangladeshi community in Britain. Ali was vaunted by her prospective publisher Doubleday who had signed her up after having seen only five chapters of the book's first draft. She became the first unpublished author to be included in Granta's decadal list of "Twenty Best Young British Novelists." Ironically however, The *Brick Lane*-writer Monica Ali's status as an ethnic icon – an image so hyped by an instant, frenzied chorus by the British media and cultural establishments – automatically curbs her creative freedom of representation and confines her to ghettos.¹⁷ The audiences back home and within diaspora question her right to write about "home" just as the West could not appreciate the European or American settings and characters in her post-*Brick Lane* novels— eg. *Alentejo Blue* (2006) or *Untold Story* (2011) — as they travelled beyond, to quote Edward Said, "the defensive little patch offered by one's own culture, literature and history."¹⁸ Does a creative writer really need to qualify as "insider" to be eligible to deal with the concerned cultural reality? In fact, it brings discredit on readers and critics when writers require feeling embarrassed or being apologetic to write about cultures and communities different from their "own." We also need to understand how cultural authenticity is manufactured as a marketing strategy: unless Monica Ali and Vikram Chandra "supply the West's perception of Bangladesh or India, they will not be treated as 'authentic'"¹⁹ and will not be viable commercially.

I shall conclude by including another small experiment in CS reading, and this time it happens to be an excerpt from Shakespeare: the second scene of the second act of *The Merchant of Venice*²⁰ dramatises an interaction between Launcelot Gobbo and his father Old Gobbo; the Gobbos remind us of the legacy of clowns or the tradition of comedy of the Elizabethan stage.

¹⁷ See one of my earlier papers titled "Politics of Right to Write and Monica Ali's Fiction." *Asiatic: IJUM Journal of English Language & Literature*. Vol.6.1 (June 2012). pp. 95-112. In the present article I have reproduced some of the relevant insights of this paper.

¹⁸ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Vintage, 1994. p.49.

¹⁹ Pramod K. Nayar. "The Transnational Indian Novel in English: Cultural Parasites and Postcolonial Praxis." *Imagined Identities: Identity Formation in the Age of Globalization*. ed. Gonul Pultar. New York: Syracuse University Press, 2014. pp. 17-32. p. 22.

²⁰ I have used the Penguin Shakespeare Edition (1937) of *The Merchant of Venice* for the present write-up. All textual references to Act II Scene 2 provided in this paper are from that edition of the play (edited by G. B. Harrison).

The clowns were great favourites with the Elizabethan audience; therefore, we receive them also in Shakespearean tragedies. Now, this sort of scene involving characters like the Gobbos was not exactly written for verbal comedy, rather, to give actors scopes for visual antics, and thereby producing maximum comic effect, the kind that we generally call slapstick. To understand the stage or visual effect of the scene one may check easily the videos of various stage productions of *The Merchant of Venice* available online. For this particular scene one can watch a Youtube clip produced/uploaded by CorkShakespeare.²¹

In the scene, Launcelot Gobbo stands before his master Shylock's house, having a hilariously muddled conversation with himself about his desire to quit his job. He is interrupted by the unexpected advent of Old Gobbo, his father, whose feeble eyesight probably could detect only the dim image of a man who may direct him to Shylock's house. Because his father does not recognise him, Launcelot decides to —play pranks on him. He takes the old fellow by the shoulders, and turns him to the right, then to the left, and finally completely round, thus giving him directions which the old man found “hard to hit.” The old father turns almost a plaything in the hands of his young son. In addition, Launcelot teases his father by referring to himself in the third person as “Master Launcelot” and then by saying the old man that Master Launcelot . . . is dead. The grief of the old makes the boy withhold his pranks, and reveal his identity but still with some pungent remarks that even if he had eyes, he would have failed to recognise his son. The “young” Lord Bassanio now enters, and Launcelot makes his father request favour from his prospective employer as he knows it well that this very blind old man whom he mocks would prove useful in this regard: the old, helpless father pleading for his able but unemployed son — an image having complete socio-cultural mandate.

Young Gobbo's compulsive urge to “try confusions” with a father who is more than “sand blind” and the customary reception of this scene as an amusing diversion by the audience, expose the essentially duplicitous profile of a society, or contemporary culture for that matter; the duplicity

²¹ Check<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O4OuH-RjzUY>>, published by CorkShakespeare on 10 June, 2014.

lies in the fact that when there is a general social acceptance, on the one hand, for such behaviour toward old people, on the other and at the same time, there remains a politics of sanctifying parent-child relation, and of perpetuating the myth of reverence in the treatment of old people.

The given situation subverts the official socio-cultural hierarchy that determines father's position as higher; in reality, old father is always lesser than young son. Old Gobbo is simply not in a position to either judge or protest his son's behaviour. Young Gobbo who is mistreated by his master assumes mastership in this context. The old man is thus thrice marginalised: he is primarily marginalised because of his belonging to the lower stratum of society in terms of his economic condition and social position, and then he is additionally marginalised because of his oldness and physical disability. He is marginalised also within his own class. Old Gobbo's marginalisation has been further accentuated by the fact that his story remains unheard as he does not react to his son's problematic role reversals, and as he does not reappear in the drama.

This reading does not discard the scene's comic status in the dramatic arrangement of the play, but decodes nevertheless the socio-cultural psychology that receives or perceives this brief father-son encounter as comic interlude, overlooking easily the violence and subversion exacted by it. Thus when we see the scene between Launcelot and Old Gobbo from the lens of CS it offers distinct cultural insights beyond the scene's comedic character.²²

Cultural Studies thus broadens the existing interpretive canvas and critical spectrum, changes the ambience of critical ecology, emphasises on the comprehensive coverage of different theories and reading strategies, amalgamates different reading practices. So, in one sense, there is no fixed, definitive, or rigid methodology for the interpretation of texts, and the ground here becomes interdisciplinary to the extent of being "anti-disciplinary," but then it proves to be a vibrant congregation of diverse perspectives: a productive and enriching chaos, indeed!

²² For detail see my paper titled, "Encountering Shakespeare's Gobbos Through Gerontological Imaginary." *Praxis: Journal of the Department of English, Rajshahi University*. Vol. 9 (2017). pp. 7- 14.

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