

Breaking Boundaries: Gender and Feminism in the Global Context

Edited by

**Banasri Kumar
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Message from the Principal

It is a matter of immense pride that our college has brought out an edited volume titled ***Breaking Boundaries: Gender and Feminism in the Global Context***. The publication of this book reflects our institution's ongoing commitment to fostering research, critical inquiry, academic excellence, and socially relevant scholarship. Education today extends far beyond textbooks and classroom boundaries. It must engage with pressing contemporary issues and encourage dialogue that challenges societal norms. This book, with its diverse and thought-provoking essays, explores gender and feminism from a global perspective, highlighting the dynamic intersections of identity, power, culture, and resistance. Such work not only enriches academic discourse but also contributes meaningfully to broader social understanding.

I extend my sincere thanks to all the contributors for their scholarly engagement. My heartfelt appreciation goes to the editorial and peer review team for their dedication and untiring efforts in shaping this volume. I am also grateful to the Publication Cell of Nirmal Haloi College for their valuable support in bringing out this timely and insightful publication.

(Dr. Kaushik Kumar Deka)

Principal

Nirmal Haloi College

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Editorial Note

"There is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind."

— *Virginia Woolf*

The act of editing this volume, *Breaking Boundaries: Gender and Feminism in the Global Context*, has been both a privilege and a responsibility. The quote from Virginia Woolf resonates not just as a poetic assertion, but as a radical declaration— a reminder that the quest for intellectual and personal freedom, particularly for women and other marginalized identities, remains as urgent today as it was nearly a century ago. Feminism today is no longer confined to specific geographies, academic institutions, or rigid definitions. It has moved from the margins to the mainstream, yet it continues to evolve and expand its reach. In curating this anthology, our intent was to gather voices that not only reflect the multiplicity of feminist thought but also interrogate the limitations of existing frameworks. The word “breaking” in our title is not merely metaphorical—it signals a deliberate rupture, an unsettling of boundaries that are historically imposed by patriarchy, colonialism, caste, class, race, religion, and heteronormativity.

This book is the outcome of months of conversations, critical reviews, revisions, and above all, a shared vision. The contributions in this volume come from a wide range of scholars, researchers, and thinkers who have offered their insights with both academic rigour and emotional honesty. The essays

traverse various disciplines—literature, sociology, philosophy, history, gender studies, political science, cultural studies—underscoring the interdisciplinary nature of feminist discourse. Together, they examine gender not merely as a biological or social category, but as a fluid, constructed, and often contested space. The volume invites the reader to engage with topics such as intersectionality, body politics, media representation, ecofeminism, postcolonial identities, queer theory, reproductive justice, and the emotional labour of women—among others.

A unique aspect of this volume is its balance of theory and praxis. While some papers take a theoretical deep dive into the frameworks that shape gender discourse, others draw from field studies, lived experiences, or cultural analysis, thus making the volume both intellectually enriching and accessible. Feminism is not just a subject to be studied—it is a lived reality, a movement, a dialogue, and sometimes, a quiet revolution. It is in the classroom and on the street, in the archive and in protest, in the pages of a novel and in the private notes of resistance. Through this book, we hope to reflect some of that vast and dynamic terrain.

The relevance of this volume is also tied to the times we are living in. Across the globe, we are witnessing both progress and backlash. From hard-earned gains in gender equality being rolled back, to the silencing of feminist voices in authoritarian regimes, from the commodification of feminism in digital cultures to the persistent erasure of queer and trans identities—this is a moment that demands rigorous thinking, activism, and solidarity. We hope that this volume, in some small way, contributes to that larger project of resistance, questioning, and hope.

We would like to express our deep gratitude to all the contributors who entrusted us with their work and ideas. Your voices form the heart of this book. We also thank the peer reviewers for their critical inputs which helped us maintain scholarly precision. Our sincere thanks to our Principal, Dr. Kaushik Kr. Dekka, whose encouragement and vision for socially engaged academic work continues to inspire us. His support has been invaluable from the inception to the publication of this volume.

We are indebted to the Publication Cell of Nirmal Haloi College for facilitating the smooth execution of the editorial and publishing process. Our appreciation also goes to the printing press for turning our manuscript into a book that we hope will circulate far and wide. Special thanks to the readers, educators, students, and activists who will hopefully find in these pages something to reflect upon, something to challenge, and something to carry forward.

Editing this volume has not been without its challenges—but every round of edits, every late-night discussion, and every moment of uncertainty has reaffirmed our belief in the importance of this work. Feminism is a constantly unfolding story, and as editors, we feel honoured to be part of the effort to write one chapter of it.

Let this book stand not as an end, but as a beginning—an invitation to continue the dialogue, deepen the inquiry, and carry forward the struggle toward a more just and compassionate world.

Banasri Kumar
Upakul Patowary

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The Impact of Globalization and the Reflections of Intersectionality and Feminism in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Novel *Americanah*

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Abstract

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* delves into complex themes of race, class, gender and identity through the experiences of Ifemelu, a Nigerian woman navigating life in both America and her home country. This paper explores how globalization reshapes identities, presenting a new sense of 'otherness' that characters like Ifemelu must grapple with. Adichie critiques the idealized notion of the American Dream, revealing the challenges and disillusionment faced by immigrants, particularly women. Central to this discourse are the themes of Third World Feminism and Black Feminism, which interrogate the intersections of race, gender and socio-

economic status. Drawing on the frameworks of Intersectionality (Crenshaw,1989), the paper discusses how concepts like hairdressing, language, and employment serve as symbols of racial and gendered identity in a globalized world.

Keywords: Gender, race, black feminism, intersectionality

Introduction:

In an era characterized by unprecedented global interconnectedness, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel *Americanah* offers a profound exploration of the complexities surrounding identity formation amidst the forces of globalization. The narrative follows Ifemelu, a young Nigerian woman who migrates to the United States for her education, as she navigates the intricate terrains of race, culture, and belonging. Adichie deftly examines how transnational experiences and cultural intersections influence personal identities, shedding light on the nuances of assimilation, racial consciousness, and the negotiation of multiple selves.

The concept of feminism in the era of globalization adds another layer of depth to this analysis. Globalization has not only facilitated the spread of feminist ideologies but has also reshaped them, intertwining local struggles with global discourses of human rights and gender equality. This intersection is evident in *Americanah*, where Ifemelu's experiences reflect both the universal and particular challenges women face in different cultural contexts. The novel portrays how globalization influences gender roles and expectations, highlighting the fluidity and complexity of feminist identities across borders.

This paper delves into the multifaceted portrayals of identity in *Americanah*, analyzing how globalization acts as a catalyst for both transformation and conflict within the lives

of its characters. By scrutinizing Ifemelu's journey and the broader immigrant experience, the study aims to illuminate the profound impacts of globalization on individual and collective identities in contemporary society. Furthermore, it explores how feminist perspectives are reconfigured in a globalized world, considering the interplay between local traditions and global movements in shaping women's identities.

Globalization and the Intersection of Identities:

Globalization refers to the increased interconnectedness of the world through technology, trade, migration, and cultural exchange. It connects the world and exposes people to new cultures, but it also changes traditional identities. It can enrich identity by offering new ideas, but also cause loss of cultural uniqueness or confusion about who we are. In Adichie's novel *Americanah*, the impact of globalization is most evident through the characters' transitional lives- especially Ifemelu and Obinze, as they move between Nigeria, the United States.

In examining the impact of global interconnectedness on identity, it is essential to understand the profound significance of the title of Adichie's novel *Americanah*. The title encapsulates the themes of identity, migration and the transformative effects of globalization. In Nigerian colloquialism, "Americanah" refers to individuals who have returned from US exhibiting American mannerisms, often distancing themselves from their Nigerian roots. Adichie uses this term to highlight the cultural transformations experienced by Nigerians who migrate to America and return, sometimes adopting new identities that set them apart from those who remained. The protagonist, Ifemelu, grapples with this label upon her return to Nigeria, embodying the complexities of reconciling her American experiences with her Nigerian heritage.

We notice, in Ifemelu's memories of school, the characters' perceptions of America are deeply influenced by the allure of a seemingly superior life abroad. Upon returning from the U.S., a classmate is met with admiration, as peers are captivated by her American experience, evident in her affected pronunciation and occasional substitution of Igbo words with English. This reverence highlights the widespread belief that America offers unparalleled opportunities and a higher standard of living. Both Ifemelu and Obinze harbor aspirations of relocating to America, captivated by its cultural representations in media. Other characters, such as Ginika, share this dream, emphasizing the widespread desire for a better future in America. Within this social milieu, discussions often revolve around visa prospects, with individuals like Emenike facing ridicule for pretending to possess the means to immigrate. Ginika, in contrast, enjoys genuine opportunities, becoming a focal point of attention. Adichie uses these dynamics to critique Nigerian societal inequalities, illustrating how wealth is flaunted as a status symbol, often without efforts to address the disparities faced by the less privileged. Their collective consciousness is colonized by the west and its charms. Another example would be Ifemelu's father who often employs complex English terms during conversations, reflecting his awareness of his limited formal education and a corresponding sense of inferiority. By using sophisticated language, he seeks societal acceptance and aims to project an image of intellectual superiority. This behavior exemplifies a segment of Nigerian society that, in its pursuit of Western ideals, modifies reality to fit in their own country, often overlooking the potential self-alienation involved.

Race is another idea reflected in the novel which is evident throughout. As Ifemelu reflects, "Black is black in America" (Adichie, 2013, p.240). Ifemelu's experience upon

arriving in the United States demonstrates the impact of globalization on identity formation. Upon entering America, she is forced to confront the racialized identity that she had never considered in Nigeria. In America, race becomes a key marker of her identity. In Nigeria, Ifemelu's identity is shaped by her ethnic group, family, and personal achievements, with little emphasis on race. However, upon arriving in America, she encounters a society where racial categories are rigidly defined, and her African heritage becomes subsumed under the broad label of "Black." The racial prejudice is highlighted by Ifemelu through her blog posts. This shift is encapsulated in Ifemelu's blog post titled "To My Fellow Non-American Blacks: In America, You Are Black, Baby," where she writes:

"Dear Non-American Black, when you make the choice to come to America, you become black. Stop arguing. Stop saying I'm Jamaican or I'm Ghanaian. America doesn't care." (Adichie, 2013, p.240).

The entrenched racial hierarchy in American society is also reflected in another of her blog post titled "Understanding America for the Non-American Black: American Tribalism" where she writes:

"If you're white, you're all right; if you're brown, stick around; if you're black, get back" (Adichie, 2013, p.203)

This rhyme, popularized by blues musician Big Bill Broonzy in 1947, epitomizes the systemic discrimination based on skin color, where whiteness is privileged, and Blackness is marginalized. Adichie incorporates this rhyme in Chapter 17 of *Americanah* to illustrate the racial stratification Ifemelu observes in the United States. She notes that in America, a ladder of racial hierarchy exists: white individuals, particularly White Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASPs), are at the top, while Black Americans are at the bottom. The positioning of other

racial and ethnic groups varies depending on time and place, but the rhyme succinctly captures the essence of this hierarchy. This reference serves to highlight the complexities Ifemelu faces as a non-American Black woman in America. Despite her Nigerian heritage, she is perceived as Black by American standards, leading to experiences of racism and discrimination. Through this incorporation, Adichie not only critiques the racial dynamics in America but also invites readers to reflect on the arbitrary and unjust nature of racial categorizations and the pervasive impact of racism on individuals' lives.

The novel is often described as a novel about the metaphor of hair. This is because hair in the novel is more than a physical trait, rather it is a powerful symbol of identity, culture, assimilation and resistance, especially for black women. Getting braids done is a tradition for Nigerian women and that is how they are comfortable with keeping their Afro, but in order to get a job in America they are expected to be 'presentable'. Auntie Uju advises Ifemelu on the necessity of altering her hairstyle to conform to American professional standards: *"I have to take my braids out for my interviews and relax my hair. Kemi told me that I shouldn't wear braids to the interview. If you have braids, they will think you are unprofessional."* (Adichie, 2013, p.132) – the question here is, how can someone decide what is professional and what is not? Braided or kinky hair is an identity of the African or African-American women but in a country that has directives for hair, where the natural hair of black women is unacceptable, these women are left with no option. Ifemelu, when she has to go for an interview for a public relations post arranged by Curt for her, has her hair relaxed.

She straightens her hair and feels a part of her dies with the natural curl of her hair. Thus the cultural pressure for black women like Ifemelu to straighten, dye, or somehow make

their hair look more like a white woman's hair becomes a symbol of the racism inherent in American culture. Ifemelu realizes that she is trying to find a place for herself in the system and is ready to modify her identity to resemble the American whites, to have her existence acknowledged. It is only later that a friend, Wambui, tells Ifemelu about a website that has hair-care ideas for Africans that Ifemelu gets a short Afro and begins appreciating her natural kink again. Engaging with this online community empowers Ifemelu to reconnect with her heritage and appreciate the beauty of her natural curls. This shift represents a form of resistance against the pervasive beauty norms that equate professionalism with straight hair. By choosing to wear her hair naturally, Ifemelu not only reclaims a part of her identity but also challenges the societal standards that dictate how Black women should present themselves.

In the novel, both Ifemelu and Obinze, along with many Black immigrants, confront profound identity challenges in foreign lands. They continually strive to assert their identities, often facing systemic barriers that marginalize their voices. In their efforts to assimilate, they experience a persistent sense of in-betweenness, feeling estranged from their authentic selves while attempting to embody Western ideals. Adichie poignantly illuminates their struggles to preserve elements of their original identities amidst these pressures.

Exploring Gender Inequality, Intersectionality and Hybridity:

Gender inequality is another pervasive theme in *Americanah*. Ifemelu operates a blog where she delves into issues of race and the unique challenges faced by non-American Blacks in the United States. She observes that many of these individuals are largely unaware of their racial identity until they arrive in America, where societal structures place them at

the lower end of the racial hierarchy. Highlighting this disparity to Americans often leads to blame rather than understanding. Additionally, Ifemelu notes that non-American Blacks support Barack Obama's presidential bid not just because he is Black, but because he is married to Michelle Obama, whom they see as 'one of their own.' This connection fosters hope that Black women will gain the recognition they have long been denied, especially in media representations where they are seldom portrayed as 'hot, desirable' figures but often cast as 'sassy, live-out-loud' friends.

Feminists have long been fighting for gender equality but African-American women have multiple battles to fight, as women, as black women, as black women demanding power. It is not that all these identities come together to have an additive effect, rather they intersect in multiple webs creating a simultaneity of oppression. This is where we bring in the concept of Intersectionality theorized by Crenshaw (1989) to understand how the intersection between these varied identities makes one's experiences markedly different.

The term 'intersectionality' is not yet commonly used in everyday language, but its recognition is expanding within academic and policy-making circles. Clearly defining this concept is crucial before it is applied to this novel. Initially developed to address the compounded discrimination faced by Black women, intersectionality has evolved to analyze how various forms of oppression are interconnected and cannot be examined separately from one another. The term 'intersectionality' has its roots in Black feminist activism. Crenshaw used the term intersectionality to refer to the double discrimination of racism and sexism faced by Black women, critiquing the "single-axis framework that is dominant in antidiscrimination law... feminist theory and anti-racist

politics” for its focus on the experiences of the most privileged members of subordinate groups. (Crenshaw, 1989 p.149). She notes:

“Black women are sometimes excluded from feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse because both are predicated on a discrete set of experiences that often does not accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender. These problems of exclusion cannot be solved simply by including Black women within an already established analytical structure. Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated. Thus, for feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse to embrace the experiences and concerns of Black women, the entire framework that has been used as a basis for translating “women’s experience” or “the Black experience” into concrete policy demands must be rethought and recast.’ (Crenshaw, 1989 p.140)

Ifemelu’s experience of being sexually targeted by a tennis coach underscores the complexities of intersectionality—how race, gender, and socio-economic status converge to shape an individual’s reality. Faced with financial desperation, Ifemelu’s decision to meet the coach reflects the harsh choices often imposed on marginalized women. This incident not only diminishes her sense of self-worth but also strains her relationship with Obinze, highlighting the emotional toll of such compromises. The America she once viewed as a land of opportunity now appears as a place where survival necessitates moral and ethical compromise.

This narrative illustrates the intersectional challenges Ifemelu faces: as a Black woman from Nigeria, she navigates a society that often marginalizes her based on race and gender. Ifemelu's journey is a poignant exploration of how intersecting identities influence one's experiences and perceptions in a complex social landscape.

Moreover, we can go over to the experiences of Ifemelu upon sharing an apartment with people like Jackie, Elena, and Allison. They have their own set of ideas about Ifemelu, and Ifemelu, who is physically distinct from their lean and fair bodies, struggles to accept herself as she is. Also, a girl at the university, Cristiana Tomas, starts patronizing Ifemelu by talking to her slowly, assuming she wouldn't understand the American accent; she acts like Ifemelu doesn't know the language at all. This makes Ifemelu feel small, and she develops a love-hate relationship with America; she wants to struggle and fight so that she stays in America; she loves the idea of being a fan of a football team; she likes reading American literature, but at the same time she can't take things like how Americans exaggerate their accent stressing on certain syllables and have no manner in their walk. There is a preconceived notion in terms of how she is 'seen' in America and how that in turn reflects in the way she sees herself and the world.

Discussing intersectionality without considering hybridity is incomplete, as hybridity is an inherent aspect of the experiences of those navigating intersectionality. In *Americanah*, the concept of hybridity is vividly portrayed through the protagonist, Ifemelu. Her journey from Nigeria to the United States exemplifies the complexities of identity formation in a transnational context, where cultural, racial, and social influences converge, leading to the creation of a hybrid identity.

Migration carries the shift of identities alongside, resulting in creating a hybrid identity for the ones who have to cross borders due to political, educational or professional reasons. The sense of displacement and the lack of belongingness inevitably follow the migrant's experience. Adichie's own experience of moving from Nigeria to the USA has influenced the crafting of the characters who find themselves in the crossroads of distinct cultures in her fiction and *Americanah* epitomizes the same influence. The novel's protagonist Ifemelu migrates from Nigeria to the USA to pursue her studies and due to racial, linguistic and cultural differences, soon ends up developing an identity crisis which she tries to get over by mimicking the American way of life. Ifemelu's journey of coping up with her fragmented self provides a fitting background to study the novel in the light of the theory of hybridity and mimicry as discussed by Homi K. Bhaba in his postcolonial theory.

Hybridity in general understanding, means a mixture made by combining two different elements. Post Colonists have used this term to refer to the mixture of cultures and identify as resulted by the experience of colonialism and globalisation. In postcolonial theory, the concept of hybridity focuses on the immigrant's conflicting issues and multiculturalism or trans-culturalism either as faced by individuals who migrate to a foreign land or as faced in one's native land because of colonization. Homi K Bhabha in his widely acclaimed book *The Location of Culture* (1994), has expanded this idea into a theoretical framework coupling it with the concept of 'mimicry'. In this book Bhabha (1994) defines the concept of hybridity as: "Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, it's shifting forces and fixities; it is the name of the strategic reversal of the process of domination through

disavowal, Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination.” (p. 112) The sense of hybridity may be developed from the mixture of culture, race or language. Shamshad and Hashmi in their study have identified the nature of hybridity found in the novel *Americanah* as ‘cultural hybridity’. Ifemelu’s struggle to be Americanized created a new hybrid culture which was a blend of both the native and the colonizer’s cultural practices. Hence, it could be traced in the text as ‘cultural hybridity’ (Shamshad & Hashmi, 2022). In Ifemelu’s case, while her race becomes a significant part of her identity, it mainly contributes to forming a marginalized state for her in America. The hybridity attached to Ifemelu’s identity stems from the differences her native culture possesses from the American culture and her desperate attempts to assimilate herself with the latter, trans passing all the contrasts between the two cultures.

In the novel *Americanah*, the sense of cultural hybridity can be characterized by the generational differences and the definite views of generations. While Ifemelu’s father was overly obsessed with the English language and American culture, Ifemelu’s interest lay in travelling to America for higher studies. Her migration was the culmination of a generational influence bestowed upon her by the people of her surrounding who idealized America as ‘dream of the West’. During her stay in America, Ifemelu got attracted to the American way of life and to sustain a life in the foreign land, the only way seemed to her was to mimic the American culture:

“My full and cool hair would work if I were interviewing to be a backup singer in a jazz band, but I need to

look professional for this interview, and professional means straight is best but if it's going to be curly then it has to be the white kind of curly, loose curls or, at worst, spiral curls but never kinky."(Adichie, 2013, p.224)

Her decision to adopt an American accent to fit in and avoid discrimination also significantly reflects her effort to assimilate into American society by altering her speech patterns, reflecting the pressures immigrants often face to conform to dominant cultural norms:

"It was convincing, the accent. She had perfected, from careful watching of friends and newscasters, the blurring of the t, the creamy roll of the r, the sentences starting with 'so,' and the sliding response of 'Oh really'..."(Adichie, 2013, p.191).

Conclusion:

In this paper, we have examined how certain groups in specific nations assert dominance, often underpinned by perceived class superiority, racial biases, or gender inequalities. Through the lens of black feminism, we explored how Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* delves into the complexities of identity, race, and belonging. The novel illuminates the experiences of African immigrants in America, highlighting the challenges they face in reconciling their heritage with the pressures of assimilation. Adichie masterfully portrays the fluidity of identity through Ifemelu's journey. Initially, Ifemelu yearns for Nigeria during her years abroad, grappling with feelings of displacement and longing. However, upon returning to Nigeria, she finds herself yearning for America, reflecting the complexities of homecoming and the continuous negotiation of identity.

Through Ifemelu's narrative, Adichie challenges readers to reconsider rigid notions of identity and belonging. The novel suggests that there is no singular, perfect place;

instead, home is a multifaceted concept shaped by one's experiences, relationships, and evolving sense of self.

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Chandraprabha Saikiani as a Radical Feminist with Special Reference to Her Contribution through Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samiti

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Abstract

Women are the thread to a family, the mother of mankind and a beautiful creation of God. Everyone can feel the pain of a mother, the worthy of a woman at home and at public place. At the same time, the discrimination, inequality, injustice are seen in our society. It is changed, improving in some aspects but not eradicated completely and a dozen of women are still facing various challenges in daily life which becomes a havoc for quality development of society. Padmashree Chandraprabha Saikiani was born at the first half of twentieth century in a very remote village of Assam. She could feel the injustice to a woman from her very early childhood period and worked candidly in her later period. Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samiti was established in 1926 by the initiatives of Chandraprabha Saikiani and a dozen of open-minded people. This paper is an attempt to analyse the works of Chandraprabha Saikiani for the welfare of womanhood and proved her as a radical feminist.

Keywords: Woman, oppression, equality, feminism

Introduction:

Women are playing a significant role at home and in society. The perennial question for the identity of women is raised at public and private sectors. Half of the world population would be discriminated if women are oppressed.

In India, basically in North-Eastern states women are comparatively worshipped, regarded worthy for their contribution at home and to the family. But It's not true in all the states of India and women are daily oppressed continuously across the whole country. Sometimes women got physical harassment and sometimes mental. According to the India's official think tank NITI Aayog report (Almost all states in red zone on gender equality: NITI Aayog), it is recorded that in every aspect of life women and girls are experiencing gender inequalities. There is a long gap between men and women in case of decision-making capacity at home and in workplace. it shows a very significant gender disparity. In Assam, a balanced attitude is seen today. People start giving importance to women education and women empowerment which were emphasised at the first half of twentieth century by women like Chandraprabha Saikiani. Chandraprabha Saikiani was so strong, bold, undaunted lady that she could lead the womenfolk of Assam in that rigid patriarchal system.

There was a lot of adventurous incidents in the life of Chandraprabha Saikiani and proved her a radical feminist. This paper is concentrated on some exemplary works of radical feminist Chandraprabha Saikiani.

Objectives of the study:

The main objectives of this paper are

- To encapsulate the term feminism
- How Chandraprabha Saikiani worked for the equality of men and women through Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samiti.

Delimitation of the study:

The life of Padmashree Chandraprabha Saikiani devoted to empower the women through her series of works. This paper is concentrated on some selected works of Saikiani through Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samiti which proved her as a radical feminist.

Methodology:

Due to the concerned topic the methodology of the paper is analytical, qualitative, library research. Both primary and secondary data are collected and analysed in the study. Primary data are collected from some print documents, like a memoir of Chandraprabha Saikiani, and secondary data are collected from some magazines, journals, books and internet.

Feminism:

There are a variety of interpretations proposed to define the term Feminism from different perspectives- social, political, religious, cultural etc. In Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, the term Feminism is defined as 'the belief and aim that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men'. So, Feminism is concerned with social, political and economic equalities of men and women. The objectives of Feminism are to search the reasons of women oppression and try to describe strategies for removing the discrepancies from the society and worked for equality, dignity, rights, emancipation and empowerment of women.

Feminist is a person who believes in the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes. Women oppression and subordination are different, so various categories of feminist have emerged like- Liberal, Marxism, Socialist, Radical etc. All these categories of feminism are meant to create a classless society, a society with equal status to both men and women and regards them equally. Main types are discussed below-

- **Liberal Feminism:** Emerging from liberal school of political thought, liberal Feminism emphasised on political and economic equality for women.
- **Marxist Feminism:** It is concentrated on economic activities of production. Human being can utilise their potentiality more, being connecting and interacting with nature. Class based discrimination is the main reason for women's oppression.
- **Radical Feminism:** Comparing to Socialist, Marxist and Liberal feminism, Radical feminism is more militant. Radical feminism is concerned with the dominant attitude of patriarchal society which makes a division between men and women. Unequal power between men and women is the focal point for this approach. Radical feminism focuses on the patriarchal attitude of the society and the dominating nature of men on women.
- **Socialist Feminism:** Socialist Feminism is focussed on the ways to consider women's private, domestic and public roles. It is the struggle against capitalism and patriarchy. It incorporates gender discrimination, class and economic condition of women. According to Socialist Feminism, women are oppressed because they are dependent on men for financial matter.

Chandraprabha Saikiani's Efforts for the Equality of Men and Women:

Chandraprabha Saikiani was facing a great challenge to lead the women of Assam at the first half of 20th century. The history of Asom Pradeshik Mahila Samiti is enclosed in Asom Pradeshik Mahila Samitir Itibritya where lot of events are included for women equality with men. Chandraprabha Saikiani was influenced by the words of Santa Vinoba 'The souls of

both men and women are alike: whatever the strength and capability of a man, a woman also possesses the same (Nari-purush duyore atma aak: sseibabe purukhar ji sakti samarthya ase si tirotaro ase). Saikiani worked for the womenfolk through Mahila Samiti very intensively, vigorously that she led the womenfolk to be independent first to make the nation independent.

By establishing Asom Pradeshik Mahila Samiti from a single women non-governmental organisation to a significant huge women organisation, Saikiani worked for all existing social issues. At that time (around 1917-1918) the only two major existed organisations of Assam were The Assam Sahitya Sabha and The Assam Association. For the students of whole Assam, the only one organisation worked together as 'Asom Chatra Sanmilan'. These are the only three organisations existed first in Assam. In the year 1918, a few women namely Sri juta Lakkshmiprava Saliha and Chandrakanti Das along with some girl students had joined in Asom Chatra Sanmilan in the program where Chandraprabha Saikiani delivered her first public speech supporting the proposal of Amiya Kumar Das for the abolition of Opium-Eating.

Rajabala Das and Chandraprabha Saikiani participated as women representatives in Asom Sahitya Sabha held in Barpeta in 1919. Saikiani delivered an auspicious speech there. Gradually the women movement was started in Assam under the initiatives of Chandraprabha Saikiani.

Hemaprabha Das established the first Mahila Samiti in Dibrugarh as 'Dibrugarh Mahila Samiti' in 1915. The Samiti provides some light foods to the poor learners. Her elder sister Durgaprabha Bora was the first matriculate girl from Assam. Sudhalata Duara and Sukhalata Duara were the first higher educated girls of Assam at that time. After that in 1917, Nagaon

Mahila Samiti was established under the initiatives of Chandrababha Saikiani where Khagendri Priya Baruani was the president and Swarnalata Barua was the secretary.

At that time, women were only allowed to go outside by riding horses and walking. Chandrababha Saikiani was the eye witness and initiator to open Tezpur Mahila Samiti with the participation of Hirawati Gohain Barua (wife of Padmanath Gohain Barua), Kunjalata Devi (wife of Mahadev Sarma) and Kironmoyi Agarwala (mother of Jyotiprasad Agarwala). Kironmoyi Agarwala was the President and Chandrababha Saikiani was the Secretary.

In Tezpur, Kiranmoyi Agarwala and Chandrababha Saikiani started to create a world for women. The first resolution of the Tezpur Mahila samiti was to abolish the purdah- system. They started to discuss and act on women education and women empowerment.

In 1925 Asom Sahitya Sabha under the presidentship of Rajanikanta Bordoloi held in Nagaon, a historical event was taken place. The women in the meeting were segregated by a bamboo-net and ironically the speech of the president was on women education. Chandrababha Saikiani could not bear that and asked the women to break the barriers. Being encouraged by her epoch-making speech, the women broke the fences and that was considered as the first revolt in public place by a large number of women in Assam (Saikiani *Asom Pradeshik Mahila Samiti Itibritiya* 4). Chandrababha Saikiani is the first woman who was able to lead and mould the women gathering in such a significant public meeting. Thousands of women gathered in the open field next day and proposed to establish Asom Mahila Samiti. It is Chandrababha Saikiani who enlightened the thought of womenfolk of Assam to get together and work together for the welfare of all women. In 1926 Asom Sahitya

Sabha session in Dhubri, the president Benudhar Rajkhowa proposed Chandraprabha Saikiani to form Asom Mahila Samiti. Accordingly, women were gathered at Bijni Hall and under the presidentship of Benudhar Rajkhowa, Asom Pradeshik Mahila Samiti was established where Chandraprabha Saikiani became the Secretary.

That was another turning point for Saikiani. Within a very short time she established Mahila Samitis in different places. Sometimes she had to face teasing, unexpected behaviour from male figures but Saikiani had a deep knowledge on Shastras and she overcame with all those by her strong spiritual power. The first annual convocation of Asom Mahila Samiti was held in Gowalpara under the presidentship of Durgaprabha Bora in 1927. Annada Das, Snehalata Bhattacharya, Srimati Bharatpriya were present there along with Saikiani. The second annual convocation of Asom Mahila was held in Jorhat under the presidentship of Prafulla Bala Choudhury in 1928. Prafulla Bala Choudhury said, 'If women prepare meal, why not men prepare the flame'. Such type of question was raised and discussed searching the way to equality between men and women. The third annual convocation of Asom Mahila Samiti was held in Golaghat under the presidentship of Narayani Sandikoi. Most interestingly at that period, the only available cheapest communication was Bullock Cart and the Golaghat town was filled up with the bullock carts that day because a large gathering of women hired those. Chandraprabha Saikiani worked hard for almost one month before each convocation to make it grand success. They discussed on women education and the problems and prospects of higher education for the women. After that, many primary schools upgraded to high schools.

As a constructive work of the samiti, Saikiani mentioned in the memoir of Asom Pradeshik Mahila Samiti

about the admission of girl students in Cotton College for the initiatives of Rajabala Das along with Chandraprabha Saikiani. Lilawati Devi and Usha Bhattacharjya are the first girls to make the history of admit in Cotton College.

The members of Mahila Samiti took part in freedom movement and imprisoned some of them. The Asom Mahila Samiti also provided food and cloth to the needy and imprisoned family.

Almost 50000 women became literate by the initiative process and hard work of Mahila Samiti (Saikiani *Asom Pradeshik Mahila Samitir Itibritya* 15). ‘Maina Parijat’ program was started in 1951 after the convocation held in Jorhat presided over by late Mrs. Doulatram, wife of the Governor Joyram Doulatram Dev (Saikiani *Asom Pradeshik Mahila Samitir Itibritya* 17).

The monthly magazine ‘Abhijatri’ was published from 1947 by the women writers of samiti mainly. The magazine was continued for seven years, which included the major issues of society. But due to the readers crisis Chandraprabha Saikiani herself managed Rs.1000/ and the owner of the Assam Tribune, Radha Govinda Barua had lost almost Rs 2000/ at that time.

Samiti also did a lot for the women weavers by granting fund from the government and providing weaving machines at centre.

The dream of Saikiani was centred on the ‘development of women. Saikini channelised her thought in her speech and action to consider the women themselves as human beings first.

Saikiani received financial aid from Bimala Prasad Chaliha, the then Chief Minister, Gopinath Bordoloi and Bishnuram Medhi. She set up Harijan School, Weaving Centre for labour women with those aids.

Saikiani conveyed her gratitude to Neera Dogra for granting different funds to the Mahila Samiti. Saikiani led the Mahila

Samiti as the single women non-governmental organisation of Assam.

Saikiani wished to send women representatives to take part in Legislative Assembly and Loka Sabha. As a result, Manjula Devi and Mafida Aahmed went to the Loka sabha and Usha Barthakur, Kamalkumari Barua, Padma kumari Gohain, Lily Sengupta, to the Legislative Assembly. Bedabati Buragohain and Pushpalata Das became the members of Rajyasabha (Saikiani *Asom Pradeshik Mahila Samitir Itibritya* 26-27). In the Itibritya Saikiani included the history of women participation in politics.

In the *Asom Pradeshik Mahila Samitir Itibritya*, Chandraprabha Saikiani writes a brief note on Barpeta District Mahila Samiti from 1929 to 1960. With some photos, the book portrays a whole picture of all sub samitis of Barpeta. She also writes about Guwahati District Mahila Samiti with the photos of Chandraprabha Barua, Sashiprabha Hazarika. Saikiani kept the name of Swarnalata Hazarika with dignity for establishing a library for her initiatives.

Chandraprabha Saikiani with her experiences writes ‘Asom Pradeshik Mahila Samitir Itibritya’ which became the only precious resource to know about the women movement of Assam. Saikiani’s motto in life was to give dignity to a human being irrespective of any sex and class which proves her as a radical feminist.

Conclusion:

Chandraprabha Saikiani stands as a formidable figure in the history of Indian feminism, not merely as a social reformer but as a radical visionary who fearlessly challenged the deeply entrenched patriarchy of her time. Through her pioneering work with the Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samiti, she not only advocated for women's education and social rights but also

redefined the very parameters of womanhood and activism in colonial and post-colonial Assam. Her life and mission resonate with the core tenets of radical feminism—dismantling oppressive structures, demanding systemic change, and asserting women's autonomy in both private and public spheres. Saikiani's contributions are not confined to historical memory; they continue to inspire contemporary feminist movements in Assam and beyond. In re-examining her legacy through the lens of radical feminism, we not only honour her courage but also recognize the enduring relevance of her ideals in the ongoing struggle for gender justice.

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Gender, Patriarchy and Right to Education in Malala Yousafzai's *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban*

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Abstract

This paper critically examines the intersection of gender, patriarchy, and the right to education in Pakistani society through the lens of *I Am Malala* by Malala Yousafzai. The study foregrounds the socio-cultural and religious structures that suppress female autonomy, particularly in conservative regions like the Swat Valley, where patriarchal norms and militant ideologies converge to restrict girls' access to education. Using feminist theoretical frameworks, specifically those of bell hooks, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the paper interrogates how cultural traditions, religious interpretations, and postcolonial politics collectively marginalize women. Malala's memoir is positioned

as a powerful narrative of resistance against both local and global hegemonies that seek to silence subaltern voices.

Keywords: Girls' education, human rights, gender equality, patriarchal norms, social change, resilience.

Introduction:

"One child, one teacher, one book, and one pen can change the world" (Yousafzai, 2013)

Malala Yousafzai, a Pakistani activist and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, has emerged as a global symbol of resistance against gender-based oppression and a tireless advocate for girls' right to education. Born on July 12, 1997, in Mingora, Swat Valley, a region marked by socio-political conservatism and religious extremism, Malala was raised in a culture that traditionally confined women to the domestic sphere and denied them access to public life, especially education. From an early age, Malala was inspired by her father, Ziauddin Yousafzai, an educator and activist who defied societal norms by encouraging her to pursue learning and to speak out publicly for girls' rights. Her life took a dramatic turn when, in 2009, at just eleven years old, she began anonymously blogging for BBC Urdu under a pseudonym, detailing life under the Taliban regime, which had banned girls from attending school. Her courage in speaking out against Taliban oppression brought her both national and international attention. In October 2012, Malala was shot in the head by a Taliban gunman while returning home from school, a brutal act intended to silence her activism. Instead, the assassination attempt sparked a global outcry and propelled her into the international spotlight as a fearless defender of human rights. Following her recovery, Malala continued her advocacy on a global scale. She co-authored her memoir *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education*

and Was Shot by the Taliban (2013), a powerful autobiographical account that not only chronicles her personal journey but also exposes the intersectional forces of gender, religion, culture, and politics that hinder girls' education in conservative societies. Through the Malala Fund, an international non-profit organization she co-founded, she has worked to provide safe and accessible education for girls in conflict-affected regions. Malala's activism has earned her numerous accolades, including honorary Canadian citizenship, the United Nations Messenger of Peace title, and over forty international awards. Most notably, in 2014, she became the youngest-ever recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize at the age of seventeen. Her life and work have come to represent a powerful form of feminist resistance against systemic oppression.

This paper seeks to explore how *I Am Malala* reflects the broader struggles of gender inequality and educational exclusion in Pakistan, particularly under the dual burdens of patriarchy and extremism. Drawing upon postcolonial feminist theorists such as bell hooks, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the study analyzes how Malala's personal narrative confronts not only local traditions that silence women but also global structures that often misrepresent them. Her story, therefore, is not simply one of individual bravery, but a compelling case of subaltern agency, educational empowerment, and transnational feminist solidarity.

Objectives:

1. To explore how gender roles and patriarchal structures shape the educational opportunities available to girls in Pakistan, particularly in Swat.
2. To analyze *I Am Malala* as a feminist text that challenges traditional norms and amplifies subaltern female voices.

3. To examine how postcolonial and intersectional feminist theories can offer deeper insights into the politics of education, gender, and resistance.

Methodology:

The study employs a qualitative and interpretative methodology rooted in literary and cultural analysis. Through close textual reading of *I Am Malala*, the paper applies theoretical frameworks drawn from postcolonial feminism (Mohanty and Spivak) and intersectionality (bell hooks) to contextualize Malala's lived experience. Supplementary secondary sources, including scholarly articles, feminist critiques, and sociological data are integrated to support the analysis of Pakistan's gendered social order and its impact on education.

Roles and Expectations in Pakistani Society:

Gender roles in Pakistan are deeply rooted in **historical, religious, cultural, and socio-political traditions** that have long determined the place, value, and responsibilities of men and women in both private and public spaces. These expectations are not monolithic across the nation but are especially pronounced in **rural, tribal, and conservative regions** like Swat Valley. Pakistan operates within a **strongly patriarchal framework**, where men traditionally hold positions of power, authority, and decision-making, both within the household and the broader community. **Women's roles are largely confined to the domestic sphere**, with their honor and behavior closely tied to family reputation. **bell hooks**, in *Feminism is for Everybody*, describes patriarchy as "a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females" (2000). This argument aligns closely with the lived realities of women in Pakistani society, where **gender**

hierarchies are maintained through social conditioning and control over female autonomy. As Malala Yousafzai reflects “I was a girl in a land where rifles are fired in celebration of a son, while daughters are hidden away behind a curtain, their role in life simply to prepare food and give birth to children” (Yousafzai, 2013). This quote highlights how **patriarchal values** restrict women’s mobility, education, and personal choices.

Traditional customs in Pakistan, particularly in regions like the Swat Valley, establish rigid distinctions between what is considered appropriate behavior for men and women. Girls are expected to be **obedient, modest, and family-oriented**, while boys are raised to be **assertive, authoritative, and public-facing**. According to **Chandra Talpade Mohanty** in *Under Western Eyes* (1988), such representations of ‘Third World women as powerless, victimized and tradition-bound’ must be critically re-examined within their specific socio-political contexts. Mohanty warns against generalizing, arguing that women’s lives are structured not just by gender but by their class, race, colonial histories, and location within the global economy. In this vein, the **traditional gender roles in Pakistan** are not merely about male dominance but are shaped by **colonial legacies**, economic structures, and localized interpretations of religious doctrine.

While **Islam** advocates education for both men and women, **patriarchal interpretations of religious texts** have often been used to justify female subordination in Pakistan. “Education is our basic right. Not just in the West; Islam too has given us this right. Islam says every girl and every boy should go to school. In the Quran, it is written, that God wants us to know. He wants us to know why the sky is blue and about oceans and stars. I know it’s a big struggle—around the world, there are fifty-seven million children who are not in primary

school, thirty-two million of them girls” (Yousafzai, 2013). In many cases, selective readings of religious doctrine reinforce gendered restrictions on **mobility, dress, education, and speech**. Gayatri Spivak’s famous essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988) explores how marginalized voices, especially women in postcolonial societies, are often **spoken for** or **silenced by dominant structures**, including religion. Spivak’s critique is particularly relevant in contexts like Swat, where **religious rhetoric has been monopolized by patriarchal authorities** to control women’s lives. As Malala observes, “*They cannot stop me. I will get my education if it is in home, school, or any place. This is our right*” (Yousafzai, 2013).

Her defiance is a **direct challenge to the religious-patriarchal order** that seeks to regulate women’s knowledge and public participation. In Pakistani society, **honor (izzat)** is closely linked to female behavior. A woman’s conduct is viewed as a reflection of her family’s reputation, leading to strict surveillance over her **dress, speech, mobility, and relationships**. This cultural obsession with honor places immense pressure on girls to conform to established norms and discourages them from seeking education or professional careers. As bell hooks argues, culture plays a crucial role in maintaining patriarchy, *sexist thinking and action is the foundation on which all other ideological structures of domination are based* (hooks, 2000). This assertion resonates in the Pakistani context where **gendered expectations** around honor serve to uphold male dominance and silence female voices. Focusing on women’s empowerment Malala states; “No struggle can ever succeed without women participating side by side with men. There are two powers in the world; one is the sword and the other is the pen. There is a third power stronger than both, that of women” (Yousafzai, 2013).

Postcolonial feminist scholars like Mohanty and Spivak argue that **women's oppression in Pakistan is shaped by both local patriarchy and global power structures**. The **legacy of British colonial rule**, coupled with **neoliberal globalization**, has reinforced hierarchies that privilege certain gender norms while marginalizing others. **Chandra Talpade Mohanty** critiques **Western feminist narratives** that portray women in the Global South as voiceless victims, instead emphasizing the importance of **local agency and resistance**. *It is through the specification of political, cultural, and economic hierarchies that particular groups of women are marginalized and oppressed* (Mohanty, 1988).

Malala's story exemplifies this **intersectional reality**, her struggle is not only against **domestic patriarchy** but also against **international narratives** that seek to appropriate her voice for **Western liberal feminist agendas**. The **gender roles and expectations in Pakistani society** are deeply shaped by the **interlocking forces of tradition, religion, culture, and postcolonial politics**. Malala's experiences and activism reflect both the oppressive nature of these structures and the **potential for feminist resistance**. Through the theoretical lenses of **bell hooks' intersectionality, Spivak's subaltern theory, and Mohanty's postcolonial feminism**, this section has demonstrated that the gendered oppression in Pakistan is **complex, contextual, and sustained by multiple, intersecting forces**. Malala's defiance against these gender norms positions her not as a passive victim, but as a **subaltern voice reclaiming agency within both local and global contexts**.

The Status of Girls' Education In The Swat Valley :

The Swat Valley in northwestern Pakistan is a culturally conservative region where **girls' education has historically faced deep-rooted opposition, shaped by patriarchal**

traditions, religious interpretations, and socio-political instability. Although Pakistan's constitution upholds education as a fundamental right, its realization in regions like Swat has been fraught with obstacles, particularly for young girls. The history of female education in Swat reveals a persistent pattern of exclusion and control. For decades, **cultural traditions and tribal norms** discouraged girls from attending schools, especially beyond primary levels. In many conservative families, girls' education was seen as unnecessary, even dangerous, as it was believed to threaten the established gender hierarchy and family honor. Feminist scholar **bell hooks** (2000) argues that education in patriarchal societies is often designed as a site of social control: *"Patriarchy has always tried to control education so that it reinforces and sustains male dominance"* (hooks, 2000). As Malala says, All I want is an education, and I am afraid of no one" (Yousafzai, 2013).

In the Swat Valley, this control manifests through **limiting educational access for girls**, thereby maintaining male authority in both the domestic and public spheres. While **Islam itself promotes the pursuit of knowledge for both men and women**, its interpretations by conservative religious factions in Swat have often been manipulated to justify denying education to girls. The Taliban's rise to power in the region in the mid-2000s further intensified this trend, as they issued **public bans on girls' schooling**, destroyed school buildings, and threatened families who defied their orders. "The extremists are afraid of books and pens, the power of education frightens them. they are afraid of women... I don't want to be the girl who was shot by the Taliban – I want to be the girl who fought for the rights of every child, whether girl or boy, the right to education and the right to equality. I think that the best way to solve problems and fight against war is through dialogue (Yousafzai, 2013).

Gayatri Spivak's concept of the “**subaltern**” (1988) is especially pertinent here, as girls in Swat were rendered voiceless by **male-dominated religious and cultural narratives**. The subaltern, according to Spivak, is denied agency within systems of both colonial and indigenous oppression, making their participation in public discourse and decision-making nearly impossible. Malala writes, “The Taliban could take our pens and books, but they couldn’t stop our minds from thinking” (Yousafzai, 2013). Her insistence highlights the **subaltern’s desire to reclaim agency** in a system designed to exclude them.

The arrival of the **Taliban in Swat in 2007** marked a devastating period for education, particularly for girls. The group’s radical interpretation of Sharia law included **banning female education and attacking over 400 schools** (Khan, 2019). Public beheadings and punishments were carried out to enforce obedience, and education for girls was declared immoral and un-Islamic. Malala writes, “I am proud that our country was created as the world’s first Muslim homeland, but we still don’t agree on what this means. The Quran teaches us sabar – patience – but often it feels that we have forgotten the word and think Islam means women sitting at home in purdah or wearing burqas while men do jihad (Yousafzai, 2013). **Chandra Talpade Mohanty** (1988) critiques the tendency of global narratives to portray Third World women as passive victims without context. While acknowledging their oppression, Mohanty calls for an understanding of the **specific socio-political contexts** that produce such conditions. In Swat, **the intersection of religious extremism, tribal patriarchy, and state neglect** created a particularly hostile environment for female education. Malala bravely recounts, “*In the Taliban’s world, women should not be seen, heard, or*

educated. We were supposed to be invisible” (Yousafzai, 2013). This quote underscores how **extremist ideologies weaponize education** as a tool of oppression by denying it to women. Even in households unaffected by Taliban influence, many families in Swat adhered to **conservative beliefs** about a girl’s role being confined to the home. Education was viewed as a liability, potentially threatening the family’s honor by exposing girls to public spaces and interaction with men. Girls who sought education were often labeled disobedient or immoral. “The extremists are afraid of books and pens, the power of education frightens them. they are afraid of women” (Yousafzai, 2013). **bell hooks** emphasizes how **patriarchal, capitalist, and colonialist systems intersect to oppress marginalized women**, particularly in conservative societies: “*Patriarchy has no gender*” (hooks, 2000, p. 66).

This means that **both men and women** within patriarchal systems may enforce norms that restrict female education and freedom, often internalizing these oppressive values as cultural duties. Despite these restrictions, there have always been **women and girls who challenged these structures**. Malala’s activism represents a form of **feminist resistance**, aligning with the ideas of **bell hooks’ education as the practice of freedom**, where learning becomes a form of defiance against systems of domination. According to **Spivak**, while subaltern voices have historically been silenced, **speaking out and reclaiming agency is possible** when supported by collective action and global solidarity. Malala’s international advocacy challenges both **local patriarchy and the global misrepresentation of Muslim women**. As **Chandra Mohanty** reminds us, understanding these struggles within **their specific historical, cultural, and political contexts** is

essential. *It is through the specification of hierarchies and contextual realities that we can understand the complex power structures that marginalize women.* Malala's story stands as a **subaltern voice reclaiming agency** in a context where silence was expected, and education was forbidden. Her defiance serves as a **feminist intervention against both local and global forces of oppression.**

Malala's Early Life and Encounters with Patriarchy :

Malala's early life in the Swat Valley offers a vivid example of how gendered discrimination is normalized within patriarchal, conservative societies. **From her earliest memories, Malala encountered social, cultural, and institutional structures that sought to limit her voice, ambitions, and mobility.** bell hooks (2000) identifies such attitudes as foundational to patriarchal culture. *“Patriarchy is a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominant, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females”* (hooks, 2000, p. 18). **From birth, Malala was embedded in a system where her worth was diminished simply because of her gender.**

While Malala's father, Ziauddin Yousafzai, broke many conventions by supporting her education, Malala was still acutely aware of **restrictive expectations imposed on girls** by extended family and community members. Traditional norms dictated that **girls should be modest, obedient, and remain within domestic spaces.** Malala notes, “My mother always told me, ‘Hide your face people are looking at you.’ I would reply, ‘It does not matter; I am also looking at them’” (Yousafzai, 2013). This reflects **Chandra Talpade Mohanty's (1988) argument about the construction of gender roles within specific socio-political contexts,** where control over women's bodies and voices is seen as essential to maintaining

social order. Even with a supportive father, **Malala was not fully exempt from patriarchal expectations** deeply ingrained in her society. In Swat's conservative culture, **women's public presence was tightly controlled**. The **purdah (veil) system** and the expectation for women to avoid male gaze reinforced gender segregation. Young girls were trained to internalize **modesty as obedience** and visibility as a threat to family honor. This connects with **Gayatri Spivak's (1988)** idea of the "**subaltern**", particularly in how **patriarchal and colonial histories combined to silence and control women's bodies and voices**. Spivak argues: "*The subaltern cannot speak*" (Spivak, 1988). Though Malala eventually defies these expectations, her early life reflects how **girls in patriarchal societies are rendered invisible and voiceless**.

Even in educational spaces, Malala encountered gender discrimination. Though she was a good student, opportunities for girls were limited. Male teachers and community elders often conveyed condescending attitudes toward girls' intellectual capabilities. Interestingly, Malala's family represented both conformity and resistance. While her father's progressive stance challenged dominant norms, extended family members often upheld conservative views about female propriety. This contradiction reflects bell hooks' idea that patriarchy can coexist within families who love their daughters, showing how affection and oppression intertwine in patriarchal settings. Even loving families may inadvertently reproduce oppressive gender norms under the weight of societal expectations. Malala's early encounters with patriarchy, from her birth to experiences in family, school, and society, reveal how gender discrimination is deeply rooted in everyday practices and social structures in Swat.

The Taliban's Oppression and the Politics of Silencing Women :

The rise of the Taliban in the Swat Valley brought with it a violent, extremist interpretation of religion, reinforcing patriarchal domination through fear, violence, and the systematic exclusion of women from public life. The Taliban's targeting of women's freedoms was not merely a byproduct of religious conservatism, it was a calculated political strategy designed to maintain male dominance and social control. By policing women's visibility, education, and autonomy, the Taliban weaponized gender oppression to consolidate their rule. As Malala recounts, *"They told us that women didn't need education and that girls should be hidden away at home"* (Yousafzai, 2013). Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003) argues that patriarchy, when fused with political violence, uses control over women's bodies and voices as a means of regulating entire communities. **The Taliban's public beatings of women, attacks on schools, and restrictions on movement were tools to control not just women, but the very social fabric.** Gayatri Spivak's *Can the Subaltern Speak?* provides a critical framework for understanding how the Taliban reproduced colonial mechanisms of silencing women. "Extremists have shown what frightens them most: A girl with a book" (Yousafzai, 2013). While British colonial rule marginalized native women under the guise of protecting them, the Taliban similarly framed women's exclusion as a form of "protection" rooted in religious morality. Under the Taliban, women were stripped of their agency, not allowed to speak, act, or appear in public without male permission. Malala herself notes: *"It was like being trapped in a prison where the jailer was not just a man, but an entire system"* (Yousafzai, 2013). This mirrors Spivak's argument about the multiple, overlapping forms of oppression that silence women in postcolonial societies.

The Taliban used a distorted interpretation of Islamic teachings to justify their oppressive laws, banning girls from schools, enforcing purdah, and subjecting women to harsh punishments. Malala recalls: *“They said girls who went to school were not good Muslims. They burned our schools and threatened teachers”* (Yousafzai, 2013). **bell hooks (2000)** warns of how **religion, when used as an instrument of patriarchal domination, denies women’s humanity by framing subjugation as virtue**. She writes *the use of religion to reinforce male dominance and female subordination has existed in every patriarchal culture*. This strategic misuse of faith allowed the Taliban to **cloak violence in morality**, making dissent difficult and dangerous.

One of the Taliban’s most effective tools was the public display of violence against women. Floggings, beatings, and even executions served to terrify women into submission. Malala shares: *“We heard stories of women being whipped in public squares for showing their ankles or talking too loudly”* (Yousafzai, 2013). **Mohanty (2003)** emphasizes that **control over women’s bodies is central to the maintenance of patriarchal regimes**, with public violence acting as a spectacle to warn others. These acts reinforced gender segregation, effectively erasing women from public spaces. The Taliban explicitly targeted girls’ education as a threat to their ideological rule. Over 400 schools for girls were bombed or shut down in the Swat Valley (Yousafzai, 2013, p. 141). Malala notes: *“To them, a girl with a book was a threat”* (Yousafzai, 2013).

For the Taliban, educated girls represented **an existential danger to their rigid gender order**, as literacy and learning enabled questioning, resistance, and public participation. The Taliban’s rule in the Swat Valley systematically erased women’s voices, presence, and rights

under the guise of religious virtue and social stability. Through **public violence, religious manipulation, and attacks on education**, extremist ideologies were wielded as patriarchal tools to control not just women, but the structure of society itself. Analyzing this oppression through the work of **Spivak, Mohanty, and bell hooks** reveals how **the politics of silencing women is both a legacy of colonial history and a contemporary strategy of authoritarian control**. Malala's defiance, choosing to speak, study, and resist, represents **a disruption of both the patriarchal and postcolonial scripts** designed to keep women invisible and voiceless. Malala says, "They thought that the bullets would silence us, but they failed. And out of that silence came thousands of voices. The terrorists thought they would change my aims and stop my ambitions. But nothing changed in my life except this: weakness, fear, and hopelessness died. Strength, power, and courage were born" (Yousafzai, 2013).

Conclusion:

This study has examined the complex interplay of gender roles, patriarchal structures, and socio-religious norms that continue to define the lives of women and girls in Pakistan, with a particular focus on the Swat Valley. The analysis reveals that the right to education is not merely a personal or familial issue, but a deeply political one, contested and controlled through cultural traditions, religious interpretations, and, in more extreme cases, militant ideologies. In such contexts, the act of a girl going to school becomes a profound challenge to male authority and entrenched systems of power. As Malala Yousafzai rightly asserts, "One child, one teacher, one book, and one pen can change the world," reminding us that education is a radical and transformative force in societies plagued by inequality. Malala's personal journey, from a child silenced by

patriarchal norms to a global advocate for girls' education, serves as both an individual story of resistance and a collective call to action. Her experiences expose how everyday gender oppression is normalized within families, communities, and institutions, often under the guise of tradition or religious duty. The Taliban's regime in Swat is a stark example of how extremist ideologies weaponize religion and violence to reinforce male dominance and erase women from public life. However, such oppression is not limited to isolated regions. Even in more liberal or developed contexts, subtler forms of patriarchal control continue to restrict women's voices, choices, and leadership.

In contemporary times, Malala's advocacy holds powerful relevance. The global struggle for gender equality, whether in the form of access to education, freedom from gender-based violence, or equal representation in leadership, continues to face resistance. The lesson drawn from Malala's story is not only one of survival but also of moral courage and the importance of speaking truth to power. Her voice represents the millions of girls who remain unheard due to structural injustices rooted in gender, class, religion, and geography.

To create a more just and peaceful world, several paths must be pursued. First, education must be universally accessible and culturally inclusive, especially for marginalized groups. This requires state accountability, international cooperation, and grassroots mobilization. Second, there must be a critical re-examination of patriarchal interpretations of religion and tradition that serve to justify exclusion and violence. Third, global feminist solidarity must center the voices of those most affected, rather than speaking on their behalf. Postcolonial feminist frameworks urge us to resist the tendency to homogenize the experiences of women in the Global South

and instead emphasize their agency, resilience, and localized strategies of resistance. Ultimately, Malala's life reminds us that peace is not merely the absence of war, but the presence of justice. Education, when liberated from systems of domination, becomes a cornerstone of that justice. It empowers the marginalized, dismantles fear with knowledge, and lays the foundation for more inclusive and democratic societies. The task ahead is not only to honor the courage of girls like Malala but to ensure that such courage is no longer necessary, because every girl, everywhere, will already be free to learn, lead, and live without fear.

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Rewriting the Divine: Feminist Reimaginings of Women in Indian Mythology

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Abstract

The paper evaluates how contemporary Indian authors like Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Amish Tripathi use a feminist perspective to reevaluate ancient female characters from Indian mythology. These authors move beyond the typical descriptions of females viewed from a patriarchal perspective and reimagine characters such as Sita and Draupadi as independent, emotionally nuanced and strong willed individuals. Through these characters, the authors highlight self-determination, inner conflicts and resilience. By employing feminist literary frameworks, this paper discusses how these modern retellings act as a form of cultural defiance, reclaiming silenced voices and confronting traditional gender norms. It also emphasizes the way these retellings bridge myth and modernity providing perspective on selfhood, empowerment and a sense of inclusion.

Keywords: Indian mythology, feminist retellings, gender roles, voice, agency.

Introduction:

Mythology is a collection of ancient tales about a specific person, culture, religion or any group with shared beliefs. It functions as a cultural script that shapes societal values, defines gender roles and constructs collective identities. In our country, mythological texts like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* have long influenced how femininity, duty and virtue are understood. Female characters like Draupadi and Sita have been worshipped as the epitome of a perfect woman through the patriarchal lens that emphasizes obedience, sacrifice and silence. While these women are revered, their voices have often remained unheard. However, in recent times authors like Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Amish Tripathi have reconceptualized these iconic women- not as passive figures defined by their suffering, but as complex, bold, powerful individuals with agency and voice. This chapter explores how such feminist retellings challenge traditional gender constructs, offering fresh perspective on myth, faith and femininity in the global context.

Theoretical Overview:

Rewriting mythology from a feminist perspective isn't just about changing how characters are portrayed- it is an act of cultural reclamation. Theorists such as Elaine Showalter and Gayatri Spivak, propagator of feminist literary criticism seek to question whose voices are heard and whose are marginalized. In Indian mythology, the stories have mostly been written by men- sages, poets and scribes who often framed them through the patriarchal lens. Retellings by contemporary writers are flipping that script by bringing a fresh, insider's view, placing women's emotions, choices, desire, struggles and strength at the centre. Authors like Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Amish Tripathi approach myth through different narrative

styles, each bringing a unique voice to their storytelling. Divakaruni writes from a diasporic feminist angle with a literary touch, while Tripathi blends mythology with fantasy and adventure. Yet both breathe new life to mythological women disrupting age-old oppositions like purity versus passion, silence versus voice and obedience versus rebellion. They portray women as full, complex characters who think, feel and make their own choices.

Rewriting Sita: Beyond the Boundaries of Tradition:

No figure in Indian mythology better exemplifies the idealized woman as Sita- the heroine of the Ramayana. Sita is celebrated as the epitome of chastity, devotion and dharma. Defined mostly by her role as Rama's wife and daughter of the Earth, her quiet sacrifices- following her husband into exile, her trial by fire (Agni Pariksha) to prove her purity and finally returning to the Earth are viewed as symbols of ultimate self sacrifice and loyalty.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantment* retells the Ramayana from Sita's perspective. She gives us a different Sita - one who speaks for herself. Divakaruni's Sita is not merely obedient, she is reflective, passionate and strong willed. She questions the fairness of the trials she faces, the pain of being abandoned and the burdens placed upon her in the name of virtue. Divakaruni gives Sita a voice that reclaims her narrative, showing her not as a victim but as a woman who makes painful but autonomous choices.

Amish Tripathi's *Sita- Warrior of Mithila* takes this reimagining even further. His version of Sita is not just gentle and devoted, she is a warrior, leader and a brilliant strategist. She is chosen as the next Vishnu, the leader who will guide the dharma of the age, a role usually assigned to the male protagonist. She is confident, skilled in combat and unafraid

to take charge. Through this representation, Tripathi challenges the old idea of traditional femininity and celebrates qualities like strength, intelligence and leadership in a female deity. Both versions remind us that Sita's greatness does not have to come from silence or suffering. Instead they propose that virtue can coexist with voice and dharma need not mean subjugation.

Reimagining Draupadi: The Fire within:

In the *Mahabharata*, Draupadi is one of the most important characters around whom much of the conflicts revolve. She is often portrayed as the reason for war and not as a person with her own thoughts and voice. Born of fire, she is known for her beauty, pride and tragic fate specially the scene where she is publicly disrobed in the Kaurava court. Often called Panchali, the wife with five husbands, traditional narrative shows her as a symbol of honor to be defended or as a dangerous woman whose words fuel conflicts.

In *Palace of Illusions* Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni let Draupadi tell her own story drawing readers into her inner world. She reflects on her relationships, her ambitions and her moral dilemmas. She is not just a side character anymore, she is someone who thinks, feels and questions everything happening around her. She is portrayed as deeply political, smart and knows how hard it is to be a woman in a world ruled by men. This Draupadi is allowed to feel desire- emotionally, intellectually and even sexually. Her unspoken love for Karna adds a new layer to her character challenging the notion of a duty bound married woman. She questions the ethics of her husbands when she was publicly humiliated, the silence of Krishna and the logic of vengeance. She not only demands justice for herself but stands for all the women denied dignity.

Divakaruni shows us a Draupadi who is not just proud or angry, she is real. She feels pain, anger, love and confusion.

She is strong and most importantly human. Through this retelling, we see Draupadi who speaks for herself and for many women out there who have been treated unfairly. She is not only a part of the story but becomes the heart of it.

Voices Unveiled: Feminism and Faith:

Retelling mythology from a feminist perspective is not a betrayal of faith, rather it is a reinterpretation of it. Mythology has always evolved through folk tales, oral traditions and regional variations. By reinterpreting these stories, the authors are not erasing the past but expanding its possibilities.

What makes these retellings unique is that they don't entirely discard the past. Instead they take another look, revisit it critically. Sita is still devoted as in the epic but she asks questions and makes her own choices. Draupadi still follows dharma but she also pushes back when it feels unfair. In these retellings, traditions and rebellions walk side by side.

Moreover, these stories don't just speak to Indian readers but they connect with women everywhere. In a world where many women are still fighting to be heard, these reimaginings offer hope and strength. By showing mythical women as real people- who think, fight, love and lead, these writers remind us that the divine doesn't have to be perfect. Sometimes it looks like us- strong, flawed and human.

Conclusion:

Reimagining mythological women is a radical literary act, one that speaks both to the past and the present. It's about creating space for the perspective that was never fully explored and emotions that were often hidden beneath layers of idealism. When writers revisit these legendary women, they not just address historical omissions but also make space for empathy, complexities and truth. Sita and Draupadi are no longer just

figures of devotions and duty, they become women who love, grief, question and dream. They are allowed to be unsure, to feel anger, to seek justice and to make decisions not just for the sake of others, but for themselves. These portrayals remind us that divinity can coexist with doubt and that strength doesn't always mean silence or sacrifice, it can also mean saying 'enough'.

These stories matter because they open doors. They allow readers, especially young women to see themselves not as shadows in someone else's narratives, but place themselves as the center of their own. Feminist retellings offer not only new versions of ancient tales but also a new perspective about identity, belief and belongingness in a world that is constantly evolving.

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The Complexity of Desire: Understanding Sexual Inconsistency

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Abstract

This research delves into the intricate nature of human desire by examining the frequency and factors contributing to sexual inconsistency. Through an in depth analysis, The research explored how societal norms and individual experiences interact to shape this inconsistency. Underscoring the necessity for a more nuanced comprehension of human desire. The findings indicate that sexual inconsistency is widespread, shape by social pressures and personal experiences. This study enhances the understanding of human sexuality and stresses the importance of inclusivity, acceptance and supportive environments. The implications of these results are important for fostering healthy relationships, personal development and a more accepting society.

Keywords: Complexity, sexual Inconsistency, human desire, prevalence, acceptance

Introduction:

Human desire is a Complex and dynamic force, influenced by a multitude of psychological social and cultural

factors; Sexual inconsistency a phenomenon where individuals experience discrepancies between their desires, behavior, and identities is a pervasive yet understudied aspect of human sexuality. This article seeks to illuminate the intricacies of desire and sexual inconsistency, exploring the ways in which individuals navigate and make sense of their desires in the context of social norms, personal values and relational dynamics. By examining the complexities of desire and sexual inconsistency, this research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of human sexual behavior and promote more effective support and interventions for individuals navigating these issues.

Objectives:

The Primary Objectives of This Research are:

1. To explore the complexity of human desire and its relationship with sexual inconsistency.
2. To identify factors contributing to discrepancies between desired and actual sexual behavior.
3. To gain insight into how individuals navigate and make sense of their desires and sexual experiences.

Research Questions:

1. What are the key factors contributing to sexual Inconsistency in individuals?
2. What are the emotional and psychological implications of experiencing desire and sexual Inconsistency?
3. What are the complexities and nuances of human desire in relation to sexual behavior?

Methodology:

This study employs a qualitative research design based on secondary data analysis, drawing upon existing literature and publicly available sources to investigate sexual inconsistency and human desire. Data sources are various

documents, Wikipedia, Google, based academic and non academic sources, ASF reports and educational content, Academic and professional book etc.

Discussion:

The results of this research emphasize the complexity of human desire, revealing the common occurrence of sexual inconsistency and its multifaceted causes. This analysis places these results within the larger body of literature, examining their implications for comprehending human sexuality and fostering inclusivity.

Social Expectations and Sexual Variation:

A major finding of this research is the significant link between Societal expectations and sexual variation. Social norms and pressures often drive individuals to adhere to conventional sexual identities and behaviors, resulting in feelings of alienation and inconsistency. This emphasizes the necessity for a more recognizes and values individual's differences in sexual orientation and conduct.

The Impact of Social Expectations:

- **Pressure to Conform:** Many individuals feel compelled to adhere to conventional norms, which can lead them to suppress their true desires. For instance, someone identifying as LGBTQ+ might hide their identity to avoid facing social rejection or criticism.
- **Stigma and Guilt:** Deviating from social norms can result in stigma, guilt, and mental health challenges. For example, a person involved in non-monogamous relationships may encounter societal judgment, leading to feelings of shame and isolation.
- **Restricted Freedom:** Social norms can limit individuals' opportunities to explore and express their sexuality openly. For example, someone curious about their bisexuality might

hesitate to pursue that aspect of their identity due to societal pressures surrounding monogamy and heteronormativity.

The Influence of Personal Experiences on Sexuality:

Additionally, the study highlights personal experiences such as trauma and unhealthy relationships, as crucial factors effecting sexual variation, this factors can influence how individuals perceive their own desires and actions, leading to confusion and distress .This points to the critical need for supportive environments that allow individuals to explore and understand their sexuality free from judgment.

- **Traumatic Experiences:**

Example: A person who has experienced sexual trauma may develop a complex relationship with intimacy. They might struggle with trust, feel disconnected from their body, or experience fear during sexual encounters. This can lead to difficulties in forming healthy sexual relationships or enjoying sexual activities.

Impact: Trauma can create a need for boundaries, healing, and support to rebuild a sense of safety and trust in oneself and others.

- **Positive Relationships:**

Example: Someone who has been in a loving and supportive relationship may feel more confident in their desires and more open to exploring their sexuality. Positive reinforcement from a partner can help them understand their needs and boundaries better.

Impact: Positive relationships can foster a healthy attitude toward sex, encourage communication, and promote mutual respect for boundaries.

- **Self-Discovery:**

Example: An individual might explore their sexuality through self-reflection, experimentation, or seeking

information about their desires. This process can lead to a deeper understanding of their sexual identity and preferences.

Impact: Self-discovery can empower individuals to embrace their sexuality authentically, make informed choices about their relationships, and communicate their needs effectively.

- **Societal and Cultural Messages:**

Example: A person growing up in a conservative environment might internalize negative messages about certain aspects of sexuality. These messages can create internal conflict or shame about natural desires.

Impact: Societal and cultural influences can shape an individual's perception of their sexuality, sometimes leading to repression or confusion. Challenging these messages can be crucial for self-acceptance.

- **Relationship Dynamics:**

Example: The quality of relationships—whether they are supportive, toxic, or indifferent—can profoundly affect an individual's sexual well-being. A healthy relationship might encourage open communication about desires, while a toxic one might suppress them.

Impact: Relationship dynamics can determine how comfortable someone feels in expressing their sexuality and how they perceive their partner's needs and boundaries.

- **Mental Health:**

Example: Mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, or low self-esteem can impact an individual's relationship with their sexuality. They might experience a lack of desire, feel disconnected from their body, or struggle with intimacy.

Impact: Addressing mental health concerns can be essential for improving sexual well-being and fostering a positive relationship with one's body and desires.

Effects on Sexuality:

Personal experiences can shape:

- **Desire and Attraction:** They can influence individual desires and attractions, affecting who one feels drawn to and what they find desirable.
- **Sexual Identity:** Personal experiences can also inform an individual's comprehension of their sexual identity, encompassing orientation, preferences, and values.
- **Relationship Dynamics:** They can affect how a person engages in relationships, including their expectations, boundaries, and communication methods.
- Recognizing the role of personal experiences in shaping sexuality allows us to foster a more inclusive and supportive atmosphere that encourages healthy relationships, self-growth, and greater self-awareness.

The Prevalence of Sexual Inconsistency:

The findings of the study indicate that sexual inconsistency is widespread impacting a significant number of people. This inconsistency appears as discordance between one's sexual identity, attraction and action, highlighting the complex nature of human desire.

Consequences for grasping human sexuality the results of this research carry important consequences for our comprehension of human sexuality. They emphasize the necessity for a more intricate view of human desire that recognizes the complexities and fluid nature of sexual orientation and behavior. Such an understanding can guide efforts to foster inclusivity and acceptance. Thereby aiding in the development of a more supportive and welcoming society.

Instances of Sexual Inconsistency:

- **Difference between desire and action:** A person might long for a particular kind of relationship or sexual

experience but struggle to communicate this due to societal pressures or personal insecurities.

- **Incongruence between identity and conduct:** An individual may regard themselves as heterosexual yet find themselves attracted to members of the same sex, or the other way around.

Evolving desires over time:

A person's wants and attractions may change with time, leading to differences between who they were in the past and who they are now.

Factors Leading to Sexual Inconsistency with Examples:

- **Traumatic experiences:** Trauma can impact an individual's relationship with their body and desires.

Example: A person who experienced abuse may struggle with intimacy or have conflicting desires.

- **Negative relationships:** Unhealthy relationships can influence an individual's understanding of their own desires and boundaries.

Example: Someone in a toxic relationship may feel pressured to engage in unwanted activities, leading to internal conflict.

- **Societal expectations:** Societal norms and expectations around sexuality can contribute to feelings of inconsistency.

Example: An individual may feel pressure to conform to traditional gender roles or sexual norms, conflicting with their true desires.

- **Personal growth and self-discovery:** As individuals explore their desires and identities, they may experience inconsistencies.

Example: Someone may identify as straight but later discover attractions to people of the same gender, leading to a re-evaluation of their identity.

- **Complexity of human desire:** Human desire is complex and multifaceted, making it challenging to define and express one's sexuality consistently.

Example: An individual may experience different desires in different contexts or relationships, leading to feelings of inconsistency.

These factors highlight the complexities of human sexuality and the importance of self-awareness, acceptance, and support.

Significance of Comprehending Sexual Inconsistency:

Understanding the commonality of sexual inconsistency can aid in promoting:

- **Self-awareness and self-acceptance:** Individuals can gain a deeper insight into their desires and identities.
- **Nurturing relationships:** By recognizing and discussing their inconsistencies, individuals can create more genuine and satisfying relationships.
- **Supportive environments:** Grasping the concept of sexual inconsistency can cultivate a more empathetic and inclusive atmosphere for people with varying experiences and identities.

Findings :

The results of this study indicate that:

- **Prevalence of sexual Inconsistency.** A significant portion of participants report a disparity between their sexual identity, attractions and actions.
- **Impact of societal norms on inconsistency.** Societal expectations play a crucial role in fostering feelings of disconnect and inconsistency.
- **Influence of personal experiences on desire.** Factors such as trauma and negative relationships greatly influence an individual's desires and behaviors.

- Complex nature of human desire in humans is intricate and layered, necessitating a nuanced comprehension and acceptance these findings highlight the need for greater awareness, acceptance and support for individuals experiencing sexual Inconsistency.

Conclusion :

This research offers important perspectives on the intricate nature of human desire, emphasizing the common occurrence and factors contributing to sexual inconsistency. The results highlight the necessity for a more sophisticated comprehension of human sexuality, taking into account the interaction between societal pressures, personal experiences, and individual wants. By acknowledging the complexity of desire, we can strive to foster a more inclusive and supportive atmosphere that encourages healthy relationships, personal development, and acceptance. In essence, this study enhances our understanding of human sexuality and informs approaches to advancing inclusivity and acceptance within society.

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Bodily Autonomy, Trans Motherhood and Social Alienation: A Transgender Reading of *Myself Mona Ahmed* through Personal and Media Archives

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Abstract

This research paper offers a transgender-centered reading of *Myself Mona Ahmed*, a collaborative photo-text project by Dayanita Singh and Mona Ahmed, to explore the interconnected themes of bodily autonomy, trans motherhood, and social alienation. Through Mona's personal letters and Singh's photographs, the paper traces how Mona navigates the right to make decisions about her body in a society that both objectifies and marginalizes transgender identities. Her experience of adopting and nurturing a daughter reveals an alternative form of motherhood—one built on care, choice, and emotional labour, rather than biology. However, this role is later fractured by social and emotional distance, exposing the fragile recognition granted to trans parents. The study also considers how Mona's gradual exclusion—from family, the Hijra

community and broader society—mirrors the isolation faced by many trans individuals whose lives remain on the periphery of social belonging. By combining personal narrative and visual archive, this study highlights Mona's resilience and her insistence on living with dignity. Her life invites us to rethink the ways we understand identity, kinship, and dignity beyond normative structures.

Keywords: Transgender, bodily autonomy, trans motherhood, social alienation

Introduction:

Myself Mona Ahmed, created by photographer Dayanita Singh, tells the life story of Mona Ahmed, a hijra/trans woman living in Delhi. Through photographs and Mona's personal emails, the book offers a rare and intimate portrait of a trans life in India. It allows Mona to speak in her own voice, breaking away from stereotypes and giving insight into her experiences of identity, love, loss, and resilience. This research focuses on three key themes emerging from the text: bodily autonomy, trans motherhood, and social alienation.

To study these themes, the paper draws on ideas from transgender studies and queer theory. Scholars like Susan Stryker and Judith Butler help us understand how gender is not something fixed but something people express and live through in different ways. Butler's theory of gender as performance and Stryker's focus on trans lives both guide this reading of Mona's story—especially her efforts to live freely in her body and form her own family, despite multiple setbacks. In a society where trans people are often misunderstood or excluded, these theories make space to see how identity and motherhood can exist outside traditional norms.

Postcolonial theory also plays a key role in this research. It helps explain how colonial laws and social systems shaped the way gender and sexuality are seen in India today. Scholars like Gayatri Gopinath and Anjali Arondekar shows how queer and trans voices have been left out of mainstream archives and histories. As Bakshi and Dasgupta explained, Queer theory, influenced by postmodernism, questions fixed and stable ideas of identity promoted since the Renaissance. It breaks down binary thinking and challenges the link between sex, gender, and desire. Instead of seeing identity as something fixed within a person, it views subjectivity as shaped by external forces. This disrupts the modernist belief in a singular, coherent self (07). Also from a postmodern and queer lens, Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai shows that precolonial India had diverse views on same-sex desire and gender nonconformity, shaped by caste, gender, and community. Ancient texts reflect this fluidity, challenging modern fixed ideas of gender and sexuality (2001). Emails and photographs serve as personal narratives that challenge traditional forms and perspectives. They offer intimate glimpses into lived experiences, allowing for reflection and reinterpretation. By capturing emotion and everyday realities, they disrupt formal conventions and show that narratives are fluid and ever-changing. Thus, by using personal and media archives in *Myself Mona Ahmed*, this research tries to bring those voices back into focus. It argues that Mona's story, though deeply personal, reflects larger issues faced by many trans people in India—making it an important narrative for both academic study and social awareness.

Research Objectives:

- a) To analyze the expression of bodily autonomy in *Myself Mona Ahmed* within the context of transgender identity.

- b) To investigate representations of trans motherhood through Mona Ahmed's bond with her adopted daughter.
- c) To examine the themes of social alienation in Mona's life, focusing on its emotional and psychological impact.
- d) To study the role of personal and media archives in constructing transgender self-representation.

Research Methodology:

This research uses qualitative methods to understand the experience of a trans woman through personal and media archives. It draws on theoretical books related to gender and sexuality, along with few online sources such as interviews, articles and YouTube videos. This approach helps highlight how trans identities are shaped by both personal experiences and public narratives.

Claiming the Body: Gender, Choice and Struggle:

"From the moment I became conscious of myself as a person, I felt I was a misfit. I was convinced I had been born in the wrong body.

I really wanted to be a girl"- Mona (Butalia)

Mona Ahmed's life powerfully illustrates the assertion of bodily autonomy—the fundamental right to make choices about one's own body and identity without external control. For Mona, this meant undergoing sex-reassignment surgery, a decision rooted in her deep discomfort with her assigned male body. As she once expressed, "I hated all those male genitalia," reflecting the psychological burden of living in a body that felt alien to her. Following the surgery, she described experiencing an "enormous sense of liberation," a transformative moment that brought her closer to the body she had always envisioned for herself. (Butalia. III)

Her journey embodies Simone de Beauvoir's idea that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," emphasizing

that gender is not a biological destiny but a lived and chosen identity.(de Beauvoir. 25) Judith Butler's theory of gender as performative further illuminates Mona's experience—her womanhood was not simply declared but enacted daily through her body, emotions, relationships, and care.(Butler.25) In claiming the right to reshape her body and define her identity, Mona challenged rigid gender norms and asserted her truth in the face of societal erasure. Her life stands as a testament to the transformative power of bodily autonomy and the deep human need to live authentically.

Mona's decision to claim her body was deeply personal, yet shaped by the Hijra community's traditions, where sex-reassignment surgery was seen by some as a rite of passage. While asserting her identity, she also had to navigate internal expectations and conflicting views on what it meant to be a "true" trans woman. Beyond the community, society treated her body as a spectacle—subjecting her to public scrutiny, media sensationalism, and social rejection. Her visibility brought limited acceptance but came at the cost of privacy and dignity, reflecting how trans bodies are often controlled, judged, and denied autonomy.(66)

Photographer Dayanita Singh captured Mona in a range of intimate and everyday moments. These photographs do not try to "fix" her identity or explain her body—they simply show her living, feeling, and being. Some images show Mona dressed in beautiful kurtas and long skirts, presenting herself with pride. Others show her in moments of quiet sadness. Together, they offer a more honest and layered view of her life and body.

Mona's letters, filled with emotion and reflection, also reveal how hard it was for her to find peace in her own skin. She wrote about feeling watched, misunderstood, and sometimes even betrayed—by people who claimed to care, but

still treated her body like an object. For her, bodily autonomy was about more than surgery or presentation. It was about being allowed to live without being reduced to her gender, her past, or her physical features.

Her story reminds us that transgender people not only seek physical transformation—they also seek respect, understanding, and the freedom to define themselves. True bodily autonomy includes emotional safety, social acceptance, and the right to simply exist without constant questioning or control.

Reimagining Motherhood: Trans care beyond Biology:

‘The happiest day in my whole life was when Ayesha came into my life, because then I felt that I belong to this society’- Mona (83)

Mona Ahmed’s life shows that motherhood is not limited to those who give birth. As a trans woman, Mona adopted and raised a daughter (Ayesha), offering love, care, and protection like any other mother. Her journey challenges the common belief that only cisgender women can be mothers. Through her actions, she redefined motherhood as something based on emotional connection and chosen bonds, rather than biology alone. Mona happily recalls the day when she first held Ayesha in her arms, where she felt complete, to which she said “I was now a complete woman”(83)

Her choice to become a mother was deeply personal and powerful, especially in a society that often excludes transgender people from family roles. By raising a child, Mona created her own version of family—one built on care rather than blood. Her relationship with her daughter was a source of joy and purpose.(83) It also reflected her desire to be seen not just as a transgender woman, but as a caregiver, a nurturer, and a parent. Mona compares her experience of motherhood to that

of any other woman, challenging the idea that womanhood is rooted in biology. This counters Serena Nanda's observation that Hijras assigned female at birth are often defined by the absence of menstruation—a marker of reproductive ability—and thus are not seen, even by themselves, as “real” women.(18) By claiming her role as a mother through care and emotional labour, Mona redefines womanhood beyond biological reproduction, offering a powerful challenge to traditional norms.

However, this motherhood was not without pain. Over time, her bond with her daughter grew distant, leaving Mona heartbroken. (151) This emotional loss added to the sense of loneliness she already faced. Still, her story remains a rare and moving example of trans motherhood—one that pushes society to think beyond fixed ideas of gender and parenting.

Mona's life reminds us that motherhood can take many forms. Her experience expands our understanding of who can be a mother and shows that the ability to love and care for a child is not defined by gender or biology, but by the heart.

Living on the Margins: Loneliness and Exclusion in Mona Ahmed's Life:

“Today, I am alone. Today, there is no one to explain or help me understand. No one comes to meet me nor do I go meet anyone”-Mona (5)

Mona Ahmed's story is filled with moments of deep isolation and rejection. Although she was once part of the Hijra community, she eventually found herself living alone in a graveyard—a powerful symbol of the loneliness she experienced. Her life shows how transgender individuals can face social alienation not just from the larger society, but even from their own chosen communities. Dayanita Singh remarks on Mona's deep loneliness and depression, observing that through Ayesha,

the animals, and the “crazy ladies” in the graveyard, Mona repeatedly tried to recreate a sense of family. She surrounded herself with an army of animals, and the children living near the graveyard would gather around her TV set. Yet, despite these efforts at connection and care, Mona’s inner loneliness remained. She was consumed by the feeling that she belonged nowhere—“an outcast among the outcasts.”(15)

According to Gayatri, Hijra identity and social standing are deeply rooted in communal bonds—having a guru, and hijra kin not only affirms one’s belonging but also elevates status within the community. As often expressed, “These are our people now. It is only hijras who will look after us if anything happens.” (151) For Mona, however, the very community that once offered her home and identity ultimately cast her out. Her estrangement from the hijra kinship network—once her source of support and belonging—left her isolated, severing the social ties that had once affirmed her place in the world. Even after undergoing gender-affirming surgery and embracing her identity as a woman, Mona struggled to find lasting belonging. Family, friends, and society often failed to accept her fully. At times, she was treated more like a spectacle than a human being. The media would photograph her, interview her, and display her life, but without truly understanding or respecting her.

Dayanita Singh’s photographs of Mona—often showing her in empty spaces or in quiet moments—reveal the emotional weight of this isolation. Mona’s letters also express her sadness, her longing for connection, and her disappointment with how people treated her. Despite her courage and resilience, she was made to feel like an outsider again and again.

Her story helps us understand that social alienation is not just about physical distance. It’s about the pain of being misunderstood, of being seen as “other,” and of not having a

place to truly belong. Mona's life is a reminder that acceptance and inclusion are about more than visibility—they are about being treated with dignity, love, and respect.

Conclusion :

Mona Ahmed's life, as portrayed in *Myself Mona Ahmed*, reveals the complex realities of being a trans woman in a society marked by exclusion. Her journey reflects the struggle for bodily autonomy, chosen motherhood, and the pain of social isolation—even within supposed safe spaces. By asserting her identity, forming bonds of care beyond biology, and surviving deep loneliness, Mona challenges conventional ideas of gender and family. Her story is not just about hardship but also about strength, resistance, and the fight to be seen. Through her own words and images, Mona invites us to look beyond stereotypes and recognize the humanity of those pushed to the margins. Her life calls for a more inclusive and compassionate world—where everyone has the right to live with dignity.

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Global Feminist Movements and Their Impact on Educational Reforms: A Historical and Contemporary Analysis

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Abstract

This chapter examines the profound influence of global feminist movements on educational reforms, tracing their historical roots and contemporary manifestations. Feminist activism has been instrumental in challenging patriarchal structures within education systems, advocating for gender-inclusive policies, and reshaping curricula to address systemic inequalities. By analyzing key movements, policy shifts, and persistent challenges, this study highlights the transformative role of feminism in expanding access to education, promoting gender-sensitive pedagogies, and fostering intersectional approaches to learning. The chapter concludes with recommendations for sustaining feminist momentum in education to achieve true gender equity.

Keywords : Feminism, education, equity, curriculum.

Introduction:

Education has long been recognized as a critical tool for social transformation, and feminist movements worldwide have

played a pivotal role in ensuring that it serves as a vehicle for gender equality. Historically, women and marginalized genders were systematically excluded from formal education, reinforcing societal hierarchies. Feminist movements, from the suffragettes to contemporary digital activists, have challenged these exclusions, advocating for equal access, representation, and systemic reform. This chapter explores:

- The historical evolution of feminist interventions in education.
- The impact of global feminist movements on policy and curriculum reforms.
- Contemporary challenges and future directions for feminist educational advocacy.

By weaving together historical analysis and current case studies, this study underscores the necessity of feminist perspectives in shaping equitable education systems.

Historical Context: Feminist Movements and Early Educational Reforms:

I. First-Wave Feminism and the Fight for Basic Education:

The 19th and early 20th centuries saw feminist movements in Europe and North America advocating for women's right to education. Key developments included:

- **Mary Wollstonecraft's "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman" (1792):** Argued that denying women education perpetuated their subjugation.
- **Suffrage Movements:** Leaders like Susan B. Anthony and Emmeline Pankhurst linked voting rights to educational access.
- **Colonial and Post-Colonial Struggles:** In regions like India, feminists such as Savitribai Phule established schools for girls despite societal opposition.

II. Second-Wave Feminism and Institutional Reforms (1960s–1980s):

The second wave expanded feminist critiques to systemic biases in education:

- **Title IX (1972, USA):** Prohibited gender discrimination in federally funded education, revolutionizing sports and STEM access for women.
- **UN Decade for Women (1975–1985):** Global platforms highlighted disparities in girls’ education, particularly in the Global South.

III. Third-Wave and Intersectional Critiques (1990s–2000s):

Feminists like Kimberlé Crenshaw emphasized how race, class, and sexuality intersected with gender in education:

- **Critiques of Eurocentric Curricula:** Demanded inclusion of marginalized voices (e.g., African feminist thought, Indigenous knowledge systems).
- **Grassroots Mobilizations:** Campaigns like the “Girl Child Education Movement” in Africa addressed cultural barriers like child marriage.

Contemporary Feminist Movements and Educational Advocacy:

I. Policy and Legislative Reforms:

- **UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4):** Calls for inclusive, equitable education by 2030, with feminist NGOs monitoring progress.
- **National Initiatives:**
 - **India:** “Beti Bachao Beti Padhao” (Save the Girl Child, Educate the Girl Child) combats dropout rates.
 - **Scandinavia:** Gender-neutral pedagogies in Sweden challenge traditional stereotypes.

II. Curriculum and Pedagogical Shifts:

- **Integration of Gender Studies:** Universities now offer courses on feminist theory, queer studies, and masculinity.

- **Challenges:** Backlash against “gender ideology” in countries like Brazil and Hungary.

III. Digital Feminism and Global Advocacy:

- **#MeToo in Academia:** Exposed sexual harassment in schools and universities.
- **Malala Fund:** Uses digital platforms to advocate for girls’ education in conflict zones.

Case Studies: Feminist Reforms in Action:

I. Scandinavia: Pioneering Gender-Neutral Education:

The Scandinavian model, particularly Sweden, offers a groundbreaking approach to gender equality in education. Feminist reforms here have systematically deconstructed traditional gender roles through:

- **Policy Interventions:**
 - The Swedish National Agency for Education mandates gender-neutral language in textbooks, eliminating phrases like “fireman” or “nurse” in favor of “firefighter” and “healthcare worker.”
 - Legislation requires schools to actively counteract gender stereotypes, including the segregation of toys (e.g., encouraging boys to engage in caregiving play and girls in STEM-related activities).
- **Pedagogical Shifts:**
 - Teachers receive training to recognize unconscious biases, such as praising girls for neatness while applauding boys for assertiveness.
 - A 2018 study showed that these interventions reduced gender gaps in STEM enrollment by 15% over a decade.

- **Challenges:** Despite progress, backlash from conservative groups argues that such policies “erase biological differences,” revealing ongoing ideological battles.

II. Latin America: Feminist Student Movements and Safe Schools:

In countries like Argentina and Chile, feminist collectives have reshaped education through grassroots mobilization:

- **#NiUnaMenos (“Not One Less”):**
This anti-femicide movement expanded into education, demanding:
 - Gender-sensitive sex education to prevent violence.
 - Protocols for reporting sexual harassment in universities (e.g., Chile’s “Protocolo de Actuación” in 2016).
- **Curriculum Reforms:**
 - Argentina’s 2020 “ESI” (Comprehensive Sex Education) law requires schools to teach consent, LGBTQ+ rights, and gender equity, despite opposition from religious groups.
- **Impact:** Student-led strikes in 2018 forced governments to address institutional sexism, with universities like UBA (Buenos Aires) establishing gender quotas for faculty.

III. Afghanistan and Iran: Feminism Under Oppression:

In Taliban-ruled Afghanistan and theocratic Iran, feminist resistance has taken clandestine forms:

- **Underground Schools:**
 - The “Golden Needle Sewing School” in Kabul disguises literacy classes for girls as sewing circles.

- Online platforms like “Daricha Foundation” provide secret e-learning for Afghan women barred from universities.
- **Protest Movements:**
 - Iran’s “Woman, Life, Freedom” uprising (2022) highlighted education as a key demand, with students refusing compulsory hijab laws on campuses.
- **Global Solidarity:** Organizations like RAWA (Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan) lobby UNESCO to recognize diplomas from underground schools.

Persistent Challenges – Systemic Barriers to Feminist Reforms :

I. Cultural and Religious Opposition

- **Backlash in Conservative Regions:**
 - In Poland and Uganda, right-wing groups label gender studies as “Western propaganda,” leading to funding cuts.
 - India’s NCERT textbooks faced protests for depicting shared household chores, deemed “anti-traditional.”
- **Religious Resistance:**
 - Nigeria’s northern states reject the UN’s “Safe Schools Initiative,” citing conflicts with Sharia law.

II. Economic and Logistical Hurdles

- **Poverty and Access:**
 - In sub-Saharan Africa, 52 million girls remain out of school, often due to costs like uniforms or familial reliance on child labor (UNICEF, 2023).

- Period poverty forces 1 in 10 Kenyan girls to miss school monthly (WHO, 2022).
- **Infrastructure Gaps:**
 - Rural schools in Bolivia lack separate toilets, deterring menstruating girls.

III. Intersectional Exclusions

- **Disability and Gender:**
 - Girls with disabilities are 3x less likely to attend school than non-disabled peers (World Bank, 2021).
- **LGBTQ+ Marginalization:**
 - In the Philippines, trans students face expulsion for wearing gender-affirming uniforms.

The Future of Feminist Educational Reforms – Strategies for Equity:

I. Transnational Feminist Networks

- **Grassroots-to-Global Advocacy:**
 - Movements like “Girls Not Brides” unite 1,400 NGOs across Africa and Asia to end child marriage—a major barrier to education.
 - The “Global Partnership for Education” funds feminist organizations in Liberia and Nepal to train teachers in gender-responsive pedagogy.

II. Technology as a Tool for Inclusion

- **Digital Classrooms:**
 - Pakistan’s “TeleSchool” broadcasts lessons to girls in conflict zones.
 - Apps like “Ubongo” (Tanzania) use cartoons to teach STEM to out-of-school girls.
- **AI and Data Equity:**
 - UNICEF’s “GenderPro” initiative uses AI to track gender disparities in real-time, guiding policy adjustments.

III. Engaging Men and Boys

- **Redefining Masculinities:**
 - Brazil’s “Program H” trains boys to challenge machismo culture, reducing school violence by 40% in pilot schools.
 - The “MenCare” campaign promotes fathers’ involvement in childcare, indirectly supporting girls’ education by redistributing domestic labor.

IV. Policy Levers for Lasting Change

- **Funding with Strings Attached:**
 - Tie World Bank education grants to gender audits (e.g., Malawi’s requirement to achieve a 50% female teacher ratio).
- **Legal Frameworks:**
 - Modeled after France’s 2023 law, which fines universities failing to investigate sexual harassment.

Conclusion :

From Sweden’s gender-neutral kindergartens to Afghan women’s secret classrooms, feminist movements have proven education’s power as a site of resistance and liberation. Yet, as Section 5 underscores, victories remain uneven. The strategies in Section 6—transnational solidarity, tech innovation, and inclusive policymaking—offer a roadmap to dismantle the barriers that persist. The fight for feminist education is not just about access but about reimagining systems that have excluded for centuries.

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Beyond The Spotlight : Scripts of The Silenced

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Abstract

Bollywood has witnessed a noticeable shift in its representation of independent female protagonists, emerging more frequently in the last decade, asserting the autonomy of women and rejecting the patriarchal norms. This article contends how the representations of films like *Queen* (2024), *Thappad* (2020) and *Piku* (2015) operate within a narrow and privileged framework that perpetuates a sanitised, caste-blind mode of feminist expression, fitted to the elite, upper-caste and urban audiences, that can be called as “Savarna Feminism”. Through close textual analysis and drawing upon the intersectional feminist theory, the article questions how these films aestheticise female empowerment, while marginalising the lived realities of working-class women. The characters in these films are granted the space to rebel and define their identities, but only within the boundaries of economic security and urban modernity. The domestic workers who occupy the periphery of these narratives are presented not as co-sufferers, but as silent characters who exist to validate the moral growth of the privileged employers.

This paper examines how these films prioritise the emotional suffering of the heroines, while the violence suffered by the lower-caste and working-class women, becomes invisible. It critiques the cinematic trope of “soft feminism”, a genre of rebellion that is tasteful and non-threatening to dominant social structures. Here, the feminist resistance is not collective, but is only repackaged as self-realization. By contextualising the analysis within the broader discourse on intersectionality in Indian feminism, the article argues for a more inclusive and radical cinematic language that focuses on the voices of the marginalised women. The study concludes by calling for dismantling the Savarna aesthetic frameworks in Indian popular cinema; only then feminist filmmaking can move beyond representation to transformation.

Keywords: Savarna feminism, caste-blind narratives, soft-feminism, intersectionality

Introduction:

The discernible evolution in the depiction of women in the mainstream Bollywood cinema is very much visible in the recent three films such as *Queen* (2014), *Piku* (2015) and *Thappad* (2020), portraying independent and assertive female protagonists who challenge the societal expectations and assert personal agency. These narratives have been seen as feminist triumphs. However, a careful and critical examination can expose a more nuanced and troubling reality in portraying the female characters in these films, interrogating these cinematic texts through the lens of intersectional feminism. The “Savarna feminist” heroines like Rani in *Queen*, Amrita in *Thappad* and Piku in *Piku* are all representatives of a modern Indian womanhood who in the films assert their agency, express their self-love, and question traditional gender roles. Their

empowerment narratives can be placed in the urban space only, which is far removed from the messier realities of various discrimination in this country. Their rebellion is emotional and aesthetic rather than political and structural

Discussion:

The protagonist in *Thappad*, Amrita, a well-educated young house-wife, whose seemingly happy life is ruined because her husband Vikram shows his masculinity, slapping her in front of guests at a party. Even though many around her advised her to “move on” or to consider it as “just one slap”; Amrita starts questioning the very foundation of their marriage and refuses to tolerate domestic violence, which is undoubtedly significant. But her ability to assert her agency is because of her Savarna privilege, as she has the space, voice and resources to challenge patriarchal norms. In contrast, the domestic worker, Sunita who appears briefly, is shown experiencing regular abuse from her husband, but is not given a proper space in the main plot of the film. Instead, her suffering is normalized. When Amrita asked her about it, she shrugged it off by saying “kya kar sakte hain didi, sab sehna padta hai”, because she does not have that privilege that Amrita has. Sunita’s silence comes from structural helplessness, not from ignorance. Sadly, the film offers no resolution to Sunita’s suffering, leaving her as a flat character. In contrast, Amrita who is educated, empowered woman, her emotional pain after the ‘thappad’ becomes the film’s central concern, which is very wonderfully aestheticised through a proper cinematography and tasteful soundtrack, symbolising gestures of self-love. In the film, Sunita’s condition is used just as a foil to remind of what Amrita is “Not”. Sunita, a silent sufferer shows how women in different classes, suffer in different ways,

reflecting how domestic violence exists across various social strata.

Similarly, Piku is often celebrated as a modern, independent woman whose life revolves around managing her father's caregiving and her career. By profession, she is an architect, and is not married yet for the sake of duty and as she prioritises her autonomy. But Piku's empowerment is enabled only by her class and caste privilege. Her struggles are framed as personal and psychological, not structural. But in many scenes, the domestic helps only move silently in the background, serving the food, cleaning the house and attending to the father. They remained unnamed throughout the entire film without any stories or agency. They are just existing to facilitate Piku's journey, to show Piku's managerial efficiency, not their own realities. In one breakfast scene, Piku snaps at the maid for making a mistake, because according to the film, Piku is the only woman who has the mountains of family pressures in her head; thus, it is portrayed as normal and even justified which subtly normalises the hierarchies of labour and caste. The film romanticises the caregiving dynamic as a noble act of daughterly duty. However, the actual labour like bathing, cleaning, and feeding a chronically constipated elder is outsourced to working-class women, making their labour invisible, reinforcing what Sharmila Rege calls the "domestication of Dalit women's labour" within Brahmin household. Piku's liberty, empowerment is only imaginable in a space like elite South Delhi, English-speaking offices. Thus, feminism, here, is framed as personal choice, not collective liberation. The working-class women in the film are present, yet voiceless. They are never given a subplot, character arc, or even names. These minor characters exist only to support the protagonist's story, which is called "instrumentalization". In

Piku, the maid is often blurred, shown only when she is serving them or getting scolded. Her response to being shouted at are not shown, presenting her just as a ‘function’ to move the plot forward or to create a background, not a character, that reflects how caste and class operate silently yet very powerfully in feminist spaces also.

Queen follows Rani Mehra, a middle-class Delhi girl from a traditional Punjabi family, who embarks on her honeymoon trip to Europe alone after her fiancé cancels their wedding. Through this journey, she discovers independence, self-worth and freedom. But the problem is that her transformation is deeply tied to her experiences in Europe. Liberation becomes accessible only through the Global North, suggesting that Indian traditions are inherently regressive while the west is synonymous with ‘freedom’, which reproduces a colonial feminist binary that ‘oppression’ is often associated with East, and ‘liberation’ with West, ignoring the indigenous feminist histories and resistance within Indian contexts. Rani may defy her fiancé, but she never confronts her patriarchal family. Her rebellion does not threaten larger systems unlike the marginalised women whose rebellion often invites violence, stigma or exclusion. In this movie, we find the “Good Woman” trope; even in her freedom, Rani is portrayed as innocent, morally upright, emphasising the idea that a woman must adhere to virtue codes to be accepted, even when she is “liberated”. This restricts the idea of feminism to a certain kind of woman, one who is bold but still “good” in societal terms. While *Queen* may be empowering on the surface, it ultimately reinforces a limited feminism that does not speak for all women. The film universalizes one woman’s privileged experience as representative of feminist liberation while marginalising caste, class issues in feminism itself. This selective narrative presents

urban upper-caste feminism in Bollywood, often at the cost of intersectional representation. *Queen* presents Rani's self-discovery through an expensive journey which she can afford an adventure to Europe, which is impossible for many Indian girls.

Conclusion:

While contemporary Bollywood films such as *Queen*, *Piku* and *Thappad* have been widely celebrated for their feminist views, a closer inspection reveals how these films often uphold "Savarna feminism", only relating to a specific class and background. Feminism is often shaped by the experiences and aspirations of upper-caste, urban and privileged women. These narratives may appear as progressive, they largely exclude the voices of the socially marginalised women. The cinematic erasure in the films mirrors a troubling reality: mainstream feminism in India, which frequently fails to represent all women. The real issue today is that feminism is still not inclusive. Movements claiming to advocate for gender justice often overlook the interesting axes of caste, class and labour. Without addressing these layered oppressions, feminism risks becoming a privilege of the few rather than a tool for collective liberation. To create a truly transformative and intersectional feminist movement, both cultural narratives and real-world activism must center the lived experiences of all women, especially those who have historically been pushed to the margins. In a world, which is constantly shaped by shifting values and evolving identities, the question of whose stories get told and how, remains unresolved. As voices from the margin slowly find space within mainstream narratives, there arises a deeper need to rethink representation, power and inclusivity. What does it truly mean to be heard and who decides whose experiences are worthy of attention?

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Nexus Between Trauma and Gender in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

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Abstract

Trauma studies first developed in the 1990s and relied on Freudian theory to develop a model of trauma that imagines an extreme experience which challenges the limits of language and even ruptures meaning altogether. This model of trauma indicates that suffering is unrepresentable. Freud's theories on traumatic experience and memory define the psychological concepts that guide the field. The concept of trauma can be very much found in the chapters of Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* which won Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1988, through its characters. Most of the characters in the novel are represented, suffering in trauma which resulted from their past encounters. So the main theme of the novel is the representative nature of traumatic experiences, that the characters of the novel, both male and female characters experienced. Readers are taken through the struggles of the characters. My paper will analyse the idea of the trauma study within Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*, particularly in regards to both the genders of the story and how trauma affect both the genders differently.

Keywords: Gender, trauma, female-body, psychology.

Introduction:

Toni Morrison was born as Chloe Anthony Wofford, the second of four children from a working class, black family, in Lorain, Ohio in Feb 18, 1931. Morrison's first book, *The Bluest Eye*, published in 1970, is a novel of initiation concerning a victimized adolescent Black Girl who is obsessed by white standards of beauty and longs to have blue eyes. In 1973, the second novel, *Sula* was published and it examines the dynamics of friendship and expectations for conformity within the community. The other novel, *Songs of Solomon* (1977) is told by a male narrator in search of his identity and its publication brought Morrison to national attention. *Tar Baby* (1981) is set on a Caribbean island explores conflicts of race, class and sex. Her critically acclaimed novel '*Beloved*' (1987) won a Pulitzer Prize for fiction, is based on the true story of runaway slave, who, in the fear of being recaptured, kills her infant daughter in order to spare her life of slavery. In 1992, Morrison published *Jazz*, a story of violence and passion set in New York City's Harlem during the 1920s. Its subsequent novels were *Paradise* (1998), *Love* (2003), *A Mercy* (2008), *Home* (2012), *God Help the Child* (2015) and in all these novels, the central theme is the Black American experience; in an unjust society, and her characters struggle to find themselves and their cultural identity.

Beloved, Toni Morrison's fifth novel, is "the book (that) had to exist". For Morrison, this publication was a conscious act towards healing a painful wound: a studied memorial to the great social wrong of the enslavement of Africans. By the time Morrison published *Beloved*, she had four previous successful novels to her credit and enjoyed wide national and international fame. *Beloved* made its way onto the New York Times Bestseller List in the week of its official publication date and within a month, after an initial run of 100,000 copies;

it was in its third printing. *Beloved* appeared in 1987, almost two decades after Morrison discovered the record of Margaret Garner's story and began considering its adoption for a book. She wanted to explore the nature of slavery, not from an intellectual or slave narrative perspective, but from within the day-to-day lived experiences of the slaves themselves. Margaret Garner wanted to save her children from a fate she considered worse than death. On one hand, Morrison saw no moral justification for Garner's crime, even in the face of the brutality of institution in question. On the other hand, she wondered if it were a worse thing for a mother to do to turn her children over to a living death. Therein was her dilemma. This book also won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1988.

The novel *Beloved*, set in 1873, roughly a decade after the Emancipation Proclamation ended slavery, is the story of a former slave, named Sethe, who had escaped eighteen years earlier from Kentucky to Ohio. Ahead of her she sent her three babies, one yet unnamed girl and two little boys. On the way she gave birth to another daughter, Denver. Tracked to her new home by her former slave owner, Sethe reacted by cutting the throat of her older daughter and would have done the same with the other children had she not been stopped. For destruction of property, i.e. the child as a slave, she had to serve a jail sentence. By the time, she is freed, the ghost of the dead baby, has come to haunt the house the family occupies. Not resigned to mischievous spirit and out of fear of their mother, the two boys leave home, but Sethe and Denver accept the baby ghost and turmoils she causes as a part of their lives. This situation changes, when Paul D, another former slave from Sweet Home, the plantation on which Sethe previously lived, arrives. First, with brute force,

he rids the house of the ghost and he and Sethe become lovers. Soon after, an unknown young woman, who behaves strangely and seems to be the age that the dead baby would have been had she lived, arrives. She calls herself Beloved. Although she seems to know nothing about herself that would usefully identify her, Beloved soon become the powerful force in the house. She forces Paul D out, first from the house and then from Sethe's life. Meanwhile, Sethe, the target of Beloved's attention and the person from whom she seeks atonement, cannot keep from becoming completely captivated by the intruder; because Sethe believes that Beloved is the reincarnation of the child she murdered. As a result, Sethe suffers physical and psychological dilapidation until Denver, seeks help from the Black women community. Under the gaze of the collective force of the women in the community, who respond to the call, Beloved disappears and for the first time in her life, Denver finds the courage to make life plans that promise positive changes for the entire community. The story concludes with the return of Paul D to a recovering Sethe, to whom he offers himself in a partnership for a life they might build together.

Discussion:

During the 20th century, trauma and its impacts became relevant in literature, and as a theme it has attracted the attention of many American writers from different socio-cultural background. As a consequence, many traumatic literary works emerged that portrayed historical events in order to represent the traumatizing past that has haunted many African Americans. Toni Morrison's master piece *Beloved* shows the consequences of slavery on the black people and the great impact of the traumatizing experiences and memories that come back to haunt them.

Morrison's master piece *Beloved* goes beyond the image of the past, it represents the hidden truth and the traumatic experiences that the African Americans had to endure after the American Civil War (1861-1865). Through the novel trauma persists and signs the blockage and interrupts the good progress of time, diverted from the past, common and painful torments haunt the characters through repeated returns which are unreadable but claims to be revealed. Through *Beloved*, Morrison brought the black trauma to light. Somehow, she revealed the unspoken and she wrote about the painful past that many people knew but never dared to talk about. Her novel bears the dark memories that the black people have suffered from. It consists of the characters' flashbacks that reveal the details of a tragic past full of traumatic experiences such as slavery, acts of violence, sexual assault and rape. Throughout the novel, the characters have witnessed many traumatic experiences which, in return affected their mental health status.

Morrison has been contemplated as the most important and representative modish African American woman novelist. She published her first novel in 1970 and her most celebrated novel *Beloved* in 1987. She has been awarded the Nobel Prize for literature.

Beloved scouts a part of African American history through the delineation of the individual and collective trauma. The past stands for the traumatizing experience of Slavery and its repercussions in general, and for Sethe's infanticide in particular. Embedded in the framework, the story focuses on the recovery of an isolated, traumatized individual, Sethe and her reintegration into a community that is itself a victim of trauma. The novel explores the characters' problematic relationship to their past, which is inevitably associated with the brutal history of slavery, and examines their attempts and

failures to avoid or confront their history of suffering. Being a novel of personal and collective remembering, *Beloved* explores the dynamics of memory. The traumatized characters are ripped up between two opposing impulses towards the past, the imperative to remember and the distressed need to forget. The characters are suspended in time, in a meaningless present, their only aim being to fight back the past. However, the past cannot just be forgotten but must be tackled, for it goes back literally and materially to haunt and oppress the central characters of the novel in the form of Sethe's rejuvenated daughter Beloved.

Trauma theory and narrative approach is an important field in literary criticism for its role to disclose the traumatic relationships and their effects on the traumatic families and communities. Thus, trauma theory operates from traces of memory and history, not positioning full reconstruction but rather elaborating the dynamic relationship between individual and collective memory. In *Beloved*, Morrison is caught by a real life story of a former slave along with two artistic pieces to mould the main plot that deals with the traumatic past of the African American community. Morrison uses trauma narrative, according to Sun et al. (2007,1) in order to "think of literature as something that gives expression to the voiceless or to that which could not make itself heard before". In order to build *Beloved's* plot(s) from the fragmented pieces and stories, Morrison uses main strategies of traumatic narrative and themes.

As a way for saving her children from the horror of the Enslavement, Morrison in *Beloved* makes Sethe hurts her two sons, slaughters her elder daughter Beloved and isolated the younger one Denver in the isolated property of 124. Morrison uses the traumatic narrative strategies to show the effects of the traumatic experiences of Slavery on the

individuals and the whole community through constructing a evocative image for the complicated relationships between Sethe and her two daughters. Morrison recounts Sethe's story through her daughters' closeness and their representation as "the voice of repressed memory" and "the voice of collective amnesia". Such amity is revealed through the use of "dialogical conceptions of witnessing" when Morrison forges Beloved as a bystander for her death and Denver's birth thereby disclose their dissociated identities. Beloved represents the memories of Sethe's past that never have to be spoken aloud: it is recorded in the unspeakable unspoken language referred to at the apex of the novel. Thus, Sethe intentionally suppresses all her past memories regarding her horror from slavery that leads her to kill her younger daughter, Beloved. For this reason, Sethe's suppressed memory is exemplified by Beloved's death, which is indelible past that she wants to forget: "I was talking about time. It's so hard for me to believe in it [...] it was my rememory. [...] Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there"(35-36). Denver appears both aware and dismayed from her mother's act of killing Beloved, so she thinks that "Sethe was trying to make up for the handshaw; Beloved was making her pay for it. But there would never be an end to that, and seeing her mother diminished shamed and infuriated her" (251). Because of this, Denver becomes detached and bewildered between her love for and horror from her mother. However, Morrison discloses that Denver's detachment and confusion towards her mother makes her represents "the collective amnesia" that Morrison has referred to before because Denver doesn't want to know anything about her mother's past regarding her mother's act of slaying Beloved.

Since trauma and memory are so closely connected, it is difficult to separate the two terms, but for inquisitive reasons it is mandatory to make a distinction. Traumatic memory could be observed as an escalation of haunting memory. Morrison's novel has been read in terms of trauma by numerous critics. In *Beloved*, trauma is applied as a narrative method to make real the representation- disobeying experience of Slavery. Repetitive circumstances appear frequently in *Beloved*, where the memories of traumatic events of the past haunt the characters like ghost. This reoccurring or haunting effect is related to a characteristic phenomenon experienced by victims of trauma, namely the composition of time: This non-linear relationship to time becomes visible in the novel's traumatized characters, who are sadly draped in a perpetuity of past and present events. Their traumatic memory "does not develop or progress in the time" but remains the same (Herman 175).

In the context of trauma, the novel also addresses the difficulty that as someone else's property, ex-slaves have lost mastery over their own bodies and in response to the cruelty of Slavery, suffer from the dissolution and loss of their sense of self. All the novel's main characters exhibit the symptoms of trauma and fight to reconnect with and recover their exploited and commodified bodies. *Beloved* is a novel about a crisis of subjectivity, a crisis inseparable from the traumatic heritage of slave culture. As a kind of personified symptom of the trauma of slavery, the figure of Beloved, in particular, personified the absence or fragmentation of selfhood. A sense of self hangs on personal freedom and independency, which the slaves were rejected. This is exemplified by Baby Suggs, who "call(s) [her]self nothing", because she doesn't have her own name. She cannot accept her slave name, Jenny. Therefore,

she renames and affirms herself with a name that gives her an identity. Similarly, Stamp Paid has chosen his own symbolic name to celebrate his freedom from debt. Again, *Beloved* doesn't have a given name but carries a common name that represents all the beloved people who died through slavery, including Sethe's baby.

All the characters in *Beloved* are sufferers of trauma, but the novel centers primarily on the recovery and conflict of Sethe's traumatic memories. She's traumatized by many past experiences, the terrible memories of which haunt her and disconnect her from the community. Sethe has not simply suppressed her memories of the past nor is she obsessed with them. On the contrary, Sethe's problem is not so much that she had suppressed her memories, but rather she's unable to forget. Sethe has different 'categories' of memories: some she can consciously remember but doesn't want to: other-her traumatic memories- return as uncontrollable flashbacks and only a few has she completely repressed. Most of her memories she cannot remember completely, even though she has witnessed the terrible events, such as the slaveholders raping her and stealing her breast milk. After escaping physical slavery, however "Sethe has [only] twenty-eight days[...]of unslaved life"(95). She inaccurately believes that she has "claimed herself"(95), until her former slave master and "owner" traces her down to claim her and her children to which Sethe reacts with demolition of the "property" to be claimed; she slays her baby daughter. From then on, she's enslaved by the haunting memories and belated effect of all the traumatic experiences she seeks to forget. Sethe's momentary happiness with her family and friends after her escape is "followed by eighteen years of disapproval and a solitary life"(173). The community's disapprobation towards Sethe is settled in what they elucidated as her "prideful"

and “misdirected” behaviour after she killed her baby and went to prison. This conduct, however can be explained in terms of trauma and seems to a general reaction. Sethe didn’t want to be Schoolteacher’s victim again. Breaking down and mourning would have been compatible to being vanquished and Sethe actually thinks she has succeeded by killing her baby. As a victim of trauma, Sethe is not able to discover the past from the present and the memory of the day she killed her baby is so real and enormous that she believes it is happening again when Mr. Bodwin comes to her place to pick up Denver for work. Sethe undergoes a traumatic repetition, a reflection of the day Schoolteacher came to bring her back to Sweet Home. This time however, Sethe, chooses to kill the source of evil instead of its target. In regards to this incident, we can assert that Sethe is traumatized not only by her past encounters but also by having survived them.

Sethe scuffles with her traumatic memories in her daily encounters. The memories of her slave experience, her act of infanticide, and its results are haunting and inevitable. They come back in unadvertised flashbacks against her will and are more realistic than anything around her at that moment. Sethe’s traumatic memories might flow at any moment and in any form, prompted by sensory perceptions in the present, such as vision, sound or smell. Therefore, her narrative of the past is shattered; she tells only selected parts as Denver critically remarks: “You never told me all what happened. Just that they whipped you and you run off, pregnant. With me”(36). Sethe’s traumatic encounters of intense loss has enforced her to aim entirely and almost compulsively on the defence and wellbeing of her remaining child, Denver. This anxiety even transcends death, because for her, past and present; life and death are the same. Paul D contemplates Sethe’s fidelity problematic even though

at the time of his observation he has not even known to her infanticide. Even before *Beloved* comes back, Sethe's trauma demonstrates itself in bodily symptoms; she feels her body falling apart. This feeling of deteriorating is a typical symptom of trauma which epitomizes the lack of a coherent sense of self resulting from the horror of her past experiences. Another physical symptom of Sethe's trauma is the absence of commotion on her back. As a result of being lashed, Sethe's back is covered with huge scars. These scars are the memories of the body and a metaphor for the violence endured by psyche. They are silent and bodily expression of her physical and psychological trauma. Since Sethe has never expressed about that "truth", the gashes have not really cured but just become verdant with scars.

Again, there's also the references of trauma related with the character Paul D. Paul D's story and his emergence at 124 is foremost to the lives of the two women of the household. Not unlike Sethe, Paul D also reacted to his trauma in an utmost and lethal manner; he strives to kill his slaveholders. Paul D gets sent to a prison camp in Alfred, Georgia, where he starts to show first physical symptoms of the trauma encountered at Sweet Home. He begins to shake unmanageably but at first no-one observes; only later does the shaking become visibly noticeable. Paul D's encounters in the chain gang emblemizes the connection between individual trauma and collective trauma as he illustrates the interdependence among the prisoners: "For one lost, all lost. The chain that held them would save all or none [...] (110)". After his absconding from the chain gang the trembling vanishes and he no longer feels his enduring immediately conveyed through his body. Although his physical activities are indeed unblemished, he is left an emotional debris with a heart as inaccessible as a rusted "tobacco tin"(72). All

the destruction and embarrassment suffered during his time at the plantation has taken away his nobility and identity. In order to persist he must forget the prison and “Halle’s face and Sixo laughing”, and, in so doing, he slams down a lavish portion of his head, employing on the part that helps him walk, eat, sleep and sing (41).

His traumatic experiences spook him and he literally keeps running away from the past. His solution is to suppress his memories, to metaphorically seal them into the “tobacco tin”, which used to be his heart and to never unshackle them. Paul D triumphs in repressing his painful memories of the past, in contrast to Sethe, who is not able to repress her traumatic impressions and must deal with them everyday. Paul D’s deportment shows how much the slave experience not only by the suffering of violence but also loss: “The best thing, he knew, was to love just a little bit; everything just a little bit, so when they broke its back, or shoved it in a croaker sack, well may be you’d have a little love left over for the next one”(45). The preservative measure becomes Paul D’s philosophy. After roaming around through the country for seven years, restless and homeless, he has some love remained and tries to settle down with Sethe, with whom he splits his past at Sweet Home. The women in the house count on him and tell him personal things because he understands their sorrows and tackle him. But he cannot talk about his own pain and suffering, which are sealed away in the “tin box” in his chest. It takes Paul D a while to perceive that he was yet to confront and work through his past before he can construct a new life Sethe. Beloved unintentionally instigates this process in Paul D when she propels him to touch her and have sex with her in the cold house. She shakes him so much that his locked “tobacco tin”, which is full of traumatic

memories, breaks open and calls into presence of his lost “red heart”(117). Beloved has so much power over Paul D, it mortifies and embarrasses him. He feels as if Beloved has dispossessed his manhood and despite his will to talk to Sethe about it, Paul D fails to break the spell Beloved has radiated on him.

Only after he has left 124, does Paul D discern the full impact of Beloved’s unlocking of his traumatic suppressed memories: “His tobacco tin, blown open, spilled contents that floated freely and made him their play and prey”(218). He cannot tolerate to confront these painful memories. He recognizes that he has merely repressed the past but not yet faced it : “Just when doubt, regret and every single unasked question was packed away, long after he believed he had willed himself into being, at the very time and place he wanted to take root-[Beloved] moved him”(221).

Not until the end of the novel, when “Beloved is truly gone”(263) does Paul D feel ready to toil through his past and return to 124. He is able to evacuate his memories of Beloved behind too: “Sifting daylight dissolves the memory [of Beloved and him in the cold house], turns it into smut specks floating in light. Paul D shuts the door” and slams this chapter of his life (264).

Conclusion:

Toni Morrison’s novel *Beloved* tells the story of one woman’s psychological process as she comes to terms with her trauma. Morrison gives voice to these unspeakable things through the literary methods she employs. This study has demonstrated that *Beloved* is a novel of trauma. It embodies personal trauma as Sethe’s resurrected dead baby and collective trauma as the representative of “Sixty Million and more” people who died during slavery and are “reaching out to the living,

demanding to be remembered”. *Beloved* approaches the history of the South during the Civil War era and explores the effects of the past on the present. Hence, *Beloved* presents itself as the unfolding of a mystery, as an effort at historical investigation associated structurally and thematically with psychoanalytic recovery. *Beloved* insists on the interconnection and interaction of personal and collective past. The analysis of *Beloved* conducted in this paper suggests that it would be interesting to further explore the problem of the past as a haunting force in Morrison’s novel that expresses an interest in the important influence of the past on the present. The novel, also, insists that, although its characters are victims of the personal and collective trauma of slavery, they are responsible for their own lives. Accordingly, they must work through their memories of the past, despite the pain and sorrow entailed in this process. *Beloved*’s living presence demands that the past, in particular the traumatic slave experience, be remembered actively before being put to rest. Because of their traumatic nature, past events in *Beloved* cannot be recalled and retold easily. The protagonists in *Beloved* must first learn to talk about their past: this is part of working through trauma and functions as a healing process. The horrors of the past must be retold to ensure that they are overcome and not repeated. Furthermore, an understanding of the communal and personal history attained through hearing and retelling the stories of the past is essential to the process of forming an independent identity, as illustrated by Denver’s story. To put it in a nut shell, the ending of *Beloved* seems to suggest that at least the principal characters have successfully started to confront their traumatic personal memories of the past through the encounter with their memories’ embodiment, *Beloved*. But whether the community has also adequately dealt with *Beloved*, or just

forgotten her, like an unpleasant dream, remains uncertain. Despite the novel's insistence on the necessity of closure on a personal level, ambivalence towards history persists on a collective level embodied by the figure of Beloved, for her sudden disappearance remains ambiguous until the very end of the novel. Through Beloved's story, it's maintained that in the context of the traumatic and traumatized past, no closure is ever available; history remains at once an irrecoverable loss and a perpetually open wound, that is to say although Beloved disappears, the logic of trauma that seems to inform this novel insists that nothing is forgotten.

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Post Colonial Literature, Feminism and The Indian Classroom: An Attempt to Voice the Unheard Rural Women of India

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Abstract

“The Rural Female Agricultural Worker remains an unacknowledged entity”-says Aardra Surendran (2020, p-149). Post Colonial Feminist Academic Writing strives to delve deeper into everyday living experiences of ‘rural women’ through the lens of Post colonial literature to uncover the social restraints in their lives, embittered by tales of corruption, scandals and personal pain. Rural women must be read more widely, in translations, across cultures, boundaries and geographies. Women’s significant contribution to agricultural revolution, food security and nutrition, informal work, domestic work within families and households in rural areas shall be increasingly recognized through Post Colonial literature. The present paper is an attempt to show how Post Colonial Feminist literature shall strengthen the world view for rural women and solidify their identity. An attempt has been made to suggest how feminist aspect in Post Colonial literature shall not only

share some significant concerns and characteristics of the 'Indian Rural women' but also restore a connection between rural women and the world beyond the villages. An attempt has been made to recognise the unappreciated women for their relentless support as the 'lifeforce of rural livelihood and sustenance'.

Keywords: Postcolonial literature, feminism, indian rural women, agricultural revolution

Introduction:

Writing, as Annie Ernaux, the Noble laureate in literature, believes, "is an act", a curtain raiser, fostering social equity. Her "belief in the liberating force of writing" (Anders Olson, Chairman of Nobel Committee) makes her use language as a 'knife', as she calls it, "to tear apart the veils of imagination". (Shaffi Sarah, The Guardian, 2022) also see <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-63156199>.

Let us tear apart the veils under which 'the Indian Village women' work. Not only do they work under pressure but keep on smiling with dignity amidst poverty as 'life giver of agrarian livelihood'. Writing shall liberate 'the rural women' from drudgery or misery. Writing shall definitely portray with courage the agony of Indian rural women, describing their work load, shameful circumstances, humiliation and shall enable us to see who they are, delve into their inner life with toil and hardship.

Rural women must be read more widely, in translations, across cultures, boundaries and geographies. They must be brought to focused world view through post-colonial narratives, feminist literature so that their personal sufferings, sorrow get attention of people, public and government. Rural women, with their trials and tribulations, experiences of daily lives, their status in the wake of such changes, must be viewed through

the lens of history. Post-colonial literature shall present experiences of rural women, their anti-colonial struggle and pursuit for self-determination from a range of philosophical, cultural and historical perspectives.

Voicing the Unheard: Literature Review on the Rural Women of India:

Though literary works and studies on ‘**gender issues, reflection, resistance and representation**’ have dealt with **feminist perspectives in literary works, rural women, particularly from India, remain underrepresented** even in the **literary sphere** of life. Coveted authors like Rabindranath Tagore, Kamala Markendaya, Anita Desai, Gayatri Spivak, Sarojini Naidu and few others have contributed immensely to writing on women issues and identity **but rural women’s stories still remain unsung, confined to the walls of rural boundaries.** Looking at the deplorable state of women and their relegated background even in literary pieces, **Jaiwanti Dimri in *Image and Representation of Rural Women*, “protests their negligence as represented in the literary canon.”** She feels the **rural woman’s entire story of existence “to be determined by domination and subordination with her feminist consciousness also subjected to subjugation by the urban middle-class women.”** She feels the need for “**Reclaiming her lost territory, voicing the voiceless,**” (Nagarajan, The Hindu, 2012) also see (Dimri, 2012, p-1, Introduction)

Feminist literature, gender perspectives in literary writings shall address the problems, requirements of rural women and find a way to overcome their problems. Postcolonialism and studies on feminism shall enable us to look beyond our contours to -

- * Get an insight into female characters, feminism in their own socio- cultural milieu.

- * Enable us to comprehend feminism in a new light.
- * Narrate personal experiences of rural women in daily lives of Postcolonial India.
- * Go through the stories, real-life incidents of strong women characters.
- * Develop respect for the strong spirit of women, victorious under stress.
- * Attempt presenting rural women's transformation into economically, psychologically & socially independent women.
- * "Discuss myriad themes of sexual violence...repression of female sexuality...to question oppression". (Aditi Upamanyu, 2017)
- * Remind us of rural women being worst sufferers of racial prejudice, political conflict and religious disparities.
- * Get to know the "feminine struggles resisting patriarchal challenges, asserting identity, voice and dignity". (Md. Shafiqul Islam & Rama Islam, April, 2019, pp 51-64)
- * Contribute to Multiculturalism and voicing the Marginalized in Postcolonial Literature.
- * Discuss Rural Indian Women in the light of "**Feminism and Postcolonialism in a Global & Local Frame**" (Bahri Deepika, 2009, pp-193)
- * Gives an attempt to encourage Rural Women, give voice to her pathos, anguish over her troubled circumstances.
- * Develop feelings of positivity, confidence & self-esteem in Rural Women to face challenges of life.
- * Aim at liberation of rural women of India.
- * "Re-tell Indian rural women's stories from historical and post-colonial perspectives to prominently portray their identities". (Upamanyu, 2017)

There is too much to say regarding Indian women. No one is there to solve their tangled web of emotions. Longing gaze of the rural woman expresses her yearning for a colourful life. Her story of longing and loneliness must be treated with care and compassion.

Connecting Classrooms, Communities & Cultures for the Cause of Rural Women :

Today's multilingual and multicultural Indian classrooms demand teaching methodologies to be adapted to **course curriculum, connecting rural terrains and local cultural landscape to not only strengthen rural heritage and promote local indigenous practices but also transform classrooms to global work places** of teaching and learning. **Vocational education and multi skilling disciplines, when rooted in the strength of our rural culture and indigenous heritage, shall eventually strengthen the identity of rural women rooted in local traditions, getting connected to the world sphere.** Students of vocational disciplines must be acquainted with local weaving patterns, agricultural methods, indigenous occupations and other local practices adopted by rural women, to be expanded to world stage. **Meaningful sessions with the local indigenous women shall benefit students to learn real world applications, promote rural women's dream, preserve local heritage and allow them to explore how rural women's identity is shaped by various socio-cultural, economic, psychological, historical and political situations in relationship with race, class, religion and environment.** Classrooms echoing with the inspiring stories of rural women, ringing with their success stories, shall be a celebration of their transformation, realization of their rural dreams.

Students must be taught to use bias-free language in their writings to make sure that all genders are fairly

represented. “Users of English are to be advised to get rid of all forms of language which reflect gender, racial or class bias...for example ‘home-maker’ instead of ‘housewife’, ‘chair’ instead of ‘chairman’, ‘spokesperson’ instead of ‘spokesman’...” (B.K.Das, K. Samantray, Mohanty Saveeta, Pani Susmita, Nayak Rath 2009, *An Introduction to Professional English & Soft Skills*, pp 39-40). **Books on rural women, their incidents, stories, real-life adventures must find a suitable place in shelves of essential readings in library.** Let the students search the identity and history of rural women with their stories of struggle, success and survival at the centre of colonial and postcolonial affairs for inspiration and growth as rural entrepreneurs. If literature is a positive platform to voice the indigenous and marginalised like the unrepresented rural woman, then there must yet be some more practical steps like doing case studies and project works on successful, award winning rural female personalities, female agriculturalists and weavers to make these women, role models to voice positive change, advocate equality, justice and progress.

A Journey to the Unrepresented Terrains of India:

The government initiatives for implementation of ‘NEP 2020’, integrating vocational education with ‘Lok Vidya’, shall be realised when institutions collaborate with rural indigenous practices, providing students exposure to ground realities.

Exploring interconnectedness with rural women, their local occupations, vocational disciplines, educational institutions, inclusion of new methods of technology assisted teaching-learning processes shall inspire change for equity.

Our local crafts, artefacts, weavings (bandha kala, ‘Sambalpuri & Sonepuri bastrakala, hastatanta’), handloom products, decorative items (pattachitra, chandua)

stand for our priceless heritage and the rural women associated with these trades must be brought to limelight, to global classrooms and educational institutions to make local products global, fostering rural and indigenous entrepreneurship.

Bringing the rural indigenous women to institutions and giving scope to express their practical ideas (making karanj oil from karanj flowers, dry fruits from char tree, oil from mahul flowers) shall expand opportunities, empower our girl students through hands-on-skills. Rural women's participation in the institute's programmes, delivering their success stories, making them a part of vocational classes, where they can share their practical experience in indigenous occupations, agricultural practices, construction, weaving and other areas of interest can encourage women, local artisans, girl students to connect and develop confidence for rural innovations, employment and ventures. Creating an enabling environment above racial prejudices for women, finding opportunities to celebrate rural women's achievements & their success stories as entrepreneurs shall inspire the girls to break the shackles of bondage for 'Atma Nirvar Bharat'.

Interaction with rural women entrepreneurs, visiting field works, getting acquainted with new vocations shall build self-esteem, self-reliance of girls, boost their self-confidence in the process of recognising these 'veiled potentialities'. Increased no of participation in programmes for 'Skill Development' shall voice the cause and concerns of rural women and encourage young girls from village community for feminist scholarship, self- entrepreneurship, growth and changing our perception towards gender stereotypes.

Conclusion :

Ambitious projects and policies of Government pertaining to women emancipation necessitates joint

responsibilities. Central government programs on “Stree Shakti Project”, “Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas”, a sub- scheme of “Integrated Rural Development Program”, “Beti Aapki Dhan”, “Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Yojana” and Odisha State Government initiatives in form of “Mission Shakti”, “Subhadra Jojana” envisage upliftment of women and strive to ensure female security. Combined efforts of educational institutions, self-help groups, rural gentry and government shall definitely accomplish an artist’s vision of rural imagination with ladies holding basket full of grass, straw, flowers and corn but independent, self-assertive and smiling with dignity.

Let us honour and acknowledge our rural women, **‘life-force of rural revival’** in the government’s mission of **“empowering women to empower nation”** as a vital **“ingredient to fight against extreme poverty, hunger and malnutrition”**, says Graziano Da Silva, UN agriculture chief. For details see (UN News, Global perspective Human stories, 16 December, 2016) also see (United Nations, International Day of Rural Women, 15 October, 2024) <https://www.un.org/en/observances/rural-women-day>

Recognising the burden, the ‘Indian Village Women’ have borne with courage, **let’s bridge the interrogating gap between ‘the marginalised’ and ‘the privileged’, ‘the rural’ and ‘the global’, “claiming rural areas with equal opportunities for all.”** See Rural Women’s Day | United Nations (<https://www.un.org/en/observances/rural-women-day>)

Let us re-write the transformation story of the ‘Indian Rural Women’, re-defining their existence, waiting to be heard.
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- <https://m.barnesandnoble.com>socio-economic> upliftment of rural women through SHGs

The Role and Position of Women In Indian Societies

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Abstract

The role and position of women in a society is very crucial. In the Pre- Vedic and the- Vedic stage women attained a respectful and dignified position. They have been given the equal status and position to their male counterpart in the society. Gradually the status of women has declined and underwent a major change. Now, the women were deprived of their religious, social, political, economic and other freedoms. Tradition and customs in a patriarchal system prevent women and ultimately it leads to the degradation of women in the society. Despite constitutional guarantees and legislative measures, women in India face significant social, political, and cultural barriers. Patriarchal norms, societal expectations and family responsibilities often restrict women. Drawing on quantitative data from the secondary sources and group discussions, the study highlights the relationship between poverty, traditional norms, gender biasness, religion, family burden. This research explores the causes, consequences and potential solutions to the degrading status and position of women in Indian Societies.

The study concludes that a multi- faceted approach is essential to address the position and status of women in the society.

Keywords: Polygamy, feticide, infanticide, molestation.

Introduction:

Women play a vital and crucial role in the development and the smooth functioning of the society. So, any study of society is incomplete without study of the status, role, and even position of women in it. In India, women have played a very significant role in various capacities, from grass root activities to holding high level political offices. Historically, Indian society has been patriarchal. The Rig Vedic Women in India played a high status in society and their condition was very good. Even the women were provided opportunity to attain high intellectual and spiritual standard in comparison to men. Many Vedic hymns were also composed by women intellectuals. But from enjoying free and respectable position in the Vedic society, women started being discriminated against since the Later – Vedic period in respect of education, and other rights and facilities. Child marriage, Sati dah, Purdah, and polygamy further worsened the status and position of women. Their status and position is rather deteriorated. In recent years, the role and status of women has undergone some drastic changes due to globalization and commercialization.

Objectives of the Study :

- To study the role and status of women from ancient time.
- To investigate whether the status of women in modern Indian is maintained or deteriorated.
- To highlight the progress made towards gender equality and identifies the existing gaps that need to be addressed.
- To go insight into the effectiveness of policies aimed at empowering women.

Review of Literature :

Mishra, R.C. (2006) explores that during ancient time, women had superior position than the men. In ancient India, though patriarchal system was highly prevalent, yet women enjoyed a position of respect and dignity.

Bader, C. (2013) writes that women were properly educated in the early Vedic period. Women had also the freedom to choose their life partners. This system was known as “Swayambar”.

Altekar, A. (2014) states that women enjoyed equivalent status & rights like their male counterparts in ancient Indian societies. We find its evidence from the works of the famous Grammarians like Katyayan and Patanjali.

Mishra et al. (2023) reveals that the role, status and activities of women can be divided into three main historical periods. These are – the ancient, the medieval and the modern.

Methodology:

The methodology of this paper is completely descriptive in nature. The required information are collected from different secondary sources like Epics, Vedas, Smritis and Puranas and other publications relating to women in the ancient age. Hindu religious books like Vedas, Upanisadas, Smritis, Puranas, Mahabharata, Ramayana etc. depict the true picture of ancient Indian society. Manusmriti, Rigveda, Puranas etc. have also been the source of information to examine the social, domestic, economic, educational, religious and political status of women in ancient Indian history. The Vedas are the most sacred Hindu scriptures highlighted the respectable and high position of women in the ancient Indian society. It also provided valuable information needed for preparing this paper. The Rig Veda revealed the economic rights of a daughter who resides forever with her parents.

Discussion :

The role and position of women in India has reached its present situation through a process of evolution from the Vedic period. The process of can briefly be discussed as below –

I. Women during the Ancient Period:

Ancient Period in India is spanning from roughly 300BCE to 500CE. It encompasses the period from the rise of the Indus Valley Civilization to the end of the Gupta Empire. The end of the Gupta Empire is often considered the end of the Ancient Period and the beginning of the Medieval Period in India. The Indian cultural tradition begins with the Vedas. The Early Vedic period is also known as the Rig Vedic period. The Rig Vedic Women in India enjoyed honourable position in society. They were provided opportunity to attain high intellectual and spiritual standard. Here, it may be mentioned that there were many women Rishis during this period. The monogamy was most common during this period though the richer section of the society indulged polygamy. There was no Sati system or early marriage. But from enjoying free and esteemed position in the Rig Vedic society, women started being discriminated against since the Post- Vedic period in education other rights and facilities. Child marriage, widow burning, the purdah, and polygamy further worsened the position of women.

The role of women in Ancient Indian Literature is immense. There were many learned ladies in Ancient India. There were two types of scholarly women – the Brahnavadinis and the Sadyovadhus. The Brahnavadinis were the women who never married and cultured the Vedas throughout their live. They strive for the highest philosophical knowledge of Brahman (universal consciousness). Sadyovadhus dedicated to domesticity and the welfare of their families. They normally

belong to a sage's wife. Panini mentioned of female students studying the Vedas. The female teachers were called Upadhyayi. Ashoka got his daughter, Sanghamitra, inducted into preaching Buddhism. He sent her daughter to Singhal (Srilanka). From the Jaina texts, we came to know about the Kousambi princess, Jayanti, who remained a spinster to study religion and philosophy. Often, Buddhist nuns composed hymns. Women also wrote Sanskrit plays and verses, excelled in music, painting, and other fine arts.

Women often enjoyed prominent roles in politics in Ancient India. Megasthenes in his book 'Indica', mentioned the Pandya women running the administration. The Satavahana queen, 'Nayanika' ruled the kingdom on behalf of her minor son. So did Pravabati, the daughter of Chandragupta-II, on behalf of the minor Vakataka prince. A little after the Gupta period, queens used to rule in Kashmir, Orissa and Andhra. Princess Vijaybhattacharika acted as the provincial ruler under the Chalukya King, Vikramaditya-I. Women were provincial and village administrators in the Kannada region.

II. Women in the Buddhist Period (500 BCE to 1300AD):

The status of women improved a little during the Buddhist period. But there was no tremendous change that had been seen. Buddhism did not believe in caste system. So, some of the rigidities and restrictions imposed by the caste system were relaxed. Lord Buddha preached the equality and he tried to improve the cultural, educational, and religious status of women. During the rule of Chandragupta Maurya, Ashoka, Sri Harsha and others, women regained a part of their lost freedom and status due to the relatively broadminded Buddhist philosophy. The women were not only confined to household activities but also they could get educational career if they desired. In the religious field also women achieved a distinctly

a superior place. Women were permitted to live a life of 'Sanyasis'. Many women took leading role in Buddhist monastic- life. Women had their sangha called the Bhikshuni Sangha. The sangha gave women cultural activities and social services and ample opportunities for public life. But their political and economic status remained unchanged.

III. Women in the Medieval India (500AD to 1500AD):

It was a time of regional kingdoms, devotion to deities, and a growing textile industry. This age proved to be highly disappointing for the Indian women. During this period, the status of women further deteriorated. When foreign conquerors like Muslims invaded India they brought with their own culture and customs. For them women was the sole property of her father, brother or husband. She did not have any will of her own. This type of thinking also crept into the minds of Indian people. And they also began to treat their own women like this. Original Indian people wanted to shield their women from the Muslim invaders. Polygamy was the norm for these Muslim invaders and they picked up any women forcibly and kept her in their 'harems'. In order to protect themselves the Indian women started using 'Purdah' (a veil), which covers her body. The women were not allowed to move freely and this lead to the further deterioration of their status. Now, Indian people began to consider a girl as misery and a burden, which has to be protected or shielded from the eyes of Muslim intruders and needs extra care. The boys helped the family as an earning hand. All these gave rise to some new evils such as Restriction on Girl Education Sati, Jauhar, Child Marriage, Restriction on Widow Re-marriage, Purdah System, etc.

IV. Women in the Modern India:

The status of women in modern India gained. During the pre – independence era, women in India were active

participants in the struggle for freedom. Figures like Annie Besant and Sarojini Naidu played the pivotal role in mobilizing women and advocating for their rights. The women's suffrage movement gained momentum during this period, leading to increased political awareness and participation among women. After independence, India adopted a constitution that enshrined the principles of equality and non-discrimination. Women were granted the right to vote and participate in the politics on an equal footing with men. Political leaders, such as Indira Gandhi, who became the first female Prime Minister of India and Pratiba Devi Singh Patil, who became the first female President of India. The active involvement of women in independence movement and formative years of the republic laid the foundation for their continued participation in politics. The modern Indian woman in one hand is at the peak of ladder of success, on the other hand they are mutely suffering the violence afflicted on them by their own family members. As compared with the past, women achieved a lot. But in reality they have to still travel long. The sex ratio of India shows that Indian is still in the grip of prejudice against female. At present also, the Indian women are facing serious problems like poor health, maternal mortality, mistreatment, overwork, dowry, human trafficking, domestic violence, female infanticide/ feticide.

Findings and Suggestions:

I. The Problems of Indian Women:

From the above discussion we find that there are many problems which the Indian women have to go through daily. These problems have become the part and parcel of life. Some of them have accepted them as their life. The main problem of Indian women include Lack of education, lack of power, Poor and unhygienic health, Maternal mortality, Mistreatment,

Overwork, Dowry, Female infanticide/ foeticide, Crime against women, Human Trafficking, Domestic violence, Workplace Discrimination etc.

II. Factors Responsible for the Degradation:

India is a patriarchal society. Patriarchy is often regarded as one of the main causes of the degradation of women in society. Tradition and custom in a patriarchal system prevent women and ultimately it leads to the degradation of women in the society. Pratibha Mukherjee, a renowned sociologist has identified some major reasons for the low status of women in Post-Vedic period. These reasons are imposition of Brahmanical austerities on the entire society, rigid restrictions imposed by the caste system and the joint- family system, lack of educational facilities for women, introduction of non- Aryan wife in the Aryan household and foreign invasion.

5.3 SPECIAL INITIATIVES:

To enhance the status of Indian women in social, domestic, economic, educational, religious and political sector the following initiatives have been taken in recent years –

5.3.01 The Indian Constitution provides several safeguards to ensure gender equality and promote women's participation in politics. Articles 14, 15, 16 and 39 emphasize the principles of equality before law, prohibition of discrimination, equality of opportunity, and the state's obligation to ensure adequate means of livelihood for men and women equality.

5.3.02 The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments proved a landmark reforms that mandated the reservation of one- third of seats for women in Panchayati Raj (rural local bodies) and Municipalities (Urban Local Bodies). This legislation has resulted in substantial increase in women's representation at the grass -root level. Additionally, the women's reservation Bill, which seeks to reserve 33% of seats in the Lok

Sabha (House of the People) and State Legislative Assemblies for women.

5.3.03 National Commission for Women (in January, 1992), the statutory body with a specific mandate to study and monitor all matters relating to the constitutional and legislative safeguards provided for women, review the existing legislation to suggest amendments however necessary was set up it.

5.3.04 The National Plan of Action for Girl Child (1991-2000) is to ensure survival, protection and development of girl child with ultimate objection of building up a better future for the girl.

5.3.05 National Policy for Empowerment of Women (2001) has been set up to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women.

Conclusion :

It may be concluded that in the Vedic Period, Indian women occupied a dignified status in the society. They had ample rights in the social, religious, economic and political fields. Through this study we can say that women have equal participation in human development, but she lack in the society. Today, women are not treated with respect as in the ancient Indian society. Lots of crimes against them are frequently seen in the modern society. Constitutional provisions are not sufficient to get women the respectable position in the society. Despite constitutional guarantees and legislative measures, women in India face significant social, political and cultural barriers. Patriarchal norms, societal expectations, and family responsibilities often restrict women. Traditional gender role and the burden of household duties and obligations limit the time and energy of women. Women need to become financially and economically independent so that they can contribute

equally to decision- making. To regain the status of women in society certain changes inside the mind- set of women as well as men are required.

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Claiming Voice, Language, and Desire: A Feminist Reading of Kamala Das's *An Introduction* in the Global Context

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Abstract

Kamala Das stands as one of the most powerful feminist voices in Indian English literature. Her celebrated poem *An Introduction* captures the anxieties, frustrations, and assertiveness of a woman navigating a patriarchal society. The poem not only addresses the personal and social struggles of women but also raises questions about identity, language, and bodily autonomy within the framework of global feminist discourse. This chapter offers a detailed feminist reading of *An Introduction*, situating it within the global context of gender politics and language politics. It further highlights Das's struggle with English, a colonial language, which she reclaims as a medium for articulating her personal experiences and universal concerns. By exploring themes such as identity, the politics of language, desire, and bodily autonomy, this chapter positions Kamala Das's work as a significant contribution to both Indian and global feminist literature.

Keywords: Feminism, postcolonial feminism, language politics.

Introduction:

Kamala Das remains one of the most influential and bold feminist voices in modern Indian literature written in English. Through her autobiographical and confessional writing style, Das challenged the deep-rooted patriarchy and exposed the silent struggles of Indian women within conservative social structures. Among her many works, *An Introduction* is often cited as a landmark feminist poem, one that courageously foregrounds a woman's search for identity, voice, and sexual freedom in a male-dominated society. While rooted in personal experience, the poem resonates universally, speaking to the collective experiences of women across different cultures and histories.

This article aims to provide a feminist reading of *An Introduction*, examining the ways in which Das addresses the interrelated issues of identity, language, and desire. It also explores how her struggle with using English — a colonial language — becomes a symbolic act of resistance and self-assertion. The poem thus situates itself within both Indian feminist writing and global feminist narratives, engaging with larger debates about language politics, body politics, and women's rights.

Voice and Identity in a Patriarchal Society:

In *An Introduction*, Kamala Das courageously lays bare the limitations imposed on women by patriarchal structures. She begins the poem by acknowledging her position within society, where men hold authority in all spheres: "I don't know politics but I know the names / Of those in power." With this line, Das ironically underscores the power imbalance in society, where a woman's knowledge and opinions are deemed insignificant compared to male authority. This early assertion points to a recurring feminist concern — the denial of agency to women.

Das does not stop at mere observation. She boldly rejects the labels and expectations that society thrusts upon her. In one of the most cited lines, she declares, “I am sinner, I am saint, I am the beloved and the betrayed.” This articulation of the self in contradictory terms reflects the complex and multifaceted nature of female identity, which refuses to conform to socially constructed binaries of good and bad, pure and impure. Feminist theorists like Simone de Beauvoir have long emphasized how patriarchal societies confine women within limiting stereotypes, and Das’s poem directly contests such categorization.

Furthermore, by narrating her early experiences of adolescent love and forced marriage, Das reveals how a woman’s personal choices are often undermined by societal expectations. Her marriage at sixteen serves as a metaphor for the premature silencing of female voices, a phenomenon not restricted to Indian society but prevalent globally in traditional patriarchal setups. Through confessional self-narration, Das transforms the personal into the political — a strategy feminist scholars like Adrienne Rich and Elaine Showalter have recognized as central to feminist literary expression.

Struggle with Language: Reclaiming English:

One of the most compelling aspects of *An Introduction* is Kamala Das’s candid discussion about her complex relationship with the English language. Being a postcolonial writer, Das grapples with the tensions between adopting the colonizer’s tongue and expressing indigenous experiences. She acknowledges the discomfort associated with writing in a foreign language yet simultaneously claims it as her own: “Why not leave / Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins, / Every one of you? Why not let me speak in / Any language I like?”

This declaration is significant in the global feminist context. Language has historically been a tool of patriarchal and colonial control. By using English, a language symbolizing both patriarchal and colonial authority, Das subverts its power and reshapes it as a medium for feminist articulation. This aligns with postcolonial feminist theory, which often discusses the politics of language and the ways in which women from colonized societies navigate and challenge the linguistic and cultural legacies of imperialism (Spivak 271).

Das's struggle with language is not merely personal but also emblematic of the broader challenges faced by women writers globally. English becomes both a burden and a weapon — a burden because it symbolizes colonial oppression, but a weapon because it offers access to global platforms and audiences. In this way, Das's work mirrors the dilemmas faced by other postcolonial women writers like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Tsitsi Dangarembga, who also navigate the politics of language while addressing feminist concerns.

Body and Desire: Asserting Feminine Autonomy:

Perhaps the most radical aspect of *An Introduction* is its unapologetic articulation of female desire. Das candidly recounts her experiences of physical love, expressing them in a manner rarely seen in Indian English poetry of her time: "I met a man, loved him. Call / Him not by any name, he is every man / Who wants a woman." By refusing to name the man, Das turns the focus away from the male partner and centres the female subject's experience and desires.

In patriarchal societies, women's sexuality is often shrouded in silence, shame, or moral judgment. Das's poem breaks this taboo by making female desire visible and legitimate. Feminist theorists like Hélène Cixous have emphasized the importance of women writing their bodies

and desires into literature, an act that Das accomplishes masterfully in this poem (Cixous 251). Her celebration of bodily autonomy resonates with feminist struggles worldwide — from campaigns for reproductive rights to protests against sexual violence.

Furthermore, Das confronts the societal policing of female bodies through her vivid and emotive descriptions. She exposes the hypocrisy that condemns women for expressing desire while celebrating male sexual agency. This double standard, though rooted in Indian society, finds echoes globally, making Das's poetry a significant intervention in feminist discourse.

Global Relevance and Feminist Solidarity:

Although *An Introduction* is deeply rooted in the specific socio-cultural context of India, its themes possess global relevance. Issues like patriarchal control over women's identities, language politics, and sexual autonomy are not confined to one society or culture. Das's poem thus serves as a site of feminist solidarity, connecting the personal struggles of an Indian woman to the collective struggles of women across the world. Her engagement with language politics mirrors debates in postcolonial societies about reclaiming colonial languages for indigenous and feminist expression. Likewise, her assertive articulation of bodily autonomy aligns with global feminist movements advocating for women's rights over their bodies and desires. By situating personal experiences within universal feminist concerns, Das creates a space where feminist solidarities can be forged across geographical and cultural boundaries.

Conclusion:

In *An Introduction*, Kamala Das crafts a deeply personal yet profoundly political poem that addresses the interconnected

issues of identity, language, and desire from a feminist perspective. Her struggle with English becomes a metaphor for the broader struggle of women in patriarchal and postcolonial societies to claim their voices and articulate their truths. By embracing her contradictions and refusing to conform to societal expectations, Das asserts a vision of feminine identity that is fluid, multifaceted, and unapologetically honest.

The poem's engagement with global feminist concerns — from body politics to language politics — situates it within the broader narrative of feminist literature. Kamala Das's courage in confronting these themes, especially in a conservative society, marks *An Introduction* as a significant contribution to both Indian and global feminist writing. The poem remains relevant even today, offering insights into the persistent challenges faced by women worldwide and serving as a testament to the enduring power of feminist literature.

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Crisis of Masculinity: A Shift in Power Dynamics

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Abstract

The notion of “Crisis of Masculinity” depicts the concerns of men regarding the social construction of masculinity and manhood in contemporary times. The idea of “Crisis of Masculinity” developed in response to social and economic changes including urbanization, feminist movements against gender role stereotypes, changing career paths and economic opportunities for both men and women. Women’s social, economic and political advances in the society have led to gender role reversal which has triggered male anxiety due to transformations in gender equation. The changes in gender roles have challenged the traditionally established codes of hegemonic masculinity that juxtaposes men as breadwinner and women as homemaker. Such transformations in society have caused due to numerous forces such as modernization and urbanization changing the employment scenarios in the world. Apart from that, feminist movements advocating gender equality and women empowerment have also caused a drastic

transformation in society leading to obliteration of gendered norms. In contemporary times, we observe women occupying influential and significant positions in the political, economic and social sector be it the armed forces or industries such as manufacturing or technology. Women's dominance in male dominated fields and professions poses threat to social construction of masculinity as it jeopardizes the conventional understanding of gender roles.

Keywords: Masculinity, gender roles, hegemonic masculinity.

Introduction :

The phenomenon of "Crisis of Masculinity" can be comprehended in relation to disintegration of codes of traditional or hegemonic masculinity or reversal of gender norms. The phenomenon of the crisis of masculinity was first suggested in studies by George M. Fredrickson (1965), James R. McGovern (1966), John Higham (1970), and Gerald Franklin Roberts (1970). In order to understand the concept of "Crisis of Masculinity" it is pertinent to delve into the understanding of "hegemonic" or "normative" masculinity propounded by sociologist Raewyn Connell. Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as a pattern of practices, bodily embodiment, demeanor which allows domination of men over women to continue. It is the most honored way of being a man and men who tend to fit into the codes of hegemonic masculinity or practices associated with it are known to be the most ideal men. Hegemonic masculinity does not only legitimize the dominance of men over women but also subordinate masculine men such as homosexuals. The major thrust upon which hegemonic masculinity is constructed is the social structure "patriarchy". The patriarchal gender system does not only create gender equality but also engenders gender role stereotypes. Gender

role stereotypes are practices, attitudes or attributes imposed on individuals on the basis of their gender. For instance, women are expected to practice household or domestic work and men are expected to be the breadwinners of their family. However, the phenomena of “Crisis of masculinity” can be understood in relation to collapse of the gender role stereotypes or the codes of hegemonic masculinity put forward by Connell. The root cause of “Crisis of Masculinity” in contemporary times lies in gender role reversal and breakdown of gender role stereotypes inducing gender role reversal. Such shifts in gender equation have amplified due to transformation of society into the postmodern era. In post modern society gender role reversal is very much evident as men are more willing to stay at home occupied with domestic chores and women are capable of acquiring livelihood through employment in the public and private sector. Hence, the phenomena of “Crisis of Masculinity” can also be termed as “Crisis of Patriarchy” because gender role reversals and breaking through the gender role stereotypes enfeeble the essence of patriarchy. However, Connell (1995) describes “Crisis of Masculinity” as “Crisis of Gender Order” as a whole because disruption of gender order itself challenges the social structure of patriarchy. Here, disruption of gender order refers to changing power dynamics of gender where men are indulging into practices that were traditionally associated with femininity and women are engrossed into practices that were traditionally associated with masculinity. Hence, the phenomena of “Crisis of Masculinity” which is very much evident in post-modern society has questioned the conventional understanding of femininity and masculinity.

Gender Role Stereotypes and Patriarchy :

R.W. Connell (1995) writes of the “Crisis of Patriarchy” as a crisis within the gender order due to erosion of patriarchal

dividends. This is a dividend that places men in a higher position in gender hierarchy in terms of honor and prestige. Patriarchy is a male centric type of society in which men have the power and control over resources and property. Since patriarchy ensures political, legal or economic domination of men, it promotes gender role stereotypes. For instance, men are traditionally associated with roles such as breadwinners, leaders or protectors whereas women are traditionally associated with roles such as caregivers or domestic workers. Gender role stereotypes basically means that certain roles must be performed by certain genders. Generally, traits such as domination, control, assertiveness are associated with men and masculinity whereas traits such as emotional dependency is associated with women and femininity. Gender role stereotypes are transmitted to individuals at a tender age through the process of socialization. Socialization is the process by which we acquire the culture of the society into which we are born- the process by which we acquire our social characteristics and learn the ways of thought and behavior considered appropriate in the society. Socialization is a process through which women acquire feminine traits and learn feminine behavior (Beauvoir, 1972). Thus, social learning plays a crucial role in bringing gendered individuals into existence. Social learning is perpetuated through social forces like family, peers and parents who socialize men and women differently. For instance, parents teaching gender stereotypical games to their children such as girls are taught to play with a kitchen set and boys are taught to play cricket or football. Individuals learn gender roles from institutions and organizations like family and peers further internalizing the gender roles as a normative pattern of behavior. Gender stereotypes reflect the primary importance we attach to task performance when judging men and women.

Assertiveness and performance are seen as indicators of greater agency in men, and warmth and care for others are viewed as signs of greater communality in women (Kite, 2008).

Hence, gender role stereotypes strengthen the structure of patriarchy in the society by privileging men over women when it comes to garner income or take control over property or resources. It is so because gender role stereotypes which is the product of patriarchy assign tasks to individuals based on gender favours men to indulge into the tasks that generate income and wealth whereas it assigns women domestic chores which do not economically benefit them. But, with the advent of modernity, feminist movements or gay movements the gender equation that existed since time immemorial have stagnated and transformed to some extent. Such transformations in society have triggered the “crisis of masculinity” or erosion of patriarchal structure leading the world towards a gender egalitarian society.

Causes of Crisis of Masculinity :

Manuel Castells (1997) writes that the major cause of “Crisis of Masculinity” lies in erosion of patriarchalism citing the transformation of women’s work and transformation of women’s consciousness due to economic and technological changes. Such transformation in socio-economic spheres of women could be witnessed from proliferating academic enrollments of women to amplifying participation of women in the workforce. Manuel Castells termed this transformation as “undoing of patriarchal family”. The crisis of masculinity is caused due to social and economic changes such as transformation in the labor market and fomentation of feminist movements or gay movements. Changes in the labor market and patterns of work have contributed to this cause as contemporary times have witnessed the decline of heavy

industries and development of the service economy. Linda McDowell (2003), for instance, notes that two-thirds of British workers are now employed in the service sector. Thus, it can be observed that the working sphere of heavy industries which were traditionally associated with the masculine identity are no longer perceived as such. The key driver behind such transformation in the work spaces is globalization. Globalization has broadened the market structure with expansion of technology, innovation and competition in the economy leading to evolution of the service sector. The changes in society which has triggered the “Crisis of Masculinity” is the changes in patterns of social relations like familial or intimate relations. For instance, increasing divorce rate (initiated by women) and rise in numbers of single mothers challenges the patriarchal model. The changes in family patterns due to economic changes which indicates the loss or weakening of links to fathers in families questions the importance and authority of father figures in the family (Frosh, Phoenix & Pattern, 2002). Another change which has caused the “Crisis of Masculinity” is the change in position of women in the labor market, politics, education and all other spheres of social and economic life. For instance, in 2004-05 and 2019-20, the female workforce participation rate (FWFPR) increased from 16.6% to 16.8% in urban India, whereas it declined from 32.7 percent to 24 percent in rural India (Pandey, 2003). Women’s employment and participation in the labour force poses persistent challenges to stereotyped gender roles questioning the conventional understanding of masculinity as breadwinners. Susan Faludi’s work, *The Betrayal of the Modern Family* (1999) emphasizes on the phenomena of “Crisis of Masculinity” depicting the collapse of relatively secure employment in work that had strong identifications with notions of masculinity and the erosion of

the heroic models of masculinity. “Crisis of Masculinity” comprises numerous indicators which signify deeper gendered crises in an established social structure. “Crisis of Masculinity” could also be comprehended as “boy’s problem” taking in account the experiences of young men and boys at institutional level. For instance, boys are now underperforming compared to girls in nearly all subjects at GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education); the less well qualified can be difficult to employ and as a result often struggle to construct stable and fulfilling lives (O’Donnell and Sharpe, 2000). Thus, the “Crisis of Masculinity” takes place at institutional and global level and refers to the erosion of the power of men across a wide range of men across a wide range of institutions (Castells, 1997).

Conclusion :

The “Crisis of Masculinity” has jeopardised the conventional understanding of masculinity and femininity by sabotaging the patriarchal structure. One of the major reasons behind such a crisis is gender role reversal and deconstruction of gender roles. Such transformation at social level have also led to changes in economic, political and legal spheres. For instance, proliferation of women’s enrolment in higher education institutions and women’s participation in labour market and political or judicial leaderships. Such transformations have questioned the normative patterns of masculinity and femininity because gender role reversals have challenged the socially constructed gender norms. However, such shifts in the gender equation is more prevalent in post-modern society due to new social movements like feminist movements or gay movements advocating gender equality. Changes such as technological advancement like the popularity of social media and popular culture have also facilitated the normalisation of gender role reversal due to promotion of

feminist ideologies through internet personalities. Thus, the “Crisis of Masculinity” is a consequence of post modernity as it paves way to erosion of patriarchal dividends.

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Mahila Samity and the Socio-Political Upliftment of Women in Assam

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Abstract

Since time immemorial women have their important role in the society, still it has been neglected by the patriarchal structure of society. This paper explores the significant role of Mahila Samities in the Socio- political upliftment of women in Assam. The Mahila Samities have not only contributed to the improvement of women's societal status through education, health empowerment initiatives but also played a crucial part in promoting political awareness and participation among women. The study is based on secondary data collected from government reports, academic articles etc. This paper highlights how these organisations act as catalyst for societal change, political consciousness, community mobilisation etc. It also highlights how Mahila Samities continue to shape women's role in public decision making.

Keywords: Patriarchy, sisterhood, leadership, resistance.

Introduction: Women that consist half of the population often termed as second citizens. They are often seen as fragile despite contributing significantly to the human society. Socially they are undervalued by many societal

practices and remain away from the decision making process. The reason behind all these was the patriarchal society, where mainly men dominates public sphere and women are confined to the private domain. (Nath,Binita-2016)

The evil practices that were rooted in the patriarchal structure affected women severely. It can be regarded as blessing of colonial period that the concerns about practices such as Sati Dah, Child marriage were arose. It was a period of social upliftment for women and the freedom struggle marked the beginning of a political awakening among women in India as well as in Assam. During the period of Non- Cooperation movement the spiritual power of Indian womenhood was revealed. The women of Assam started organising in many names, among them Mahila Samiti is the important one. Mahila Samiti started empowering women by emphasising on education, eradicating social evil practices, demanding political rights for women and so on, which helped the women of Assam to transform their role from home to decision making process.

Historical Background:

The emergence of Mahila Samities (Women's committees) in Assam dates back to the early 20th century, which were closely linked with the broader social reform and nationalist movements of that time. As the Indian freedom struggle intensified, women in Assam began organizing themselves into collective groups to support the movement and advocate for social reform, education, and empowerment of women. They played a significant role between the 1920s to 1940s organising themselves as Mahila Samiti (Giri, 2020). The first Mahila Samiti was established at Dibrugarh(1915) then at Nagaon(1917) and Tezpur (1919) influenced by Gandhian ideologies, which emphasised self reliance and social welfare. In 1926, the state- level Asom Mohila Samiti was

formed as “ Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samiti’. Chandraprabha Saikiani was the secretary of this body which resulted in the formation of various other district and primary or village level Mahila Samiti.

During the independence movement, Mahila Samities became platforms for political mobilization, with many women participating in protests, spinning khadi, and spreading nationalist ideas. Postindependence, these organizations shifted focus toward community development, literacy campaigns, and women’s rights. Prominent women leaders like **Nalini Bala Devi, Pushpalata Das, and Swarnalata Barua** played active roles in both the freedom struggle and in shaping early Mahila Samiti initiatives. These women not only promoted khadi and indigenous goods but also mobilized rural women for political awareness and self-dependence.

After independence, Mahila Samities shifted focus from political mobilization to social development and welfare. They played a key role in promoting Women’s literacy, Family planning, Maternal and child health, Vocational training for economic independence.

They also began working in coordination with local schools, health centers, and Panchayati Raj institutions to ensure women’s participation in rural development. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments (1992) that mandated 33% reservation for women in Panchayati Raj institutions gave new political relevance to Mahila Samities. Many women leaders trained and nurtured by Mahila Samities emerged as elected representatives, social workers, and village heads (Sarpanch). Today, Mahila Samities continue to work on Gender sensitization, Legal literacy, Combating domestic violence, Supporting girls’ education, Disaster response and relief (especially important in flood-prone Assam)

These Samities act as bridges between government schemes and rural women, advocating for their rights and ensuring their voices are included in governance. Today, Mahila Samities remain vital grassroots institutions that continue to play a key role in the socio-political upliftment of women in Assam.

Socio- Political Status of Women :

Over the years, the Socio- political status of women in Assam has undergone notable changes. Historically women were mostly limited to household responsibilities, with minimal participation in political and public life. However, with increasing awareness, education and grassroot movements, women have started asserting their presence in Socio-political spaces. The introduction of reservation policies in local self-governance has opened up avenues for their political participation, through challenges like lack of proper training, societal restrictions, and limited autonomy still persist.

Methodology:

This paper is descriptive in nature and is based on mixed method. Data are collected from secondary sources like - articles, publications, blogs, books etc.

Role of Mahila Samities in Socio- Political Upliftment of Women in Assam:

Since Pre- Independence era Mahila Samities of Assam have played a significant role in women's empowerment. The Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samity(APMS) led by Chandraprabha Saikiani worked tremendously for education and awareness for women. They organised literary programs for rural women. Realising education as key to break all social constraints, they advocated for greater access to school for girls. Mahila Samiti also emphasised on the need to eradicate social evils such as child marriage, dowry, polygamy etc which affected women

severely. The Mahila Samiti fought against these deep- rooted patriarchal elements. It also promoted widow remarriage. they fought continuously against all social constraints that prevents women's upliftment.

Mahila Samities at different levels worked on subjects such as child and maternity welfare, Mass education, social reforms etc. However, from 1950's the nature and work of Mahila Samiti have changed and become more concerned about political rights of women altering the ideology of social work. The members of Mahila Samity participated in the freedom struggle and mobilised women to join political party, Panchayats and local governments.

Moreover, for educating women on their rights (under acts like Domestic Violence Act, Dowry Prohibition Act etc) Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samity held legal literary camps as well as provided support in cases of domestic violence and dowry harassment.

Recent Activities (post-2000) :

APMS partnered with NGOs and government agencies run different different empowerment schemes. It is seen working on organising voter awareness campaigns, and through which try to encourage women to vote and contest in elections. Through different targeted programs it worked for tribal and tea garden women's welfare.

Through different activities it contributed to the increase of literacy and awareness among rural and marginalised women, enhancement of participation of women in the Panchayati Raj institutions. It also contributed by strengthening grassroots leadership among women and influencing policy changes In women and child welfare.

Contributions of Key Mahila Samities in Assam :

There are many important organisations that have

significantly contributed to the Socio Political upliftment of women.

The Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samity (APMS), established in 1953 organizes workshops and seminars to educate women about their legal rights. Also is concerned with the women's representation in local governance and legislative bodies.

Tezpur District Mahila Samiti working on eradicating illiteracy among rural women, especially older age groups. Also, it encourages women to take part in village panchayat and local decision making bodies.

Anupama Mahila Unnayan Samittee, Guwahati which was established in 2007 focuses on gender sensitization, it organizes gender equality workshops in schools and communities. Also it provides free legal aid to victims of abuse and conducts street plays to raise awareness.

Electoral Participation by Women in Assam:

Yr.of election	1952	1957	1962	1967	1972	1978	1985	1991	1996	2001	2006	2011
Male contestant	449	304	402	486	510	N/A	1124	242	1012	861	927	8969
Female contestant	6	8	6	9	12	20	29	7	17	55	70	85
Female Winer	2	5	5	6			5		6	10	13	14
Percent of female	1.58	3.96	3.17	4.76	6.43	0.79	3.96	3.96	4.76	7.93	10.32	10.4

Source : Election Commission of India.

The table shows that the participation of female in Assam's legislative assembly elections from 1952 to 2011 is less compared to male.

Result of the study :

This study shows that Mahila Samities in Assam have

significantly contributed to the Socio- political empowerment of women by organizing awareness programs, legal aid camps and leadership training. Samities like Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samity and Tezpur Mahila Samity have conducted voter awareness campaigns and encouraged women to contest in local election. Though these organisations have helped increase women's participation in local governments, according to the available data, women's political participation in Assam legislative assembly election remains low. However, grassroots organizations are working to bridge this gap.

Recommendations:

The Mahila Samities can take following steps to strengthen the Socio- political upliftment of women in Assam:-

- The Mahila Samities can create dedicated groups within Mahila Samities to identify, train, and mentor potential women leaders for Panchayat and municipal elections.
- As succes stories motivate others So they can Collect and publish real-life examples of women who rose to political or social leadership through Mahila Samities to inspire others.
- There is a need to facilitate interaction between urban and rural Mahila Samities to share experiences, strategies, and resources for political empowerment
- Manila Samities should provide practical training in public speaking, budgeting, meeting procedures, and proposal writing to prepare women for formal political roles.
- Mahila sanities should try to Include younger women and girls in their activities to build a pipeline of future socially and politically aware leaders.

Conclusion :-

Mahila Samities have played a significant role in transforming the Socio- Political Landscape for women in

Assam. Through Education, awareness initiatives it has challenged different social evils and contributed in uplifting the social status of women. By providing legal aids, leadership training, encouraging participation in local government the Mahila Samities continue to shape a gender neutral society. Strengthening these organisations through policy support, political inclusion, and resource allocation can lead to greater representation of women in decision making role. Thus Mahila Samities Continue to be a driving force in the journey toward a society where women enjoy equal status with men and their political participation is not just encouraged, but fully realised.

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Intellectual Without Borders: Julia Kristeva's Cross-Cultural Philosophy

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Abstract

Julia Kristeva (1941–) stands as one of the most influential intellectuals of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. A philosopher, psychoanalyst, linguist, novelist, and cultural theorist, Kristeva's work transcends disciplinary boundaries. An intense engagement with language, identity, and subjectivity marks her thought. As a Bulgarian who settled in France during a time of political and intellectual upheaval, Kristeva embodies an intellectual identity forged at the intersections of nations, languages, and epistemologies. She describes herself as a *Bulgarian-born European citizen of French nationality*¹, and this layered identification forms the foundation of her cross-cultural philosophy. This paper examines Kristeva's intellectual development as an 'intellectual without borders', focusing on her lived experience of exile, her engagement with foreignness and language, and her ethical vision for Europe and global humanism.

Keywords: Semiotic, symbolic, stranger, subjectivity.

Introduction :

I. Kristeva: The Foreigner

The first stage of Kristeva's intellectual journey (1966 to 1974) was defined by a profound engagement with linguistics, semiotics, and the evolving field of poststructuralist theory. Arriving in Paris from Bulgaria on a doctoral scholarship, Kristeva entered the vibrant intellectual milieu of the French capital at a moment of radical theoretical transformation. Her initial research centered on the *French New Novel* (Nouveau Roman), a literary movement marked by narrative fragmentation and anti-realist aesthetics. However, Kristeva soon came to feel that an adequate understanding of this modern narrative experimentation required a broader inquiry into the novel's historical formation. Under the guidance of Lucien Goldmann, she turned to early French literature, particularly the works of Antoine de la Sale. This shift in focus formed the foundation of her *doctorat de 3ème cycle* and culminated in her first major publication, *The Text of the Novel: A Semiological Approach to Discursive Structure* (1970), which laid the groundwork for her theoretical intervention into the analysis of narrative form.

Kristeva's early years in Paris were intellectually generative, shaped by encounters with key figures across multiple traditions. These included the semiologist Roland Barthes, Russian discourse theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, structural linguist Émile Benveniste, avant-garde writer Georges Bataille, and the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. Particularly decisive was her engagement with Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, which emphasized the multiplicity of voices and the heterogeneity of language within the novel. Bakhtin's vision of language as inherently dialogic and socially embedded resonated with Kristeva's own position as a cultural and linguistic outsider.

Her 1967 essay *Word, Dialogue, and the Novel* brought Bakhtin's work to French intellectual attention and marked a pivotal moment in Kristeva's theoretical development. It was in this essay that she famously introduced the term *intertextuality*, asserting that:

“Any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another.”

(*Kristeva*, 1980: 66)

This radical assertion challenged prevailing notions of authorship, originality, and stable meaning. It also reflected her cross-cultural perspective: as a foreigner writing in a new language, Kristeva experienced first-hand the ways texts—and subjects—are shaped by cultural and linguistic inheritances that precede them.

This orientation was intimately linked to Kristeva's personal experience of exile. In a 1988 interview, she described her early years in Paris as a time of intellectual awakening and cultural integration, recalling her dreams of France and her fascination with the French Enlightenment. The political climate under Charles de Gaulle fostered tolerance and openness, creating an environment in which a young scholar could flourish. Kristeva's involvement with the avant-garde literary journal *Tel Quel*, led by Philippe Sollers brought her into direct contact with the debates shaping postwar French intellectual life. The *Tel Quel* group leaned toward a revolutionary Marxist orientation, embracing Maoism in the late 1960s. At the same time, Kristeva's intellectual mentors—Goldmann and Barthes—provided a bridge between literary theory and cultural critique. As a research assistant to Lévi-Strauss, she was exposed to structuralist anthropology, which emphasized the deep structures of myth and society. Yet Kristeva's experience of foreignness pushed her to see these

structures not as static, but as historically contingent and psychically charged. Her reading of Lacan's *Écrits*, in particular, spoke to her own internalized sense of dislocation. She understood her exile not only in geographical or sociological terms but as a constitutive element of her psychic reality—a lens through which to approach subjectivity itself.

This synthesis of influences came to fruition in her groundbreaking work *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974). In this work, Kristeva developed what she called *semanalysis*—a method for analysing the signifying process that combines linguistic, psychoanalytic, and cultural elements. She advanced a new model of subjectivity centered around two interrelated modalities of language: the *symbolic* and the *semiotic*. The symbolic refers to the order of grammar, syntax, and social law, structured around the paternal function and the Oedipal configuration. The semiotic, by contrast, is associated with the maternal body, pre-Oedipal drives, and the non-verbal, rhythmic energies that disrupt the symbolic order. Kristeva asserts,

“Linguistic changes constitute changes in the status of the subject—his relation to the body, to others, and to objects.” (1984:15)

This insight upends the structuralist view of language as an impersonal system. Instead, Kristeva foregrounds the subject-in-process—always in flux, always negotiating the tensions between law and desire, syntax and rhythm, structure and rupture.

Crucially, Kristeva argues that literature—and especially avant-garde poetry—functions as a privileged site for observing the interaction between the semiotic and the symbolic. In poetic language, she contends, the repressed bodily drives of the semiotic return, disrupt conventional meaning and open up new modes of signification. This view reframes

literature as a space of semiotic resistance, a laboratory for testing the limits of meaning and identity. In emphasizing the productive and disruptive potential of poetic language, Kristeva articulates a theory that is both linguistic and political. Language, she insists, is not merely a tool for communication but a site where subjectivity is formed and reformed in response to historical, cultural, and psychic forces.

Through her innovative work in this early period, Kristeva emerged as a key figure in the development of poststructuralist thought. Her theory of *semanalysis*—with its emphasis on *intertextuality*, *the semiotic*, and the *speaking subject*—challenged foundational assumptions in linguistics, psychoanalysis, and literary criticism. Just as significantly, her own experience of exile shaped a theoretical vision that was inherently transnational and interdisciplinary. She was, from the start, an intellectual without borders—one who understood that meaning, like identity, is always provisional, plural, and in motion.

II. Cultural Encounter and Political Disillusionment: Kristeva's Visit to China and Transition (1974–1980)

The second stage of Kristeva's intellectual evolution, spanning from 1974 to 1980, marks a pivotal transformation in her theoretical and political orientation, deeply shaped by her visit to Maoist China and her simultaneous turn toward psychoanalysis and feminism. Kristeva's 1974 journey to China, accompanied by fellow Tel Quel members Roland Barthes, Philippe Sollers, Marcelin Playnet, and François Wahl, was originally envisioned as a political and cultural investigation. The Tel Quel group, having aligned itself with Marxist ideology and expressing interest in Maoism, hoped to find in China a radical alternative to Western capitalist and Soviet communist models. However, for Kristeva, the attraction to China extended beyond political enthusiasm. As she reflects,

“In the meantime, we went to China and for me it was more a cultural interest than a political one. There were both interests. But I wanted to see what can be done when Marxism is developed in a country that possessed a different cultural background, that doesn’t have a monolithic religion, that thinks in a particular way, that speaks in a particular way.”²

This curiosity about cultural alterity was, however, met with disillusionment. The harsh realities of life under the Cultural Revolution—with its repression, censorship, and orchestrated political performance—left the Tel Quel group dispirited. For Kristeva, this encounter with authoritarianism catalysed a profound intellectual and personal reorientation. Disenchanted with the reductive and dogmatic application of Marxism, she turned away from political orthodoxy and began to focus instead on psychoanalysis, the maternal body, and the unconscious as more fruitful terrains for understanding power, identity, and meaning. The China trip, therefore, marked not just a geographical displacement but an epistemological break—one that distanced Kristeva from collective ideological frameworks and steered her toward the private, the libidinal, and the subjective.

This transition is first articulated in *About Chinese Women* (1974), a text that oscillates between travelogue, cultural critique, and psychoanalytic reflection. Structured in two parts—‘On This Side’, which centers on the author’s subjective position, and ‘Women of China’, based on her observations—*About Chinese Women* examines the intersections of femininity, ideology, and cultural representation. Drawing from psychoanalytic theory, Kristeva critiques the displacement of maternal deities by patriarchal

monotheism in Judeo-Christian traditions, arguing that such a historical development underlies the symbolic repression of women's bodies. In a passage that critiques the binary impasse facing women in patriarchal societies, Kristeva writes (as quoted by Moi): women must either remain

“identified with the mother, thus ensuring her own exclusion... or, repressing the body of the mother, she identifies with the father, thus raising herself to his symbolic heights. Such an identification, however, not only deprives the woman of the maternal body, but also of her own” (Moi, 1986: 139).

The ambivalence of womanhood and motherhood becomes a central theme in Kristeva's writings from this period. In *Stabat Mater* (1977), she deepens this critique by interrogating the cult of the Virgin Mary. While Mary is often idealized as the compassionate mother, Kristeva identifies this icon as symptomatic of a Christian repression of bodily desire and maternal complexity. She cautions against feminist discourses that, in their attempts to escape patriarchal narratives, wholly reject motherhood. Instead, Kristeva calls for a secular, psychoanalytic rethinking of maternity—one that preserves the multiplicity, pain, and joy of the maternal experience without reducing it to either a biological fate or a symbolic myth. The figure of the mother, in Kristeva's theory, becomes a privileged site of ethical and semiotic potential.

This line of thought culminates in her seminal essay *Women's Time* (1979), where Kristeva provides a critical genealogy of feminist movements. She identifies three temporal modalities of feminism. First-wave feminism, she argues, is universalist in its demand for equality and inclusion within the male-dominated symbolic order. Second-wave feminism, by

contrast, celebrates sexual difference and locates women's specificity in their embodiment, particularly through maternity. Yet, Kristeva warns that the second wave essentializes womanhood by grounding it in fixed concepts of difference. Instead, she calls for a third modality of feminism—one that refuses binary logic and acknowledges the multiplicity of subjectivity. In this third phase, femininity is understood not as a biological or symbolic but as a process—an open-ended negotiation between identity, language, and history.

Central to this reconceptualization is the maternal body, which Kristeva revalued as a source of linguistic innovation and subjective rupture. She writes, “Linguistic changes constitute changes in the status of the subject—his relation to the body, to others, and to objects” (1974: 15). The maternal is not merely a biological function but a semiotic force that disrupts the symbolic order and opens space for new modes of meaning-making. Rather than marginalizing motherhood as regressive, Kristeva positions it as a site of creative resistance—capable of expressing pain, love, and separation in ways that challenge conventional systems of signification.

Kristeva's turn to psychoanalysis during this time was also shaped by her personal experience of exile. As a Bulgarian living in France, she experienced a dual estrangement: *from her native language and culture, and from the dominant Western symbolic order*. This condition of displacement led her to explore psychoanalysis not simply as a theoretical tool but as a practice of subjective transformation. She came to psychoanalysis not through theory but through necessity. By 1979, she had completed her training and become a licensed psychoanalyst. Her turn to analysis allowed her to explore how deep-seated memories, repressed desires, and cultural codes are translated into language—a process especially important

for someone negotiating the psychic translation of one's identity between two cultural worlds.

This second stage of Kristeva's career marks a decisive movement away from the structuralist legacy of *Revolution in Poetic Language* toward a more intimate, embodied, and psychoanalytically informed mode of thought. Her writings from 1974 to 1980 reflect an increasing commitment to exploring the maternal, the unconscious, and the affective dimensions of subjectivity. Rather than viewing these elements as obstacles to reason or politics, Kristeva reframes them as essential to a fuller understanding of cultural life and human experience. Her critique of ideological rigidity, coupled with her psychoanalytic investigation of the self, thus positions Kristeva as a thinker deeply invested in both the internal and external structures that shape human existence.

III. Third Stage: Kristeva as Psychoanalyst (1980s Onwards)

The 1980s marked a profound shift in Kristeva's intellectual trajectory, characterized by her deep immersion into psychoanalysis—a shift that moved her away from direct political discourse and toward an exploration of psychic life, emotional suffering, and the inner architecture of subjectivity. Her works during this period—*Powers of Horror* (1980), *Tales of Love* (1983), *In the Beginning Was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith* (1987), and *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (1987)—demonstrate a sustained inquiry into the affective dimensions of human experience. This stage in Kristeva's career can be seen as a time of introspection, a kind of intellectual adolescence where she opened herself to what she terms the repressed, engaging with themes such as horror, melancholy, depression, and love through the psychoanalytic lens.

In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva articulates the notion of abjection, a condition of being cast off, both physically and

symbolically, that marks the fragile boundaries between self and other. Abjection, she argues, is integral to psychic development, especially in the maternal relationship. The infant's process of individuation necessitates a symbolic expulsion of the maternal body, which becomes the first object of abjection. Kristeva writes,

“It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.” (1982:4)

Abjection becomes a site of intense anxiety and fascination—a cultural and psychological mechanism that manifests not only in maternal relations but also in societal structures, including xenophobia, nationalism, and fascism. The political implications of abjection are clear: in times of crisis, the abject other (whether woman, foreigner, or deviant) is expelled to preserve the illusion of social and psychic unity.

Kristeva's *Tales of Love* further deepens her engagement with subjectivity by exploring the fragility and reconstruction of identity through the prism of love. In a fragmented postmodern world, love is no longer tethered to stable social structures or metaphysical guarantees. Instead, it becomes a space of risk and vulnerability, where subjectivity is continuously formed and re-formed. Drawing on Plato, Freud, and Christian mystics, Kristeva positions love as both a philosophical and psychoanalytic encounter that, though marked by lack, offers a path toward reconstituting the self.

Importantly, Kristeva's psychoanalytic project was never confined to theoretical reflection alone. Her daily work as a practicing analyst informed much of her later writing. In her 1979

essay *Language Has No Master*, Kristeva articulates a vision of psychoanalysis as a poetic and ethical practice. She asserts that the analysts must attune themselves to the margins of speech—those silences, slips, and ruptures that reveal the unconscious.

For Kristeva, the analyst assumes a role akin to that of the poet: attentive to difference, disruption, and transformation. This interpretive practice is deeply political, insofar as it resists the automation of thought and the homogenization of identity in modern global societies. Psychoanalysis, she insists, is not only about healing individual psychic wounds but also about offering resistance to ideological closure and the loss of symbolic richness.

In a 1988 France Culture broadcast titled *The Pleasure of Julia Kristeva*, she described psychoanalysis as her “secret garden,” a deeply personal practice that shaped every facet of her life:

“So, psychoanalysis has had immeasurable benefits for my work, my sensibilities, my relationships with other people, and my intellectual life. To put it simply, analysis has transformed my personal style, lifestyle, and writing style.” (Guberman, 1996:9)

This period also saw Kristeva stepping into the role of a public intellectual with increasing global visibility. Her 1982 essay *Psychoanalysis and the Polis*, published in *Critical Inquiry* shortly after Lacan’s death, introduced Anglophone readers to her conviction that psychoanalysis holds the key to understanding contemporary political malaise. The analyst’s focus on the unconscious offers tools to critique authoritarianism, consumerism, and the erosion of meaning in the globalized world. By 1987, Kristeva had become a full member of the Paris Psychoanalytic Society and the International Association of Psychoanalysis, officially recognized as a clinician.

In the years that followed, Kristeva's practice continued to shape her theoretical work, informing her writings on motherhood, female genius, foreignness, and the sacred. Her engagement with Russian patients, her travels to China and the United States, and her public interventions in debates on religion and secularism all stemmed from this deeply psychoanalytic mode of thought. Through psychoanalysis, she found a language to articulate suffering that was not reducible to political categories—a language that could express the vulnerability, ambiguity, and resilience of being human.

In this way, Kristeva's third stage marks a shift from external revolutions to internal ones: a turn inward that does not signify retreat, but a redefinition of resistance. Her work in the 1980s and beyond thus reveals the political potential of psychic life and insists on the inseparability of personal and cultural transformation.

Conclusion:

The Transgressive Intellect – Kristeva Without Borders

Kristeva's intellectual journey unfolds as a movement across borders—geographical, disciplinary, linguistic, and psychic. From her early years as a structuralist outsider navigating the French intellectual scene, through her engagement with the political and cultural upheavals of the 1970s, to her mature turn toward psychoanalysis and the intimate realms of human suffering, Kristeva has consistently resisted fixity. Each phase of her work marks a refusal to remain enclosed within any one framework, be it *Marxist theory*, *semiotics*, *feminism*, or *psychoanalysis*. Her life and writing constitute a philosophy of movement, contradiction, and transformation.

Kristeva's cross-cultural philosophy is not merely the product of her Bulgarian roots and French naturalization.

Rather, it reflects her deeper commitment to intellectual nomadism. She has always situated herself between languages, between East and West, between politics and poetics, between the symbolic and the semiotic. This in-betweenness allows her to interrogate the foundations of identity, subjectivity, and belonging—whether through the figure of the foreigner, the mother, or the melancholic. Her work invites us to dwell in those liminal spaces that unsettle certainty but also open the possibility for renewal.

Throughout her career, Kristeva has argued that it is only by listening to what escapes—what is silenced, repressed, or abjected—that we can begin to reimagine the human condition. Whether through the disruptive power of poetic language, the ethical demand of the maternal relation, or the intimate listening of psychoanalysis, she insists on the necessity of confronting the Other within and without. In this sense, Kristeva offers a unique form of philosophical engagement—one that does not provide answers, but a method of questioning grounded in vulnerability, plurality, and revolt.

Her vision is fundamentally transgressive: she seeks to cross boundaries, not to abolish them, but to expose their contingency. In doing so, Kristeva offers a model of the intellectual as a border-crosser—one who refuses to remain loyal to any single system or identity, and who insists instead on complexity, nuance, and the transformative power of thought. To live with strangeness, to think through contradiction, to speak from exile—these are the marks of Kristeva's intellectual legacy. In an era increasingly defined by rigid borders and polarized identities, her work remains a vital call to imagine otherwise.

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(Footnotes)

¹ Kristeva was later accepted by the United States.

² Julia Kristeva, “My Memory’s Hyperbole”, Quoted in *The Portable Kristeva* ed by Kelly Oliver (p25)

Prospects Of Future Feminism And Gender

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Abstract

Feminism has been playing a vital role in bringing the gender equality and justice in the society. From the time of its origin feminism is fighting for the victimized women who had been oppressed and experienced brutally whether it is sexually, politically, economically, culturally and educationally under the patriarchal society. Though in initially, Feminism was working for the oppressed and subjugated and marginalized women only but during the due course of it the concept of feminism becomes vast and an umbrella term under which feminism started to include all the gender problems like the oppressed LGBTQ+ people and others. This paper will focus on the future prospects of feminism and gender that feminism is going to encounter in the upcoming times. How feminism will deal to its ever-changing problems and what will be the nature of future feminism and what will be the new inclusion and new aspects in the future. Feminism, a movement aimed at promoting gender equality and challenging patriarchal norms, has undergone significant transformations since its inception. From the suffragette movement to the present day, feminism

has adapted to changing social, cultural, and economic contexts. As we navigate the complexities of the 21st century, it is essential to consider the future of feminism. This paper will explore the prospects of future feminism, examining the role of intersectionality, digital activism, and inclusivity in shaping the movement's trajectory. By investigating these key areas, we can better understand the potential future directions of feminism and its capacity to address the evolving needs of marginalized communities.

Keywords: Feminism, gender, future.

Introduction:

French philosopher and utopian socialist Charles Fourier is credited, with the coining of the term “feminism” in 1937 using the French word “feminisme” to refer to advocacy in women's right. While the term initially referred to feminine qualities, it gained its political association with women's rights and the movement for equal rights in the late 19th century. Historically we can trace back the feminism from the Seneca falls of convention. In July 1848 around 300 women and men came together to discuss the status of women in the United states. They wrote the declaration of sentiments, which called for women to be given the right of vote. Therefore, the root of the feminism can be considered as the Seneca convention of fall. And thereafter the universe got surrounded with the monotonous waves of feminism. Now one may think of what is feminism exactly? At its heart, feminism is the belief that women deserve equal rights and opportunities, challenging gender inequality and advocating for social justice. The renowned feminist.

Mary Wollstonecraft argues that “women are not naturally inferior to men, but appear to be only because they

lack education”, in her epoch-making feminist text “A Vindication of the Rights of Women” 1792. According to Bell Hook “feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression, encompassing all forms of gender-based discrimination and inequality” (*Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*-1984).

To imagine the future of feminism we must know the whole history of feminism. If we look back we find that the 1st wave of feminism is generally considered to have taken place from the mid 19th century to the early 20th century, with the Seneca falls of Convention 1848 often marking its beginning. The primary focus of this wave was on achieving legal equality for women, including the Right of vote, property rights, and the right to education and employment. Philosopher J. S. Mill in his book “Subjection of Women” argued that “the subjection of women is the only remaining legal slavery. “Men do not want solely the obedience of women, they want their homage”. The emancipation of women is practically the greatest movement of our times”. The second wave of feminism occurring primarily in the 1960s and 1970s, had started to expand the focus of the women’s movement beyond just suffrage. Unlike the first wave, which primarily focused on securing women’s right to vote, the second wave aimed for equality in all areas of women’s lives, including employment, politics, marriage, family, education, and sexuality. Second-wave feminists questioned and sought to dismantle traditional gender roles and societal expectations placed on women, including those related to domesticity and motherhood. Reproductive rights, including access to contraception and abortion, became a central focus of the movement, with feminists advocating for legal and social changes to ensure women’s control over their bodies and reproductive lives. The second wave feminism also addressed issues of female

sexuality, challenging societal taboos and advocating for women's right to sexual autonomy and pleasure. Betty Friedan author of *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), which is considered a seminal text of the second wave, argued that "women were unhappy with their roles as housewives and mothers.". The third wave of feminism emerged in the early 1990s, partly as a response to perceived failures of second-wave feminism and the backlash against its initiatives. Third-wave feminism was influenced by postmodernist thought, which questioned traditional notions of gender, sexuality, and identity, leading to a more fluid and diverse understanding of feminism. The movement championed bodily autonomy and sexual liberation, including issues like reproductive rights, pornography, and sex work, moving beyond the second-wave's focus on gender equality and viewing sexual desire as problematic. Kimberle Crenshaw in her 1989 article *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics* argued that third wave feminism aimed to create a more inclusive movement that addressed the diverse experiences of women from different races, classes, and gender identities, emphasizing the concept of intersectionality (where various social identities, such as race, class, and gender, interact to create unique experiences of oppression). Beyond this Judith Butler on the other hand was advocating for the sexual liberation in the society through the publication of her book *Gender Trouble* (1990). Indeed, Butler goes far as to argue that gender, as an objective natural thing, does not exist: "Gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed" ("Performative" 278). Critics also believe that after the third wave of feminism there was the new demand that arising from the people that has been categorized as the 4th wave of

feminism. Although debated by some, many claim that a fourth wave of feminism began around 2012, with a focus on sexual harassment, body shaming, and rape culture, among other issues. A key component was the use of social media to highlight and address these concerns. The new wave arose amid a number of high-profile incidents. In December 2012 a young woman was brutally gang-raped in India and subsequently died, sparking local protests and international outrage. That was followed two years later by the Gamergate campaign, a manifestation of the so-called “men’s rights movement” that had its origins on the Web site 4chan. Gamergate ostensibly sought to promote ethics in video-game journalism, but it was in reality a harassment campaign against “social justice warriors.” The latter were often women who objected to female stereotypes in video games and were subsequently inundated with death threats and rape threats.

Prospects of Future Feminism and Gender:

The future feminism creates the path to a world where all people have the support to realize their full potential. Where every worker is valued for their contributions to our economy and professional women working out of the home aren’t building power on the backs of the domestic workers who support them in their homes. Where we look to each other for the value we can add, rather than the power we can take. Only then can we build a society where we value every person, their lives and their contributions, with dignity and respect. It’s the end of zero-sum politics, and it’s the future of feminism. Despite what seems obvious, the opposite of male-dominated politics and the future of feminism is not female-dominated politics and power structures. Instead, it is to move beyond the zero-sum game to systems and structures of abundance, where power is built and shared. This third option is best described as the “shine theory”

by Ann Friedman and Aminatou Sow: “I don’t shine if you don’t shine.” It understands that when I lift you up, when you “shine,” my own “shine” becomes brighter. It’s a theory of power built on multiplication rather than addition and subtraction. It moves beyond competition and the dualism of less and more.

After having a look in to the previous waves of feminism we come to learn that feminism is no longer a movement that speaks and advocates only for female and women rather it becomes a unisex debate of rights and the gender performativity binaries. ‘Intersectionality’, a critical framework developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, reveals the intricate relationships between social categories such as race, class, gender, and sexuality. Although Crenshaw introduced the idea of intersectionality in the 3rd wave of feminism but it was not successful in that time period and recently in the current scenario Crenshaw’s idea of intersectionality got viral and appreciated by the critics. And it will not be exaggerated today if we say that the soul of the future feminism is ‘intersectionality’. This approach acknowledges that individuals experience multiple, interconnected forms of oppression, resulting in unique experiences of marginalization. “Future feminism must prioritize intersectionality to address the complex needs of diverse communities effectively. According to Kimberly Crenshaw “Intersectionality is not just a buzzword; it’s a framework for understanding how multiple forms of oppression intersect and compound.” – Crenshaw, K. (2015). By embracing intersectionality, future feminism can amplify marginalized voices centering the experiences of women of colour, LGBTQ+ individuals, and people with disabilities ensures that their concerns are addressed and their voices are heard. It should address intersecting oppressions recognizing the multiple forms of oppression individuals face

allows for more effective activism and advocacy, as seen in the work of intersectional feminist organizations such as the National Black Feminist organization. The future feminism should also Foster solidarity and coalition-building. Intersectionality encourages collaboration across different social movements, strengthening the feminist movement as a whole and facilitating more inclusive and equitable social change. For instance, the #MeToo movement's failure to initially acknowledge the experiences of women of colour and LGBTQ+ individuals highlights the importance of intersectionality in future feminism. By prioritizing intersectionality, future feminist movements can avoid replicating existing power dynamics and instead create more inclusive, equitable spaces for social change.

The rise of digital technologies has transformed the feminist landscape, offering new opportunities for activism, community-building, and social change. Digital feminism, which encompasses online feminist activism and advocacy, has become a crucial component of modern feminist movements. Social media platforms, in particular, have emerged as key sites for feminist organizing and mobilization. Hashtag campaigns such as #MeToo, #TimesUp, and #BlackLivesMatter have demonstrated the power of social media in amplifying marginalized voices. Social media can amplify the voices of marginalized individuals and communities, providing a platform for them to share their experiences and advocate for their rights. Raising awareness about social justice issues in digital platform is also a new add to the digital feminism and in the future days it will be an active propaganda for the future feminism. Social media can facilitate the dissemination of information about social justice issues, raising awareness and mobilizing collective action. In mobilizing collective action

Social media can facilitate connections between individuals and groups, creating online communities that support and mobilize feminist activism. However, digital feminism also faces challenges, such as online harassment and misogyny. Women and marginalized individuals often face online harassment and misogyny, which can silence their voices and limit their participation in online feminist spaces. The digital divide and issues of accessibility can limit the participation of marginalized individuals and communities in online feminist spaces. To address these challenges, future feminist movements must prioritize digital literacy, online safety, and accessibility. Feminist technology emphasises the need for women and marginalized groups to have access to and control over technology. The dispute around robotic feminism centres on concerns about the representation of women, potential biases in AI, and the ethical implications of robots in a male-dominated tech industry. Some argue that feminizing robots could inadvertently perpetuate existing gender inequalities, while others see robotic feminism as a way to challenge traditional gender roles and create more inclusive technologies.

The future feminism should also look over the growing aspects of third world feminism or the global south feminism because the experiences of the women in Asia, Africa and Latin America are different than from the mainstream feminism. According to Sonia Alvarez “Third world feminism is not just about women, it is about transforming the social, political, economic structures that oppress us”. Renowned Indian post colonial theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that “the experiences of women in the third world are not just about oppression, but about resistance, struggle and survival”. Third World feminism faces various challenges, including cultural and social challenges, economic challenges, political

challenges, and theoretical and methodological challenges. Addressing these challenges requires promoting context-specific approaches, building alliances and partnerships, and developing innovative solutions to promote women's empowerment and rights. Some notable challenges that the third world feminism is dealing with are- limited access to education, poverty and economic inequality, limited access to resources, Globalization and neoliberalism, lack of representation, violence and conflict, limited research data and western centric theories etc. Among which the limited access to education is a big challenge that the future feminism must work on in the third world countries.

Beside these, Environmental feminism also known as eco feminism, emphasises the interconnectedness of social and environmental justice. Future feminist movements must prioritize sustainability and address these disproportionate impact of environmental degradation on marginalized communities. Critics beliefs that like the female body nature is also exploited by the corporate society to fulfil their need of luxurious lifestyle. The future feminism should not only to be concerned about the female they should be concerned also for the sustainability to protect the earth as worth living for the future generation. There is an endless list of places we could expend our feminist energy, but as we look at the status of women globally for the next 20 years and beyond, the one crisis that is not seen as a gendered issue, but often is, is climate change. Women stand to lose the most as we continue to see the impacts of global warming. As communities are displaced, women are the most vulnerable to the implications of mass migrations and home loss (according to one statistic, 80 percent of those displaced from climate change are women). It is often women farmers in the global south who have fed their families off crops

they will no longer be able to produce, seeds they no longer have access to. As climate change related diseases increase, such as Zika, it is often women who suffer the greatest consequences.

Another important aspect of future feminism will be the concern of female domesticity and household. Hood feminism is a term used to describe a movement that combines feminist principles with the experiences and perspectives of women from urban, low income, and predominantly Black and Latino communities. Hood feminism offers a critical perspective on the Intersections of racism, classism and sexism and highlights the importance of community based organizing and empowerment. According to notable Hood feminist Mikki Kendal “feminism has to be more than just individual success. It has to be Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, 1990. about creating a world where all women can thrive”. The quote highlights the importance of intersectionality and inclusivity in feminist movements, emphasizing the needs to address systemic issues that affects the marginalized communities. Mainstream feminists rarely talk about meeting basic needs as a feminist issue, argues Mikki Kendall, but food insecurity, access to quality education, safe neighbourhood, a living wage, and medical care are all feminist issues. All too often, however, the focus is not on basic survival for the many, but on increasing privilege for the few. That feminists refuse to prioritize these issues has only exacerbated the age-old problem of both internecine discord and women who rebuff at carrying the title. Moreover, prominent white feminists broadly suffer from their own myopia with regard to how things like race, class, sexual orientation, and ability intersect with gender. How can we stand in solidarity as a movement, Kendall asks, when there is the distinct likelihood that some women are oppressing others?

“The fights against hunger, homelessness, poverty, health disparities, poor schools, homophobia, transphobia, and domestic violence are feminist fights. Kendall offers a feminism rooted in the livelihood of everyday women.” —Ibram X. Kendi, #1 New York Times-bestselling author of *How to Be an Antiracist*, in *The Atlantic*.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the future of feminism will depend on its ability to adapt to changing social, cultural, and economic contexts. Intersectionality, digital feminism, globalization, and inclusivity are crucial frameworks for understanding and addressing the complex challenges faced by women and marginalized communities.

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Feminism and Anthropology, A Dialogue through Time: Exploring the Evolving Relationship through the Voices of Key Scholars

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Abstract

This article delves into the complex yet enriching dialogue between feminism and anthropology, tracing their gradual convergence from disciplinary tension to mutual transformation. It investigates how feminist thinkers have interrogated the biases and exclusions within anthropological practices, pushing the field toward more inclusive and critical frameworks. Rather than treating gender as an isolated variable, feminist anthropology has foregrounded it as a central analytic lens, challenging dominant narratives around culture, power, and representation. The paper also sheds light on the influence of postcolonial voices and intersectional approaches in reshaping the goals and methods of anthropological research. Through the contributions of both pioneering and contemporary scholars, it highlights feminism's role in reimagining the very foundations of how human societies are studied and understood.

Keywords: Feminist anthropology, gender and culture, power relations, intersectionality

Introduction:

Feminism and anthropology, though deeply connected by their interest in human lives and social structures, have always shared what Marilyn Strathern (1987) famously called an “awkward relationship.” The belief and support for the social, political and economic equality of the sexes is known as feminism. It is especially concerned with addressing and combating the systemic and historical disadvantages that women and marginalised genders have suffered. It aims to eliminate patriarchy – systems and structures that support male dominance and advance equality and justice for all people, regardless of gender. Anthropology on the other hand is the holistic study of human beings examining their behaviour, cultures, societies and biological elements in an effort to comprehend how and why people live the way they do. It aims to understand cultures from the inside, often suspending judgment, while feminism seeks to critique, expose, and transform power structures—particularly gendered ones. Despite this tension, the interplay between the two fields has sparked some of the most profound reimaginings of gender, culture, and knowledge production in the social sciences.

Lynn Walter (1995) states, feminist anthropology is not only feasible but also being done. He goes on to say that as a discipline, feminist anthropology should investigate how power and knowledge disparities have been shaped over time as gender differences, how people replicate and challenge these gender gaps in daily life, and how they can sometimes alter them. This paper aims to explore the evolving relationship between feminism and anthropology, tracing how feminist critiques have

transformed the discipline from merely adding women's perspectives to fundamentally rethinking concepts of gender, power, and culture. It examines key feminist interventions, theoretical developments, and postcolonial critiques that have reshaped anthropological knowledge production. By highlighting the contributions of foundational and contemporary scholars, the paper seeks to demonstrate how feminist anthropology offers a critical, reflexive, and intersectional approach to understanding human societies and social structures.

Early Feminist Interventions: Centering Women:

One of the earliest feminist critiques came from women who were themselves deeply embedded in the anthropological tradition, Ruth Benedict, a student of Franz Boas, who developed the 'configurational approach' to culture, arguing that societies favoured certain personality types and that culture shaped individuals just as much as individuals shaped culture. Her work challenged deterministic models of human behaviour and broadened the possibilities for interpreting social systems, including gender roles. In parallel, Margaret Mead revolutionized how anthropologists thought about the categories of sex and gender. Drawing from her fieldwork in Samoa and New Guinea, Mead distinguished biological sex from culturally constructed gender roles. While Benedict and Mead were reshaping the theoretical terrain, Zora Neale Hurston was forging new ground methodologically and politically. Her works, *Mules and Men* (1935) and *Tell My Horse* (1938), remain key texts in both anthropology and African diaspora studies. Hurston not only challenged the boundaries of academic disciplines but also critiqued racial hierarchies within them. Her ability to theorize the African diaspora and innovate methodologically marked a significant contribution to feminist anthropology.

A significant part of anthropology's creativity stems from navigating the tension between explaining universal human traits and accounting for unique cultural differences. Within this framework, the topic of women presents a particularly difficult challenge. The lower status of women across societies is one of the few genuine universals – a consistent feature observed in all cultures (Ortner, 1972). In the early 1970s, feminist scholars began questioning the male-dominated lens of traditional anthropology. Cultural practices were typically analysed from the perspective of men, while women's roles were either marginalized or misunderstood. Sherry Ortner's (1972) essay *Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?* marked a turning point. She argued that women are universally devalued because they are symbolically associated with nature, while men are aligned with culture—something societies tend to value more highly. In reality, women are no more connected to nature than men – both possess consciousness and face mortality. However, there are specific reasons why women are perceived this way. Although women cannot change their physical bodies, it is unlikely that biological differences alone are enough to justify the diminished perception of women. Around the same time, Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (1974) co-edited *Woman, Culture, and Society*, a collection that analysed the structural foundations of women's subordination across cultures. They argued that although the forms of gender inequality vary, they are nearly universal—prompting anthropologists to ask why, not just how, gender roles are culturally constructed.

Reframing Gender: From Women to Power System:

Feminist anthropology soon moved beyond simply adding women to anthropological accounts. Scholars like Gayle Rubin (1975) introduced concepts like the sex/gender system,

showing how gender inequality is produced and maintained by cultural institutions. Rubin's essay *The Traffic in Women* demonstrated how women were often exchanged like goods in marriage systems—a sharp critique of both patriarchy and kinship structures. In the 1980s, Rayna Rapp (1987) and others emphasized studying gender (not just women) as a relational system involving both men and women, deeply embedded in cultural, economic, and political frameworks. Feminist anthropology became more self-reflexive, critical of its own assumptions, and began to challenge the idea of universal womanhood. Anthropology has traditionally called out biases in western thinking, especially the tendency to treat its own values as universal standards of truth, beauty, and morality. It has played a key role in exposing the racism and ethnocentrism behind those assumptions. Feminist anthropology builds on this by challenging the idea that culture is a neat, unified whole. Instead, it sees culture as more complex and contested, which allows Anthropology to engage more meaningfully in ongoing debates within feminist, ethnic and cultural studies about the power of ideas and cultural norms (Walter, 1995).

Intersectionality and Postcolonial Feminist Critique:

As feminist theory expanded, so did feminist anthropology. It became clear that class, race, colonial histories, and national contexts shaped how gender was lived and understood. Lila Abu-Lughod (2002), in her landmark article *Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?* critiqued Western feminists for treating non-Western women as passive victims. She called for more nuanced, context-specific understandings that respected the agency of women in different cultural settings. At the same time, anthropologists like Kiran Narayan (1993) and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) brought forward the need to decolonize research. They questioned the authority of the

Western anthropologist and called for methodologies that uplifted the voices and knowledge systems of Indigenous and marginalized communities. These scholars reframed feminist anthropology to be more intersectional, collaborative, and politically aware. Today, feminist anthropology continues to evolve. Many anthropologists embrace a feminist lens not just in what they study but in how they study it—questioning their own positionality, research ethics, and the impact of their work. The boundary between activism and academia is increasingly blurred.

Strathern's (1987) observation of the “awkward relationship” between feminism and anthropology remains relevant, but the awkwardness is now often productive—fuelling new questions, collaborations, and critiques. Feminist anthropology at present is not a fixed identity but a methodological and ethical commitment to understanding how power works through gender, race, class, sexuality, and colonial history. As stated by Ortner (1972) men and women can and should participate equally in creative and transcendental endeavours. Only then, in the continuous dialogue with nature, would women be perceived as naturally in line with culture.

Conclusion:

The relationship between feminism and anthropology has been marked by friction, transformation, and innovation. From Ortner and Rosaldo to Abu-Lughod and Smith, feminist scholars have reshaped anthropology into a field that is more inclusive, critical, and accountable. What began as a call to include women has become a far-reaching reimagining of how we understand human lives and the structures that shape them. As we move forward, feminist anthropology continues to challenge not only what we know—but how we come to know it. Feminist anthropologists initially reacted against how women

were portrayed in traditional anthropology. In early studies, women were mostly discussed only in relation to marriage, kinship, and family by ignoring the full range of women's lives and experiences. Another issue was with linguistics, anthropologists often used the word "man" to refer to all humans, which created confusion and invisibility for women. In this case, feminists pointed to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which suggests that the language we use shapes how we think. So, using male-cantered words can reinforce male-cantered thinking. Through the pioneering work of scholars like Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, Sherry Ortner, Gayle Rubin, Michelle Rosaldo, and later, Lila Abu-Lughod, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, and others, feminist anthropology has brought critical attention to how gender intersects with race, class, colonialism, and other of identity and oppression. These scholars have shown that understanding human life demands more than detached observation—it requires empathy, accountability, and a willingness to engage with the lived realities of others on their own terms. Today, feminist anthropology stands as a field marked by openness, reflexivity, and political awareness. It does not offer simple answers or fixed categories. Instead, it invites complexity, embraces nuance, and commits to ethical engagement with communities and knowledge systems. The "awkward relationship" Marilyn Strathern described in 1987 has become, in many ways, a source of creative tension—one that continues to inspire new ways of thinking about culture, power, and justice. At last, it can be stated that feminist anthropology is not just about who is studied, but how and why. It is a powerful reminder that the pursuit of understanding must always be tied to a pursuit of equity. In questioning what we know and how we come to know it, feminist anthropology not only reshapes the discipline—it reimagines what it means to be human.

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The Tree as Legacy: An Eco-feminist reading of Tamsula Ao's *Laburnum for My Head*

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Abstract

This paper aims to look deep into Tamsula Ao's *Laburnum for My Head* from an eco-feminist lens. It explores the utmost desire of a woman to be recognized and raise high in a world constructed by patriarchal ideology. Lentina, the protagonist of the story, encompasses human boundaries by approaching death with a warm heart to find solace in earth's soil. The paper looks at how a woman resists patriarchal norms, finds her space and voice in the heart of nature. Both the protagonist and the laburnum tree resist the mechanical norms set by the patriarchs for them. They rise together challenging all these suppression. The paper examines the necessity of the coexistence of nature and women to fight for a more equitable and sustainable world. This paper argues that *Laburnum for My Head* portrays death not as negation but as regeneration, and through Lentina's defiance, Ao articulates a politics of care, memory, and ecological rootedness.

Keywords: Eco-feminism, patriarchs, female voice, resistance

Introduction:

Temsula Ao is a celebrated writer from Nagaland and a pioneering voice in Indian English literature from Northeast India. She is known for her portrayal of women's lives against the backdrop of cultural tradition, ecological consciousness, and subtle forms of resistance. In her short story *Laburnum for My Head*, Ao presents Lentina, an elderly woman who rebels by choosing to plant a laburnum tree as part of her own funeral ritual. This act, though modest, becomes a strong assertion of identity, autonomy, and ecological belonging.

To explore the symbolic depth of Lentina's choice, this paper draws on the theoretical framework of Ecofeminism. The term "Ecofeminism" was coined by the French writer Francoise d'Eaubonne in her work *Le Feminine ou la Mort (Feminism or Death)*, 1974). Ecofeminism is "about connectedness and wholeness of theory and practice" (Mies and Shiva 49). Ecofeminism critiques the ideological structures that link the domination of women and the exploitation of nature, while offering alternative modes of relational, cyclical, and embodied understanding. It looks for the parallel relation between Patriarchal oppression of women and exploitation of nature leading to environmental degradation. While women are oppressed by the patriarchy for the ages, the natural resources are constantly exploited in the name of human development.

Laburnum for My Head is the introductory story in Ao's collection of short stories with the same title. The story from its beginning makes a clear statement on nature's ability to rise high against all human obsession to transform it into a lifeless entity by the fabrication of granite edifices. Every May something extraordinary happens when the laburnum bush with pretty yellow flowers grow higher and stronger amidst the

marble and granite headstones. The season itself admires these yellow flowers. In the spots where laburnum trees grow no human intervention can control its growth:

That particular spot displace nothing that man has improvised; only nature, who does not possess any script, abides there: she only owns the seasons. And the seasons play out a pantomime of beauty and baldness on the tree standing on the edge of the lifeless of opulence, spread over the remains of the assorted dead: rich and poor, young and old, and mourned and un-mourned. (Ao 2)

Hence, these laburnum trees outgrow all the vainglorious specimens erected in marble and granite. The nature of this tree to grow high shows life's vitality and the urge for rebirth. While the marble granites show the death and lifeless body of nature controlled or determined by men, the laburnum tree invites an interpretation on life's permanency. It crosses all the boundaries set by the men's world. Here the laburnum tree/ nature becomes the supreme Captain for the ship called Life, it is no longer the mere passenger of humans.

In this story the readers meet a woman named Lentina, who desires to have some laburnum tree in her garden. Lentina admires these yellow flowers because she thinks that it carries femininity in a modest form unlike the gulmohars. Laburnum flowers hang themselves earthward symbolising 'humility to the gesture'. Lentina sees the laburnum flowers as representing femininity, but not in a conventional or overtly showy way. Instead, her idea of femininity is tied to gentleness, grace, and humility. The gulmohar trees, with their bright and bold orange-pink blossoms, are seen as flashy or aggressive. When the story further proceeds Lentina's choice of laburnum flower to plant

in her garden, and eventually on her grave becomes an obsession. This obsession is directly linked with her desire to root immortality with the laburnum tree.

Ynestra King in her essay *The Ecology of Feminism and the Feminism of Ecology* has rightfully argued that “the hatred of women and the hatred of nature are intimately connected and naturally reinforcing” (King 18). She says that women are believed to be closer to nature than men. Therefore it is quite obvious that women’s fight and nature’s fight are intricately related. Lentina’s fight has connections with the laburnum tree’s affirmation to rise high. Lentina too, like the laburnum tree; wants to resist the conventionality of societal norms to be buried next to her husband’s burial spot. Lentina goes through various planning and plotting while choosing her own burial spot over where she wants yellow laburnum flowers to blossom every May.

Lentina’s act of choosing her own burial spot; “this is my spot, I want to be buried here when my time comes” (Ao 6), invites multiple interpretations from the reader’s part. She might want to seek a peaceful afterlife where there will be no intervention or disturbances from the world which has been shaped by patriarchs. She makes a strong effort to make herself immortal with these yellow blossoms. By choosing a laburnum tree and not conventional marble granite with script on it she makes a call for women’s desire to live again in the shadow of nature. In this shadow there’ll be no one who will tell her to behave like a woman. She chooses her own partner for her afterlife. She says it clearly:

...I do not wish to be buried among the ridiculous stone monuments of the big cemetery. I need a place where there will be nothing but beautiful trees over my grave.
(Ao 9)

Lentina doesn't just wish to plant a tree on her grave; she goes to extraordinary lengths to legally acquire a burial plot for her in the town cemetery, specifically so she can plant a laburnum tree on it, which will grow after her death. This is a quiet but radical act of planning and agency. Lentina buys a plot near the cemetery from Khalong and she manages to come to negotiate with the Town Committee. She affirms to the committee that she will donate the piece of land to them if they accept "her terms" (Ao 12). Claiming and deciding 'her terms' is itself a strong call for all women's cause in a world shaped by patriarchs from alpha to omega. This bold act—both legal and symbolic—demonstrates her quiet resistance to passive social expectations. Rather than seek approval through conventional religious or family channels, she forges her own path.

Her decision to plant a laburnum tree on the spot is deeply symbolic: She often thought that the yellow flowers would act like medicine for her soul, to ease its passage into the unknown. And the trees indeed work as medicine for Lentina. When she learns from Babu that her laburnum trees are doing great on her future burial spot she survives another season:

This was a message that he had just visited the trees and that they were doing well. This seemed to provide her with the will to live where food and medicines seemed to have failed. (Ao 15)

She waits for these laburnum flowers to fully bloom. She finds energy within herself to keep herself alive till the laburnum bloom on her intended burial spot. Seeing the spirits of Lentina, her sons approach her with business advice, "something which had never happened during the father's lifetime". This laburnum tree gives her the spirit which helps her to make a spot on her

family's eyes. Therefore, it is not that nature co-works with Lentina only after her death, but it does when she is alive too.

The laburnum, with its cascading yellow blossoms, becomes more than a grave marker—it is a living extension of her will and identity, a form of spiritual reassurance and remembrance. Through this simple yet profound gesture, Lentina creates a legacy of beauty and self-determination that challenges both patriarchal and institutional norms surrounding death and memory.

The marble granites- with no life on it will not be the symbol of permanency for Lentina. Rather, she chooses laburnum trees which will appear every May making sure that Lentina's soul gets rebirth each year. Ao shows Lentina's death not as a negation, but as regeneration. She will be immortal in nature's world. Lentina with the laburnum tree will outgrow all men's efforts to fabricate them in certain boundaries.

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Analysing Indira Goswami's *The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker* from a Feminist Perspective

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Abstract

Indira Goswami's novels *The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker* is renowned for thought provoking exploration of Subalternity and subversive subalternity terms. The novel highlights the experiences of women's experiences, challenging patriarchal stereotypes and social norms, Goswami critiques the treatment of women and societal expectations, giving voice to the subaltern. In *The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*, Goswami critiques the oppressive Bhrahmical codes that relegate widowed women to life of isolation and spiritual subjugation, illustrating their status as subaltern within both domestic and social spheres and those women begin to resist or challenge those patriarchal norms, which symbolises the rise of subversive subalternity. The novel critiques the patriarchal society, highlighting the struggles of women and subalternity subaltern groups. Indira Goswami's writings show that women are always treated as second gender in Indian society.

Keywords: Subalternity , patriarchy, subversive subalternity and feminism.

Introduction:

The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker (2004) is the English translation of Goswami's original Assamese novel *Dontal Hatir Une Khowa Howadah* (1986). She skillfully combines subalternity and feminism in her writings.

Feminism refers to the inequalities and injustices experienced by women and other genders. It examines how power structures social, political , cultural and economic are shaped by gender and how these structures can be changed to achieve equality. It criticizes the patriarchy system where men hold primary power and dominate in role of leadership, moral authority , social privileged and control of property. Judith Butler critiques in his book *Gender Trouble* the way societies enforce gender norms through religion , family and tradition , gender norms can be challenged through acts that expose their constructedness. Butler's concept of gender performance argues that women can resist oppression by reclaiming their identities, even in constrained spaces (Butler 45).

Subaltern theory is concept that originated after Antonio Gramsci's hegemony theory. The term subaltern refers to individual or groups who are socially , politically and economically marginalized or oppressed within a society . Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak subaltern theory used to address the ways in which those marginalized groups are silenced or rendered invisible within dominant narratives. It explores the power dynamics that exclude them from the ability to represent themselves articulate their needs on influences society. It focuses on groups that are excluded from mainstream (Spivak 104).

Goswamy describes the subalternity and feminism through the character Giribala, Saru Gossainee, Durga, in the novel.

Feminism and Subaltern Voice in *The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker* :

The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker, Goswami portrays the suffocating lives of widowed Brahmin women in a conservative Assamese society. The story mainly revolves around Giribala, a strong but silent widow who struggles against the deeply entrenched norms that dehumanize and isolate women after her husband's death. Giribala lives in a large but crumbling ancestral house, symbolizing both the decaying traditions and her personal disintegration. In her youth, Giribala was married and widowed early and since then lives with restrictions, social seclusion and emotional deprivation as she belongs to upper caste society. According to society a widow has to live through some restrictions and they are not allowed to do everything. Giribala is restricted on everything like eating certain food, clothes or participating in festivals. After the death of her husband, Giribala returns to her paternal home. The Brahmin society which once pronounced her as a married woman and after her husband's death they are criticizing as a widow seems she committed crime. Giribala voices anguish during an encounter with neighbourhood women who came to visit her. She becomes fed up by their intrusive behaviour and the weight of imposed traditions. She came out from her room and confronting them directly and said that "they say we are holy, yet they treat us like the cursed. We are pure, yet they push us into the shadows away from laughter, away from life. What is the purity, that silenced us? What is the holiness that starves us?" (Goswami, 509). This dialogue highlights the patriarchal culture and societal expectations placed on women.

in the novel. As a widow in traditional Assamese society, she expected to live a life of silence, solitude and self effacement. So she said, “I was a wife once. A daughter, a woman who could speak, who could smile. But widowhood has stolen my name, my colours, my right to exist. Now I am just a shadow moving through these walls, a whisper no one listens to, is this my fate? To bow my head and pray to Gods who do not listen? To live in hunger while the men who preach, renunciation feast on our suffering” (Goswami 720). This dialogue reflects her deep regret and pain for the loss of her previous freedom. Before her husband’s death she could speak, smile and could live a life full of relationship and roles as a daughter, a wife and a woman with a voice of voice and agency. However after becoming a widow, she is socially isolated and forced to live under strict norms and expectations. It highlights the oppression patriarchal traditions that erase women’s identities after they are widowed forcing them into a life of invisibility and silence. She portrays the Spivak’s subaltern theory, where she argues that subaltern marginalized groups can’t fully speak for themselves because their voices are often silenced or misrepresented by dominant groups (Spivak 104). Durga is the eldest of the three. She is widowed sister of Adhikar of the Sattrā, who after her husband’s death is harassed and rejected by her husband’s family as an inauspicious woman. She seeks shelter in her brother’s house, where she is treated as a poor relation. She is devoted widow and victim all the restrictions and duties imposed on widows. She waits in vain for someone from Chikarhati to take her back to her husband’s house. “Her in-laws had never enquired even about her welfare, let aside taking her back. Days and months passed, waiting by the fireside, hoping against hope, but only her skin became darker, her makhela more ash coloured” (Goswami 394). Durga is

turning old day by day, but she never leaves her hope and still waiting. Even in her brother's house, she is not happy. Her only desire is to mix the ash of her dead husband in the holy Ganga, but she has no money. The jewels that she left for safety in Saru Gossainee's house, which is stolen. Her in-laws even deprived her of her share of property. But as a widow and woman, she will never go to court. At least her health fails, she leaves for Chikarhati on her own to take her last breath in her husband's house. According to Bulter, this widowhood is not an identity but a ritualized performance, sustained by societal expectations like isolation, restrictions. The widow's mental and emotional resistance reflects that Bulter's idea that gender norms are fully stable. She surrenders to the traditional norms and regulations wordlessly without any protest. Durga stands as the representative of many such voiceless subaltern women who do not know how to raise their voice.

In the novel *The Moth Eaten Howdah Of The Tusker* Saru Gosain is a central figure whose life encapsulates the deeply patriarchal of Assamese Brahminical society in early 20th century. Saru Gossainee emerges not just a tragic individual but as a represented of the silenced, marginalized female voice in men dominated society. Her desires, opinions and autonomy are all suppressed by patriarchal society. Once she said "I am not impure. I touched the calf out of love" [Goswami 300]. This line defines the Brahminical norms that considers a widow's touch, especially a ritual as polluting. She has an attraction for a man called Mahidhar, a Brahmin, who helps her to collect rent. She has fantasizing dreams about him. In return, greedy Mohidhar cheats on her and tries to sell her land on a forged letter of authority. After witnessing the treachery of this selfish man, her dreams of love and faith are shattered and ruined.

Conclusion :

This study analyses the protest of against patriarchal society. How women often tried to raise their voice against the men dominated society. But they couldn't because their voice is marginalized by the society. They opposed silently against the norms of patriarchal society. The character of Giribala represents the collective protest of women against the oppressive norms of society. In *The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker* is described the pathetic journey of three widows.

A revolutionary figure, Giribala is desperate to escape the suffering imposed by widowhood, ultimately finding suicide to be her only means of resistance. Her tragic death serves as a powerful act of defiance against the rigid, conservative structures that govern women's lives.

Saru Gossainee also voice of subalternity who is betrayed by her beloved man Mahidhar and her desire also suppressed by men after her husband's death. Durga is also the pathetic character. After her husband's death she is isolated and restricted by the society. She was hungry for love but it all had to be suppressed for the society.

It is believed that without a male guardian or custodian of her body and mind, a widow is denied an identity in the framework of traditionalist patriarchy. A widow is a 'nobody' without her husband and is lacking in many ways. She is without the reproductive ability as scriptures deny the remarriage of women. So after their husband's death they are pushed towards the fringes of the peripheral zones.

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Reclaiming Draupadi: Feminism and Narrative Alchemy in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*

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Abstract

This article explores the feminist reimagining of Draupadi in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*. By adopting a first-person narrative voice, Divakaruni allows Draupadi—renamed Panchaali—to reclaim her silenced identity from the male-centric narrative of the Mahabharata. The novel challenges traditional portrayals of Draupadi as subservient and voiceless, instead presenting a powerful female protagonist who exercises agency, introspection, and emotional depth. Drawing from feminist theory, particularly Kate Millett's critique of patriarchy, this study highlights how Divakaruni's novel subverts mythological conventions to amplify the voice of a historically marginalized woman. Through this narrative alchemy, *The Palace of Illusions* becomes a radical act of literary reclamation, merging myth with modern feminist consciousness.

Keywords: Draupadi, The Palace of Illusions, feminist retelling, patriarchy.

Introduction :

In the Author's Note to the novel *The Palace of Illusions*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni notes her reservation on the portrayal of Panchaali or Draupadi in the infamous epic, the *Mahabharata*. She says that Draupadi is a strong character who is born out of fire, but her treatment in the epic does not befit her nature. She is subservient to their male counterparts, voiceless and devoid of an individual identity. She is a victim of both the patriarchal system and the narrative perspective of a male. She is a victim of, as Kate Millett writes in *Sexual Politics*, the “patriarchy’s chief institution” called the “family” (33). To reclaim the identity of Draupadi and add voice to the marginalised, Divakaruni re-writes the myth using a first-person narrative in which Draupadi herself is the narrator. Thus, she brings Draupadi into the centre from the margins. This article attempts to examine the character of Draupadi from a feminist perspective and analyse how Divakaruni rewrites the myth of Draupadi to reclaim her identity.

In the *Mahabharata*, Draupadi causes wars, supports the Pandavas, and shoulders shame—but where do we hear her in all the chaos of battles and big dreams? Who dares to bring her out of the background and make her the author of her own story? Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* answers this, showing us Panchaali—a Draupadi who not only survives but takes control of the narrative with strength. This isn't just a simple retelling; it's a bold feminist move, a torch lit and thrown into the historical shadows. Divakaruni gives Draupadi a spirit full of power and hope, challenging the *Mahabharata*'s male-dominated structure.

Theoretical Framework: Lenses of Inquiry:

Feminist history, as Joan Wallach Scott argues, goes beyond just finding out about women's lives. It breaks down

the idea of a neutral past, showing how gender shapes it. Chandra Talpade Mohanty's postcolonial feminism helps us understand Draupadi's voice as uniquely her own, shaped by India, not by Western ideas. Together, these ideas show *The Palace of Illusions* as a vibrant mix: a feminist challenge, a postcolonial statement, a metafictional game, and a story that rises from the ruins of tradition.

Reclaiming narrative: Reclaiming Identity:

The *Mahabharata* portrays Draupadi with harsh, almost crude strokes: born from fire, married to five men, and humiliated in a dice game. However, the epic's perspective diminishes her, making her seem like a background figure in a story dominated by men. Divakaruni changes this, putting Draupadi front and center, giving her a voice that's full of life. In the novel, she is the central character, the narrator—the "I" that deserves central space. "I stepped from the fire", she declares, turning her birth from a predetermined fate into a bold statement of self, recognizing herself as special—a gift to her father and an instrument of destiny. As some unknown voice proclaims at her birth: "Behold, we give you this girl, a gift beyond what you asked for. Take good care of her, for she will change the course of history." (5)

In the epic, Arjuna wins her with an arrow in the kingdom of Panchaal in a Swyamvara. She simply becomes the prize to be distributed among the five Pandava brothers. She is a silent participant in the events around her life. Divakaruni reimagines this scene. She adds voice to Panchaali and renders an identity of her own. Divakaruni, however, adopts the perspective of the liberal feminist and shapes her character as an empowered woman who does not seek to rule over men. As Mary Wollstonecraft argues in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, "I do not wish them [women] to have power over

men; but power over themselves” (80). Draupadi in Divakaruni’s *The Palace of Illusions* is more inquisitive, interrogative, and assertive than dominating. She seeks to take control of her life. That is why she questions the process by which she was named. She and her brother were born out of fire. However, her father names her brother as Dhristadyumna, Destroyer of Enemies. She, on the other hand, is named Draupadi, the daughter of Drupad. Her father’s identity is eternally embedded in her name. However, in the narrative of Divakaruni, she interrogates this patriarchal perspective and questions:

If I were his parent, I might have picked a more cheerful appellation, like Celestial Victor, or Light of the Universe. But Daughter of Drupad? Granted, he hadn’t been expecting me, but couldn’t my father have come up with something a little less egoistic? Something more suited to a girl who was supposed to change history? (5)

She also breaks the barrier of patriarchal understanding of women and their colour. She was dark-skinned, often associated with evil or ugliness. She, however, embraces her colour and refuses cosmetic treatments by her nurse- “*I, too, am beautiful*” (09), she says to herself. This affirmation of the self evolves in the Swyamvara. Unlike the original versions of the epic in which she is a silent spectator of the events, she, in *The Palace of Illusions*, says, “I stood behind the curtain, my heart racing. . . I wanted a man who’d truly see me, not just win me” (63). One can feel her anticipation, her eyes on Krishna’s knowing smile—it’s not about victory, but about her own choice.

Then there’s the dice game, a painful memory. The *Mahabharata* focuses on Yudhishtira’s loss and Duryodhana’s

gloating, with Draupadi almost an afterthought. Divakaruni brings us into her suffering: “Let them stare at my nakedness, I thought. Why should I care? They and not I should be ashamed for shattering the bounds of decency.” (193). Her words are powerful, her pain cutting through the epic’s detached tone. At the same time, there is a tone of resilience, strength, and courage that the men in the house lacked. She converts her victimhood into a reorientation.

There is another twist in Divakaruni’s narrative. Karna, who is the sixth son of Kunti, whom she had given birth to before her marriage to Pandu, is portrayed as evil in the original epic. However, in *The Palace of Illusions*, Divakaruni shows that Draupadi had a soft corner for Karna during the Swyamvara. Here, Divakaruni seems to be asking one critical question, rather satirically, that if Draupadi can marry five of Kunti’s sons, why not the sixth one? Not only does it mock the forced polyandry, but it also exposes the questions of women’s rights. Draupadi had a soft corner for Karna, but she is compelled to marry five brothers who share her like a prize, commodified.

Feminist Fire: Strength, Complexity, and Resilience:

Divakaruni doesn’t just give Draupadi a voice; she ignites her with strength, depth, and a feminist spirit that’s present in every line. On her first wedding night, she is made to sleep near the five brothers’ feet. She is furious and rebellious. Though she does not express her anger but she says, “I’d save my rebellion for another day” (109).

Mohanty’s postcolonial perspective is relevant here—Draupadi’s resistance comes from an Indian context, but it also resonates globally, highlighting a universal struggle. Mohanty in *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse* argues that Western feminism relies on the

experiences of Western women in a Western setting and ignores the plight of the third-world woman. Divakaruni's novel breaks this stereotyped notion of feminism and localises the experience of Draupadi, who had to deal with five husbands just because of a misunderstanding of Kunti, her mother-in-law. From these complex religious and social structures, she seeks to assert her identity. She's not perfect; she longs for Karna, and she's critical of Subhadra. These imperfections make her more human, grounding her as a woman, not just a myth.

The miraculous moment when Krishna provides endless cloth during the disrobing scene changes from a display of divine power to a shared victory. Besides, in the original epic, though she curses the Kauravas, in Divakaruni's narrative, she speculates on the nature of men as well. She realises that Karna might have helped her if she had pleaded before him. She places Karna and the Pandava brothers in the same line, who are slaves of their arrogance, pride, and honour. She says, "Their notions of honour, of loyalty toward each other, of reputation were more important to them than my suffering. (197)." This isn't a weak act of revenge, but a strong, uncontrolled cry, a feminist move that doesn't hide her true feelings.

Even in exile, her strength is clear. Kicked out of the palace, she thinks, "As we moved through the forest, I carried a pouch of salt in honour of my lost palace. At night, I let the grains run through my fingers, over skin scraped raw by rocks and branches, and welcomed the sting. It would help me not to forget" (198). Her spirit is unbroken even in the forest. Her conversations with Kunti are also full of tensions, a battle of wills that shows she won't give up. She says, "Now that she'd had her way, Kunti turned to me. She allowed herself to smile as she welcomed me with a bouquet of gracious words. But I

felt the thorns underneath” (109). These moments, clear and emotional, show Draupadi as someone who is not just present but fully alive.

The feminist idea in the novel is very strong, like Mohanty would want. Draupadi’s struggle with dharma isn’t just a debate but a real fight, rooted in Indian culture but also reaching far beyond. Her relationship with Krishna, a dance of trust and mystery, her strength in exile, and her conflicts with Kunti create a story that is both local and universal. This isn’t a borrowed story; it’s a fire started from within, showing a woman’s power to change her world.

Divakaruni’s narrative technique reaches to its peak when she narrates the stories of the war through the voice of Draupadi herself. Here, the readers are the Dhritarastra to whom the story is narrated through the voice and understanding of Draupadi as Sanjaya does to Dhritarastra in the *Mahabharata*. Not only does she narrate the story, she also mingles past with present, reflecting on all the wrongs that have been done to her. It also reflects her motherly worries and wifely tensions. Thus, Divakaruni blends an Indian perspective to an otherwise universal theme of feminine issues.

Conclusion:

The Palace of Illusions isn’t just a retelling of the past; it’s a bold statement, a feminist and historical awakening that makes Draupadi the main voice. Divakaruni shows us a Draupadi who is both timeless and relevant—a woman who is strong, vulnerable, and always striving. She seems to be telling herself that the world would remember her not as a prize or a victim, but as Panchaali, who dared to dream beyond her time. This isn’t just a passive story but an energetic call to action, a way to see our own unspoken thoughts, and proof that history is always changing. Divakaruni doesn’t just repeat Draupadi’s

story; she brings it to life, showing that the past isn't set in stone but a living flame, ready to ignite again for those who were once ignored.

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The Gandhian Approach to Women's Empowerment: An Analysis

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Abstract

In a patriarchal society, women have always struggled for power and recognition. Pre-independent India was no exception, as the male-dominated structure favoured men and confined women to domestic roles. Although women enjoyed greater rights and freedom during the Vedic period, their status sharply declined in the Post-Vedic and British eras. By the time of Gandhi, gender discrimination and violence against women had reached a peak. Women were treated poorly and were often considered the cause of all social evils. Social practices such as female infanticide, dowry, child marriage, *purdah*, permanent widowhood, abuse, sati, and polygamy made life extremely difficult for women. It was Gandhi who sought a complete reformation and openly opposed all such harmful practices. He believed that women were not only equal and different but,

in many ways, superior to men. Although he was not a feminist in the modern sense, Gandhi was deeply concerned about the condition of women and worked sincerely to uplift their status. He strongly advocated for women's rights and made remarkable efforts toward their empowerment. This paper aims to explore Gandhi's role and approach in empowering women. Accordingly, an analysis is made of the prevailing social evils during that time and Gandhi's critique of these issues.

Keywords: Women, empowerment, violence, ahimsa.

Introduction:

Mahatma Gandhi, being one of the greatest social and political reformers, played an important role in eradicating social misdeeds towards women. He made his utmost effort to liberate all people from prevailing social evils. Gandhi was more than just a political leader; he was deeply committed to humanity and strongly opposed all forms of injustice and inequality in society. Women, in particular, had to face social injustice more than men, as they were subordinated and their rights were violated in the name of customs and traditions. Gandhi sought to reform the patriarchal nature of Indian society. Patriarchal society is essentially male-dominated, and as such, women struggle for power within it. Patriarchy favours men, so women had fewer opportunities in every sphere.

In the history of India, the status of women in the Vedic period was completely different from that in the Post-Vedic and British periods. Women had better rights and enjoyed a higher status in society. But during the time of Gandhi, gender discrimination and violence were at their peak. Women were treated very badly and were often considered the cause of all evils. They depended on men and held a very low position in society. Various practices existed that were completely against

women, such as female infanticide, dowry, child marriage, purdah (veil), permanent widowhood, abuse, sati, polygamy, etc. Gandhi was deeply concerned about these social evils. He did not hesitate to oppose practices that were harmful to women, even when supported by Dharma, Shastra, law, or tradition. Gandhi worked not only for the progress of women but also for the upliftment of Harijans and the poor.

Influences on Gandhi's Thought:

It is true that Gandhi's thought has an originality and a certain freshness about it, but it also bears the stamp of several influences. Ancient Hindu tradition can be said to be the backbone of his thought. In his family, there was great respect for orthodox ways of religion and worship. He had read the Gita and the Ramayana, along with various texts from Vaishnavism and Jainism. All these helped sharpen his moral thought.

Besides this, focusing on the various women who influenced him, one of the most important figures was his mother. Mahatma Gandhi was deeply influenced by his mother, Putlibai. It was **she** who shaped his thought process with compassion and ethics. Gandhi opines, "The outstanding impression my mother has left on my memory is that of saintliness. She was deeply religious. She would not think of taking her meals without daily prayer. She would take the hardest of vows and keep them without flinching. Illness was no excuse for relaxing them" (Gandhi, M.K. *My Experiments with Truth*).

Besides his mother, his wife Kasturba also influenced him a lot. During times of conjugal conflict, Kasturba used 'fasting' as a weapon. This inspired Gandhi to start *Satyagraha* against the British. From these two women, Gandhi learnt a lot that shaped his entire thought process and adds an element that favours an optimistic view towards women. Both of them influenced Gandhi, but women's influence upon him was not

only limited to his family. There were other women who influenced him to a great extent and helped in nourishing his thought process. Some of them were—Annie Besant, Sarojini Naidu, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, and Pushpa Mehta.

Gandhi's Critique of Gender-based Social Evils:

Gandhi was not happy with the status of women in society. He was completely against gender discrimination. During the time of Gandhi, gender discrimination was at its peak. Women were suppressed in the name of customs and traditions. Gandhi was not happy with the preference of Indian society, as it favours the boy and neglects the girl child. It is regarded as an unlucky sign to have a girl child. Therefore, every time a girl child was neglected by society, as such, women in general **have been considered** as the negative element of a society. Thus Gandhi opines—"I fail to see any reason for jubilation over the birth of a son and for mourning over the birth of a daughter. Both are God's gifts. They have an equal right to live and are equally necessary to keep the world going." (Kripalani, J.B. *Gandhi: His Life and Thought*, p.402). Gandhi's concern towards the upliftment of women is reflected in his strong opposition to dowry, female infanticide, child marriage, purdah (veil), sati, polygamy, pathetic widowhood, female illiteracy, etc.

I. Dowry:

Gandhi was totally against dowry. According to him, taking dowry was a sin. He believed that the custom of dowry turned young girls into mere chattels to be bought and sold. Gandhi called this custom pernicious, as it lowered the status of women, destroyed their sense of equality with men, and defiled the institution of marriage (Bakshi, S. R., *Gandhi and His Social Thought*, Criterion Publications, 1986, p. 175). He suggested that instead of giving dowry and being humiliated

by a husband over it, girls should remain unmarried. He urged parents to educate their daughters so that they could refuse to marry men who demand dowry. Gandhi advocated for a strong public opinion against the practice and called for the social excommunication of men involved in dowry. According to Gandhi, dowry marriages are ‘heartless.’ What he preferred was mutual love, mutual consent, and respect between partners. As he said, “The ideal that marriage aims at is that of spiritual reunion through the physical. The human love that it incarnates is intended to serve as a stepping stone to divine or universal love” (Young India, 21/05/1931).

II. Female infanticide:

Gandhi was firmly opposed to the practice of female infanticide. During that time, the birth of a girl was often considered a sign of bad luck. Gandhi observed that the arrival of a girl child was generally unwelcome, as she would eventually be married off and expected to live and work in her marital home. Another major reason behind this rejection was the custom of dowry, which turned the girl into a financial burden for her parents. Gandhi strongly advocated for the eradication of this inhumane practice from society. He believed that just as people celebrate the birth of a boy, they should also celebrate the birth of a girl. Both should be welcomed with equal joy, and no distinction should be made between a boy and a girl. Gandhi’s strong opposition to dowry was closely tied to his condemnation of female infanticide, as dowry played a major role in perpetuating the practice.

III. Child Marriage:

Gandhi was strongly against child marriage. The main issue with child marriage, according to him, was the absence of consent from both the boy and the girl involved. In most cases, neither the bride nor the groom was mature enough to

understand the responsibilities of marriage. Gandhi suggested that both the boy and the girl should be mentally and physically prepared before marriage—only then could they choose their life partner. He considered child marriage an inhuman act and a moral and physical evil. To him, it was an immoral and cruel practice that turned innocent girls into objects of lust, damaged the health of young mothers, and left many young girls widowed. Child marriage was a major obstacle to the progress of women. Instead of enjoying their school life, girls were burdened with household work and expected to bear and raise children. Gandhi saw this as a form of mental and physical cruelty, and thus completely opposed the practice.

IV. Purdah(veil):

The purdah system required women to be hidden from men and strangers. It was imposed to maintain chastity. However, Gandhi believed that this practice weakened morality rather than strengthening it, since chastity is not something that can be preserved artificially or imposed externally. He argued that a wall of purdah could not protect chastity, as true chastity must come from within—it is an inward process. According to Gandhi, purdah was both inhuman and immoral. He believed it crippled women's freedom of movement, interfered with their personal growth, and prevented them from contributing usefully to society. As such, Gandhi urged people to dismantle the purdah system.

V. Sati:

Gandhi was totally opposed to the custom of Sati. He believed that the practice stemmed from the blind egoism of men. If a wife was expected to prove her loyalty and devotion by dying on her husband's funeral pyre, then the husband should be held to the same standard. Gandhi argued that true loyalty does not require self-destruction. Sati, to him, was a

meaningless and senseless act—jumping into fire does not bring back the dead husband, but only takes away another life. Gandhi defined “satihood” as the pinnacle of purity, but insisted that purity cannot be achieved through death. Rather, it is attained through constant striving and the daily sacrifice of the spirit.

VI. Polygamy:

Polygamy, the practice of a man having more than one wife, was unacceptable to Gandhi. He believed that a wife is not a slave, but a companion and a friend. Marriage, in his view, should be based on mutual understanding and respect. If a husband is unjust, the wife has every right to live separately. For Gandhi, married life should promote mutual well-being.

VII. Pathetic Widowhood:

Gandhi was deeply concerned about the pitiable condition of widows in India during his time. The condition of child widows was especially tragic. They were seen as symbols of bad luck and were denied the right to live a normal life. Remarriage was forbidden. This imposed widowhood, based on religious or social customs, led to secret vice and corrupted the home and the faith it claimed to preserve. Gandhi believed that girls widowed before the age of 15 were never truly married, and therefore should be allowed to remarry. They should be free to choose whether to remarry, live as widows, or live independently. In the case of adult widows, especially those with children, Gandhi preferred they remain faithful to their original marriage. However, if a widow wished to remarry, he believed she should be allowed to do so and that society must accept her choice.

VIII. Female Illiteracy:

According to Gandhi, the lack of education was the root cause of many evils faced by women. He emphasized that education was essential to awaken women’s minds and help

them understand their natural rights. Without education, women were denied access to social, political, and intellectual power. Gandhi advocated for proper education for women, believing that it would make them aware of the inequalities they faced. His views on education were shaped by his belief in complementary family roles: men were suited to activities outside the home, while women were supreme in the domestic sphere.

Through education, Gandhi preached self-dependence, self-reliance, and holistic development. Gandhi is **optimistic** that education can liberate women mentally, physically, as well as spiritually. He argues that social progress can be possible only through female education. He writes: “Educate a man, you educate an individual; educate a woman, you educate a family” (*Harijan*, 10/11/1946). Therefore, he **considers** female education as an instrument that **serves** as an optimistic approach to **enlighten** the whole generation..

Gandhi’s Vision and Practice of Women Empowerment:

Gandhi was trying hard to give women equal status as men. So, Gandhi was concerned with the upliftment of women. The goal of empowerment, Gandhi believes, depends on a threefold revaluation: firstly, to bring change in their lives; secondly, to create awareness for change; and thirdly, to change the social structure. So, for Gandhi, three important factors that promote women’s empowerment are education, employment, and change in social behaviour. These three are important as well as mutually related. So, he urged women to realize their inner power. Women are naturally blessed with the qualities of love, forgiveness, non-violence, and sacrifice. Gandhi insisted on granting political rights as well as legal rights to women so that all exploitation against them vanishes. Gandhi opened the door for women in politics. He urged every woman to participate in the freedom struggle. He involved

women in the no-tax campaign and Salt *Satyagraha*. Women also played a forefront role in the Civil Disobedience Movement under the influence of Gandhi. It is not that Gandhi focused only on the upliftment of women; rather, he emphasized the upliftment of all human beings. A survey of Gandhi's social ideas makes it clear that his ultimate goal was to establish a society where peace and happiness would prevail. Gandhi advocated for the upliftment of humanity as a whole and sought to restore peace and harmony among all people. He believed this would only be possible when both genders recognized their roles and responsibilities within society.

Gandhi's concepts of *Ahimsa* (non-violence) and *Sarvodaya* (welfare of all) reflect his broader vision. He stated, "Non-violence is a power which can be wielded equally by all-children, young men and women, or grown-up people-provided they have a living faith in the God of love and have therefore equal love for all mankind. When non-violence is accepted as the law of life, it must pervade the whole being and not be applied to isolated acts." (Gandhi, *Harijan*, 5/9/1936). Additionally, *Sarvodaya*, meaning the upliftment of all, promotes cooperation and ensures equal opportunities for everyone.

Conclusion:

Gandhi's concern for women's empowerment has been a reflection of his mother's nature. Gandhi wanted to make all women aware of the dignity they possess. In one of his letters written to Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Gandhiji wrote, If you women only realize your dignity and privilege, and make full sense of it for mankind, you will make it much better than it is. But man has delighted in enslaving you, and you have proved willing slaves till the slave and holders have become one in the crime of degrading humanity. My special function from childhood, you might say, has been to make women realize her dignity (*The Indian Express*).

Gandhi emphasizes giving a new identity to women. He put emphasis on transforming women from *abala* to *sabala*: “When woman, whom we all call *abala*, becomes *sabala*, all those who are helpless will become powerful” (*The Hindu*, 24/12/1936). His words and approach inspired women and will continue to do so in their battle against injustice, inequality, and social evils. Gandhi’s efforts toward the empowerment of women are truly commendable. Although many issues have been addressed over time, women continue to face serious challenges even today. Violence against women is rising at an alarming rate. It is high time we reflect on and follow the path shown by Gandhi. His ideals of equality, non-violence, and social justice are more relevant now than ever. Empowering women through education, eliminating regressive customs like dowry and child marriage, and promoting gender equality in both public and private life are crucial steps toward building a harmonious society. As Gandhi believed, true progress can only be achieved when both men and women are treated with equal respect and dignity.

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The Evolution of the Global Feminist Movement: Milestones, Challenges, and Future Directions

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Abstract

The global feminist movement has evolved through multiple waves, each addressing distinct social, political, and economic inequalities. Beginning with the first wave in the 19th and early 20th centuries, which focused on suffrage and legal rights, the movement expanded in the mid-20th century to challenge workplace discrimination, reproductive rights, and gender roles. The third wave introduced intersectionality, emphasizing the diverse experiences of women across race, class, and culture, while the ongoing fourth wave harnesses digital activism to combat gender-based violence and systemic oppression. Despite significant progress, challenges remain, including backlash against feminist gains, persistent wage gaps, and restricted access to reproductive healthcare. Future directions of the movement suggest a continued focus on inclusivity, global solidarity, and policy reforms to achieve gender equity. This paper explores key milestones, enduring struggles, and the path forward for feminism in an increasingly interconnected world.

Keywords: Feminism, gender equality, intersectionality.

Introduction :

Feminism has been a transformative global force advocating for gender equality and challenging systemic discrimination. Emerging in different forms across various historical periods, the movement has evolved from its initial focus on women's suffrage to addressing broader issues such as reproductive rights, workplace equality, and intersectionality. This chapter explores the historical evolution of feminism, key milestones, contemporary challenges, and future directions in the global feminist movement.

The Waves of Feminism: Historical Evolution:

- **First Wave Feminism (19th to Early 20th Century): The Fight for Suffrage** The first wave of feminism primarily focused on women's suffrage and legal rights. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, feminist activists in the United States, United Kingdom, and other countries campaigned for voting rights, property rights, and access to education. The Seneca Falls Convention of 1848, organized by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, marked a pivotal moment in the U.S. feminist movement. Similarly, Emmeline Pankhurst led the British suffragette movement, employing militant tactics to push for women's enfranchisement. These efforts culminated in significant victories, including the Nineteenth Amendment (1920) in the U.S. and the Representation of the People Act (1918) in the U.K.
- **Second Wave Feminism (1940s–1980s): Expanding Rights Beyond Suffrage** The second wave of feminism expanded beyond voting rights to focus on social, economic, and reproductive issues. Influenced by Simone de Beauvoir's

The Second Sex (1949) and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), this wave challenged traditional gender roles and advocated for workplace equality, reproductive freedom, and the end of domestic violence. The establishment of the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966 was a crucial milestone, pushing for policies such as the Equal Pay Act (1963) and Title IX (1972). One of the most controversial debates during this period was the fight for reproductive rights, particularly *Roe v. Wade* (1973), which legalized abortion in the U.S. Similar struggles were observed in Europe, where countries like France and Germany saw movements advocating for bodily autonomy and contraception access.

- **Third Wave Feminism (1990s–2000s): Intersectionality and Inclusivity** The third wave of feminism, emerging in the 1990s, sought to address the limitations of previous feminist movements, particularly their focus on white, middle-class women. Scholars like Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced the concept of intersectionality, emphasizing how race, class, and sexual identity shape women's experiences differently. This period saw increased advocacy for LGBTQ+ rights, body positivity, and global feminist solidarity. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) was a landmark event where global leaders committed to advancing women's rights worldwide. Furthermore, Riot Grrrl, a feminist punk movement, promoted activism through music, art, and zines, addressing sexism in the media and entertainment industries.
- **Fourth Wave Feminism (2010s–Present): Digital Activism and Global Movements** The emergence of the fourth wave of feminism, largely facilitated by social media, has allowed for widespread awareness and activism. Movements such

as #MeToo and #TimesUp have exposed workplace harassment and gender-based violence, leading to legal and corporate policy changes. The fourth wave is also characterized by the global nature of feminist struggles. In Latin America, Ni Una Menos protests have drawn attention to femicide and gender violence, while in India, movements like #PinjraTod challenge restrictions on women in educational institutions. Additionally, feminist activism has played a role in overturning restrictive laws, such as Ireland's Repeal the 8th movement (2018), which led to the legalization of abortion.

Challenges Facing the Global Feminist Movement:

Despite significant progress, feminism continues to face resistance and setbacks. Some of the major challenges include:

- **Backlash and Misrepresentation:** Feminism is often mischaracterized as anti-male or radical, leading to public skepticism and opposition.
- **Political and Legal Barriers:** In many countries, women's rights are still restricted due to conservative governments and discriminatory laws. For example, in Afghanistan, the Taliban's return to power in 2021 severely limited women's access to education and employment.
- **Economic Inequality:** The gender pay gap persists worldwide, with women earning significantly less than men for the same work. The Global Gender Gap Report (2023) indicates that it will take over 130 years to close the wage gap at the current pace.
- **Violence Against Women:** Gender-based violence remains a critical issue, with an estimated one in three women experiencing physical or sexual violence globally (WHO, 2022).
- **Digital Feminism and Online Harassment:** While digital

activism has amplified feminist voices, it has also exposed activists to doxxing, cyberbullying, and threats from anti-feminist groups.

Future Directions of Feminism:

The future of feminism lies in its ability to remain adaptive, inclusive, and intersectional. Key areas for future development include:

- **Global Collaboration:** Strengthening international feminist alliances can help address systemic issues like gender-based violence, reproductive rights, and economic disparity on a larger scale.
- **Men as Allies:** Engaging men in conversations about feminism and gender equality is crucial for dismantling patriarchal structures. Campaigns like HeForShe, initiated by the United Nations, encourage male participation in feminist activism.
- **Legal and Policy Reforms:** Continued advocacy for gender-neutral policies in workplaces, education, and governance will help bridge gaps in representation and economic equality.
- **Technology and Feminism:** As artificial intelligence and automation shape the future workforce; feminist movements must address gender bias in AI algorithms and tech-related discrimination.
- **Environmental and Ecofeminism:** The intersection of gender and environmental justice is gaining prominence, with ecofeminists advocating for sustainable policies that protect both marginalized communities and natural resources.

Conclusion:

The global feminist movement has undergone significant transformations, adapting to the social, political, and

technological shifts of each era. While historical milestones have paved the way for gender equality, contemporary challenges continue to demand feminist advocacy. By embracing inclusivity, global solidarity, and digital activism, feminism can continue to push forward toward a more equitable world.

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Role of Khasi Women in Tribal Economy: A Feminist Reading of the Challenging Character Lyngkien Makri of *The Distaste of the Earth* by Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih

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Abstract

The geographical and socio-political diversity of the Northeast creates a segregated identity from mainstream India in various sectors. Notably, the position of tribal women in multiple sectors faces challenges, or their contributions are overlooked and neglected. The study tries to connect the idea of Intersectionality of feminist reading to grasp the unequal opportunity, education, and recognition, which makes the Khasi women more inferior and vulnerable, and their strong and unique leadership roles become silent in mainstream society. The paper aims to analyze the significant and subversive role of Khasi women in the economic sector through the character of Lyngkien Makri. The study focuses on a thorough underpinning by analyzing her bold leadership who runs a pata (local bar) despite the challenge she faced by marrying more than ten. Moreover, it also focused on the patriarchal attitude

toward a matrilineal woman despite their strong economic contribution, which is internalized that Khasi women are rarely marginalized. In addition, this paper tries to dismantle that despite the political and geographical segregation, where the position and value of Khasi women are blurred, nonetheless they have proved to be powerful, and empowering women.

Keywords: Khasi women, women empowerment, oppression.

Introduction:

Depending on historical, geographical and political segregated characteristics, Northeast India has built its own unique diversity among their various tribes or groups. Over a long period of time, they have acquired a different cultural lifestyle from mainstream society. By building different habits and lifestyles and acquiring some local skills, they have distinctively attained a unique recognition. However, these uniqueness and differences are both positively and negatively responded to by mainstream society. Among all these tribes, the Khasi tribes are characterized by their unique structure of living regarding their architecture, family relationships, etc. Being a matrilineal society, Khasi women have acquired different roles, and their position is distinct from that of other women.

Being a female gender, which position has faced many taboos over a period of time; the Khasi women also face various challenges to present themselves. Being a part of the matrilineal structure, they have a great influence in various sectors such as the economy, land rights, etc. However, the capability, strength, and leadership skills are overlooked by mainstream society. Khasi women “may be the mistress of the house and inheritors, but men have sole authority in issues of politics and statecraft” (Marbaniang and Singh 17). However, by managing

the paternal and maternal family and positioning themselves in various labour sectors, they have built a strong feminine power. Depending on some emerging facts, such as Khasi women have the right to acquire paternal property, they are the head of the family, they need not stay in the law's house, etc, it is internalized and propagated that they have rarely faced gender discrimination. But deconstructing the whole structure of matrilineal society, it is found that Khasi women are also segregated, marginalized, and traumatized by the patriarchal society. "Owner's right and user's right as it may so happen that she owns the land but has no role in the management of the particular resource" (Ghose and Choudhury 69).

Intersectionality is a key theoretical term that emerged in feminist theory to analyze the various levels of oppression faced by women irrespective of their culture, class, race, ethnicity, caste, etc. In 1989, the American writer Kimberlé Crenshaw gave the idea of intersectionality in her article titled *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*. The writer uses this idea to figure out specifically the oppression of Black women. "Black women can experience discrimination in ways that are both similar to and different from those experienced by white women and white men" (Crenshaw 149). Moreover, this theory helps to grasp the oppression of women in each sector according to the situation. Lyngkien Makri is a significant character in this novel, who runs a pata (local bar). Despite the tragic love story of Manik Raitong and Lieng Makaw, the narrative gives insight into the character of Lyngkien Makri. The narrative points out the way she manages her bar and her drunken husband. Being a Khasi woman, she has a great responsibility. Being an owner of a bar, she has faced challenges managing her drunken male

customers. As a woman, the way her authoritative ownership is challenged by Sapho. The way her command is neglected by her customer is depicted by the time Sapho utters some unacceptable words towards Manik.

“Lyngkien beating Sapho with a fat stick on the back of his head. As sapho was crying..... ‘How often have I told you never to use expletives here, *ha?* How often have I told you never to curse Ailin, *ha?* How often have I told you never to curse in front of respectable people like Bah Shem and Bah Kynih, *ha?* Have you forgotten the purple yam on your forehead? Do you want me to give you another one?’” (Nongkynrih 5).

Her response towards him on the surface level seems to be masculine and authoritative, but the way he neglects her with each command is shown by her frustration with the frequent use of “how often”. It depicts the position of Khasi women in the context of Khasi society. Her character propagates women’s empowerment in the economic sector in a male-dominated environment. The narrative gives both perspectives of her character as challenging women who face obstacles and a subversive Khasi woman who breaks traditional gender norms to show her entrepreneurial spirit. Her behaviour toward Sapho shows her leadership qualities, which are demanded as per the situation, and it depicts her ability to run a business without depending on males to dismantle traditional stereotypes. In addition, the behaviour of Sapho towards her is dismissive and disrespectful, which presents the patriarchal attitude to each challenging woman in every sector they have faced.

Apparently, the marriage of Lyngkien Makri with ten men looks like a strong Khasi woman who can marry multiple times. However, examining the underlying structure of Khasi

society, it is observed that there are some internalised taboos practised to women that they are unable to run their lives without taking help from Men. In the case of Lyngkien Makri, undoubtedly, she presents as a strong woman to manage the bar without taking help from her drunken husband. But, only for social pressure, and to protect herself from patriarchal society, she has married ten times. This kind of self-forced marriage indicates the condition of the personal and professional life of Khasi women, where the apparent image of Khasi women as strong, independent and free from patriarchal autonomy is dismantled. In the prevalent cycle of patriarchal dominance, where males are the protector of women and the doubt of Khasi women regarding their power is reflected as,

“Lyngkien was a much-married woman. She had been married ten times already...for the marriages were forced on her by the ultimate deaths of the husbands.....She could have stayed a widow,.... someone said, ‘She was too beautiful to be a widow.’ Lyngkien herself has a much more pragmatic explanation: ‘ How can I, a woman, run a path alone?’”(Nongkynrih 8).

As a result of cultural and ethnic diversity, Khasi women maintain a vigorous, economically empowering position. They have been practising some physical activities to run their livelihood. But, their labour and local skills are overlooked under the protection of man. In the case of Lyngkien Makri, knowing the situation of her two drunken husbands after her first marriage, she is culturally imbibed that she should run her bar with the help of her husband. The advice of Meisan to marry another husband carries both critical comments and societal pressure. “However, now tired of her Meisan’s advice

and useless insistence on non-pata men, she began a not-so-secret relationship with one of her customers, whom she later married” (Nongkynrih 12). The narrative points out that a woman can run a bar independently through the words ‘useless insistence on non-pata men’; but also a paradoxical meaning arises that an independent women’s contribution is challenged in non-pata men. Her character also portrays the way she faces challenges to maintain feminine roles such as motherhood and womanhood. Ignoring her maternal health for her three pregnancies with a stillborn child, she continues her bar by fulfilling societal demands, also marrying one man as a fulfilment of objectified women. “She was now about twenty - six and very much in the full bloom of womanhood. Some men tried to win her attention” (12).

Objectification of women as a commodity or an item for pleasure-seeking by patriarchal society and the continual stripping of power over women are depicted through the condition of Lyngkien after the death of her ninth husband. The way society thinks women are powerless is depicted through the comments of customers of Lyngkien. “Who wouldn’t want to marry her? Who wouldn’t want free food and drinks and a body like hers? Kaba dang ibang bha te! She is still quite tasty looking, you know... Anyone of us could have become lord and master of all this!” (Nongkynrih 14). The narrative gives a clear picture of the patriarchal viewpoint towards women. On the one hand, the narrative portrays the seriousness of Khasi women regarding their business and takes the help of men as a supportive factor, but on the other hand, it also shows the subtle internalization of society where women are just a prize or object to fulfill desire, and enjoyment.

From the point of view of mainstream feminist reading, it is generalized that a Khasi woman faces the same patriarchal

attitude and oppression as a mainstream woman experiences. But through the lens of intersectionality, the character of Lyngkien presents what are the conditions, oppressions and challenges a Khasi woman has to deal with within their own space. Dissecting the societal structure of khasi lives, it dismantled the prevalent subtle representation that a Khasi woman independently and securely runs her business and observed that they are still suffering various levels of oppression which can be observed through the study of intersectionality.”Intersectionality first and foremost reflects the reality of lives” (Shields 304).

Conclusion:

The above-mentioned analysis tries to figure out the reality of Khasi Women through the character of Lyngkien Makri. The paper tries to dissect the various levels of oppression and challenges a Khasi woman has to face within their own boundary. The prevalent power dynamic, hierarchy of matrilineal society and objectification of women as a sexual pleasure, specifically in the economic sector, have been analysed by relating to the concept of intersectionality. In addition, this paper also tries to point out the strong leadership quality of an independent Khasi woman despite the nuanced patriarchal structure by establishing as “Khasi women are very industrious” (Shangpliang 89).

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Echoes of Feminist Identity and Exploration of Depression by the Study of Sylvia Plath.

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Abstract

Sylvia Plath is one of the well known and most widely-studied writers of the twentieth century. Many critics have presented different images of Plath like, ‘suicidal’ poet, the frustrated wife and mother, the feminist precursor. Sylvia Plath remains one of the most compelling and enigmatic figures in contemporary literature. Plath’s short but prolific career produced a significant body of work that has captivated audiences with its intensity, emotional depth, and innovative use of language. This paper seeks to explore the interplay between Plath’s tumultuous personal life and her creative output, examining how her poetry and prose reflect her inner turmoil and broader societal issues. It focuses on gender equality in terms of Sexual equality, state of equal access to resources and opportunities regardless of gender, economic participation and decision making, individuals opportunities that do not depend on others whether they are Male or female. We can see the reflection of women’s perspectives and views in her writings. Basically, her life is something mystical. The

present study concentrates on how Plath deals with Gender equality in her poems.

Keywords: Feminist, depression, male dominated, gender equality, individuality.

Introduction:

Sylvia Plath's poetry patently epitomizes her personal and artistic struggle as a woman writer to be part of a largely male-dominated canon. Plath's work often explores the complexities of femininity and gender roles, and her exploration of these themes has inspired many feminist poets to examine similar issues in their own work. Plath's use of language and form has also had a profound impact on contemporary poetry. Her work often incorporates unconventional syntax, fractured narratives, and dense, layered symbolism, all of which have become hallmarks of contemporary experimental poetry. Furthermore, Plath's work has been instrumental in bringing mental illness and its effects into the public consciousness. Plath herself struggled with mental illness and her poetry provides a powerful testament to the inner turmoil and pain that can accompany these conditions. Her willingness to confront these issues head-on has encouraged many contemporary poets to do the same. Overall, Sylvia Plath's influence on contemporary poetry is multi-faceted and far-reaching. Her unique style, powerful themes, and fearless approach to difficult subjects have made her a significant figure in the development of modern poetry, and her legacy continues to inspire and challenge today's writer. Plath's work has been influential in shaping contemporary attitudes towards mental illness and the role of women in literature. Plath was open about her struggles with depression and her experiences as a woman in a male-dominated society, and her work has helped

to break down many of the stigmas surrounding these issues. Today, many poets continue to draw on Plath's example by writing about mental illness and by exploring the experiences of women in their work. Overall, Sylvia Plath's influence on contemporary poetry is significant and far-reaching.

Objectives of the Study:

1. Understanding Sylvia Plath's personal experiences and their impact on her writing, exploring her confessional style and its influence on literature
2. Examining how Plath's poetry reflects the internal struggles of those affected by mental health problems and trauma.
3. Analysing her poetry reflects the personal identity and her quest for self-discovery.

Methodology:

The methodology used in this study is completely doctrinal in nature. It is based on secondary data. The sources are mainly collected from articles, journal, books, internet, research paper etc.

Plath's Personal Context:

Sylvia Plath was depressed from her childhood till her death. Her father Otto Plath and mother Aurelia Schober both belongs to different communities. Her father was a German and her mother was a Jew. In her poems use many metaphors to describe her relationship with the people whom she hated. Her poems were mostly confessional ones. Plath under went many stages of conflicts, like identity crisis, her longing for her father and her fear of ageing etc. She committed suicide at the age of thirty.

Her Prominent Works:

In her autobiographical poem 'daddy' deals with woman's challenges and of a desire for a change in contemporary society. Sylvia Plath portrays her depression, her

obscene language with full of metaphors and figurative images throughout the poem *Daddy*. She indicated as her father is a symbol of destruction who limits her happiness and equality in contemporary society, she trained and had to live upon a strict gender structure.

“Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I’m through.”

It is a final, powerful statement of the speaker’s liberation from her father’s influence. The repetition of the word “daddy” is both affectionate and infantile, but it’s starkly contrasted by the harsh language that follows – “you bastard.” This juxtaposition underlines Plath’s complex, conflicted emotions towards her father – a mix of longing, resentment, anger, and even love. “I’m through” signifies a finality, an end to her emotional struggle. It’s as if Plath is liberating herself from the haunting memory of her father and the emotional hold it had on her.

“Lady Lazarus” is another well known poem of Sylvia Plath, where she delves into her personal struggle with mental health and societal expectations, using vivid and sometimes grotesque imagery to convey her anguish. This poem explores the themes like death, rebirth, suffering and defiance. It presents a figure who repeatedly faces death but always returns to life, much like the biblical Lazarus who was resurrected by Jesus. Through this poem she tries to reveals her critique of society’s morbid curiosity and insensitivity towards personal pain.

“A paperweight,
My face a featureless, fine
Jew linen.”

This lines demonstrates how Plath’s suffering weighted heavily on her. She lacks a sense of identity, she cannot recognise her name, her originality, no one would spot her in the crowd. She also mentioned that her face is like ‘fine Jew

linen ‘ before being placed in the tomb, the body of Lazarus was wrapped in Jewish linens. This poem depicts her mental state while she was going through worst times and her mind was flooded with suicidal thoughts. She uses of holocaust imagery to convey her own sense of personal hell like consequences.

”Tulip” is one of her most renowned poem for the intense emotions and feelings of Sylvia Plath. She wrote this poem when she received a bouquet of tulips at hospital bed after her recovery. The speaker presents sickness and death as blissfully simple and restful, a kind of welcome numbness. Even she praises the “peacefulness” of the hospital environment and imagines “the dead” blissfully accepting it like a holy “Communion tablet.

“The tulips are too red in the first place, they hurt me.”

The poem represent the speaker’s desire for the simplicity of death and here tulips encourages towards life. In the poem as the speaker intensifies the personal experience by declaring that she didn’t want the flowers at all, all she wanted was the feeling of absolute peace and with it the profound sense of freedom. Colours plays an important role in this poem and adds to the deeply emotional feelings the speaker experiences. White is chosen as a symbol of peace, virginity and winter and eventually death too. The red of the tulips represents a forceful life, from that of a carnivore to the bodily wound, an abhorrence and the surfacing of blood. Plath demonstrates the whiteness and sterility of the hospital room with the liveliness of the tulips. The tone of “Tulips” is introspective and reflective. The speaker describes her thoughts and feelings in a quiet, contemplative voice. The poem’s mood is gloomy, with sadness and loss pervading throughout.

Here’s a more prominent components in her poetry:

Feminism:

Plath's poetry was a voice of feminist rebellion, reflecting the personal struggle of women in a male dominated society. Her poetry explored themes of gender and identity and challenged traditional gender roles, inspiring a new generation of feminist poets to address similar themes in their work.

Language and Form:

Plath's use of innovative language and form, such as free verse, helped to break away from traditional poetic structures and paved the way for experimentation in contemporary poetry. Many contemporary poets have been inspired by her use of enjambment, repetition, and rhyme schemes in their own work.

Mental Health:

Plath's experiences with mental illness, particularly depression and suicidal ideation, were reflected in her work. She used her poetry as a tool to explore and process her own mental health struggles, which inspired a new generation of poets to address similar themes of mental illness and self-care in their work.

Confessional poetry:

Plath's work mostly credited with pioneering the confessional poetry movement. She often characterized by the personal and autobiographical nature of the subject matter.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, Sylvia Plath's contribution to feminist literature, and her innovative use of language and form have all had a profound impact on the development of modern poetry. She left her footprint in the field of experimental poetry, through her personal demonstrations and difficult themes. Her legacy has also contributed to a greater understanding of mental illness and its effects on individuals and society. Her raising voice

inspires many poets and readers even her works remains so valuable, powerful and relevant in today's time.

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Rewriting the Myth of Devki: Feminist Implications in *Boki* by Nitoo Das

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Abstract

A myth plays the role of a source to bring out the targeted meanings of the rewritten text affording beyond the literary construal. Selected text, a poem entitled “Doiboki” by Nitoo Das is no exception being a rewriting on the myth of Devki of Indian mythology. Devki is the biological mother of Lord Krishna as suggestive through the mythological interventions of Mahabharata. The theme in the poem is metaphorical just like the transformation of the title of the book being *Boki* instead of being “Doiboki” or “Debki”. The syntactical transformation of the title reflects the metaphorical implications in the text itself. However, the theme raised in the poem “Doiboki” comes across a metamorphically nuanced stance. Doiboki is a familiar mythological character in Indian community. It is interesting how the poem deals with the particular myth yet not confining to it at the very outset. To put it straight, a contemporary meaning is made out of the traditional understanding of the myth. The poem comes a long way away from the mythological

construal but to emphasize on the ambicionado meaning of the poet. This paper attempts to present how the poet has rewritten the idea of Devki to reconstruct a new idea of Doiboki at present times. The character in the poem is not worshipped. Rather she is portrayed as an ordinary woman who is loitering in the street. That character sketch of Devki is a metamorphosis in the minds of the reader. This paper attempts to mediate in that textual expedition.

Keywords: Myth, rewriting, metaphorical meaning, metamorphosis.

Introduction:

Rewriting of myth is an exemplary segment amid the various practices of literature. Rewriting retells the existing myths and examines the related beliefs and ideas. The act of rewriting invokes layers of perspectives leading towards a full-fledged scrutiny. Rewriting presents the myth with a multidimensional perspective. It is at this juncture that the scholars of literature interpret the task of rewriting. This paper also endeavors to indulge in the task of analyzing the revising of the popular myth of Devki in the poem of Nitoo Das.

Nitoo Das, a poet based on Assam writing in English, has authored three books of poems entitled *Boki*, *Crowbite* *Cyborg Proverbs* till now. An observation on the trend of writing in English from the state of Assam points out that Nitoo Das together with a group of writers like Nabina Das, Aruni Kashyap, Jahnabi Goswami form the first generation of Assamese writers are writing in English. But the scopes of discussing the poems are not solely because of the writer's contribution to the emerging trend of North Eastern English Writing in English. Significance lies in the themes that orient the poems. The selected poem "Doiboki" is extracted from the collection *Boki* which is the first collection of Nitoo Das

published in 2008. The name *Boki* is also a shortened form of the title “Doiboki.” Here is an extract from the poem:

“Doiboki
Doiboki
doi
boki.” (Das, 10)

The word “boki” that appears here in this stanza is also the title of the book. It is reiterative to state that Devki is a mythological character from Mahabharata. She is the biological mother of Lord Krishna. The story of Devki is such that she loses six of her children in the hands of Kamsa as a result of a curse. Kamsa, the brother of Devki, is cursed that he will be killed by the eighth child of Devki. Consequently, Kamsa attempts to kill all the eight children in fear of losing his life. Devki saves the girl child by surrogating her in the womb of Rohini and Krishna is saved by the advice of Basudev and Yoshoda looks after him (Roy, n.d.). That is how Devki holds the position of Goddess in the minds of the devotees of Krishna as she gives birth to the Lord.

But the poem written by Nitoo Das does not have any such direct references to the myth. An in-depth interpretation of the poem nullifies such delink. This paper attempts to analyze how the poem stands in apparent denial of references to the myth yet emphasizing the relevance. ‘Doiboki’ is the Assamese pronunciation of Devki. Doiboki is sometimes kept a name of a new-born girl child in Assamese society. The woman described in the poem is one such Doiboki familiar in the Assamese society. Hence, she is the representative of the thought presented through the poem. That woman when described in the poem is the woman supposed to be mad and loitering homeless in the street. People poke at her without necessarily being hateful yet ignoring the very existence of the

lady. Doiboki is a source of entertainment for the people who poke and taunt at her. She remains silent. The poet builds up an image of Doiboki at the very beginning of the poem.

“She went around
With scowling hair
her long betel-spittled
lips exploding sex-words.” (Das,10)

She has ‘scowling hair’ and ‘betel-spittled lips.’ Gradually the poem explores the metaphorical construal and states that she carries with her ‘secrets’ and these ‘secrets’ are like the ‘roots.’ This Doiboki is the woman representing all the woes of a woman and hence is the justification of the word ‘root.’ She knows the tales of oppressions which are usually some ‘secrets’ but which carry forward the ‘roots’ or the mechanism of the structural domination of the society. She will speak often the ‘sex-words.’ It is significant to note that she does not only utter the ‘sex-words’ but also ‘explodes’. Following stanza is a reflection of the same:

“She sat in street-corners
and exposed glistening secrets
like roots with
shifty-eyed knowledge.” (Das, 10)

The use of the word ‘exploding’ is significant as if her words manifested dormant sexual gratification of her eventually representing the female psyche. A topic which is supposed to be obscene but her utterance of the ‘sex-words’ perhaps raises the question for whom in reality such topic is obscene. She being labelled as a wanderer and being the isolated woman enjoys the liberty of choosing her words. Seemingly she is the one in isolation but in reality, she has the choice to celebrate some of the barred choices. Then the verses reveal how the human around reacts to her deeds and living in the street. ‘Men’

tease her whereas women do not pay heed towards her. The speaker addresses himself or herself as ‘we’ and call themselves the ‘children.’ ‘Children’ including the speaker acts like they are afraid of her. But they are never fearful to call out her name in a manner of teasing like ‘Doiboki,’ ‘boki’ and ‘doi.’ But this lady would never be silent and always replies back to all who misbehave towards her. She would sometimes be naked willingly when she is mocked at. Such an act is more metaphorical rather than being literal. When she is literally naked, she metaphorically discloses the hidden stances of the people around. And eyes of the growing children are ‘experienced’ in the sense that they are part of the structural ways of domination in the society. Following stanza embodies the same:

“She’d turn around
and unbutton
her blouse for our
experienced eyes.” (Das, 11)

Now the question emerges how the myth of Devki is a constant relevance in the reading of the poem. A reader if to judge under the criterion of open-ended reading can necessarily bring in the references of the myth. Devki of Mahabharat comes across denials at different stages of life. Her choice in cherishing motherhood is snatched away by Kamsa who stands out to be the epitome of devilry. She is also denied the joys of nurturing Lord Krishna as a resultant of the advice of Basudev. With this pain, she is a significant part in Indian Mythology. Devki can be a mother to the Lord and she can also be the symbol of utter dominance. She is the mother of the Omnipresence yet in the traditional society she is no exception to suffering. The rewriting of the myth in Nitoo Das’ “Doiboki” supplements the analytical nuances to reread the myth. Devki along with her husband is imprisoned until they are saved by the Lord. But Doiboki of

Das fights her battle in the best possible way she can adhere to. What draws attention towards the poem is the portrayal of the image of Doiboki. She is not the Devki of the myth apparently. Rather she is one familiar to all people in Assamese society. She is not hard to dual in the imagination of the reader. Even the description about Doiboki in the poem also is very common unless one attempts to interpret beyond the apparent meaning. In a nutshell, the commonplaces open the door for manifestation of the deeper reality. Perhaps it occurs parallelly with the exploration of the myth through the image of Doiboki. In the same collection of poems called Boki, Nitoo Das rewrites the folktale of Tejimola, an Assamese folktale telling the tortured life of Tejimola by her step mother. Tejimola is tortured to death in the absence of her father as it goes with the orally transmitted version of Tejimola. Rewriting this folktale, Nitoo Das gives a voice to Tejimola to fight back the sufferings and she is enabled in the poet's vision to speak 'out loud' (Das, 2008, P.56). Thus, the writing of Nitoo Das has redefined the age-old tales with a new orientation to reconstruct the idea of people centered around such folkloristic beliefs. These poems offer to rethink the established normative. Myths and fairytales work like a text to work upon the biased normative. Such text with foundational errors keeps on reemphasizing on the narrow frameworks of gendering. This author stresses upon the theory of feminist revisionist mythology and terms such methods of rewriting as revisionist mythmaking (Mathew 2011). Following quote also suggests that retelling of myth is suggestive of the feminist nuances. If retelling of myth becomes an act of feminist retelling, writers and readers must have to go beyond to include real- life feminist experiences.

“However, feminist retellings are only the first stage in improving the literary representation of women and women

writers. To fully overcome the patriarchal nature of language and literature, we need to further challenge its male domination and find more ways to include genuine female experiences and perspectives into the literary canon.” (Plab,58)

Conclusion:

Discussion on rewriting and recreation of myth hints at the importance of looking back at the myth through contemporary and relevant lenses. It will save female characters of mythology from being silenced and distorted. It also challenges the prevailing stereotypical representation of biased thoughts against femininity and feminist ideology.

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Rewriting the Epic: Gynocriticism in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* and *The Forest of Enchantments*

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Abstract

This study investigates feminist retellings of Indian mythology in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novels *The Palace of Illusions* and *The Forest of Enchantments*. Drawing upon the principles of Gynocriticism, it explores how Divakaruni reclaims mythic narratives by privileging the female viewpoint. Through the use of first-person narration, the author disrupts the patriarchal structure of classical epics by allowing central female figures—Draupadi and Sita—to recount their lives in their own voices. Rather than portraying them as idealized symbols of virtue or silent victims, Divakaruni reconstructs them as self-aware, emotionally complex women navigating social and moral dilemmas. By foregrounding female agency, emotional nuance, and the importance of inter-feminine bonds, these novels reshape the cultural memory embedded in mythology and offer critical contributions to feminist literature.

Keywords: Gynocriticism, feminist retellings, mythology, gender, female agency.

Introduction:

The Mahabharata and Ramayana are foundational to Indian literary and spiritual tradition, having shaped moral and social values for centuries. However, these epics have predominantly been told from a male perspective, rendering their female characters either idealized or marginal. Within this androcentric framework, women are often denied narrative depth, reduced to supporting roles that serve the hero's journey or uphold patriarchal ideals. In recent decades, feminist writers have revisited these ancient epics with a view to rewriting them from the standpoint of women. Among them, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni emerges as a key voice, known for her ability to humanize mythological figures and imbue them with psychological and moral complexity. Her novels *The Palace of Illusions* and *The Forest of Enchantments* reposition Draupadi and Sita as central figures in their respective stories, allowing them to recount their lives in their own words and reflect critically on the expectations imposed upon them.

Guided by Elaine Showalter's theory of **Gynocriticism** (which encourages the study of women's literature as a distinct tradition) this paper examines how Divakaruni reworks these epics to foreground female experience. Her narratives not only give voice to women but also subvert the very storytelling structures that have historically muted them. By rewriting the epics through the lens of female subjectivity, Divakaruni contributes meaningfully to feminist literary discourse.

Gynocriticism and *The Palace of Illusions*:

In *The Palace of Illusions*, Divakaruni reinterprets the Mahabharata by allowing Draupadi (here called Panchaali) to narrate her own life story. This act of self-narration itself marks a revolutionary departure from traditional versions, which

predominantly interpret her through male voices and perspectives. By giving Panchaali control over the narrative, Divakaruni dismantles long-standing patriarchal assumptions and enables readers to encounter the epic from within the consciousness of its central female character. Panchaali's story begins with reflections on her unusual birth, as recounted by her Dhai Ma, who describes her as "the girl who wasn't invited" (*The Palace of Illusions*, p. 1). This phrase captures Panchaali's sense of exclusion and foreshadows her lifelong quest for identity and belonging. From an early age, she displays a resistance to prescribed gender roles—challenging male authority, questioning religious doctrine, and seeking knowledge typically denied to women. Her reaction to a tutor's claim that women are the root of all suffering—"I resented the tutor's declaration that women were the root of all the world's trouble" (*The Palace of Illusions*, p. 24)—illustrates her early feminist awareness.

Divakaruni's Panchaali is portrayed as more than a symbolic figure; she is a person full of contradictions—ambitious, passionate, vulnerable, and insightful. A striking example of this complexity is her concealed love for Karna, which adds emotional depth to her character and highlights the rigidity of societal codes that suppress female desire. Her polyandrous marriage, rather than being romanticized or condemned, is explored as a political necessity fraught with emotional costs. The episode of her public disrobing in the Kaurava court—a scene central to the Mahabharata—takes on new resonance when told from Panchaali's perspective. Rather than a passive recipient of humiliation, she becomes a figure of resistance. Her refusal to be shamed into silence and her insistence on speaking her truth mark a powerful challenge to the norms that expect female submission.

Equally significant are her relationships with other women, which are often neglected in conventional versions of the epic. Kunti is portrayed not merely as a queen or mother-in-law, but as a woman shaped by duty and compromise. Subhadra, too, is given voice and significance, serving as an emotional anchor in Panchaali's otherwise turbulent life. These portrayals emphasize female solidarity and shared resilience in a male-dominated world. Ultimately, *The Palace of Illusions* presents Panchaali not as an archetype but as a human being who refuses to be defined by others. Her voice reclaims space in a literary tradition that had long silenced her, aligning with the goals of gynocriticism to restore agency to women in literature.

Gynocriticism and *The Forest of Enchantments*:

In *The Forest of Enchantments*, Divakaruni undertakes a similar feminist project with the Ramayana, but this time through the perspective of Sita. From the outset, the novel signals a departure from patriarchal tradition: Sita reads Valmiki's version of her life and feels misrepresented. In response, she chooses to author her own account—called Sitayan—written in red ink, a color rich with symbolism. She explains her choice by invoking the lived realities of womanhood: “How else could I write my story, except in the colour of menstruation and childbirth, the colour of the marriage mark that changes women's lives, the colour of the flowers of the Ashoka tree under which I had spent my years of captivity?” (*The Forests of Enchantments*, Prologue)

This reimagined Sita is not the obedient and docile wife familiar from traditional narratives. While she loves Rama, her affection is not blind. She questions his decisions—particularly his rigid adherence to dharma at the cost of compassion—and she evaluates the moral consequences of his actions on her life and wellbeing.

Divakaruni presents motherhood as central to Sita's identity but refuses to idealize it. Her pregnancy in exile and her experience of raising her sons alone are portrayed as emotionally and physically challenging. Through these scenes, the novel challenges traditional glorifications of maternal sacrifice by emphasizing the real, lived experiences of women. Sita's refusal to undergo a second trial of purity is one of the most poignant acts of defiance in the narrative. She asserts her dignity by refusing to validate her worth through the lens of male honor.

The novel also grants voice to other women in the Ramayana—Mandodari, Ahalya, Urmila, and Surpanakha—giving them narrative space and human complexity. These women are no longer mere side characters; they emerge as individuals with their own griefs, hopes, and wisdom.

Sita's final decision to return to the earth is not framed as an escape or failure but as an empowered choice. In removing herself from a world that repeatedly failed to recognize her truth, she reclaims agency over her body and story. Through *The Forest of Enchantments*, Divakaruni thus subverts patriarchal readings of the *Ramayana* and centers female voice and experience in a story historically dominated by male heroism.

Comparative Reflections: Two Heroines, Two Forms of Resistance:

Although Draupadi and Sita come from different epics, Divakaruni draws a compelling parallel between them by reimagining both as authors of their own lives. In doing so, she challenges the cultural legacy that has for centuries dictated what women should be—obedient, silent, self-effacing—and replaces it with characters who speak, question, resist, and grow. Draupadi's defiance is external and direct. She confronts injustice vocally, challenges authority figures, and seeks public

recognition for her suffering. Her resistance is visible, forceful, and embedded in the political structures of her time.

Sita, on the other hand, represents a quieter form of resistance. Her strength lies in reflection, endurance, and the calm assertion of her ethical boundaries. Her choices—to speak when necessary, to remain silent when words are insufficient, and to walk away when dignity demands it—are all acts of autonomy.

Both women resist the narrow identities that myth has imposed upon them. They are not mere embodiments of loyalty or rage, but rich, emotionally complex individuals who seek to define themselves on their own terms. Moreover, both novels celebrate the relationships among women—mothers, sisters, and friends—that provide emotional support and highlight the importance of collective female memory.

In rewriting these epics, Divakaruni demonstrates that myth is not fixed. It can be revisited, reinterpreted, and re-authored. By placing Draupadi and Sita at the center of their stories, she transforms them from symbols into subjects, from passive ideals into active narrators.

Conclusion:

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novels *The Palace of Illusions* and *The Forest of Enchantments* represent a radical intervention in the tradition of mythological storytelling. By centering the voices of Draupadi and Sita, she offers a counter-narrative to centuries of patriarchal representation. Through the lens of gynocriticism, these works reveal the emotional and ethical complexities of female experience that have long been ignored or oversimplified.

Divakaruni does not merely revise the content of the epics—she reshapes their very form. By empowering her female protagonists to speak and reflect, she challenges the literary

conventions that have historically marginalized women. These novels serve not only as feminist retellings but also as acts of literary reclamation, restoring agency, dignity, and voice to figures once confined to the margins of myth.

In reimagining these classical tales, Divakaruni reminds us that literature is a living tradition. It can evolve, adapt, and expand to include perspectives previously left out. Her work encourages readers and scholars alike to question dominant narratives and to seek out the silenced stories that lie beneath.

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Exploring Queer Theory through Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract

This chapter covers the aspects of queer theory and its precision crafted extraordinarily throughout the novel *Funny Boy* authored by Shyam Selvadurai. It deals with the ethnic drawbacks found to prevail through the characters. The attempt to universalize and freeze the identities in a particular frame has always been unfair and in some cases severe violence. Heterosexuality as a prejudiced societal norm controls the marginalization of 'sexual minorities'. The paper demonstrates the cultural marginalization of the people with queer attributes.

Keywords: Queer, gender and sexuality, heteronormative, absurdity, perversion

Introduction:

Queer, the umbrella term, denotes the reciprocal to heteronormative school of thought. It puts queries upon the fixed paradigms on sexual identity developed on normal ideology of sex. Arjie, the protagonist of the novel 'Funny Boy', suffers mere discrimination and deviation growing

since budding child to a mature adolescent. The narrative itself set in 1980s Sri Lanka depicts Arjie as a tamil boy being raised in the island, grappling with his factor of 'sexuality' mirroring alongside the societal expectations, ultimately leading him on a journey of self-discovery and acceptance. Barely involved in conventionally masculine pursuits, Arjie is more fond of acting out weddings and reading "little women" rather than playing cricket. To Arjie, his unnatural and unusual tendency of putting on girly wear displaces him out of the conventional heteronormative school of thought.

Analysis:

Indifferent to gay and lesbian studies, the term 'Queer' shows often derogatory connotations focusing more on the marginalization of sexual minorities adjacently condemning male and female homosexual desirability. The field of "Queer Theory" is used to designate the combined area of gay and lesbian studies, together with the theoretical and critical writings about all modes of variance - such as cross-dressing, bisexuality and transexuality- from society's normative model of sexual identity, orientation, and activities. Identity turbulence, resistance to interaction, fear of isolation of family and friends drives him to the exploration of his feminine attributes and queer effeminacy. Selvadurai chooses games and sports as an instrument to encapsulate the established heteronormative perspective in the contemporary timeline. The game of 'bride-bride' reveals the sprouting of ingenuine girl-like tendencies within the protagonist. He wants to be a bride in the game and always owns his mother saree with him uses along with make up in a servant, Janaki's room. Arjie prefers decoring and adoring himself up to roaming under

scorching sun playing outdoor games. Whenever his Amma is getting dressed up for a special occasion to stare and cherish her from top to bottom. To him, entering her room is a greater boon than that granted by any god to mortals. His first analysis is that he is enchanted by the faint aroma of perfume rising out of the box each time he picks up a piece of jewellery. Another analysis is the pleasure of watching his Amma putting on the saree gracefully from shaking opening the yards to finally tucking it into her waistband and pinning with a brooch. These exhibit his 'problem' of sexual orientation and unmanly psyche. A plot of Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* shifts to an evening when Arjie's Appa found to be arguing with Amma and accusing her alongside of Arjie's abnormal desires. "If he turns out *funny* like that Rankotwera boy ,if he turns out to be the laughing stock of Colombia, it'll be your fault. You always spoil him and encourage all his *nonsense*." "What do I encourage?" Amma held back. "You are the one who allows him to come in here while you're dressing and play with your jewellery." ather replied. Appa's monologue adds layers to considering Arjie's abnormal behavior as imbecile and unconventional. He epitomizes *funny* to characterize Arjie as an idiot individual. The absence of queer and homosexual in connection with Arjie are very prominent. Selvadurai instead opts to go with the word *funny* Selvadurai outlines the traditional, rigid structures of Tamil contemporary society through the cruel visualization of Appa's character.

This narrative not only offers an 'innocent-peek' into the biased perspectives of heterosexuals towards queers but the use of a child narrator is a deliberate ploy with which Selvadurai deconstructs the craving for a so-

called 'healthy text'. Jonathan Ned Katz while chronicling the history of heterosexuality discussed the idea of "invention of heterosexuality." Following the argument of Sigmund Freud, Katz points out that "heterosexual" is not merely a noun but frequently an adjective, describing a "drive", "a love", an "instinct", and a "desire", as well as a "sexual activity" and a type of person. When Katz called "the invention of heterosexuality" referred his idea that "heterosexuals were made, not born". One can extend the Freudian idea of heterosexuality to homosexuality and claims that homosexuality is also a love drive that is invented to serve as a binary opposite of heterosexuality, and perhaps its emergence is directly connected to the middle class morality. Challenging this middle class morality for the sake of same-sex attraction has been one of the agendas of Selvadurai's novel. Sri Lanka, like other commonwealth countries, queer laws are a bunch of Victorian relics left by the British oppressors that condemns homosexual love.

Raiding the historical roots, the term *queer* has been used to silence, suppress, and disdain practices, identities, and values located of established social boundaries and limitations. To be referred to as queer meant a person was a symbol of perversion, disdain, sickness, and absurdity. Queer later has turned against what is considered *normal* in social practices, identities and values. Apparently, heteronormativity interferes in individual psyches and social institutions, practices and knowledge systems as a means to regard heterosexuality as the hegemonic and dominant form of sexuality. The term Queer Theory traces its roots in a scholarly work on lesbian and gay studies de Lauretis' (1991). Queer theory is a conceptual framework

that conveys a double emphasis-on the conceptual and speculative work involved discourse production. Queer theory problematizes fixed and stable identity-categories, comprising male/female, masculine/feminine, and lesbian/gay/straight/distinctions, and re-thinks notions of plurality, intersectionality, and fluidity in discourse compilation. The field of Queer theory posits these categories of “lesbian and gay” or the use of “heterosexual/homosexual” as binary to display heterodominance are social constructions and that they are, as such artificial. Queer theory attempts to break down the continual use of categories and labels that stereotype and harm those who are in marginalized positions, such as lesbian/gay/bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people (de lauretis , 1991). Queer theory deals with a more fluid and transparent concept of gender and sexuality to enhance understanding of human diversity (de Lauretis, 1991).

Selvadurai’s acclaimed novel , *Funny Boy* , explores the implications of imposed performances of identity within national contexts of conflict and displacement. By outlining doomed love affairs and lifestyles occurring exterior of acceptable or penetrable community borders in Sri Lanka. Selvadurai speaks in favour of certain individual traumas and difficulties that get caught up within national narratives of conflict between communities ; especially the way characters must quit gut tendencies due to peer pressure to fit into the rigid constructs of ethnic orthodox and gendered identities. The spaces in which these performances are possible fall exterior of the normative border of society for *queer community* . To highlight this imaginary space, Selvadurai ingenuinely ambiguous language to exhibit queer sexualities in the text. By illuminating the fear of

isolation and discrimination from bordered identities, Selvadurai challenges orthodox notions of sexuality and heteronormative school of thought. As a consequence, ultimately, he leads to the normalization of *Queer personalities*. Selvadurai coherently elucidates the chaos and crisis of identity performance within the framework of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. By portraying the traumas associated with rigid ethnic and gender roles, Selvadurai critiques the accepted boundaries of community identity. Through the queering language and spaces, he illustrates how queer identities can challenge and transcend these obligations, suggesting that solidarity can exist across and amidst diverse communities. The work highlights personal relationships and desires that defy normative constructs creating a space for alternative expressions of identity exterior of traditional borders.

The women characters in the novel are the firm followers of patriarchal norms and values. After the incident at Arjie's grandparents' house, Arjie's mother refuses to allow him inside her dressing room. She clears, "Because the sky is so high and pigs can't fly." This incited Arjie to part himself away from a sophisticated world. He instead recognizes that he belongs to the other world, "I would be caught between the boys's and the girls' worlds, not belonging or wanted either". Arjie is often excited to hear Aunt Dorris praising him, "What a lovely boy, Should have been a girl with those eyelashes". Arjie feels a kind of transformation in him after meeting the son of his father's friend, Jegan Parameshvaran. He finds a fascination with his body and admires him. He lately afterwards confesses that, "Lately I found that I looked at men, at the way they were built, the grace with which

they carried themselves, the strength of their gestures and movements. Sometimes these men were present in my dreams.”The chapter “The Best School of All” narrates Arjie’s gender crisis transparently and in detail. In order to *cure* Arjie’s funny and abnormal behaviour his father sends him to the Victoria Academy, an English style boy’s school where he encounter Shehan Soyya. Shehan defends Arjie from Salgado’s severe racist criticism about Tamils. In spite of his brother’s warning that Shehan is homosexual, Arjie continues his friendship with him which contributed to his alienation from the heterodominant world.

Conclusion:

The novel covers documentation of Arjie’s journey to being recognized as a queer character. For Arjie’ Imagination, fantasy, play serve as a negotiation devise for him, in order to overcome the borders of gender, ethnicity and sexuality. The intimate alliance that Arjie have with Shehan is the ultimate turning point that has collided with his personal admirations and interests. Coherently, it boosts him to choose ‘*the road less taken*’ although this would perhaps exile him from his family and lead him into which they could not follow him. During the entire course of the novel, Arjie has been recognized and categorized as ‘funny’ and ‘girlie - boy’. While the poor boy unsees the sense of fallacy and the complexities/subalternism that the term ‘funny’ holds, stating by himself “It was clear to me that I had done something wrong, but what it was I couldn’t comprehend. Arjie himself is increasingly aware of his feelings towards the boys in his school, accepting that he thinks of the shorts they wear and longs to be with them. Selvadurai skillfully weaves the bumpy journey of self – discovery of the protagonist through the

contemporary political unrest, identity complexities, gender priorities and rise of perversion.

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Queer Legal Progress in India: Milestones, Challenges, and the Road Ahead

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Abstract

The legal landscape for LGBTQ+ rights in India has undergone significant transformation, yet the path to full equality remains fraught with challenges. This paper examines the historical trajectory of queer legal progress in India, focusing on key judicial milestones and legislative reforms. From the colonial imposition of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code to its eventual decriminalization in *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India* (2018), the struggle for legal recognition has been shaped by both legal victories and setbacks. Additionally, the *NALSA v. Union of India* (2014) judgment marked a crucial step toward recognizing transgender rights, leading to the enactment of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019. However, significant gaps persist, particularly in the absence of anti-discrimination laws, marriage equality, and comprehensive protections for queer individuals in education, employment, and healthcare. This study critically evaluates the impact of these legal changes while highlighting the need for further reforms. By examining court rulings, government

policies, and academic scholarship, the paper underscores the urgent need for legal frameworks that move beyond decriminalization toward full legal and social inclusion. The paper concludes by discussing the way forward for ensuring substantive equality for queer individuals in India.

Keywords: LGBTQ+, judicial milestones, legal reforms, Queer activism, inclusion.

Introduction:

The struggle for LGBTQ+ rights in India has been deeply intertwined with legal and social structures, reflecting a complex history of marginalization, activism, and judicial intervention. For centuries, Indian society exhibited diverse understandings of gender and sexuality, with historical texts and cultural narratives acknowledging non-heteronormative identities. However, with the imposition of colonial laws, particularly Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) in 1861, same-sex relationships were criminalized, framing queer identities as “unnatural” and punishable under law (Bhaskaran, 2004). This colonial legacy persisted post-independence, reinforcing systemic discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals in legal, social, and economic spheres. The legal battle for queer rights gained momentum in the late 20th century, culminating in landmark judicial decisions that challenged state-imposed restrictions on personal freedoms (Naz Foundation v. Government of NCT of Delhi, 2009; Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India, 2018). However, despite these victories, substantive equality remains elusive, with legal recognition failing to translate into full civil rights, such as marriage, adoption, and workplace protections (Narrain, 2018). While the decriminalization of same-sex relationships in Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India (2018) was a historic victory, it

did not guarantee broader legal protections or social acceptance for LGBTQ+ individuals. The *NALSA v. Union of India* (2014) judgment recognized the rights of transgender individuals, yet the subsequent Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 has been widely criticized for failing to adequately safeguard their interests (Mukherjee, 2020). Moreover, India lacks anti-discrimination laws that explicitly protect LGBTQ+ individuals from bias in education, employment, and healthcare. Marriage and family rights remain a contested issue, with the Supreme Court ruling in *Supriyo Chakraborty v. Union of India* (2023) refusing to recognize same-sex marriages under existing legal frameworks (Choudhry, 2023). These limitations highlight the gap between legal recognition and lived realities, making it crucial to critically assess the effectiveness of India's legal reforms in ensuring full equality. This paper aims to analyze the legal progress made in India concerning LGBTQ+ rights, examining key judicial and legislative milestones while identifying persisting gaps. The study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To trace the historical evolution of LGBTQ+ legal rights in India, particularly the colonial imposition of Section 377 and its post-independence implications.
2. To analyse the impact of key judicial and legislative decisions mainly the *NALSA v. Union of India* (2014) case, *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India* (2018) case, Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 and *Supriyo Chakraborty v. Union of India* (2023) case.
3. To discuss the way forward by examining the persisting legal and policy gaps, particularly concerning same-sex marriage, adoption rights, workplace protections, and social security.

The paper begins by providing a historical context of queer legal struggles in India, focusing on pre-colonial acceptance,

colonial criminalization, and post-independence legal battles. It then examines key legal milestones, analyzing their impact on LGBTQ+ rights. The final section discusses the way forward, emphasizing the need for inclusive policies, legislative reforms, and societal shifts to achieve full equality. While significant progress has been made, the struggle for LGBTQ+ rights in India is far from over. Legal victories, though crucial, must be supplemented with policy measures that ensure substantive equality and protections for queer individuals. By critically analyzing existing legal frameworks, this study contributes to ongoing discussions on the future of queer rights in India and the path toward full inclusion.

Historical Evolution of LGBTQ+ Legal Rights in India:

India's journey toward LGBTQ+ rights has been shaped by colonial influence, cultural shifts, and post-independence struggles. One of the most significant legal impositions affecting LGBTQ+ individuals was Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), introduced by the British in 1861. This law criminalized "carnal intercourse against the order of nature," effectively marginalizing non-heteronormative sexual identities for over a century (Jus Corpus, 2023).

I. Pre-Colonial Perspectives on Gender and Sexuality:

Prior to British colonialism, Indian society had a more fluid and diverse understanding of gender and sexuality. Ancient texts such as the *Kamasutra* and mythological narratives reference same-sex relationships and gender variance. Temple sculptures at Khajuraho and Konark also depict homoerotic imagery, suggesting a level of societal acceptance (Vanita & Kidwai, 2000). Additionally, the Hijra community, a recognized third gender in South Asia, held significant cultural and religious roles (Nanda, 1999). However, British colonization introduced Victorian-era morality, which

reshaped Indian legal and social perspectives on sexuality (Bhaskaran, 2004).

II. Colonial Imposition: The Introduction of Section 377

The British enacted Section 377 as part of their broader effort to impose European moral codes on Indian society. It was modeled after Britain's Buggery Act of 1533 and sought to criminalize any sexual activity that was considered "unnatural," primarily targeting same-sex relationships. While framed as a law against sodomy, it became a tool for broader discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals, reinforcing heteronormativity and deepening social stigma (Jain, 2018).

III. Post-Independence Silence and Legal Inertia:

After India gained independence in 1947, Section 377 remained in force, highlighting how colonial-era laws continued to shape the newly formed republic's legal framework. While other colonial laws were repealed or amended, Section 377 persisted, demonstrating the deep-seated reluctance to recognize sexual diversity. The LGBTQ+ community faced systemic oppression, with the law being used to justify police harassment, blackmail, and social exclusion (Narain & Bhan, 2005).

The post-independence legal system remained largely silent on LGBTQ+ rights until the late 20th century, when activism began gaining momentum. While the Constitution of India guarantees fundamental rights such as equality (Article 14), non-discrimination (Article 15), and personal liberty (Article 21), these protections were not extended to LGBTQ+ individuals for decades (Kirpal, 2020).

IV. Beyond Section 377: The Ongoing Struggle for Equality

The decriminalization of homosexuality in 2018 was a landmark moment, but it did not automatically guarantee broader rights such as marriage equality, adoption rights, or

anti-discrimination protections in workplaces and public spaces. The LGBTQ+ movement in India continues to fight for these rights, pushing for legislative reforms that go beyond decriminalization to full legal and social inclusion (Rao, 2021). The history of LGBTQ+ legal rights in India is deeply intertwined with colonial legacies and evolving societal attitudes. While pre-colonial India demonstrated greater sexual and gender diversity, British laws like Section 377 imposed rigid moral codes that persisted long after independence. The eventual decriminalization of homosexuality marked a significant step toward equality, but the struggle for full legal recognition and societal acceptance continues.

Key Judicial and Legislative Decisions on LGBTQ+ Rights in India:

The legal recognition of LGBTQ+ rights in India has been shaped by significant judicial rulings and legislative interventions. While the decriminalization of homosexuality in *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India* (2018) was a landmark victory, other crucial decisions—such as *NALSA v. Union of India* (2014), the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act (2019), and *Supriyo Chakraborty v. Union of India* (2023)—have influenced the legal landscape for LGBTQ+ individuals. Each of these rulings and laws has had distinct implications, shaping identity recognition, rights protection, and access to legal institutions. This section critically examines their impact on LGBTQ+ rights in India.

I. NALSA v. Union of India (2014): Recognizing the Third Gender:

The National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) v. Union of India (2014) case was a watershed moment for transgender rights in India. The Supreme Court recognized the right of transgender individuals to self-identify their gender,

whether as male, female, or third gender, without requiring medical procedures (NALSA v. Union of India, 2014). The judgment was based on fundamental rights guaranteed under Articles 14 (equality before law), 15 (non-discrimination), 16 (equal opportunity in public employment), and 21 (right to life and dignity) of the Indian Constitution.

One of the most significant aspects of the ruling was its emphasis on the doctrine of “self-identification,” ensuring that transgender persons could assert their gender identity without state-imposed barriers. Additionally, the Court directed the government to take proactive measures, including affirmative action, to integrate transgender individuals into mainstream society. The judgment also held that discrimination against transgender persons was unconstitutional, setting a precedent for future legal battles on gender rights (Mukherjee, 2016).

However, the implementation of the ruling has been inconsistent. While some states have incorporated transgender welfare policies, others have been slow to act. Moreover, societal stigma and lack of awareness continue to hinder the full realization of transgender rights despite the legal recognition granted in NALSA (Ghosh, 2019).

II. Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India (2018):

Decriminalizing Homosexuality:

The Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India (2018) ruling was a historic moment in Indian legal history, as it effectively struck down Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), decriminalizing consensual same-sex relationships between adults (Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India, 2018). This judgment overturned the 2013 decision in Suresh Kumar Koushal v. Naz Foundation, which had reinstated the colonial-era ban on homosexuality (Kirpal, 2020).

The Supreme Court, in its verdict, recognized that Section 377 violated Articles 14 (equality before the law), 15 (protection against discrimination), 19 (freedom of expression), and 21 (right to dignity and privacy) of the Constitution. The ruling emphasized that LGBTQ+ individuals are entitled to the same fundamental rights as all other citizens and that sexual orientation is an innate and immutable characteristic (Chandrachud, 2018).

Beyond decriminalization, the judgment had a powerful symbolic impact. It not only affirmed LGBTQ+ identities but also urged society and the state to take proactive measures to ensure equality. However, despite this legal victory, the ruling did not provide a framework for anti-discrimination protections in employment, housing, and public services, leaving many LGBTQ+ individuals vulnerable to systemic exclusion (Menon, 2021).

III. The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019: A Step Forward or Backward?:

Following the NALSA judgment, the government introduced the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, intending to provide legal recognition and protection to transgender individuals. The Act sought to prohibit discrimination in employment, education, healthcare, and public accommodations while also mandating the establishment of welfare measures for transgender persons (Government of India, 2019).

However, the Act was met with significant criticism from the transgender community and activists. One of the most contentious aspects was the requirement that transgender persons apply for a certificate of identity from a district magistrate to be legally recognized as transgender. This provision directly contradicted the NALSA judgment's

principle of self-identification (Hossain, 2020). The Act also failed to address issues of affirmative action, employment reservations, and social security, making it a limited and flawed attempt at inclusion. Furthermore, the law did not provide clear punitive measures against discrimination or violence against transgender individuals. Despite its stated intention to protect transgender rights, the Act reinforced bureaucratic barriers and failed to center the voices of the transgender community in policymaking (Reddy, 2021).

IV. Supriyo Chakraborty v. Union of India (2023): A Setback for Marriage Equality:

The most recent judicial intervention in LGBTQ+ rights, *Supriyo Chakraborty v. Union of India* (2023), addressed the demand for same-sex marriage recognition in India. LGBTQ+ activists and petitioners argued that the denial of marriage rights violated constitutional guarantees of equality, dignity, and personal liberty (*Supriyo Chakraborty v. Union of India*, 2023). However, the Supreme Court, while acknowledging the rights and dignity of LGBTQ+ individuals, stopped short of legalizing same-sex marriage.

The ruling emphasized that legislative action, rather than judicial intervention, was required to recognize same-sex marriage in India. While Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud and Justice S.K. Kaul were in favor of granting some legal recognition to same-sex couples, the majority opinion held that marriage is a subject of legislative competence and should be addressed by Parliament (Livemint, 2023).

This decision was a disappointment to the LGBTQ+ community, as it left same-sex couples without access to legal rights associated with marriage, such as inheritance, taxation benefits, and adoption. Despite the setback, the ruling reignited discussions on the need for comprehensive anti-discrimination

laws and civil union frameworks, pushing the conversation forward in public discourse (Gupta, 2023).

The evolution of LGBTQ+ rights in India has been marked by significant legal victories and persistent challenges. While NALSA recognized transgender identities, the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act diluted the spirit of that ruling. Navtej Singh Johar decriminalized homosexuality but left broader legal protections unaddressed. Most recently, Supriyo Chakraborty highlighted the limitations of judicial interventions in securing marriage equality. While these cases and laws represent progress, true equality remains distant. Legislative action is needed to guarantee anti-discrimination protections, legal recognition of same-sex relationships, and social security benefits for LGBTQ+ individuals. Until then, the struggle for full equality continues.

The Way Forward: Bridging Legal and Policy Gaps in LGBTQ+ Rights:

While India has made significant progress in recognizing LGBTQ+ rights, key legal and policy gaps persist, limiting the full realization of equality. The decriminalization of same-sex relationships in *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India* (2018) and the recognition of transgender rights in *NALSA v. Union of India* (2014) were landmark rulings, but they did not grant broader civil rights such as marriage equality, adoption rights, workplace protections, and social security benefits. The *Supriyo Chakraborty v. Union of India* (2023) ruling, which denied same-sex marriage, highlighted the judiciary's reluctance to legislate on these issues, leaving the responsibility to Parliament (*Supriyo Chakraborty v. Union of India*, 2023). As a result, LGBTQ+ individuals remain legally vulnerable, facing discrimination and exclusion from essential rights. Addressing these gaps requires comprehensive legal

reforms, proactive policy interventions, and greater societal acceptance.

I. Legal Recognition of Same-Sex Marriage:

One of the most significant legal barriers for LGBTQ+ individuals in India is the denial of marriage rights. Without legal recognition, same-sex couples lack spousal rights related to inheritance, medical decisions, tax benefits, and pension entitlements (Gupta, 2023). The Special Marriage Act, 1954, which was designed to facilitate interfaith and inter-caste unions, could be amended to include same-sex couples without interfering with religious laws (Menon, 2021). Parliament must take proactive steps to introduce legislation that ensures equal marital rights, enabling LGBTQ+ individuals to access the same legal and financial benefits as heterosexual couples.

II. Adoption and Parenthood Rights:

The right to family is a fundamental aspect of human dignity, yet LGBTQ+ individuals in India face significant restrictions in adoption and parenthood. The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 allows single individuals to adopt, but it does not explicitly recognize same-sex couples (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2015). Additionally, the Assisted Reproductive Technology (Regulation) Act, 2021 excludes LGBTQ+ individuals from accessing surrogacy services, limiting their options for parenthood (Rao, 2022). Reforms should ensure that LGBTQ+ couples have equal adoption and reproductive rights, removing discriminatory legal barriers that reinforce heteronormative family structures.

III. Workplace Protections and Anti-Discrimination Laws:

Workplace discrimination remains a significant challenge for LGBTQ+ individuals. Despite constitutional guarantees of equality, there are no specific anti-discrimination laws that protect employees from bias based on sexual

orientation or gender identity (Indian Constitution, Article 15). The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 includes provisions against workplace discrimination, but its implementation is weak, and it does not extend protections to the broader LGBTQ+ community (Hossain, 2020). India must introduce comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation that explicitly prohibits bias in employment, housing, education, and public services. In addition, corporate organizations should adopt diversity and inclusion policies to create safer and more equitable workplaces.

IV. Social Security and Healthcare Reforms:

Access to social security benefits and healthcare remains a significant concern for LGBTQ+ individuals. Most pension and insurance schemes recognize only legally married spouses, effectively excluding same-sex partners (Reddy, 2021). Furthermore, many private insurance providers do not cover gender-affirming healthcare, despite the NALSA ruling affirming transgender individuals' right to self-identification (Mukherjee, 2019). The government must ensure that social security schemes and insurance policies include LGBTQ+ individuals and provide adequate healthcare support, including gender-affirming treatments and mental health services.

Legal recognition alone is not enough; LGBTQ+ individuals in India need substantive legal protections and equal rights across all aspects of life. The way forward requires Parliament to enact comprehensive anti-discrimination laws, recognize same-sex marriage and parenthood rights, and ensure equal access to employment, healthcare, and social security. While legal reforms are crucial, societal acceptance and awareness are equally important in building an inclusive India. Through continued activism, judicial advocacy, and policy reforms, India can move toward true equality, ensuring that

LGBTQ+ individuals are not merely tolerated but fully embraced as equal citizens.

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Role of Male in Matrilineal Tribes in North-East India

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Abstract

In matrilineal societies of India, men while not holding primary power through inheritance or lineage, still play significant roles. “Northeast India, comprising seven states has the unique distinction of having more than one hundred tribal communities and sub- communities. Although the kinship system in most of the tribal groups in this region is patriarchal in nature, the khasis, inhabiting the state of Meghalaya, are known to have one of the strongest matrilineal system in the world.”¹ In Northeast India, there are three main matrilineal tribes, the khasi, Garo and Jaintia. This paper aims to provide the role of men in matrilineal tribes. Men often hold positions of leadership, responsibility and respect within the family and community like guardians, political leader and, warriors.

Keywords: Matrilineal, male, leadership, tribes.

Role of Male in Matrilineal Tribes in North-East India:

The khasi, Garo and Jaintia tribes of North-Eastern India are the most prominent examples of matrilineal societies in India. In these matrilineal societies, the presence and nature

of male authority are nuanced. While descent and inheritance are matrilineal, it does not equate to an absence of male influence or authority. Men often hold significant roles in family, economy, and community, and their roles and influence are shaped by cultural, historical, and evolving societal factors. Understanding these complexities is vital for a comprehensive understanding of matrilineal societies and gender dynamics within them.

Role of Male in Khasi and Jaintia Societies:

Khasi and Jaintia communities are indigenous tribes primarily located in the state of, Meghalaya, in north-eastern India. Both tribes belong to the larger Austroasiatic language family and share a matrilineal social structure, though their customs and traditions vary in some aspects –

The Jaintia tribe, especially in its Synteng subgroup, follows a stricter form of matriliney than the khasis. Property and family lineage pass through the female line, especially to the youngest daughter, known as *ka khadduh* in khasi community. Men do not inherit ancestral property, which is unusual in most of the Indian societies.

While father has the limited authority in the household, maternal uncles (*mama*) play a significant role in the lives of their nieces and nephews. They often take responsibility and guiding the younger generation. In Jaintia society, the maternal uncle, known as '*kni*', holds a significant role, particularly in the context of their matrilineal system. He is a mentor, counsellor, and support his sisters' children, often taking on ceremonial and cultural duties. The maternal uncle also has a degree of control over lineage property, if the youngest daughter inherits it.

In both khasi and Jaintia communities, Men play significant roles in community leadership. In khasi community,

Traditional village councils (Dorbar shonong) are usually male-dominated, where men act as headmen or village elders. Jaintia men also hold important roles in traditional political structure, like doloï (chief) and religious life.

After marriage, a khasi man moves into his wife's maternal home which is known as matrilocal residence. This limits his control over the household and family properly. Even, children take their mother's surname, and their clan identity is based on the mother, not the father..

Men act as custodians of clan rituals and traditions, especially in performing religious rites and protecting clan property. In the field of economic participation, khasi men often manage finance and assets on behalf of the family or community. On the other hand Jaintia men , particularly in the rural and agrarian economy play a larger role in land cultivation, trade, and forest use. While both Khasi and Jaintia males share the challenges of living within a matrilineal but patriarchal society, the Jaintia male's role is often more formalized and structured, especially in traditional administration. Khasi men, on the other hand, are experiencing a more visible social movement questioning gender dynamics. However, in both cases, men remain central in public life but relatively marginal in domestic inheritance and kinship authority.

Analysing the male's social standing within Khasi society, Tiplut Nongbri , a professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University, in a 2011 study titled ' Deconstructing Masculinity: Fatherhood, Matrilineality and Social Changes,' argues that the matrilineal system is not detrimental to the status of men. She explain that although women are custodians of property and the family line is traced through them, they wield little actual power.²

Role of Male in Garo Community:

The community is one of the major tribal groups in Northeast India, and they are primarily located in Garo Hills region, Meghalaya. Again, Garo founds in Assam and Tripura also. Particularly in areas bordering Meghalaya, such as Goalpara and Kamrup.

The Garo are one of the few remaining matrilineal societies in the world, and Garo individuals take their clan titles from their mothers. Traditionally, the youngest daughter (nokmechik) inherits property from her mother. Sons leave their parents' house at puberty and are trained in the village bachelor dormitory (nokpante). After getting married, the man lives in his wife's house.³

Like Khasi and Jaintia community, Garo Maternal uncles also play a key role in the upbringing and welfare of sisters' children. Again, men act as custodians of clan land and resources on behalf of the matrilineal lineage.

The males are responsible for clearing jungle and setting fire to the debris for shifting cultivation, while women are responsible for planting, weeding, and harvesting. During the peak agricultural operations, the men sometimes help the women. Construction and repair of the house are male duties. Men make baskets, while women carry crops from the field and firewood from the jungle. Women look after the kitchen and prepare beer, and men serve the beer to guests. Women rear the children and keep the domestic animals. Both men and women sell firewood and vegetables in the marketplace.⁴

In modern times, Garo men are becoming more involved in professions, education, and politics. There is a growing shift

toward gender balance, though male dominance in public life continues.

The matrilineal system of the Garos, one of the few existing matrilineal societies, has been extensively studied for its uniqueness. Although Garo women exercise considerable freedom compared to women in patrilineal societies, but men seem to dominate over specific areas such as religious rituals, kinship system, decision making and administration. Exclusion and prohibition of women is also noticed in traditional customs.

Conclusion:

In the matrilineal societies of north-east india, particularly among khasi, Jaintia and Garo communities of Meghalaya, the status of men is undergoing significant changes in modern time. Traditionally, these societies follow a matrilineal system where lineage and inheritance pass through the mother. In all three tribes, men hold power in community and religious spheres, but are excluded from inheritance and household authority due to matriliney. The Garo system is somewhat more balanced, giving men real influence despite symbolic female leadership. The Khasi system faces growing internal challenges from men, while Jaintia society maintains a quieter coexistence of matrilineal customs and male authority. Today, men in redefining societies are actively engaging in redefining their roles, striving for general equality without undermining the unique cultural identity of their communities.

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A Comprehensive Study on the Impact of Migration in North Eastern States of India with Special Reference to Assam

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Abstract

Demographically, North-East India considered as a miniature India. It is a home of ethno-linguistically and religiously major groups of people found in the country. Migration has become an essential and inevitable component of socio-economic life. It is a process of change of residence either permanently or semi- permanently. It plays an important role in reshaping the population. North East India covered by foreign country and around 2.5% of the total population in North-East India migrated from other region. The researcher tries to highlight the socio-economic impact of migration in North-East India and also tries to highlight the challenges faced by the native people because of Migration. The researcher tries to highlight how the internal displacement happens in North-East India.

Keywords: Migration, demography, environment, colonial

Introduction:

Migration and displacement both are the sociological phenomena. Migration is usually defined as a geographical movement of people involving a change from their usual place of residence. It can be internal and international. Migration occupies an important place in population studies. It determines population Sizes along with fertility and mortality. Migration is a symptom of social change in society. Irrespectively migration of internal or external conditions move either to improve their standard of living or to escape from poverty, conflict and famine or socio-political persecution or environmental disaster. Its an intrinsic component of human behaviour and a natural process. Firstly migration occurred with the movement of Homo erectus out of Africa across Eurasia about a million years ago. The homo sapience appear to have colonized whole Africa about 150000 years ago , moved out of it 70000 years ago and spread across Australia , Asia and Europe by 40000 years ago. Today also it continuing process that occurs within a country or international borders. Migration has become an essential and inevitable component of socio-economic life. If it properly settle down than it could be beneficial for individuals societies and also for the state. Migration impact on future development and demographic structure of territory. Because of migration demographic imbalance prevalent between developing and developed countries. Demographical migration affects the rapid population growth and economic environment of a country.

Discussion:

Human mobility is an old phenomenon driven by numerous factors, people move in search of better economic

and employment opportunities, due to changing policies at home or abroad, to escape conflict and social persecution or in combination with natural hazards and environmental degradation affecting their livelihoods.

According to the United Nations as of 2015 approximately 244 million people were living outside their country and another 740 million people either internally displaced or moved. Migration is a process of change of residence either permanently or semi-permanently. Indian constitution provides basic freedom to move to any part of the country, rights to reside and earn livelihood of their choices i.e migrants not needed to take permission or register at the place of origin as well as at the place of destination within a territory. According to 2011 census of India enumerated 450 million internal migrants in the country constituting 37% of the total population.

The stages of Internal migration can be identified in the country as intra-state, inter district and inter-state migration.

Demographically, North-East India considered as a miniature India. It is the home of ethno-linguistically and religiously major groups of people found in the country. Migration plays an important role in reshaping the population composition in North-East India. North-East India is covered by foreign countries and around 2.5% of the total population in North-East India migrated from other region. From different regions people migrated to North-East India like Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Myanmar. Recently studied by Lusome and Bhagat analysed in detailed the migration intensity in North-East India taking into consideration both internal and international migration together and its impact on the region.

In North-East India some Nepali people migrated from Bhutan because the bhutanees attack on the migratory Nepali

people. Because of this reason some people return to their place and some were entered in Assam and also North-East India. Nepalis migrated to North-East India as Soldiers and manual labours during the colonial period. The Indo-Nepal treaty facilitated their settlement in North-East India.

The Maximum Number of immigrants in the North-East were from Bangladesh. When the British first came to Assam and found immense fallow lands with very few people to cultivate and pay revenue, new wasteland settlement rules were introduced. The peasant migrants were lured by easy settlement rules and infrastructure development. Mostly people migrated from Bangladesh are Bengali people they spread to all parts of Assam and beyond to other states in the North Eastern region. In Tripura, about 72% are immigrants coming from neighbouring countries. Except Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Nagaland, in the rest of the state of North-East India, the contribution of International migrants has been higher than the National average.

Along with the immigrants Native people also face challenges because of migration. North-East Indian states experience the multi-dimensional conflicts between settlers and indigenous people. Displacement is the worst economic consequences of immigration in NE India. Increase of population it's led to competition for resources and jobs as both land and opportunities turned out to be scarce and soon such competition singled out migrant communities as people to be sent back to their countries of origin. North-East India experienced violent incidents and conflicts related to the secessionist movement and insurgencies since Independence. Marriage is another source of inter-state immigration. According to 2011 census 24.30% people migrated because of marriage. Migration badly impact on North-Eastern socio-

economic environment. The native people are facing lot of challenges in agriculture employment and other such situation.

Migration in Assam:

The problem of migration in Assam has been persistent challenge to the state and various steps have been taken over the years to address this burning problem. During the colonial period the people of Assam facing migration challenges. British Government employed an immigration strategy in Assam, leveraging the argument that the local people were not sufficient for tree plantation in Assam. These people are not classified as illegal migrant they moving within India.

After Independence Pakistan implemented 'Prevention of Infiltration from Pakistan Scheme' in 1964. Because of this scheme East Pakistan was prompted by an anti Hindu riot, which led to a significant influr of Hindu Refugees seeking shelter in Assam. Since then people of Muslim community migrated in Assam for various perpose. Formation of Bangladesh also impact on demographic condition of Assam. These migrated people has led to encroachment on various types of land including wetlands, forest, reserved areas and natural flood water drains. They also illegally occupied the Satra land, Char areas land and agricultural land for their settlement.

Illegal migration also effected on economic life of native people, particularly in the labour market, They Become a threat to the native people in terms of employment. According to 2011 Census, Barpeta, Bongaigaon, Darrang, Dhuburi, Goalpara, Hailakandi, Karimganj, Morigaon and Nagaon are mostly affected district of Assam by illegal migrants. The migrated people begin to work in various field such as construction work, agricultural works etc. Now a days they enter into formal labour market which started to deprived native

people from job and it aggravated the educated employment problem.

Conclusion :

Migration is a complex and multifaceted. It irrespective of internal and external conditions move either to improve their standard of living .Large scale of migration impact on destination will be positive when it related with development, Population adjustment and economic growth and it will be negative implication when it affect the demographic changes, environmental degradation, social and political distortions and conflict arises.

Migration also affects in student's life. In developing countries are the one kind investment of parents life. In that case migration affects it. Work or employment is the main reason for migration .In North-East India the unemployment rate is very high. Tripura have witnessed double digit unemployment rate.

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Sexual Liberation and Identity in Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues*

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Abstract

This paper analysis Butch, Queer, or Questioning gender identity in light of Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* published in 1993. The novel describes the extreme violence and physical assault in a butch woman's life. Queer in popular culture illustrates the homosexual subculture and how it affects them in society. Within the context of queer representation in popular culture, the novel presents 'butch' as a powerful and central identity. The main character, Jess Goldberg, is unsure about her gender, and the transformation has serious impact towards sexuality. *Stone Butch Blues* offers a vivid portrayal of LGBT lives, which can be examined in relation to queer depictions in mainstream culture. Through the protagonist, the novel illustrates both feminine and masculine behaviour. Sexual liberation is one among the novel's central themes and a concept

that connects to popular culture. Feinberg also delves into the lives of marginalized queer subcultures, including drag performers and dykes, offering a rich and complex view of queer existence.

Keywords: Queer, butch, popular culture, sexuality.

Introduction:

Queer theory is a broad interdisciplinary subject that deals with homosexuality, bisexuals, transgender, and others. Historically, the term “queer” has had different connotations. In the theory, the term “queer” is interconnected with cultural and feminist studies. Similarly, society has created gender relations with predefined norms. Negative discourse occurs when an individual’s behaviour deviates from the expected norms. It explores the complexities of gender identity and they are marginalized by the mainstream society.

Queer and gender are interconnected which questions the sexuality. Questioning of identity begins when the individual faces traumatic experience and doubt of his own identity. Heterosexuality offers a patriarchal oppression of women. Gender oppression exists even to non-heteros. Queer theory categorised in terms of gender and sexual identity which enables the problems of non-hetero people facing in both private and public sphere.

Discussion:

The representation of queer theory highlights the condition of queer people in terms of their livelihood, economic and societal status in the society. From history to contemporary the traces of sexuality changes and the individual happens to be queer faces severe challenges in society. In present condition, the acceptance of queer is present but not widely. The sexual oppression of queer is predominantly present over the decades.

From this article the queer representation of ‘Butch’ deals with the woman. The oppression of woman and being a queer denotes a triple oppression in the society. The triple oppression denotes as a woman, and as a queer. The perception of heteros on homosexuality is highlighted BY Shakulanta Devi in her work as, “that homosexuals are a clearly identifiable group, consisting of merely stereotypes, and the most widely- held image of the homosexual is probably that of an effeminate man or a tomboyish woman” (15). This proves the portrayal of non-heterosexuals in society.

In some countries, having sex with the same gender is considered a taboo because it is against the law of nature. Recently, a law has been passed for homosexual people. Having physical relationship with the same gender considered illegal, and many people were executed for engaging in homosexual behaviour. Later, some argued that homosexuality is not a social crime. Ulrichs argued that males are born with the role of women, i.e., with strong femininity, and some females are born as strong men, i.e., with high masculine power. When a person is attracted to the same sex, they are said to be homosexual. Ulrichs points out in the chapter one entitled “The Social Construction of Same-Sex Desire: Sin, Crime, Sickness”,

At a particular point the foetus then becomes either male, female, or what Ulrichs called an Urning (a ‘feminine’ male who will be sexually drawn to men) or a Uringin (a ‘masculine’ woman who is sexually drawn to women). (CIQT, 5)

In the Victorian era, activist Karl Heinrich Ulrichs coined the name ‘Uranian’. He developed the phrase ‘Dioning’ to describe homosexual men. When we consider these terms, Ulrich derived them from the Greek Gods ‘Uranus and Donis’,

as described in Plato's *Symposium*. Horace argues that homosexuality is both against nature and meaningless. The term "homo" breaks the constructed boundaries such as male and female, active and passive, subject and object, mind and body.

LGBTQIA refers to a broad range of communities that express their gender identity. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual are the acronym for this group of individuals. Different nations have different levels of social inclusion in homosexual relationships. In order to explore own gender attractions, the LGBT has always had a unique identity. When we contrast the homosexual environment in literature with that of everyday life it is more acceptable in fiction than in reality. In addition to psychological characteristics such as stress, pain, and other disorder, homosexuality is defined by more than just gender attraction.

Culture is the fundamental argument against homosexuality. Disputes about homosexuality are a common cultural phenomenon. The viewpoint of a heterosexual person on homosexuality is significant, and they have a serious demeanor toward non-heteros. It is known by the name of social constructivism, and Gender categories play a key role. The word "category" comes from the Greek word "accusation." Therefore, the dominating category—heteros—is to blame for the gender accusation. People are targeted according to societal norms and based on their gender or sexual orientation. Homosexuality in literature focuses on sexual identity.

The queer theory explores an individual's sexuality, which popular culture promotes, and concentrates on gender identity. Additionally, it addresses problems that arise, when a person is uncertain or doubts their own identity. In this queer popular culture, there are several terms to describe one's sexual orientation, including transsexualism, butch, gender queer, gender

fluid, dyke, and many more. In terms of history and religion, homosexual activities exist at various levels in all cultures.

Serious mental illnesses like schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and many affect LGBT individuals. They are able to live a homophobic life as a result. The first-person narration in the text begins with a letter. The main protagonist of this story is Jess. Her early life has a strong resemblance to a traumatic incident. Although Jess was born a woman, her behaviour and attire later represent masculinity. Jess struggles with the question of whether she is a woman or a man. Psychological trauma and mental disease are the results of such gender problems. The character Jess gives rise to gender nonconformity. On the other hand, this results in a non-normative behavioural pattern. In the beginning of this novel, Leslie Feinberg made reference to the “Stonewall Riots”. When Leslie was working at the bar, she was frequently taken into custody by the police. Since the novel is based on actual events, the Greenwich Village Riot may be witnessed through the life of the character Jess. The novel is a travel narrative as the protagonist travel from young age escaping from discrimination and assault as well as to identify her sexuality. The space for them to live in this world considered being a great threat.

‘Butch’ the term used to describe ‘Lesbian’ who exhibits a masculine identity also the term serves as a subculture in homosexuality. Butch act as a lesbian who born with feminine, but possesses masculine behaviour. Only in 1940’s, butch culture begin to evolve in America. The term ‘Butch’ and ‘Femme’ began from 20th century, which comes under the category of lesbian sub culture. ‘Femme’ denotes the characteristic traits of femininity. The title *Stone Butch* has a deep significance of queer. ‘Stone Butch’ possesses traditional masculinity in femaleness.

The main character in this novel is female as she is attracted towards the same sex but resemblance of male attitude. So, the term 'Stone Butch' familiar with the author Leslie Feinberg's work *Stone Butch Blues*. In this novel the fear of expressing one's identity shows how the protagonist lives in oppressive environment and fights for liberation. Leslie focuses on sexual identity and liberation of one's life. As the novel is a semi-autobiographical work, the main character Jess resembles author lives.

In chapter one, the protagonist narrates the working place experience at bars and how the practicing of bar culture among the queer (Butch and Femme) exist. On the other hand, the ill-treatment of cops in bar towards stone butch expressed through the characters. The protagonist is a stone butch, who narrates the humiliation as,

The cops picked out the most stone butch of them all to destroy with humiliation, a woman everyone said "wore a raincoat in the shower." We heard they stripped her, slow, in front of everyone in the bar, and laughed at her trying to cover up her nakedness. Later she went mad, they said. Later she hung herself. (Blues, 3)

From the above narration, the reader can understand the human violation takes place by the police. The physical torture and mortification for Butch result in death. On the other, Jess shares how cops ruin the life of a queer people. The heterosexist treats the non-conformity gender as low as they're unfit to live in this world. The protagonist Jess often fix with her gender as 'he/she' means Female Masculinity.

The narrator express the human violation and recalls the terrific experience shared in a letter to her ex-lover as, "In a glance you would memorize the wounds on my body like a

road map – the gashes, bruises, cigarette burns” (4). In the beginning of the second chapter, the narrator strongly holds her fear of what category she belongs to? The narrator shares her childhood experience where her name ‘Jess Goldberg’ doesn’t resemble like a girl name. In a conversation with her teacher, the teacher interrogates “Jess is not a girl name, it resembles Jewish” (8). From this the incident reflects with the author, Leslie Feinberg as she belongs to Jewish origin. Here the autobiographical reflection reflects through the character Jess.

The author shared her experience through Jess of how society expects an individual to live with norms. Jess had a shameful life from her childhood, where she was criticized for being herself. The tough life she carried from her childhood to adult is a mere reflection of other side of cruel society. During her parents absence she tries her father outfit, unexpectedly when her parents noticed her attire they sent her to mental asylum. This made her to decide not to believe anyone in this world. On the other, she noticed how her neighbour treats her by questioning her identity as “Are you a boy or a girl?” (10). This made her to prefer to lead a solitude life.

Jess’s Masculinity expressed not only in the form of behaviour also by her outfit. She desire to dress like tom boy i.e (Roy Rogers Outfit), but her father bought Annie Oakley which resembles tom girl dress. She denied her father and further she argued for Davy Crockett hat. Out of his patience he made a statement to realize herself by stating, “Because you’re a girl” (14). On the other, Jess friend Gloria who worried about her brother activity. She shared with Jess that his brother loves to wear women clothes. Author Feinberg portrayed Gloria as realistic because she understood her brother and states it’s not his fault. From this one can understand that, the gender

non-conformity is nothing to do with birth. It has connection with psychological and hormonal change.

The sub-culture of queer is deeply enrooted by the author Leslie. She also throws the vision about drag shows. Where drag artist performs in stage. For instance, a man dresses like woman and performing in stage likewise a woman dresses like man and performing it. This novel also focuses on bars where Stone Butch, Femme, Drag kings, Queens staged in nightclubs. The police often raid bars and indulge in odd treatment with filthy words towards the Stone Butch. Here one of the cops mocking at her gender and abusing her by,

You think you're a guy, huh? You think you can take it like a guy? We'll see. What's these?" he said. He yanked up her shirt and pulled her binder down around her waist. He grabbed her breasts so hard she gasped. (Blues, 58)

From the above instance, how the inhuman activity persists without any hesitance of second thought. This also shows the vulgarity of human cruelty. They treat them mercilessly through physical abuse. On the other, it shows the power authority dominating the voiceless, who wants to voice out their problems and needs.

W.E.B. Bois and James Baldwin had an impact on the author and the text. One of the key elements is how a new dimension of culture arose in the Harlem Renaissance. Baldwin and Bois are a striking example of liberation, identity, and culture for homosexuals. James Baldwin's writings also focus on issues of masculinity and sexuality. The difficulty of same-sex relationships is depicted in *Giovanni's Room* published in 1956 which is partially mirrored in the *Stone Butch Blues* character Jess.

Leslie's *Stone Butch Blues* focuses upon certain relevant issues, including oppression. For instance, Butch and other individuals whose behaviour does not correspond to their biological gender are frequently mistreated by the police. Additionally, the novel explicitly displays power imbalances over others, in addition to inequality. The novel's main character struggles to admit she is attracted to people of her own gender. In *Giovanni's Room*, David, a character, also experiences sexual identity issues like Jess does. On the other, the protagonist feels isolated of how society ignores her because of her sexuality. She converse with Edna by sharing her grief as,

I feel like a ghost, Edna. Like I've been buried alive. As far as the world's concerned, I was born the day I began to pass. I have no past, no loved ones, no memories, no me. No one really sees me or speaks to me or touches me (231)

From the above instance, Jess tries to convey the harsh reality of society and how the individual gets trap within their consciousness. The isolation due to identity has an impact on individuals who lead them to suffer psychologically and sometimes results in end to their lives.

As Jess is butch who wants to come out from her female born identity. She feels her sexuality trapped in wrong body. She says, "I don't feel like a man trapped in a woman's body. I just feel trapped." (171). The author concludes with the mass protest which has connection to reality of 'Stone Wall Riots'. Many of Butch and Femme share their harsh experience faced through the society. This chapter resembles the voiceless are being voiced for their lives. The rally shows how the non-gender conformity has worsen state of livelihood. Jess's statement in front of huge crowd she admits "I'm not a gay man. I'm a Butch he-she" (324).

Conclusion:

From the above analysis many misconceptions are there in society about the homosexual identity. Large sections in the society think that homosexual is only related with physical needs. The myth of homosexual is deeply enrooted in society and this result in hatred and humiliation to non-hetero people. From earlier to contemporary many found to fail to express their gender identity where it reveals in gender expression. Thus homophobia results in psychological stress and it continues to live a hidden life from the society.

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Gender Apartheid : A Case Study Of Women In Afganisthan Under Taliban

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Abstract

This study examines the systematic and institutionalized forms of gender-based discrimination known as 'gender-apartheid', with an emphasis on Afghanistan. Afghanistan, which is under Taliban rule are perpetrating 'Inhuman Acts' against women with respect to gender. The central argument put forth is that Taliban administration displays a structural comparison to apartheid, where institutionalized gender-based discrimination and segregation resulted in significant marginalization and exclusion of women. The situation in Afghanistan is a serious human rights disaster that requires immediate international attention and action. The work emphasised on understanding gender apartheid and the status of women under Taliban 2.0 in Afghanistan and how the numerous international organisations is addressing it. The study employs a qualitative research approach and the findings reveal that the Taliban's regime constitutes a clear violation of international human

rights laws, including those outlined in UDHR (Universal Declaration of Human Rights) and CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women).

Keywords: Gender-apartheid, afghanistan, taliban 2.O, international organisations.

Introduction:

The term gender apartheid refers to the economic and social sexual discrimination against individuals because of their gender or sex. It is a system that is enforced through the use of physical or legal practices to relegate individuals to subordinate positions. Feminist psychologist Phyllis Chesler defines the phenomenon as practices which condemn girls and women to a separate and subordinate sub-existence and which turn boys and men into the permanent guardians of their female relative's chastity.

The notion of gender apartheid was first invoked during the Taliban rule of the 1990s in Afghanistan. At that time, women were forbidden to attend school or work, could be shot for leaving the house without a male relative and were forced to wear the burqa. (Mehran, 2023) When the Taliban rule regain its power after withdrawal of the U.S peacekeeping forces from Afghanistan in 2021 (commonly referred as Taliban 2.O) it was observed that the condition of the women were further deteriorated. The condition of women can be summarised through a statement of a former Afghan MP and women's rights activist Fawzia Koofi, "The Taliban have no mercy for our rights. We are still invisible, still voiceless, still silenced." And former Afghan mayor and women right activist, Zarifa Ghafari "I know women who were doctors, engineers, with big educational backgrounds who were enrolled in these

institutions...now they have nothing. It's heartbreaking.”(Hayes, 2024)

Like racial apartheid, gender apartheid is the systematic oppression of women, where their rights are infringed and they are segregated and excluded from participation in society, solely on the basis of gender. It is crucial to acknowledge the similarities in the oppression that both types of apartheid uphold, even though the particular experiences of people and groups under these regimes vary. Regarding segregation, both systems entail physically separating people according to their identities. People were divided into distinct racial groups in public places, schools, and neighbourhood's during the racial apartheid era. Similar to this, Afghanistan's gender apartheid system segregates people according to their sex, even in public places and schools. (Naheed Farid, 2023)

International human rights law aims to establish global norms based on equality and non-discrimination. Currently, “gender apartheid” is not a recognized legal word or idea under international law. Gender apartheid and racial apartheid share similarities, highlighting the need to widen the term to encompass systematic discrimination against women.

Research Objectives:

- To define and contextualize gender apartheid as a form of systematic gender-based oppression.
- To study the systematic discrimination and oppression of women under Taliban rule in Afghanistan.
- To understand the role of international bodies (e.g., UN, NGO's) in addressing gender-based oppression in Afghanistan.

Literature Review:

Dr. Huma Ahmed-Ghosh (2003) charts the political changes that have affected women's rights in her work “A

History of Women in Afghanistan: Lessons Learnt for the Future or Yesterdays and Tomorrow: Women in Afghanistan". She points out that while women's independence increased in the 1960s and 1970s, it experienced serious reverses in the 1990s while the Taliban was in power.

Metra Mehran's (2023) in her paper, provides a compelling argument for labelling the Taliban's treatment of women as gender apartheid under international law. Mehran contends that Afghan women's systemic oppression, evident in their exclusion from education, work, healthcare, movement, and public places, fits the standards established by the 1973 Apartheid Convention and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Zahra Khavari (2024) in her master thesis, makes the case that the Taliban's treatment of women qualifies as gender apartheid under the law. She illustrates the systematic exclusion of Afghan women from public life by drawing comparisons to South Africa's racial apartheid regime and using black-letter legislation. Khavari calls for legal acknowledgement of gender apartheid as a crime against humanity and draws attention to the shortcomings in existing international law. Her work gives the expanding academic and activist conversation on systematic gender oppression in Afghanistan a solid legal basis.

Naheed Farid and Rangita de Silva de Alwis (2023) examine how the Taliban's policies have institutionalised a system of gender-based oppression that fits the concept of apartheid under international law in their paper. According to them, the Taliban's deliberate exclusion of women from public life, work, and education amounts to not just gender discrimination but also a legally recognised kind of gender apartheid. The authors urge the international community to publicly acknowledge and address these transgressions, using

legal documents including the Rome Statute and the Apartheid Convention. Their work adds a crucial legal and policy-focused viewpoint to the expanding conversation, highlighting how urgent international action is to defend Afghan women's rights.

Methodology:

This study adopts a qualitative approach to examine the concept of gender apartheid experienced by women in Afghanistan under Taliban rule. The study relies on secondary data sources, including review of literature, documents, academic materials, and reports, newspapers, articles etc. The study explains how gender apartheid is not just a direct result of governmental regulations, but also profoundly linked with cultural and religious practices that perpetuate women's inferior status. The sources offer an extensive insight into the legal, social and economic constraints placed on Afghan women following the Taliban's resurgence in 2021.

Findings and Discussions:

This study was undertaken to investigate the notion of gender apartheid and the position of women in Afghanistan under the Taliban. Evidence suggests that women in Afghanistan have been stripped of their humanity, denied human rights, and pushed to the periphery of society. Experts, activists, and feminists worldwide have compared Afghanistan's poor conditions to 'gender apartheid,' drawing inspiration from the global resistance to apartheid in South Africa.

Gender Apartheid:

Analogous to racial apartheid, gender apartheid is a system of governance, based on laws and policies, which imposes systematic segregation of women and men and may also systematically exclude women from public spaces and spheres. (Bennounce, 2023)According to Karima Bennouna,

gender apartheid is inescapable for women, they are reminded of their lack of agency and humanity because the system of apartheid pervades everything, all public and private life. In Afghanistan, gender apartheid is systematic, intentional, and fundamentally unfair. Afghan life, according to women, is “death in slow motion.” (Bennounce, 2023)

Features of Gender Apartheid-

Gender Apartheid can be viewed as an umbrella concept as it encompasses numerous forms of discrimination like denial of civil and political right, Economic, social and cultural right, under it embed.

- **Civil and Political Discrimination:** Taliban bans women from education for girls above 6th grade. They also restrained women from all forms of profession. The men are debarred from teaching female students at the same time women cannot teach which clearly shows denial of education to women in any grade. They prohibited women from the participating in government sector by announcing “caretaker government without women”. The Taliban ask their female officials of Ministry of finance to send a man as their(women) own replacement. Under Taliban’s rule girls have no say in their marriages, polygamy is allowed for men whereas it is opposite in case of women, their wives have no say in their marriages and also domestic violence is not criminalised. Under their rule child and forced marriages are practiced, they forcibly take unmarried girls to be their sex slave. They were denied from participating in civic and political rights and are treated as a second-class citizen.
- **Economic Discrimination:** Taliban prohibits women from employment. Women, alone are not permitted to

go outside the home without Mahram which implies women have no mobility as well as has no freedom to practice the profession of their choice or to generate income. Data reveal that 61% of women had lost their jobs following Taliban's decision of restriction on women's freedom of movement. (Bennounce, 2023) Women-led businesses have faced closures or severe limitation as they were pushed into home-based work with limited income. Under its rule the property rights of women have severely impacted as women had no legal claim to any property which they once accessed.

- **Social and Cultural Discrimination:** Under Taliban women are stripped of from basic freedom and participation in public life. Women are banned from public places (including parks, gyms etc.) without following proper dress code such as burqa. They also ban women's from entertainment (soap operas, dramas, singing, dancing) furthermore they restricts women from public gathering such as (weddings, public celebrations). These restrictions not only isolate women socially but it erases them from cultural fabric of the country.

After analysing the Taliban's rule, it is clear that they legitimize and creates the idea that men and women are fundamentally different and women should be subordinated. Therefore, recognising gender apartheid is essential as it highlights the gravity and scope of the issue in Afghanistan and highlights how urgent it is. UN Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan in 2023 also called for recognition of gender apartheid. (Bennounce, 2023)

Dehumanization of Women under Taliban's 2.O Rule:

One of the former female teacher in Afghanistan quoted "In my province we had girls that could be singers,

professors, athletes and politicians. Now we have nothing left. All of those talents were arrested, left the country, or now live in hiding. Families rush to marry their daughters because they are afraid the Taliban may take them for marriage. Most girls are forced to marry. This is a nightmare I never imagined to happen.”

The above statement gives us a wider view of the dreadful condition of the females, who are even denied of basic human rights which are described by UDHR (United Declaration of Human Rights) as inevitable for every human. Taliban rule has disbarred women even from education threatening the whole society as the sayings go “If you educate a man, you educate an individual, but if you educate a female, you educate a whole family”. The status of women can be compared to that of cattle since they are denied autonomy, dignity and voice. They are being dehumanised and extremely objectified by reducing their role to domestic servitude and reproduction. The ban on Ministry of Women’s Affair, clousure of public baths, prohibition of cafe entry without mahram, not providing them with driving liscence etc. limelights the facts that they have left no room for women discussions and debates. All the action taken by Taliban regime can be seen as way of clipping wings of birds and confining them to cage of silence and submission. The remark by Meryl Streep (acclaimed actress and activist) at the United Nation event in 2024 make the sitaution more clearer, “A squirrel has more rights than a girl in Afganistan today because the public parks have been closed to women and girls by Taliban”.

Despite worldwide censure, the Taliban has shown little desire to change its attitude, presenting its practices as compatible with its understanding of Islamic ideals, even if they violate universal human rights norms.

Role of Various International Organisations:

When the Taliban returned to power in Afghanistan in 2021, women's rights were severely repressed, which sparked international outrage and action from a number of international organisations. United Nations (UN) has played a central role in addressing the subjugation of women under Taliban rule in Afghanistan through various agencies and mechanisms. UNAMA (United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan) and UN Women actively recording human rights abuses and promoting the rights of Afghan women, the UN has taken the lead. Furthermore, humanitarian assistance is given by UN organisations such as UNICEF and WFP, which concentrate on food, healthcare, and education for women and girls. Amnesty international as well as Human Rights Watch have released thorough studies on women's subordination under Taliban rule, raising worldwide awareness and assisting Afghan women activists, particularly those in exile. The European Union has imposed sanctions and granted aid with conditions to improve the human rights situation in Afghanistan, as well as sponsoring women-led non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has worked with the Taliban utilising Islamic frameworks, campaigning for women's rights within cultural and religious traditions, but with minimal practical outcomes. The UN-adopted Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is critical in establishing worldwide legal standards for women's rights. Although Afghanistan is a signatory to CEDAW, the Taliban's activities are in clear contravention of its rules, bringing worldwide legal and diplomatic censure. Furthermore, various foreign non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and advocacy networks, like as the Malala Fund and Women for Women

foreign, have played critical roles in sponsoring education, facilitating relocation, and amplifying Afghan women's voices on global platforms. Despite these attempts, the Taliban's reluctance to engage with many foreign organisations, as well as the possibility of aid being withheld, pose substantial hurdles. Nonetheless, continued worldwide campaigning is critical to helping Afghan women's resilience and resistance under repressive government.

Conclusion:

Afghanistan under Taliban control is a striking and dreadful example of gender apartheid an institutionalised system of discrimination that segregates, marginalises, and systematically violates women's basic human rights. This study has shown how Afghan women have been rendered invisible in public life, denied of education, work, movement, and autonomy, by conducting a critical assessment of literature review on Taliban's laws, policies, and everyday behaviours. The Taliban's leadership is based on a purposeful patriarchal policy that aims to uphold male supremacy and female subordination, rather than only religious conservatism. In addition to violating several international human rights agreements, this system of gender-based oppression poses a serious threat to the international community's commitment to gender equality and justice. Despite the immense odds, Afghan women continue to resist-via underground schools, clandestine action, and worldwide advocacy. Their resiliency highlights the importance of long-term international solidarity, legal responsibility, and policy reforms that prioritise Afghan women's voices and rights. Finally, the fight against gender apartheid in Afghanistan is more than a regional or cultural issue; it is a human rights necessity that requires global responsibility, knowledge, and actions.

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Gender and Feminism Narrated in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Sister of My Heart*

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Abstract

This paper explores gender roles, female agency, and feminist resistance as portrayed in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel *Sister of My Heart*. It delves into the world of Anju and Sudha—two cousins raised in a matriarchal Bengali household—highlighting how their lives are shaped by societal expectations, patriarchal constraints, and personal aspirations. The study reveals how Divakaruni reimagines traditional myths and gendered narratives to present a new feminine world rooted in sisterhood, resilience, and transformation. By examining the emotional and psychological growth of the protagonists, this article underscores how the novel redefines identity, freedom, and womanhood within the frameworks of diasporic consciousness and socio-cultural transitions.

Keywords: Gender roles, feminism, sisterhood, female agency.

Introduction:

Sister of My Heart opens with the Chatterjee family already deprived of its male figures and its former economic status. As the three widows (Pishi Ma, the cousins' paternal aunt, and their mothers) and two young girls (Anju and Sudha) of this family meander their way through the drama of life, facing marriage, motherhood, divorce, widowhood, etc., each stage brings into focus a certain aspect of the upper-class Bengali culture and tradition, which is cherished or criticized from the uniquely feminine and diasporic perspective of the author.

The novel *Sister of My Heart* portrays a woman's world, this time of middle-class urban women, confined to houses in which their domain is strictly demarcated but which enables them to reach out to each other in sisterhood, and in so doing achieve far greater success as human beings than the men who straddle the outside and bigger world. Rendered in an often sensual and poetic language, the story primarily weaves around the magnetic love that pulls these two women together, though with birth, marriage, and pregnancy all occurring for the two Chatterjee sisters at about the same time, not to mention the fact that they also lose their fathers under the same malicious star. Anju and Sudha Chatterjee are very different in appearance, temperament and achievements, and grow up together under similar yet very different conditions: their fathers, cousins themselves, died together in the same accident, but where Anju's father was the master of the house, and her mother from an equally aristocratic family, Sudha's father was a poor relation, her mother's background nondescript, lower middle-class. Sudha and her mother continue to live in the family mansion not out of ancestral right but because Indian family ties would not have it otherwise.

The girls, Sudha and Anju, live in a patriarchal home in which there is absolutely no male control. The only male alive in the family is disguised as Singhji, the driver and exerts no authority over the household. What was originally conceived of as a restrictive boundary for the women is recreated into a female universe. The rules that are upheld in this world are laid down by the patriarchal society. It is only later that the world of the Chatterjee women is completely transformed into a modern. Divakaruni exposes women freedom, humanity, and the right to life. Anju gives us a clear picture of the need of economic stability for emancipating women. Sudha's father left nothing other than debts. This has been one of the reasons for her inability to perform academically well even if she is as intelligent as Anju. On the other hand, Anju gets a lot of encouragement from her mother and she goes on to win spelling bees and debate contests and good academic achievements in college. Sudha, nevertheless, also does well with her cooking, knitting and crocheting even if she can't excel like Anju. She chooses to be traditional which also demands a lot of courage and tolerance.

I want to design clothes, she says. Salwaarkameezes. Pleated wedding ghagras with mirrors stitched in. Kurtas for men, embroidered white on white silk. Babay frocks in satin and eyelet lace. I want to have my own company, with my own tailors and my own label, so that customers at all the best stores will ask for the Basudha brand. People in Bombay and Delhi and Madras will clamour for my work.(90)

Discussion:

In *Sister of My Heart*, Divakaruni rejects conventional myths and creates new ones. The first book in the novel is

titled *The Princess in the Palace of Snakes*. In this part both the protagonists attempt to conform to the traditional feminine roles allocated by the male hegemonic society. This is symbolised by the traditional fairytale of the princess in the palace of snakes waiting for her Prince Charming to rescue her. The second book is titled *The Queen of Swords*, is not a traditional fairytale. When Anju is upset over her miscarriage, Sudha tells her this tale and Anju recovers. Then she relates what happened to the three mothers. Then Pishi, the usual teller of tales, asks her about the story she told Anju.

‘I told her a story’.

‘Ah, a story’, nods Pishi. More than any of us, she knows the power stories hold at their centre, like a mango holds its seed. It is a power that dissipates with questioning, so she merely asks, with an odd, wistful look, ‘Was it a story I had told you, Sudha?’

I am sorry to disappoint her. ‘It’s a new story. One I made up, sort of, on the spot.’

‘Does it have a name?’ asks Gouri Ma.

I start to shake my head. Then it comes to me.

‘The Queen of swords’, I say. (312)

This new myth symbolises the new feminine world that Divakaruni envisages. It is a world across the rainbow (ironically a conventional symbol of hope) where women rescue other women and do not wait helplessly for the men.

This change is seen not only in the story that Sudha narrates but also in her attitude and her actions. During their childhood, the girls used to enact the fairytales that Pishi told them. Sudha always played the princess in danger and Anju the prince who rescued her. Even while they were playacting, Sudha would never reach out to the prince and help him help

her. She always said that it was the duty of the prince to do all the hard work and rescue her. Later when she falls in love with Ashok and the mothers decide to get her married elsewhere, she waits for Ashok to make all the moves and rescue her.

The extent of the woman's oppression within the marriage is obvious. After her marriage to Ramesh, Sudha enters a household ruled by her tyrannical mother-in-law. She is not allowed to pursue her financial independence. In many ways, she is the prototypical victim of an arranged marriage. In arranged marriages, an attempt to schedule an expression of female sexuality to coincide with institutional structures of marriage renders impossible an articulation of women's desires. Her commodification is complete within the imbrications of patriarchal structures and economic systems. She puts up with the ill-treatment there for a long time, still the conventional princess of the fairytale, waiting for her husband, the prince, to rescue her. When she conceives and it is established by tests that her baby is a girl, her mother-in-law tries to force her into an abortion and treating her as a baby machine. "You probably agree with all those Indian men who see a woman as nothing more than a baby machine." (213)

In traditional relationships women are not expected to have the power to leave home; in fact, to have agency is to transgress beyond normative feminine behaviour. But now Sudha decides that she should do something to protect her baby. She leaves her husband's home and returns to her parental home in Calcutta. Sudha leaves with her jewellery, possibly "gifted" by her parents during the marriage, to set up her own economic unit within which she can re-formulate her own identity. "I have five hundred rupees. I took them from Ramesh's desk drawer. And all my jewellery that wasn't in the safe. Just in case." (261)

The upholder of family tradition, Pishi comes to rescue Sudha. She renders support and says Sudha is old enough to make her own decision. The women in the Chatterjee family doesn't allow Sudha to kill the girl baby to save the family's face in the society, instead they bless her to be like the Rani of Jhansi, the Queen of Swords. In spite of her mother's lamentations she wipes off the sindur powder and wedding bracelets and accepts the divorce proceedings sent by Sanyals. Pishi mourns for the tyrannical rules of the society for a widow at the age of eighteen and says:

Why should she care any more what people say? What good has it done her? What good has it done any of us, a whole lifetime of being afraid of what society might think? I spit on this society which says it's fine to kill a baby girl in her mother's womb, but wrong for the mother to run away to save her child. (268)

Divakaruni's women, however, face a different situation. They love their men, or believe they do, and they suffer agonies of jealousy and misery when they feel they have been betrayed by friend with husband; but they quickly realize that they love their women friends more than their men, a love that surpasses all other relationships. It is in her *Sister of My Heart* that Divakaruni most obviously explores this theme.

Even after marriage Shdha is the most important person in Anju's life, not Sunil, her husband. When, therefore, she learns that Sudha's in-laws want her to abort her baby because the prenatal sex-determination test has shown it is female, in spite of Sunil's evident disapproval she urges her to leave her husband and go to her (Anju's) mother in Calcutta – apparently Sudha's mother is not sufficiently supportive to start a new life there, promising herself that she would somehow bring her

cousin over to America no matter what the cost to her, financially and emotionally.

The woman in the mirror is none other than she herself, but in a novel manifestation. She is that woman who has emerged victorious over all dilemmas, all oppositions, all crushing sensibilities, and is as bright and radiant as a bird, ready to fly into the exotic skies. Sudha refuses to go back to a tormenting past, she is ignorant of what the future holds for her, yet her eyes look forward, and the spirit of fire burning within her convinces everyone that none can now dare to stop her in her upward and onward journey. Sudha indeed, emerges as a triumphant woman. She transforms herself, from the princess in the palace of snakes to the queen of swords. She refuses to return to Ramesh. When Sudha is given a second chance of happiness, when Ashok reappears in her life and wishes to marry her, she is once again faced with the choice between her own happiness and Anju's, and chooses Anju's. She also turns down the conditional offers of Ashok to marry her. The rejection of male - allotted stereotypical roles is complete. Anju wants her in California, and so she will go to California. But she doubts that would this have been a real friend's decision. Both she and Anju know that Sunil was really in love with Sudha and had never been able to forget her; indeed, their friendship had almost broken up when Anju had discovered her husband's feelings for her cousin. Not only will she be a financial burden on Anju, as she and her parents have always been on Anju's family- a fact that she cannot forget and feels she must be grateful for - in a sense, in fact, Sudha is responsible for Anju's miscarriage, for Anju feels obliged to pay for Sudha's fare to the USA, since Sunil cannot afford it, and takes up a job, overworks, and loses her baby. It was not as if she would not have been able to make a fresh start in life in

Calcutta; indeed, she had already begun to do so. Above all, she knows that her presence in Anju's marriage will inevitably cause problems and unhappiness, something that Sudha had anticipated long before in an old dream: "If only Anju and I, like the wives of the heroes in the old tales, could marry the same man, our Arjun, our Krishna, who would love and treasure us both, and keep us both together." (131) Sudha's journey to America is really the beginning of her journey to a new world of women.

Despite the innumerable headaches that an American lifestyle entails, Divakaruni's characters seem convinced about its ultimate superiority. This is well expressed in these words of Sudha, who is planning to leave for America with her fatherless, newborn daughter in search of a respectable life for both: "Best of all, no - one would look down on her, for America was full of mothers like me, who had decided that living alone was better than living with the wrong man" (274).

The solace faced by Sudha in the novel is similar to the postmodern woman faced by all souls stuck between the crossroads of tradition and modernity. When certain aspect of conventional pattern of life become morbid and tormenting, one wishes to tear apart all boundaries and escape into a world where everything is replete with novelty, glory and adventure.

The mothers begin to lead a fulfilling life with a social purpose. They listen to the music that they like and take walks where they please. They no longer worry about the social stigma attached to a divorcee and keep Sudha with them. They lovingly take care of her daughter. The final gesture of the rejection of patriarchal norms and the acceptance of the rules of the new female universe is the gifting of the ruby left to them by Sudha's father to Dayita, Sudha's daughter.

The mothers have joined book societies and knitting classes. They go for walks around Victoria

Memorial. They volunteer at Mother Teresa's Shishu Bhavan and – chaperoned by an insistent Singhji-attend all-night classical music concerts from which they return, cheeks flushed with the early morning cold, humming a song in the bhairav raga. They take day trips to Dakshineswar and bathe in the Ganges . . . Already they are talking of a trip to Darjeeling in the summer. (296)

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Voices from the Margins : The History, Disputes, and Call for Resurgence in Global Indigenous Feminism

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Abstract

In recent times , feminist movements have become widespread, inclusive and intersectional. The quest for equality and balance in domestic , social and professional spheres remain a major ongoing challenge for indigenous women. At a greater level ,indigenous women are eagerly advocating for land rights , drawing attention to have better control over their lives ,their territories and their resources. The indigenous feminist movements have been self – determinant and specific to the problems faced by these women in diverse social contexts. Globally , it is a movement focused with its distinctive nature of championing for reclamation of traditional knowledge and advancing towards social justice. The environment , the social surroundings and ethnic beliefs have shaped and impacted the thought processes of the men and women , leading to entrenched binary distinctions between them. Oftentimes, this also leads to a disproportionate rise in violence and oppression. The negligence of the machineries of law and justice and the long-

standing effects of colonialism also further exacerbate these issues. The objective of this chapter is to highlight the challenges faced by indigenous women globally today and from decades back , specifically in colonized countries, taking a look at works of fiction like Katherena Vermette's *The Break* , Mamang Dai's *The Black Hill* and Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horsemen*.

Keywords: Indigenous feminism, violence, colonialism, land

Introduction:

One of the prominent feminist texts that lays the foundation for the advocacy of women's rights is Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Typically, this text also expounds on the idea of an ideal feminist who can reject the societal constraints by inculcating the values of education and rational thought. However , the text mostly inclines towards the tenets of mainstream or liberal feminism. Wollstonecraft constantly argued about a woman's position being reduced to glittering ornaments in the lives of men , noting that the education offered to women was undignified and discriminatory . But , the question here arises whether development of the self and perfecting the education system alone added to the advocacy for women's rights. It is because of this anticipation that, in different timelines , feminists woke up with alternate layouts, promoting their unique ideals, collectively becoming the change agents of a never-ending movement. Mainstream feminism might have acted as a beacon of hope , but it failed to address the problems of different sections of people.

Hence, the need for a feminism defined by natives , known by the umbrella term *indigenous feminism* arose. In this context, Sojourner Truth in her speech, "Ain't I a Woman?"

highlighted the exclusionary habits of mainstream feminism toward Black women's experiences and the complexities of race and gender inequality. Her legacy is pertinent in questioning and challenging dominant narratives in mainstream feminism, which remains far removed from the notion of inclusivity. In contemporary times, the idea of indigenous feminism is no longer an alien concept, and there is an urgent need for familiarity with its nature, characteristics, and expanding scope.

The community life of the natives was intricately linked with nature. There existed a harmonious agreement between nature and the bearers of humanity – the women. However, the conventional system has been corrupted by the pervasive influence of patriarchy, which has not only remodeled the structure of local governance and administration, but also has served as a framework for gender oppression. In this regard, Environmental activist and writer Jihan Gaeron aptly notes, “Patriarchy gives men power and privilege at the expense of women and acts as the framework for the domination and oppression of gay, queer and transgender people, as well as the stunted development of men.” She points out the malignancy that proliferates into various abnormalities, resulting in stereotyping, domination, violence and death. Furthermore, it is colonialism that has exacerbated this disconcerting structure by serving to reinforce and strengthen existing patriarchal systems, or introduce new ones.

Marginalized and Overlooked : The Experiences of Alienated Native Women:

The danger of a colonial past is rampant around all corners of a nation state that was once a part of its dominion. This affects developing countries of the Global South mostly, but extends even to the Western Liberal Democracies like

Canada . In these countries , it is difficult to trace how the concept of girlhood is taken into account and lived in the context of a postcolonial state. Apparently, First Nation Girls become part of a series of violence , sexual assault and inferior treatment. Native women are mostly considered to be working girls , relegated to marginalized roles, and the system fails to recognize the deep-rooted violence by neglecting the presence of girls. Indigenous resurgence can be deeply interlinked with the theory of ‘ presencing’ . It could be a decolonizing force and apparently , Leanne Simpson states , “Indigenous societies were societies of presence. Our processes- be they political, spiritual , education or healing – required a higher degree of presence than modern colonial existence.” As such , it can be assumed that presencing can determine a course for the cause of cultural and spiritual resistance , with collective advocacy and mobilization as a possible solution.

The Canadian author Katherena Vermette , in her novel, *The Break* has also used the technique of presence and absence , highlighting the binaries responsible in a family structure. It is an intergenerational narrative on trauma that weaves a recurring pattern of fear, abandonment and violence that adds up to the complexities in family life. The central characters are women, who, despite being present and vocal, remain mostly unheard. The institutions like the police and the hospital refuse to acknowledge that native women from communities like the Metis can reasonably be victims of violence and assault. The novel’s setting, ‘Break’ ,as it goes, is an obscure and eerie suburb consisting of native families ,that becomes the venue of a crime scene. The spotless white landscape, an empty ground of familiar stories hold on to the baggage of all the women who were similar victims . The two operational massive Hydrotowers mentioned in the beginning of the novel are

unanimated and passive witnesses to the crime scenes, just like Stella, who can only observe her niece Emily's assault from a corner, recognizing the incessant string of violence that she had probably witnessed from a young age.

In the novel, the theme of absence is highly apparent, indicating the emotional unavailability of the male characters who subsequently fail to establish their presence and play a proactive role around the lives of the women. It is unclear whether their absence is intentional or has been overshadowed by strong female characters like Lou and Rita who never underestimate their independent roles in their respective family life. Ironically, the perpetrator of the crime turns out to be a teenage girl, who is addressed as *Phoenix Anne Stranger*. She has been depicted as a girl from a broken family that has failed to shape her as a responsible individual. She, like many others, end up in the cycle of anti – criminal activities, embarking on the path of violence. At one point of the novel, the correlation between rape and power is also examined, contradicting the popular belief that gender alone is responsible for such heinous crimes. The supposed power that Phoenix enjoys as a 'ringleader' is yet another part of her downfall. Emily, on the other hand, represents the countless indigenous women, who have faced some form of assault or violence indicating how rape culture is deeply rooted in victim blaming, racism and patriarchal stereotypes, leading to the miscarriage of justice.

Colonialis, Land and the Erasure of Women's Spaces:

It is often argued that " Tribal women are at the peril of being subsumed within an exotic cultural trope as non-speaking participants, passive data subjects...waiting to be integrated into mainstream governance and decision making " (Shreyashi). This implies that women and their participation in the affairs of the community on the larger and the local level is taken for

granted. In the landscape of Northeast India, diverse challenges are faced by the different tribal and ethnic groups. This is the prime reason why ethnic conflicts are rampant here and the stories of contribution, struggle, pain and sacrifice remain overlooked. An example could be that of Mizoram, where the nature of patriarchy has been dynamic throughout different periods of history. We can consider the pre colonial and post colonial phases of gender – related discrimination by the Christian missionaries in Mizoram. The pre-determined roles assigned to the Mizo women were household chores, taking care of the children and taking part in Jhum cultivation. Likewise, every part of Northeast unfolds a similar story.

Colonialism is a threat to the indigenous society, and it is a cultural as well as an ecological threat. The great environmentalist John Francis opines, “We are the environment and how we treat each other is really how we treat the environment.” This implies that there persists a close relation between women, their needs, their access to space, their contribution in preserving nature. This theory can be interlinked with the community as a whole, their land, and their ownership rights. In Mamang Dai’s *The Black Hill*, the problems of internal tribal conflicts have been depicted. The lack of collective participation of men and women to defy the rights on their land and territory can be considered as calamity of the first water. The White people, addressed as Migluns, soon try to occupy the ‘empty spaces’ and convert the tribal lands into private property for industrialization, farming and recreational activities.

The couple in the novel dive the readers into a realm where they make their own interpretation of land and space. Gimur almost merges with the land that covers her narrative from childhood to later life. With Kajinsha by her side, she

never stops climbing up the hill and settling into a new neighbourhood, transgressing the concept of a woman's limited access to space, compared to her male counterpart. The novel also focuses on the concept of historical erasure of women in many narratives where a woman's relationship with land is symbolic to her being present and being part of community life. In Gimur's story, 'land' becomes an ever-expanding space. The indigenous Abor and Mishmi women's relation to land and property rights were never acknowledged; neither were they consulted, held accountable and granted freedom to make their choices. As a matter of fact, customary laws prevented the transgression of women in personal matters of importance too, like marriage and divorce.

Similarly, in the domestic sphere too, Gimur is depicted as someone who started preparing from an early age to be able to adhere to the pre-determined gender roles. That way, along with the division in labour, the male – female binary with regard to spaces were also divided: "Gimur took over the duties associated with the woman of a house. Kajinsha had...separate spots for hunting, fishing and catching rodents and birds ..." (81)

Matriarchs, Wives and a Cultural Continuity:

The importance of collective advocacy lies in the fact that it helps in amplifying individual voices, fosters awareness and strengthens impact. That is why, in certain African nations such as Nigeria, collective organization was widely prominent. This was a feature within Yoruba culture during the pre-colonial phase, where the tribals articulated their interests and protected the same from intervention by others. Within this system, a woman's disagreement with a policy carried equal weightage as men. But, during the colonial era, this system was revoked. According to Oyewami (1997), "Colonisers

adopted tools such as education , land ownership,...religion and leadership ...to berate and wield power from women . Female voting limitations and tax payment were also narrated .” (Johnson 1982 ; Amandiame 1987 ; Adetunji 2013). Apart from this ,men started to adopt professions which were authoritative and provided financial security. On the contrary , women never had that privilege.

Wole Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman* traces the ritualistic complexities within the Yoruba tribe. Along with that , the play also stages certain female characters in dominant roles . The mother of the market , Iyaloja has entitled herself to the role of a matriarch. She is compelling , powerful and headstrong enough to motivate , manipulate, criticize and mock the intentions of the male characters in the narrative. Iyaloja never hesitates to pinpoint Elesin’s incapacity to fulfill the sacrificial duties . She is not only the voice of the market , but also the voice of the play as she is the one who creates a momentum in criticizing Elesin’s actions , signalling the catastrophic outcome that is supposed to befall on the villagers. Iyaloja is joined by the girls of the market who play an active role in turning Amusa away , taunting him for his inclination towards Western values and his wilful abandonment of Yoruba beliefs.

On the other hand , it is the colonizer’s wife Jane Pilkings who wields lesser power in her marriage. One part of this lies in her incapacity to influence her husband’s behaviour and decisions . Despite of the imbalances in power dynamics between both the cultures, it can still be established that the ‘ female’ here in whole has been perceived more like a possession , a ‘ trophy wife’ or the custodian of her respective culture. The female characters throughout the play owe their loyalty to the culture and the belief system they were born and brought up in .

Way Forward : The Future of Indigenous Feminism:

Feminism propounds the importance of women's voices and the recognition of women's strength and agency. Lena Dunham aptly states , “ A huge part of being a feminist is giving other women the freedom to make choices you might not necessarily make yourself .” This implies making room for women from different corners of the world to be empowered by capacity building and exercise their rights and privileges. Historically , the trajectory of subjugation , violence and oppression of women might have been different across the world . However, the way in which mainstream feminism has been applauded , Indigenous feminism has been neglected. Indigenous feminism does not have a limited and definite elucidation. Gender plays a part undeniably but the roles of colonial suppression targeting indigenous sovereignty and the interplay of race and ethnicity can not be ignored. The future will be full of possibilities only if the underlying problems in a native society can be addressed. In modern society , newer standards of gender norms have been established that makes a native woman alien in her own space , where she can't obtain the benefit of her own resources; such as the traditional products being outsourced by the MNCs. In myths , the way she behaves , dresses and accessorizes has always been glorified . But , in reality , it is time that the indigenous women can look eye to eye with the women from different spheres , holding different identities and may actually be able to glorify her own position.

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Intersecting Marginalities: Gender and Caste in Bama's *Karukku*

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Abstract

This paper explores the interlocking structures of gender and caste oppression as portrayed in Bama's autobiographical novel *Karukku* (1992). Written in Tamil and later translated into English, *Karukku* is a groundbreaking narrative that gives voice to the experiences of Dalit Christian women in Tamil Nadu. The study analyzes the socio-cultural and political frameworks that perpetuate caste-based and gender-based marginalization, and how Bama's text critiques these frameworks from a subaltern feminist standpoint. Through a critical textual analysis, this paper examines how the narrative strategies and language of *Karukku* expose the entrenched hierarchies of power and articulate resistance. The paper also engages with scholarly perspectives to situate *Karukku* within Dalit feminist discourse.

Keywords: Dalit feminism, caste, gender, indian literature.

Introduction:

Indian literature has long been critiqued for its Brahmanical and patriarchal leanings, often excluding or

misrepresenting voices from the margins. Dalit literature, emerging from the lived experiences of the oppressed, challenges the mainstream canon and offers alternative narratives that reflect the realities of caste and gender discrimination. Bama's *Karukku* is a seminal work in Dalit women's writing, portraying the multiple layers of oppression faced by Dalit Christian women. The text confronts not only the brutality of the caste system but also the complicity of religious institutions and patriarchy in maintaining hegemonic control. This paper aims to interrogate how Bama uses her narrative to assert agency and construct a collective identity for Dalit women.

Research Objectives:

1. To analyze the intersection of caste and gender in Bama's *Karukku*.
2. To explore the narrative strategies used by Bama to articulate Dalit women's experiences.
3. To understand *Karukku* through the lens of Dalit feminism and subaltern theory.
4. To examine critical responses to *Karukku* from feminist and gendered perspectives.

Methodology:

The study adopts a qualitative research methodology, primarily using literary analysis to interpret the text. It involves close reading of *Karukku* and secondary research, including feminist, Dalit, and postcolonial theoretical frameworks. The analysis draws on Lakshmi Holmström's English translation to ensure depth and accuracy. Scholarly articles, interviews, and reviews are also incorporated to understand the critical reception of the text.

An Overview of *Karukku*:

"*Karukku*", meaning "palmyra leaves with serrated edges," symbolizes the duality of pain and resistance. The

narrative, written in a non-linear, fragmented style, mirrors the lived experiences of marginalization. Bama's use of colloquial Tamil and her decision to write in a first-person voice are political acts that subvert literary elitism. From the outset, Bama's awareness of caste difference is shaped by daily humiliations: "Because we are born into the Paraiya caste, we are never given any honour or dignity or respect" (Karukku, p. 14). Her childhood memories reflect the internalization of inferiority and the normalization of caste hierarchy. The text portrays various forms of discrimination, from being forced to sit separately in school to being denied access to public spaces and resources. Religious institutions, rather than offering solace, exacerbate her oppression. As a Catholic, Bama experiences gendered exploitation and hypocrisy within the Church. She writes, "I had imagined that I would find peace in the convent. Instead, I found that caste and discrimination existed even more cruelly there" (Karukku, p. 70). This disillusionment with religious authority becomes a central theme in her journey towards self-realization.

Depiction of Gendered and Caste Discrimination in *Karukku*:

Bama's narrative unflinchingly documents how Dalit women occupy the lowest rungs of the social hierarchy. The text reveals the compounded discrimination they face, not just from upper-caste men and women, but also within their own community and religious structures. Dalit women are portrayed as labourers, domestic workers, and caretakers—roles that sustain both economic and social exploitation. The socialization of Dalit girls is marked by silence, submission, and sacrifice. Bama writes, "From the time we are born, we are taught to endure everything in silence" (*Karukku*, p. 36). This imposed passivity is both a survival mechanism and a form of internalized oppression. However, Bama simultaneously

foregrounds the resilience and solidarity among Dalit women. The communal strength of women who labor, laugh, and resist together is a recurring motif in the text.

Critical Voices on *Karukku* in Feminist and Gendered Perspectives:

Karukku has received acclaim for its honest portrayal of Dalit women's lives. Feminist scholar Gopal Guru emphasizes the need for "Dalit women to speak for themselves" rather than be spoken for by upper-caste feminists. Bama's voice in *Karukku* exemplifies this agency. Meenakshi Moon and Urmila Pawar, in their anthology "We Also Made History", highlight how Dalit women's narratives challenge both patriarchy and casteism. They find resonance with Bama's articulation of her community's struggles. Sharmila Rege's concept of "Dalit feminist standpoint" becomes relevant in analyzing *Karukku*. Rege argues for a critical pedagogy that includes the lived experiences of Dalit women as legitimate knowledge sources. Feminist critics like Susie Tharu and K. Satyanarayana argue that *Karukku* disrupts the dominant feminist discourse by centering caste as integral to any analysis of gender. According to Raj Gautaman, Bama's work is "a radical expression of Dalit selfhood and an indictment of caste patriarchy" (Gautaman, 2001). The text's power lies in its capacity to speak from the margins without seeking validation from the center. *Karukku* exemplifies this standpoint through its experiential truth and emotive authenticity. The narrative does not merely recount suffering; it also envisions liberation through education, solidarity, and self-awareness.

Discussion and Findings:

This study critically explores *Karukku* by Bama as a significant text that offers nuanced insight into the lived experiences of Dalit women. Through a close reading of the

text and a review of scholarly interpretations, the research fulfills its objectives by analyzing the intersection of caste and gender, identifying Bama's narrative strategies, situating the work within Dalit feminist discourse, and examining the critical responses from feminist and gendered perspectives.

I. Intersection of Caste and Gender in *Karukku*

Bama's *Karukku* offers a layered depiction of how caste and gender intersect to doubly marginalize Dalit women. As both a Dalit and a woman, Bama experiences systemic discrimination within multiple domains—family, church, school, and society at large. While caste-based discrimination marginalizes her community socially, economically, and culturally, patriarchal norms reinforce her subordination within the Dalit community itself.

- a. Education and Religion:** Bama's schooling reveals the prejudice of dominant-caste teachers who humiliate Dalit students, often under the guise of discipline. Even within Christian institutions, which are supposedly based on principles of equality, caste and gender hierarchies persist. Bama recounts how Dalit girls are treated with condescension and are expected to internalize inferiority.
- b. Labour and Social Role:** Dalit women are expected to engage in hard, menial labor—especially in upper-caste households—without recognition. Bama highlights how these women's physical and emotional labor sustains the privileged sections of society, even as they remain excluded and demeaned.
- c. Gendered Oppression within Dalit Communities:** While *Karukku* critiques upper-caste oppression, it also does not shy away from addressing patriarchal structures within the Dalit community. Women's

freedom is curtailed, their roles are restricted, and their voices are often silenced even within their own homes.

II. Narrative Strategies to Articulate Dalit Women's Experiences:

Bama's narrative is revolutionary not only for its content but also for its form and style. She defies the conventions of literary writing in both Tamil and English by employing the following strategies:

- a. **Autobiographical Voice:** The first-person narrative renders the text deeply personal and emotionally resonant. Bama does not distance herself from her story, thereby validating Dalit women's voices and asserting their subjectivity.
- b. **Oral Tradition and Colloquial Language:** Bama's deliberate use of colloquial Tamil and the oral storytelling style reflects the cultural expressions of Dalit communities. This allows the text to resonate with grassroots authenticity and defies the elitist norms of literary language.
- c. **Fragmented Structure:** *Karukku* is non-linear and episodic, reflecting the fragmented and disjointed nature of memory, trauma, and resistance. This also mirrors the "karukku" (serrated) metaphor—the painful, sharp experiences of life.
- d. **Spiritual Metaphors and Biblical Allusions:** Although critical of institutional Christianity, Bama uses religious metaphors to reclaim spirituality as a source of resistance and healing. The title itself, *Karukku*, refers to the serrated leaves of the palmyra and also alludes to the double-edged sword in the Bible—symbolizing truth, pain, and resilience.

III. Understanding *Karukku* through the Lens of Dalit Feminism

Dalit Feminism, distinct from mainstream Indian feminism, is rooted in the specific experiences of Dalit women who face caste, class, and gender oppression simultaneously. *Karukku* aligns closely with Dalit feminist principles through:

- a. **Assertion of Identity:** Bama challenges the imposed silence and shame around Dalit identity. She foregrounds her Dalit Christian identity with pride and defiance, breaking the internalized stigma.
- b. **Community over Individualism:** While *Karukku* is autobiographical, it transcends individual experience. Bama often speaks as “we,” suggesting a collective Dalit women’s consciousness. This aligns with Dalit feminist solidarity and collective resistance.
- c. **Rejection of Upper-Caste Feminist Norms:** Bama critiques savarna feminism for failing to acknowledge the centrality of caste. In *Karukku*, the feminist stance is grounded in lived experiences, physical labor, and the cultural specificity of rural Dalit women’s lives.

IV. Critical Responses from Feminist and Gendered Perspectives: The reception of *Karukku* in academic and feminist circles has evolved over time:

- a. **Initial Reception:** Upon its publication in 1992, *Karukku* was met with resistance, especially from Christian institutions and conservative readers. Bama’s critique of caste practices within the Church and her unapologetic portrayal of Dalit life were seen as radical.
- b. **Feminist Readings:** Feminist scholars have lauded *Karukku* for foregrounding the body and labor of Dalit women as sites of both oppression and resistance. Scholars like Susie Tharu and K. Satyanarayana have placed Bama’s work within the canon of Dalit feminist

literature that redefines what constitutes feminist thought in India.

- c. **Gendered Critique of Resistance:** Some gendered readings emphasize Bama's internal conflict between faith and identity, between personal freedom and community loyalty. These critiques explore the psychological burden carried by Dalit women navigating hostile social terrains.
- d. **Criticism of Representation:** A few critiques question whether Bama's narrative risks homogenizing the Dalit woman's experience. However, such criticisms often fail to appreciate the plurality embedded in Bama's multi-vocal narrative, which draws from community voices, songs, and shared stories.

The text makes it clear that caste and gender cannot be viewed in isolation when analyzing the oppression faced by Dalit women. Their experiences are marked by a dual burden, creating a complex matrix of marginality. Bama's stylistic choices are political. They democratize the literary space and provide an authentic medium through which Dalit women's realities can be articulated, heard, and validated. *Karukku* embodies Dalit feminist thought by resisting both caste and patriarchal domination, while also criticizing savarna frameworks that exclude Dalit women's voices. *Karukku* has contributed to expanding the boundaries of feminist and postcolonial literary criticism in India by centering the subaltern woman's voice and unsettling dominant paradigms of representation.

Conclusion:

Bama's *Karukku* is more than a personal memoir; it is a collective testimony of Dalit Christian women's resistance against multiple forms of oppression. Through the text, Bama not only writes back to dominant discourses of caste, gender,

and religion but also opens up a dialogic space for Dalit women's voices that had long been silenced. The intersectional analysis of caste and gender, the innovative narrative strategies, the lens of Dalit feminism, and the diverse critical responses all affirm that *Karukku* is not merely an autobiographical text but a revolutionary act of self-assertion and social critique. It remains an indispensable work for anyone seeking to understand the lived realities of Dalit women in contemporary India. By intertwining caste, gender, and religion, the text reveals the layered complexities of marginalization in Indian society. Through her defiant prose and subversive storytelling, Bama reclaims agency for Dalit women and disrupts the literary status quo. The narrative serves as both a critique of institutionalized discrimination and a manifesto for social justice. In amplifying the voices from the margins, *Karukku* occupies a crucial space in Indian literature and feminist discourse.

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Sacred and Subversive: Feminist Intervention in Power, Faith and Technology

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Abstract

In a world caught between ancient faiths and digital frontiers, feminist movements are rising as both sacred and subversive forces, challenging hierarchies, reclaiming identities, and reimagining justice. This paper explores the intersectional, global, and dynamic nature of contemporary feminist movements as they intervene in three significant spheres of influence: faith, power, and technology. At the heart of this study is the idea that feminism is both sacred and subversive- sacred in its reverence for life, justice, and collective healing, and subversive in its refusal to comply with hierarchies rooted in patriarchy, colonialism, and heteronormativity. Through feminist theology and decolonial spiritual reinterpretations, this paper examines how women and queer individuals engage with religious traditions not as passive adherents, but as active agents of transformation. In contexts where religion is often used to justify gender-based oppression, feminist thinkers and activists are reimagining sacred texts, reclaiming spiritual narratives, and reshaping religious spaces to be inclusive of diverse gender

identities and sexual orientations. Simultaneously, the digital age has ushered in new forms of feminist expression and resistance. From hashtag movements like #MeToo and #WomenLifeFreedom to global campaigns for reproductive rights and LGBTQ+ equality, digital feminism has become a borderless platform for solidarity, storytelling, and activism. However, the same technologies that empower also reproduce inequalities through algorithmic bias, online harassment, and surveillance. The research also situates feminism within global structure of displacement, migration, and environmental degradation. Intersectionality serves as a critical framework to explore the lived experiences of women and queer individuals who are disproportionately affected by forced migration, climate crises, religious persecution, and economic precarity. Feminist responses to these global challenges often emerge from the grassroots, where activism intersects with indigenous knowledge systems, ecofeminist ethics, and climate justice. This study ultimately reveals feminism as a resilient and adaptive force, reshaping global narratives of power, identity, and justice in both sacred and secular spaces.

Keywords: Feminism, intersectionality, masculinity, queer theory, global feminist movements.

Introduction:

What happens when silence becomes sacred, and resistance becomes a form of prayer? In many corners of the world, feminism does not march loudly- it whispers in rituals, codes itself into culture, and finds power in subversion. In some places, it is veiled under tradition; in others, it is encoded in algorithms. Whether woven into the folds of a sari or embedded in lines of digital code, feminism today is not fixed ideology, but a living, shape-shifting force that refuses to be confined by

borders, binaries, or disciplines.

As the global landscape evolves, so too does the face of feminism. It is no longer solely concerned with gender equality in political representation or legal rights- it now questions the architecture of power itself. It asks why some voices are sacred while others are silenced, why technology often mirrors the same exclusions as ancient scriptures, and how displacement, environment, and identity intersect in the lives of those rarely seen at the centre of power.

This research embraces feminism as both sacred and subversive- sacred for its spiritual grounding in justice, care, and connection, and subversive for its radical interrogation of systems that devalue the feminine, the queer, and the displaced. Moving between realms of faith, technology, migration, environment, and sexuality, this paper explores how feminism is being reshaped and reimagined across the globe- not as a single movement, but as a constellation of voices reclaiming what it means to live, lead, and love with freedom.

Discussion:

In today's rapidly evolving world, feminism is no longer confined to the streets or seminar rooms- it breathes through hashtags, rituals, forest trails, refugee tents, political podiums, and algorithmic codes. It questions why gender still dictates freedom in digital realms, why queer bodies are silenced in sacred texts, and how colonial legacies linger in the eco-crisis. Feminist movements now span continents and cultures, fueled by intersectionality that listens to the silenced, from displaced women crossing borders to trans activists challenging binary norms. It stands at the confluence of globalization and identity, confronting masculinities shaped by capitalism and conflict, and embracing digital resistance as a new-age protest. Feminism today sings in the voices of indigenous women

guarding forests, echoes in the sermons of feminist theologians, and clicks through the keyboards of digital warriors. It is both fierce and fluid- disrupting patriarchal power while nurturing new ways of being. As migration reshapes nations and climate change redraws survival maps, feminism expands, bends, and stretches across faith, technology, and politics- redefining not just gender, but the very idea of justice, belonging, and liberation for the future.

Feminism today does not just resist- it reimagines. It asks what freedom looks like in a world where digital spaces mirror real- life hierarchies, and where surveillance often replaces solidarity. Digital feminism isn't just about visibility; it's about survival, community, and rewriting algorithms that were never made with all genders in mind. Religion, once a fortress of patriarchy, is being reinterpreted through feminist lenses. Sacred texts are no longer off-limits- they are being reclaimed, rewritten, and revoiced by women and queer theologians' who dare to ask: what if divinity also looks like us?

In the heart of environmental struggles, ecofeminism grows- resilient, local, and deeply rooted. It draws connections between the exploitation of the earth and the exploitation of the feminine, showing that healing the planet is inseparable from healing social injustices. Meanwhile, borders keep shifting, but stories of migration and displacement often echo the same grief: of women leaving behind homes, queer individuals fleeing hate, and entire communities uprooted by war and climate collapse. Feminism listens to these stories- not as statistics, but as survival narratives.

Masculinity, once defined by dominance, is also in flux. New forms of being male- sensitive, nurturing, vulnerable- are emerging, breaking the grip of hegemonic norms.

Feminism does not aim to erase men- it invites them

into the conversation of change. This is not just a movement; it's a mosaic. Feminism in the global context is both sacred and subversive, ancient and futuristic, personal and political. And it's still unfolding.

As we navigate a world shaped by digital innovation, climate uncertainty, mass migration, and cultural pluralism, feminism refuses to remain static. It moves across borders, timelines, and traditions- transforming with each voice it includes. To understand its evolving shape, we must begin by mapping its foundations and tracing its many intersections across gender, environment, faith, technology, and global politics.

1. **Foundations of Feminist Thought:** Modern feminism owes much to its foundational thinkers- from Mary Wollstonecraft to bell hooks- who challenged the marginalization of women and other gendered bodies. Early waves focused on suffrage and legal rights, while later movements embraced intersectionality, realizing that race, class, sexuality, and religion are inseparable from gendered experiences.
2. **Intersectionality and Global Feminist Voices:** At the heart of modern feminist theory lies the concept of intersectionality, introduced by Kimberle Crenshaw (1989). She critiques single- axis analyses that treat race and gender as isolated categories. Intersectionality reveals how systems of oppression- racism, sexism, classism- interlock, especially in the lives of marginalized women. This approach underpins global feminist movements that prioritize inclusivity and complexity.
3. **Digital Feminism and the Reimagination of Resistance:** In the digital age, feminism has evolved through hashtags, blogs, and online campaigns, but not without contradictions. Sarah Banet- Weiser (2018) in *Empowered*

explores how popular feminism has entered the mainstream, often commodified into slogans, merchandise, and curated identities. While digital platforms offer visibility, they also incubate popular misogyny, reinforcing patriarchal backlash. Digital feminism, therefore, is both a site of empowerment and vulnerability.

4. **Feminism, Religion, and the Sacred:** Feminist engagement with religion often involves a double movement: reclaiming lost histories and challenging patriarchal interpretations. Elizabeth Schussler Florenza (1983), in *In Memory of Her*, reinterprets early Christian history to spotlight women's leadership roles. Her feminist theology resists the male-centric lens through which sacred texts are often read, advocating for inclusive spiritual narratives. This religious critique resonates with global efforts where women and queer individuals challenge religious institutions while also drawing strength from them, seeking to transform the sacred into a space of liberation.
5. **Feminism and Environmental Justice:** Vandana Shiva (1988), in *Staying Alive*, connects environmental degradation with patriarchal and colonial practices. Her ecofeminist stance sees women- especially indigenous women- as protectors of ecological balance. Shiva's critique of capitalist development sheds light on how the environment, like women's labour and bodies, is exploited for profit.
6. **Migration, Gender, and Displacement:** Globalization has not only connected economies but also displaced millions, especially women. Saskia Sassen (1999) in *Guests and Aliens* analyses how global economic restructuring creates flows of feminized migration. Migrant women often work in invisible and undervalued sectors, facing both economic

and gendered vulnerability.

7. **Queer Theory and the Disruption of Gender Norms:** Feminism's evolution includes a deeper understanding of gender fluidity and the rejection of binaries. Jack Halberstam (1998), in *Female Masculinity*, challenges traditional gender norms by exploring masculinity in non-male bodies. Their work disrupts the male- female dichotomy, making space for alternative identities that resist conformity.
8. **Masculinities and Patriarchy:** A feminist analysis of power must also interrogate how masculinity is constructed and maintained. Raewyn Connell (1995), in *Masculinities*, introduces the concept of hegemonic masculinity, which legitimizes male dominance and marginalizes alternative masculinities. She argues that masculinity is a socially constructed identity constantly reshaped through institutions and media. Understanding the shifting nature of masculinities is vital for envisioning gender equality- not just in empowering women and queer communities but also in liberating men and oppressive norms.

Feminism in the global context does not unfold in neat chapters- it spirals, intersects, and echoes across borders, centuries, identities, and terrains. It is not a singular struggle, but a constellation of voices, each illuminating a different face of oppression and possibility. Through this journey, we encounter feminism not merely as a movement, but as a living archive- a site of ancestral memory, radical dreaming, and everyday resistance.

Today, feminism is more than a movement- it's a philosophy of reclamation. From the grassroots struggles of displaced women to digital revolutions led by hashtags, it reclaims bodies from binaries, nature from exploitation, and

spirituality from rigid dogmas. Ecofeminists link ecological and gender justice, while digital feminists challenge patriarchal algorithms and online spaces. Queer feminists dissolve identity boundaries, offering fluid alternatives to fixed gender roles. Intersectional voices remind us that true liberation must uplift the most marginalized. Masculinity, too, is evoking – toward care, vulnerability, and shared power. Migrant women and the displaced resist invisibility through stories and community. Feminist theologians rewrite sacred narratives to reflect inclusion and compassion. Together, these movements form a counter-narrative – a living, breathing archive of resistance and renewal. Feminism, is not a destination but a journey of becoming, it flows through temples, tech, soil, and speech – both fierce and tender, sacred and subversive. Breaking boundaries means expanding them, until no one is left out. Feminism, in all its complexity, is not a static ideology but a dynamic, breathing force – constantly responding to the rhythms of our changing world. From the margins of displacement to the centers of political power, from sacred altars to digital screens, it refuses to be boxed into one definition. Instead, it grows, evolves, and stretches across boundaries – cultural, spiritual, ecological, and technological – connecting seemingly disparate struggles through a common thread: the pursuit of justice.

What emerges is not a singular story but a mosaic of voices – intergenerational, intersectional, and global. These voices don't just critique – they create. They reimagine what leadership looks like, what care feels like, and what freedom could truly mean. Ecofeminists remind us that the Earth's wounds mirror our own. Queer and trans feminists dissolve binaries to reveal the beauty of fluidity. Feminist theologians reclaim the divine as a site of empowerment, not exclusion. And digital feminists write their revolutions not just in the

streets, but in code and conversation. In this fluid terrain, masculinity itself is redefined- not as dominance, but as shared humanity. Migration stories become archives of resistance. Technology becomes a battleground for representation and autonomy. Each thread, when woven together, tells story of transformation.

Conclusion:

To conclude, feminism today is not about breaking boundaries for the sake of rebellion- it's about expanding them so that more voices can be heard, more truths can be told, and more lives can be lived freely. It is an invitation- not just to witness change, but to participate in it. Because in the end, the boundaries we break today shape the freedoms we build for tomorrow.

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Guardians of the Land: Indigenous Women and Traditional Ecological Knowledge in the Age of Climate Change

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Abstract

The role of Indigenous women is important when we talk about preserving cultural heritage, maintaining cultural harmony and resilience, and solving social issues such as climate change and social injustice. Their unique knowledge systems and leadership are pivotal in sustaining biodiversity, ensuring food security, and fostering social cohesion. However, systemic barriers, including land dispossession, gender inequality, and globalization, threaten their contributions. This chapter explores the various roles of indigenous women, emphasizing their knowledge, and leadership. Through case studies from the Amazon, Africa, and the Arctic, it highlights their impact and

challenges, while providing actionable policy recommendations to amplify their voices and secure their rights. Thus to conclude, Recognizing and empowering indigenous women is essential for achieving sustainable development and social justice.

Keywords: Indigenous women, gender equity, cultural preservation, advocacy, sustainable practices.

Introduction:

In a world going through increasing consequences of climate change, the wisdom established in Traditional Ecological Knowledge has emerged as an invaluable resource. This knowledge, which comes from generations of experience and proximity with nature, is capable of providing sustainable practices and principles necessary to address ecological challenges. Among the most significant guardians of this knowledge are Indigenous women, whose roles within their communities make them important caretakers of biodiversity and environmental resilience. However, despite their contributions, Indigenous women are situated at the margins of environmental discourse, with their voices silenced by gender bias, cultural whitewashing, removal of land rights and even dispossession of land.

In this chapter, we will explore the interplay of gender, environment, and Indigenous rights. By bringing to light the contributions of Indigenous women to ecological sustainability, the chapter highlights their role in breaking patriarchal and colonial boundaries that have excluded them from global environmental and feminist conversations.

1.1 Background: Understanding Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)

Traditional Ecological Knowledge is a system that includes practices, values, and beliefs amassed from generations

of interaction with the environment. It is a reflection of the close understanding of the environment, biodiversity, and the management of resources. Traditional Ecological Knowledge is not limited to techniques but is embedded in the culture and lives of the Indigenous communities, forming a framework for both land governance and ecological balance.

Key Components of TEK Include:

- **Practical Knowledge:** Techniques for water conservation, forest management, and wildlife preservation in addition to rotational farming and natural pest control have developed through ecological cycles.
- **Beliefs and Values:** It includes the spiritual and cultural principles that guide human interaction with nature. These principles lay an emphasis on harmony and respect for all living beings.
- **Intergenerational Transmission:** The transfer of knowledge through oral storytelling, rituals, and hands-on practices, making sure ecological knowledge is preserved.

1.2 Indigenous Women and Traditional Ecological Knowledge:

Indigenous women cannot be called passive inhabitants of the ecosystem; they are active knowledge holders, caretakers, and carriers of Traditional Ecological Knowledge. This knowledge consists of various practices, including sustainable agriculture, forest conservation, climate monitoring, and water management. For example, the role of Indigenous women in preserving the biodiversity of the Amazon rainforest is crucial, as they cultivate and protect native plants, helping maintain the regional ecological balance. On a similar note, Arctic Indigenous women offer insights into glacial retreat and weather changes, which may be beyond the capacity of modern tools.

These practices are less technical and more deeply intertwined with spiritual and cultural values that emphasize harmony with nature. In sub-Saharan Africa, women lead the way to counter soil degradation and desertification, employing sustainable agricultural practices to restore soil fertility. These techniques not only increase agricultural productivity but also reduces the after-effects of change in climate by reducing dependency on chemical fertilizers.

The importance of Traditional Ecological Knowledge when countering climate change is deep-rooted. In contrast with industrial approaches, which believe in exploiting resources, Traditional Ecological Knowledge believes in regenerative practices made specifically for particular ecosystems. This knowledge is considered important when making strategies for climate adaptation, providing cost-efficient and locally relevant solutions.

The practices of Indigenous women are in line with modern sustainability goals as mentioned in the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals. By advocating for biodiversity conservation (15), climate action (13), and sustainable agricultural practices (2), their efforts are an example of environmental stewardship.

These case studies highlight the indispensable role of Indigenous women in achieving sustainability, stressing the need to integrate their point of view into global environmental frameworks.

1.2.1 Indigenous Women's Knowledge Systems and Leadership:

Indigenous women's knowledge is not limited to mere ecological practices but includes a deeper understanding of family, health, religion, and governance. This gendered knowledge is a reflection of their unique perspective and

responsibility not only within the family but also in the community.

It is not unknown that women possess special knowledge about medicinal herbs, food practices, and rituals of the community, which are important both for the transfer of cultural heritage and the betterment of their people. These women also play the role of a leader in times of crisis—whether caused by climate change, epidemics, or even political upheaval. They are an indispensable part of the community, where they play the part of organizing relief, solving conflicts, and their knowledge of local resources plays a central role in recovery efforts. Indigenous women are always on the frontline when confronting systemic inequality and demanding justice for their society. Their activism is a bridge between modernity and traditionalism, where they maintain their cultural heritage and, if needed, challenge dominant narratives that aim to marginalize their people.

1.2.2 Threats to Indigenous Women's Roles and Rights:

Rising global temperatures, habitat destruction, and scarcity of resources disrupt traditional ecological practices. Changing rainfall patterns, deforestation, and degradation in forest cover harm the ability of Indigenous women to cultivate native plants and sustain agricultural systems. The gradual melting of polar ice, rising levels of the sea, and the movement of communities due to undesirable effects disrupt their connection to the land, which was once a foundation of their knowledge. These disruptions pose a danger to the survival of TEK (Traditional Ecological Knowledge) and are barriers to efficiency of Indigenous women to come to terms to the after effects of change in climate.

Another threat to TEK is the force of globalization, market driven economy and cultural homogenization. The

commodification of natural resources prioritizes short-term gains over sustainable practices, with a disregard for traditional methods. In addition to economy, the Indigenous language and culture have also been marginalized by the modern education system. This cultural assimilation due to the erosion of oral traditions threatens biodiversity and weakens the resilience of Indigenous communities.

It is important to take up policies that will recognize the contribution of Indigenous women, which will be pivotal while addressing these threats. It is also essential to protect their rights to land, culture, and decision-making in order to preserve the invaluable knowledge they hold.

Thus, Traditional Ecological Knowledge holds the key to sustainable living in the era of a rapidly changing planet.

1.2.2 The Paradox of Marginalization:

Despite their crucial role in ecological sustainability, Indigenous women are treated as systemic marginalization that disregard their contributions. Patriarchal bias, within and outside their communities, limits their accessibility to decision-making rights and land ownership rights. The role of globalization and colonization in the erosion of Indigenous culture has been massive, damaging the generations of traditional knowledge.

Besides, climate change also disrupts the ecology that sustains TEK (Traditional Ecological Knowledge), forcing Indigenous women to adapt. This marginalization is not only an injustice to these women but also a loss for humanity. When we mute the voices of those who are most familiar with nature's music, we lose the way to sustainable living that is the need of the hour. Finding a resolution to these systemic barriers is not only a feminist imperative but also an environmental necessity.

1.3 The Potential of Indigenous Women's TEK in Climate Resilience: Policy Recommendations

From protesting pipeline constructions to leading international delegations, Indigenous Women's roles is getting traction, where they demand recognition and justice for their communities on international platforms, their activism highlights the relation between social, environmental and economic justice. By integrating their traditional perspectives with modern science, Indigenous women offer innovative solutions to global environmental problems.

To fully make use of the potential of TEK and address the issues which Indigenous women face, the following policies are suggested:

- **Inclusive Climate Policies:**

Climate policies are needed to be developed by both the government and international organizations, which recognize and empower Indigenous women as key stakeholders. It may involve the integration of TEK into national and regional strategy. Platforms can be established for Indigenous women where they can take part in the process of making a decision, and funds can be allocated to support community-led climate initiatives.

- **Protection of Land Rights and Cultural Heritage:**

It is important to secure land tenure for the Indigenous community in order to preserve Traditional Ecological Knowledge. Legal frameworks should be enforced to protect Indigenous land rights against encroachments. Besides, cultural programs can be used to sustain traditional practices and languages.

Conclusion:

Indigenous women maintain a unique balance between ecological sustainability and cultural preservation. Their role

as transmitters of cultural tradition and guardians of their environment places them in the perfect position to address global challenges such as climate change and loss of biodiversity. Recognition of their environmental expertise is necessary not only to maintain sustainable practices but also to preserve cultural heritage. Their unique knowledge systems, rooted in generations of lived experience, are invaluable for addressing contemporary global challenges, including climate change and social inequities.

However, systemic barriers such as land dispossession, gender-based marginalization, and the pressures of globalization continue to undermine their contributions. Recognizing and empowering indigenous women is not only a matter of justice but also a strategic necessity for fostering sustainable development and environmental stewardship. Collaborative policies, inclusive platforms, and respect for their cultural autonomy can unlock the transformative potential these women hold for a more equitable and sustainable future.

This chapter, thus, underscores that the contribution of Indigenous women is not only auxiliary in setting up sustainable development goals but also integral to a contributory vision in achieving them. By protecting and reinforcing their voices, we can pave the way for a sustainable future.

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Breaking Boundaries: Women Redefining Gender in Cultural and Environmental Spaces

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Abstract

This chapter explores how women challenge traditional gender roles by asserting themselves in arenas historically shaped by patriarchal norms. It focuses on two remarkable figures from Assam—Parvati Barua, India’s first female elephant mahout, and Purnima Devi Barman, a renowned wildlife conservationist. Parvati Barua’s courage in navigating the deeply masculine world of elephant training redefines ideas of women’s strength, resilience, and traditional ecological knowledge. While, Barman’s leadership in creating the “Hargila Army,” a women-led movement to protect the endangered Greater Adjutant Stork, illustrates how grassroots environmentalism and women’s empowerment can go hand in hand. By stepping into roles once deemed ‘unsuitable’ for women, they challenge gendered expectations while contributing to cultural preservation and environmental sustainability. The chapter argues that gender is not a fixed identity but a dynamic space that can be reshaped through everyday acts of courage, care, and community.

Keywords: Gender, empowerment.

Introduction:

Gender roles have long been shaped by patriarchal values that dictate what women can and cannot do in both public and private life. These roles often exclude women from spaces seen as traditionally masculine—such as cultural institutions, environmental professions, or leadership positions. Yet, across time and cultures, women have continued to challenge these constraints, sometimes quietly through everyday actions and sometimes through bold defiance, reshaping the spaces around them.

This chapter explores how women redefine gender by entering and transforming arenas historically closed to them. It focuses on the journeys of two remarkable figures from Assam: Parvati Barua, India's first female elephant mahout, and Purnima Devi Barman, a wildlife conservationist who leads the all-women Hargila Army to protect the endangered Greater Adjutant Stork. Through their engagements with both cultural tradition and ecological stewardship, these women demonstrate that gender is not a fixed identity but a dynamic, evolving construct shaped by action, resistance, and community.

This understanding of gender aligns with Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, which argues that gender is not something one is, but something one does—a series of performances shaped by repetition, norms, and expectations. In this view, gender is not innate or biologically determined, but socially constructed through daily practices. Barua and Barman disrupt these performances by stepping into roles not traditionally assigned to women, thereby reshaping what it means to “do” gender in their cultural contexts.

Parvati Barua's journey into the male-dominated world of elephant training reimagines strength, resilience, and traditional ecological knowledge as inclusive rather than

gendered. Meanwhile, Purnima Devi Barman's grassroots leadership illustrates how environmental conservation can become a powerful vehicle for women's empowerment. Their stories invite us to view gender not as a limitation, but as a space of possibility—one that can be reshaped through acts of courage, care, and community engagement.

Reimagining Tradition through Quiet Resistance:

In India, elephants have traditionally been considered as symbols of power, heritage, and tradition. They are deeply connected to religious rituals, and royal histories. The role of the mahout, or elephant tamer, is one of prestige which often passed down through generations of men. It is a profession that requires not only physical strength but also deep knowledge of animal behavior, forest ecosystems, and traditional practices. For centuries, it remained an all-male domain until Parvati Barua stepped in.

Parvati Barua was born into a family of elephant catchers in Assam and broke a centuries-old gender norm when she became India's first female elephant mahout. Since childhood, she had a keen understanding of and interest in elephants, spending much of her time in the jungles with her father. While boys were trained to handle elephants, girls were expected to stay away, watch, admire, but never touch. Parvati refused to follow those rules. She insisted on learning her father's skills by spending hours observing, asking questions, and eventually handling elephants herself. Her entry into this male-dominated field was met with doubt, resistance, and sometimes ridicule, as many in her community questioned whether a woman could handle the strength and unpredictability of elephants. Parvati did not just prove that she was capable, but she excelled. Her strong understanding of elephant behavior, calm nature, and respect for traditional

methods earned her the trust of both the elephants and the mahout community.

What makes Parvati's journey truly remarkable is not just that she succeeded in a space closed off to women but that she redefined what it meant to be a mahout. She did not approach her work through dominance or force, qualities often associated with masculinity but she approached through empathy, patience, and care. In doing so, she challenged the idea that cultural traditions must always be preserved in rigid, male-centric ways. Instead, she showed that tradition can evolve, and that women, too, can be carriers and protectors of heritage.

Parvati's story is also about reclaiming traditional ecological knowledge. In many indigenous and rural communities, such knowledge is gendered. Men are taught certain skills and women others. Elephant handling was seen as a masculine skill, but Parvati's skill showed that such roles are socially constructed not biologically determined. She understood the forest, the rhythms of the elephants, and the rituals of the mahout profession just as well as, or even better than men.

Her journey has inspired a new generation of women in Assam and beyond. While the number of female mahouts is still few, Parvati's journey opened up conversations about inclusion in cultural professions. She became a symbol of quiet resistance someone who did not protest loudly, but simply lived her truth in a way that encouraged others to expand their understanding of gender roles.

Parvati Barua's work is not just about elephants or tradition, it's also about representation. In many societies, women's work in natural and traditional spaces is often ignored or undervalued. Her story makes us question what kind of work we see as important and who we think should protect and carry-

on cultural knowledge. Cultural spaces may seem neutral, but they are shaped by power and Parvati's life shows how that power can be influenced by gender. She showed that strength and tradition don't have to look the same as they always have. They can be reimagined, made more inclusive, and infused with care. Her story urges us to think about culture not as something to be preserved exactly as it is, but as something living and capable of changing, growing, and including those who have long been excluded.

Redefining Leadership in the Heart of Nature:

Environmental movements have often ignored the important role women can play, viewing them as passive observers rather than active leaders. But this is changing with time. Across India, women are stepping up in conservation efforts, turning environmental spaces into places of strength and empowerment. Purnima Devi Barman, a wildlife conservationist from Assam, is a powerful example who started movement to save a rare bird, with women at its heart.

The focus of her work is the Greater Adjutant Stork which is locally known as Hargila. This large bird was once seen as dirty because of its scavenging habits and unattractive appearance. People even cut down the trees where it nested in an attempt to drive it away. Purnima realized that saving the Hargila required more than just scientific facts, it needed a change in how people felt about the bird. She started by working with local women who had a deep connection to their land and surroundings. Although these women were often excluded from formal conservation efforts, Purnima saw their potential. She went on to form the "Hargila Army", a group of women volunteers dedicated to protecting the stork.

She trained the members of the Hargila Army to watch over nests, rescue injured ones, and protect the birds' habitat.

She also encouraged them to include Hargila designs into their weaving beautiful attires and other crafts as a symbol of their commitment to protecting the stork. Slowly, the image of the bird changed from something unwanted and ugly to a source of pride.

This movement did not only help the Hargila birds but also transformed the women. Most of them had never spoken in public or taken on leadership roles, but now they are speaking at meetings, teaching others, and leading change in their communities. Purnima Devi's work shows how environmental justice and gender justice are closely connected. When women take part in protecting nature, they bring special knowledge, care, and long-term dedication. Under her leadership, the Hargila Army has become a symbol of how caring for the environment can help women grow as leaders in their own communities.

What makes Purnima Devi's approach special is how she blends science with tradition and community life. She uses her knowledge as a wildlife biologist to study the Hargila birds, protect their nests, rescue them, and understand the birds' behavior and habitat. Instead of using only scientific methods, she also works closely with local women and their cultural practices. She encourages women to weave stork designs into traditional clothes. She brings people together to talk about nature and celebrate it through songs and school programs. She makes conservation a shared responsibility and helps the women leading it become visible and valued.

Barman's work breaks the idea that protecting the environment is only for men or scientists. She shows that everyday people, especially women, can also lead strong and meaningful change. Because of her efforts, the Hargila birds and their nesting trees are now protected, and whole villages

support their conservation. Most importantly, people's perspectives have changed—not just about the birds, but also about the women who care for them. Her story shows us that the challenges women face are not just physical, but also social and cultural. By taking part in conservation, women like Purnima Devi Barman are not only saving nature, but also becoming leaders and creating a more equal and caring world.

Shifting boundaries with steady steps:

The stories of women like Parvati Barua and Purnima Devi Barman show how small acts of courage can challenge and change traditional gender roles. For many women, stepping beyond these roles is not always about doing something big. It is often about simple, steady actions that slowly change how people think about what women can or cannot do. In many places, including India, women are still expected to focus mainly on caring for the family, managing the home, and keeping traditions alive. These expectations have been passed down for generations and are strongly rooted in culture. Breaking away from these roles can feel difficult. But even simple acts like these can challenge old beliefs and open new possibilities for women.

For Parvati Barua, India's first female elephant Mahout, the idea of working with elephants was never meant to be a bold act of rebellion; it was simply a calling of the heart. In a world where handling elephants was considered dangerous and strictly a man's job, Parvati quietly chose a different path. She was drawn to elephants from an early age. Despite being told that this work was not for women, she learned the skills needed to care for and train elephants. Her decision was not an act of rebellion in the conventional sense, but a personal salience against the societal expectation that women should not take on

such roles. And what makes her achievement remarkable is not just her ability to work with the elephant, but how she defined the meaning of strength. For Parvati, strength was not about force or control—it was about patience, care, and deep understanding. These are the qualities that has long been undervalued when associated with women. As she worked with elephants, feeding, training, and nurturing them; she quietly reshaped the idea of what women are capable of. Her journey didn't begin with a fight, but with a choice. And through her choice, she gently challenged a tradition that had long excluded women by showing that care and courage can be just as powerful as control.

Similarly, Purnima Devi Barman showed how everyday acts of courage can lead to powerful change. In the villages where she worked, the Hargila (Greater Adjutant Stork) was seen as dirty and unlucky because of its large size and scavenging habits, and people often cut down the trees where it nested. But Purnima saw things differently—she understood the bird's importance to the environment and to Assam's natural heritage. Instead of forcing change, she gently persuaded villagers by spending years building trust and helping them see the stork as something to be proud of. She focused especially on women, who are usually left out of conservation work, and encouraged them to take the lead. She formed the Hargila Army, a group of local women who became leaders in protecting the storks. They watched over nests, saved trees, spread awareness, and taught the younger generation. Through these small but steady actions, they not only helped save an endangered bird but also broke old ideas about what women can or cannot do. Their work showed that real change often starts from the ground up—when communities come together and when women are given the space to lead.

Conclusion:

The stories of Parvati Barua and Purnima Devi Barman remind us that gender is not something fixed or limited—it is something that can be reshaped through everyday actions, courage, and care. These women did not wait for permission to step into roles that were once seen as “unsuitable” for them. Instead, they showed that strength can look different—it can be quiet, patient, and nurturing. By working with elephants or protecting endangered birds, they not only helped the environment and preserved culture but also proved that women can lead in powerful and meaningful ways. Their journeys challenge the old belief that leadership, strength, and wisdom belong only to men. They inspire us to think of a future where everyone, regardless of gender, has the freedom to follow their passion, contribute to society, and protect the world around them. As we imagine this future, we must continue to ask: how can we support more women in breaking boundaries, and what changes do we still need to make for true equality?

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Beyond the Hashtag: The Politics of Digital Feminism

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Abstract

This paper explores the transformative landscape of digital feminism, examining how social media platforms have become crucial arenas for feminist discourse, resistance, and activism. It traces the emergence and evolution of digital feminist movements through significant case studies such as #MeToo, #YesAllWomen, #DalitLivesMatter, and #NiUnaMenos, highlighting the potential of online spaces to amplify marginalized voices and foster intersectional solidarity. The paper also interrogates the commodification of feminism, the challenges of online misogyny, algorithmic bias, and legal backlash. While digital platforms empower feminists globally, they simultaneously reproduce structural inequalities. Through critical engagement with theories of postfeminism, cyberfeminism, and intersectionality, this study underscores the urgent need for ethical, inclusive, and technologically responsible activism. Ultimately, it envisions a future where feminist discourse not only thrives in digital spaces but actively shapes the technologies of tomorrow.

Keywords: Digital feminism, hashtag activism, femvertising, intersectionality.

Introduction:

In May 2014, a simple yet powerful hashtag #YesAllWomen, swept across Twitter, amassing over a million tweets in just a few days. Behind each post was a story, a voice, a long-silenced truth about gender-based violence and inequality. What began as a response to a tragic event quickly transformed into a global conversation, proving that digital platforms are not just social spaces but potent tools for feminist resistance. Digital feminism, while rooted in the historical struggles of earlier feminist waves, has become a site of protest, storytelling, and solidarity, allowing marginalized voices to challenge patriarchal structures beyond traditional spaces. This shift marks a significant evolution in feminist praxis. “Social media is something of a double-edged sword. At its best, social media offers unprecedented opportunities for marginalized people to speak and bring much attention to the issues they face,” writes Roxane Gay. This paper explores how digital feminism is reshaping gender activism while grappling with the complexities of the digital landscape. To frame the discussion, the paper begins by situating digital feminism within existing feminist discourse through a brief contextual overview of relevant literature. It then, explores key theoretical perspectives that shape our understanding of feminist expression in digital spaces. A few significant case studies help ground the discussion in real-life movements, highlighting both impact and complexity. The focus then shifts to the problems digital feminism faces today, ranging from algorithmic filters to backlash, and finally, the paper reflects on where things might be headed as feminism continues to evolve alongside technology.

Discussion:

Digital feminism refers to the use of online platforms to resist gender oppression, raise feminist consciousness, and

foster collective engagement through digital spaces. These forums began as simple websites, and developed into communities of hundreds of thousands of people who needed a platform to express themselves. As years went by, social technologies began to evolve into a robust, diverse field of web-based tools and platforms. Today, this evolution of online technologies has produced thousands of activists, writers, bloggers, and tweeters across the globes who live and breathe this movement, engaging their audience every day. Several foreign and Indian scholars have written extensively on the dynamics of digital feminism, including Jessalynn Keller in *Digital Feminist Activism: Girls and Women Fight Back Against Rape Culture* and “Fiercely Real?: Tyra Banks and the Making of New Media Celebrity”, Amy Hasinoff in *Sexting Panic: Rethinking Criminalization, Privacy, and Consent*, Meena T. Pillai in *Affective Feminisms in Digital India: Intimate Rebels*, Paromita Pain in “It Took Me Quite a Long Time to Develop a Voice’: Examining Feminist Digital Activism in the Indian #MeToo Movement”, Shreya Khaund in “Building Solidarity Through Digital Activism in Assam”, and Noopur Tiwari in “Smashboard”. These works have explored both the potential and the challenges posed by digital platforms in promoting feminist movements.”

Building on this engagement, the Fourth-Wave feminism emphasizes on intersectionality and the power of online networks, intertwining with Cyberfeminism, which explores the relationship between gender and technology. Hashtag Activism, exemplified by movements such as #MeToo, #TimesUp, and #YesAllWomen, has emerged as a powerful tool for mobilization, amplifying women’s voices against harassment, workplace inequality, and everyday misogyny. Similarly, campaigns like #NiUnaMenos highlights gender-

based violence and the erasure of marginalized women from mainstream discourse, while #FreeBritney sheds light on issues of bodily autonomy and legal control over women's lives. At the same time, Meme Feminism utilizes the internet culture to challenge gender norms, fostering feminist dialogue in a way that resonates widely. However, the digital space is also filled with challenges, as seen in the persistent presence of Online Misogyny, which seeks to undermine feminist discourse and silence women's voices.

Against this backdrop, the evolution from traditional to modern feminist practices marks a pivotal transformation in both approach and accessibility. Historically, traditional feminism focused on women's rights and gender equality through legislative and policy changes. Activists used protests, picketing, and lobbying strategies to make their voices heard. Feminist discussions were mostly limited to academia, books, newspapers, and activist groups. However, with the advent of digital media and social platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok, modern feminism has taken a more visible and accessible approach by presenting women with a new space to speak up and be heard. For example, the #MeToo movement went viral on Twitter when actress Alyssa Milano in October 2017, tweeted, "If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted write 'me too' as a reply to this tweet." This single tweet sparked a global movement and crossed racial, economic and other socio-cultural communities. However, power dynamics still exists in media industries where rules and practices that maintain the dominance of certain groups, particularly men, limits the ability of a women to fully disrupt the status quo. At times, media discourse on power structures overlooks the struggles of non-Western women, whose cultural barriers differ from those of White Western women in movements like #MeToo and #SayHerName.

The digital space presents a paradox, as it both disrupts and subtly reflects certain postfeminist ideals. Post-feminism focuses toward achieving and enjoying women's existing rights and freedom through self-realization and self-acceptance, suggesting that women are free to make their own choices and shape their destinies, ensuring women's access to power positions. Digital feminism contradicts this idea by revealing that women still face ongoing issues like workplace discrimination and online harassment. While digital feminism aims to challenge gender inequalities, some campaigns adopt postfeminist rhetoric that prioritizes empowerment over structural changes. For instance, Instagram feminism often promotes #self-love and #GirlBoss culture but does not always address deeper issues like the wage gap or reproductive rights. A similar trend is seen in 'femvertising', where brands market feminism through empowerment-driven ads. Campaigns like Dove's 2024 'Real Beauty' video framed natural beauty as feminist liberation, sparking public discussion and boosting the company's sales by 60 percent. While such campaigns may raise awareness, they also commodify feminism, turning it into a marketing strategy rather than a movement for systematic change.

In contrast to the commodification, a more grounded strand of feminist activism engages with complex social issues through an intersectional lens, confronting the layered realities of systemic inequality. The concept of intersectionality was introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 to explain how overlapping identities such as gender, race, class, and sexuality, shape experiences of discrimination. The term 'White Feminism' critiques movements that overlook these intersections, failing to recognize the unique struggles of marginalized women. While #MeToo and #Timesup gained widespread recognition, other digital movements have also

played a crucial role in feminist activism but were often overlooked in mainstream discussions. #WhyIStayed, for instance, emerged as a response to victim-blaming narratives surrounding domestic violence. The hashtag gained traction when Janay Palmer Rice, wife of NFL player Ray Rice, stayed with him even after he was caught on video assaulting her. Many criticized her decision, but survivors used #WhyIStayed to highlight the psychological, financial, and societal barriers preventing individuals from leaving abusive relationships. Similarly, #SayHerName shed light on the often-overlooked violence faced by Black women in cases of police brutality. While cases like George Floyd received widespread attention, the deaths of Breonna Taylor, Sandra Bland, and Atatiana Jefferson were often overlooked in mainstream discussions. The African American Policy Forum (AAPF) launched the campaign to ensure that the names and stories of Black women affected by police violence were not forgotten. The movement gained traction in protests and policymaking discussions, pushing for racial and gender justice in law enforcement. A similar conversation unfolded in India with #DalitLivesMatter, which paralleled global racial justice movements by highlighting caste-based violence against women from marginalized communities. Beyond these, movements like #NiUnaMenos in Latin America have mobilized large-scale protests against femicide. The movement started in Argentina in 2015 after the brutal murder of 14 year-old Chiara Páez, whose body was found buried in her boyfriend's backyard. Outraged by the increasing number of femicide cases, activists launched #NiUnaMenos, which quickly spread across Latin America. The movement resulted in stricter laws against gender-based violence and inspired nationwide protests in Mexico, Peru, and Chile. Altogether, these instances expose

how dominant feminist narratives largely shaped by white and middle-class perspectives, often fail to recognize the layered realities of women whose lives are shaped by intersecting systems of race, class, and structural inequality. However, digital feminism provides a platform for women from disadvantaged communities to share their experiences, whether facing misogyny, sexual violence, or patriarchal oppression, reinforcing the belief that feminist liberation must include all women.

The ability to share experiences instantly and connect with a wider audience has been a defining strength of online feminism. Yet, despite these successes, digital activism also faces significant obstacles. While the Internet has amplified feminist voices and mobilized collective action, it has also exposed activists to relentless hostility. Online spaces often turn into battlegrounds where women speaking against gender injustice face targeted harassment. The Gamergate controversy remains a stark example, where female game developers and critics were subjected to doxxing, death threats, and organized cyberattacks for challenging sexism in gaming. In India, several journalists and activists have also faced similar online abuse, with hate campaigns orchestrated to silence their voices. The state of Assam saw a disturbing case in 2012 when a teenage girl was molested by a group of men outside a bar in Guwahati while a news channel cameraman filmed the incident instead of intervening. The video, which went viral, led to public outrage, but it also subjected the survivor and those advocating for her to online harassment, with victim-blaming narratives dominating digital spaces. Even as the case sparked discussions about women's safety, it demonstrated how social media can be weaponized against victims rather than serving as a platform for justice.

Beyond harassment, the commercialization of feminist discourse presents another challenge. Brands and corporations

frequently adopt feminist rhetoric to appeal to progressive consumers while failing to implement real change. This is particularly evident in the marketing of menstrual products, where sanitary napkin brands promote themes of female empowerment and breaking taboos while continuing to profit from an essential need. Despite the financial burden menstruation places on women, especially in underprivileged communities, menstrual products remain commodified rather than recognized as necessities. Digital activism has highlighted the issue through campaigns like #MenstrualEquity and #FreeThePeriod, demanding free and accessible menstrual hygiene products. However, while some governments have taken legislative steps, private corporations rarely support such initiatives, reflecting the broader issue of performative allyship. Another pressing issue lies in the way social media algorithms govern visibility. Digital activism relies heavily on platforms like Twitter and Instagram, yet content moderation policies suppress feminist discourse. Posts using hashtags related to gender rights, body positivity, or menstrual health have been flagged as “explicit” or “inappropriate”, limiting their reach. In India, discussions around honor-based violence and gendered caste oppression have reportedly faced algorithmic suppression, restricting visibility. In 2020, Instagram faced backlash for allegedly suppressing posts supporting survivors of sexual violence in South Asia, highlighting the biases ingrained in digital platforms. Meanwhile, misogynistic and abusive content continues to circulate unchecked, revealing the uneven enforcement of community guidelines.

Further complicating matters, legal retaliation against feminist activists is becoming more common. Defamation lawsuits and cybercrime charges are frequently used as tools to silence women who speak up against powerful individuals.

Survivors sharing their experiences online risk facing legal consequences rather than justice, making it increasingly difficult for victims to come forward. Roxane Gay highlights that while social media can empower marginalized communities by giving them a platform to raise awareness, it can also become a space for unchecked outrage and performative reactions. The fear of legal repercussions also influences how digital feminism operates, as activists must carefully navigate discussions to avoid backlash. Despite these challenges, online feminist movements persist, constantly adapting to digital resistance. However, for activism to remain effective, stronger legal protections, ethical corporate responsibility, and algorithmic transparency are necessary to ensure that feminist voices are not merely heard but also safeguarded from systemic suppression.

The future of digital feminism lies in its ability to shape emerging technologies while safeguarding the spaces where feminist discourse thrives. As Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Virtual Reality (VR) continue to evolve, feminist perspectives can play a critical role in addressing gender biases embedded within these systems. By integrating intersectional feminism into AI development, digital spaces can move beyond male-dominated structures, fostering more equitable technological advancements that challenge systemic discrimination. Women's active participation in AI and VR innovation will be essential in ensuring these technologies reflect diverse experiences rather than reinforcing existing power hierarchies. Gender diversity in technological research and industries can drive more inclusive solutions, from improving workplace equity to expanding healthcare access and creating safer digital environments. However, the integration of AI and VR into everyday life also raises ethical concerns, particularly regarding data privacy. The

misuse of personal information, especially in patriarchal digital spaces, poses risks for feminist activists and survivors of gender-based violence, making data protection a crucial issue in digital feminist movement. Despite these challenges, digital feminism will continue to adapt, advocating for ethical technology policies and increased representation of women in technical leadership. As technology continues to evolve, it is crucial to ensure that the Artificial Intelligence and Virtual Reality serve as tools for social change, rather than reinforcing existing inequalities, for digital feminism to make a long-term impact.

Conclusion:

Building upon the evolving complexities explored throughout digital feminist discourse, it becomes evident that online spaces serve both as catalysts for empowerment and as arenas where structural inequalities are continually negotiated. From the intersections of race, class, and gender to the influence of algorithmic systems and performative allyship, the digital landscape reveals both the promise and pitfalls of modern feminist movements. Yet, it is within these complexities that digital feminism finds its strength in its adaptability, global reach and in its capacity to center marginalized narratives. As technology continues to evolve, the task is not only to occupy digital space but to reshape it, ensuring that future platforms are built on principles of equity and collective liberation. The movement's true potential lies not just in visibility, but in its power to inspire reflection, solidarity, and sustained cultural change, both online and beyond.

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Masculinities and Changing Gender Norms: A Socio-economic Analysis

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Abstract

This paper examines how gender standards and ideas of masculinity have changed within the socioeconomic context of modern-day India. It investigates how changes in the labor market, state-led policy interventions, and evolving cultural expectations are all contributing to the altering of traditional gender roles through a qualitative and descriptive analysis. Even while programs like the POSH Act, the Arunodoi Scheme, and Beti Bachao Beti Padhao have significantly increased the number of women in the labor field, there are still significant gender differences in access to opportunities, occupational representation, and pay. The study illustrates how traditional masculinities continue to influence economic identities and fuel structural injustices by referencing national datasets and global inequality indexes. In order to promote gender equity in both public and private domains, the article contends that masculinity, as a social construct, needs to be reinterpreted to reflect more inclusive, egalitarian principles. Additionally, it

highlights the fundamental connection between social justice and economic development and the need for both institutional change and a reshaping of cultural norms to overcome gendered economic inequality. This study adds to current discussions on inclusion, identity, and equity in development by placing gender analysis within a larger economic framework. It also emphasizes the importance of intersectional and gender-sensitive approaches in the creation of modern policies.

Keywords: Gender inequality, masculinity, socioeconomic transformation, labor market dynamics.

Introduction :

The term “Masculinity” describes a collection of socially created traits, actions, and roles that are typically associated with men, including assertiveness and competitiveness(Franklin II,2012). Masculinity has historically been associated with attributes such as strength, dominance, and financial provision, shaping societal expectations for men(Courtenay,2000). Masculinity and gender norms have long shaped societal structures, influencing roles in both private and professional spheres(Rudman & Glick,2021). Social expectations about the roles, actions, and duties that are considered suitable for men and women are known as “gender norms”(Dietrich et al.,2021). These standards have an impact on career advancement, vocational choices and pay structures, frequently erecting obstacles for women in lucrative fields(Epstein,2022). Systemic labor market disparities result from traditional gender stereotypes that suggest women should prioritize caring for others while males should be the major breadwinners(Evans,2016).

Gender Norms, which establish behavioral expectations based on social conventions, continue to shift as economies

evolve and labor market dynamics change(Pearse & Connell,2016). A descriptive and qualitative analysis of labor market conditions reveals that globalization, automation, and the expansion of the service sector have disrupted traditional employment patterns, leading to shifts in gender roles(Kovacova et al.,2019). The Nobel Prize-winning economist Claudia Goldin's research highlights persistent wage disparities despite increased female labor force participation and educational attainment (Olivieri,2024).

Understanding how economic structures influence gender identities is crucial for addressing systemic inequalities and fostering inclusive labor policies. This paper is a meticulous scrutiny of the relationship between masculinity, gender norms, labor market inequalities, and economic structures to analyze how masculinity is evolving in contemporary society. It also highlights the structural barriers that sustain economic imbalances and the necessity of inclusive policies to increase workforce equity. By employing qualitative and descriptive methodologies, this study aims to contribute to ongoing discussions on gender equality and labor market transformations.

Literature Review:

A fundamental viewpoint on how masculinity is socially created rather than biologically innate is offered by Franklin II (2012). He contends that historical and cultural training produced classic male markers like control, dominance, and emotional repression. This point of view is important for comprehending how contemporary social and economic shifts necessitate a reexamination of what it means to be a male in the modern world. Participation in caregiving, emotional work, and fair partnerships are all redefining masculinity as the labor market and gender roles change (Franklin II,2012).

Pearse & Connell, highlight how ingrained gender norms have an economic impact. Their research demonstrates how these norms restrict men’s roles to conventional breadwinning and erect structural hurdles to entry and development in the job market, particularly for women. They contend that unless specifically created to combat gender inequality, macroeconomic policies frequently serve to perpetuate it. This body of research backs up the paper’s claim that inclusive policymaking and changing masculinities are essential to eliminating systemic inequities (Pearse & Connell,2016).

Ovacova and colleagues investigate how traditional labor divisions are being challenged by globalization, automation, and the digital economy. They contend that these changes can force men to assume more adaptable and emotionally complex roles and enable women to pursue careers in non-traditional fields. This is consistent with your research’s focus on qualitative labor market restructuring and the ways in which structural and technological economic shifts impact societal norms surrounding masculinity and gender(Kovacova et al.,2019)

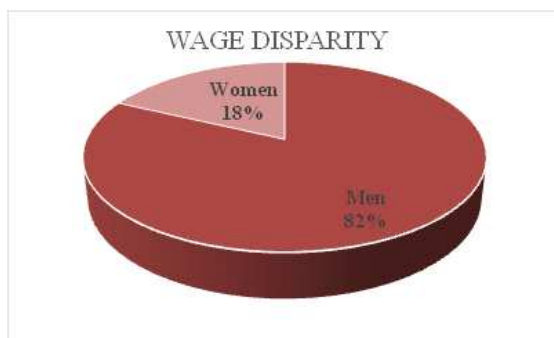
Findings and Discussions:

FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN LABOR FORCE

FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN LABOR FORCE									
Years	Rural			Urban			Rural + Urban		
	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Peron
2017-2018	76.4	24.6	50.7	74.5	20.4	47.6	75.8	23.3	49.8
2021-2022	78.2	36.6	57.5	74.7	23.8	49.7	77.2	32.8	55.2
Change in 2021-2022 over 2017-18 (%points)	1.8	12.0	6.8	0.2	3.4	2.1	1.4	9.5	5.4

Source: Annual PLFS Report

In 2021–2022, the female labor force participation rate (LFPR) rose 9.5% points over 2017–2018. There are other important factors that have contributed to this upward trend in LFPR. Additionally, it is evident from the figure that the increase in the female LFPR is the main driver of India's overall labor force participation growth. One of the main reasons for the positive developments in the female labor market is the Indian government's initiatives to boost employment and women's empowerment through a range of laws, rules, and programs. It is promising that the female LFPR is increasing over time and has already crossed one-quarter of all females and reached one-third of all women, despite the fact that it is inferior to the male LFPR in India.



Source:- World Inequality Report.

The World Inequality Report 2022 states that women in India only receive 18% of labor income, while males receive 82%. From July 2022 to June 2023, the average monthly compensation for an Indian male employee was ¹ 20,666. The average monthly salary for a female employee was ¹ 15,722.25. India came in at number 135 out of 146 nations in the World Economic Forum's 2022 Global Gender Gap Index.

Government Interventions:

I. BETI BACHAO BETI PADHAO (BBBP):

Addressing gender-based discrimination and advancing the welfare of girls were the main goals of this program, which was introduced by the Indian government on January 22, 2015. Three main areas are the focus of the scheme:

Preventing Gender-Biased Sex Selection – The plan seeks to increase the Child Sex Ratio (CSR) and prevent female foeticide by implementing stringent laws on sex-selective abortions and raising awareness of the importance of the girl child.

Ensuring Survival and Protection of the Girl Child – In order to lower infant mortality and provide a secure environment for girls, BBBP advocates for improved maternity and child healthcare.

Promoting Education and Empowerment of Girls – The program promotes girls' education, offers financial aid, and upgrades school facilities to raise female literacy and employment prospects.

II. PM POSHAN (Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman):

In order to enhance nutrition, enrollment, and attendance in government and aided schools (Class 1–8, including pre-primary), PM POSHAN was introduced on September 29, 2021, replacing the Mid-Day Meal Scheme. The funding arrangement for the program is 60:40 (Centre: States) (90:10) for Northeastern states/UTs). SHGs and local farmers supply the food, and AI, ICT, and Nutrition Gardens ensure oversight. Implementation is the responsibility of PRIs and SMCs. It offers hot, cooked meals that include veggies, milk, and enriched rice. It helps rural populations, improves education, and lowers starvation, yet problems with quality control, leaks, and growth still exist.

III. ARUNODOI SCHEME:

The Arunodoi scheme is a major poverty alleviation programme launched by the government of Assam on 2nd October 2020. The program provides a monthly financial aid of Rs. 1000 per month to the women belonging to poor households in the state to DBT. The amount has been increased to Rs.1250 per month under the Arunodoi 2.0 version launched in December 2022. Being the primary caretakers of the family, women have been kept as the beneficiaries of this scheme. This scheme helped to improve purchasing capacity among rural women, poverty alleviation, and greater household-level decision-making by female beneficiaries. However, challenges remain in terms of beneficiary identification, exclusion errors, and delays in fund disbursement, which hinder its full potential.

IV. THE PRADHAN MANTRI UJJWAL YOJANA (PMUY):

On May 1, 2016, the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana was introduced by the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas. In an effort to safeguard the health of women and children, PMUY offers them LPG, a clean cooking fuel. The Indian government offers Rs 1600 in cash assistance for a new LPG connection under this program (Rs. 1150 for a 5 kg cylinder or Rs. 142 kg cylinder for a connection). Women who are 18 years of age or older and do not have access to LPG are the program's target audience. According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), the plan is a "major achievement" in enhancing women's health and the environment. Even though the initiative has increased access to clean cooking techniques, polluting fuels are still often used, particularly in rural India.

V. SHAKTI SCHEME:

Mission Shakti seeks to improve interventions for women's security, safety, and empowerment. The two sub-schemes of Mission Sri are "Sambal" and "Samarthya." The

“Samarthya” sub-scheme aims to empower women, whilst the “Sambal” sub-scheme focuses on women’s safety and security. The mission of Shakti is to provide both short-term and long-term services and information for the holistic development and empowerment of all women and girls, with a focus on those who are vulnerable groups in need of care and protection, have disabilities, or are socially and economically disadvantaged.

The objects of mission Shakti also include - Provide immediate and comprehensive continuum of care, support, and assistance to women affected by violence and for those in distress

To establish high-quality systems for the rescue, protection, and rehabilitation of women who are in need of help and who have been the victims of violence or crime

To increase women’s access to a range of government services at different levels

Capacity building and training of functionaries/duty bearers under various schemes / Legislations.

VI. POSH ACT:

The Indian government passed the POSH Act in 2013 to address the issue of sexual harassment that women experience in the workplace. The Act aims to provide a safe and encouraging workplace and shield women from sexual harassment. The goal of POSH is to shield all workers from sexual harassment in both private and public contexts. Employers who violate the provisions of the POSH Act may also face penalties under the Act. A fine of up to INR 50,000 is part of it. Penalties for false charges are also discussed. All things considered, the POSH Act is a significant step forward in creating a safer and hospitable workplace in India.

VII. THE NATIONAL CRECHE SCHEME:

Beginning on January 1, 2006, the Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme (RGNCS) evolved into the National

Creche Scheme. Offering day care services to working mothers' children between the ages of six months and six years is its main objective.

The fund-sharing pattern under the National Creche Scheme amongst the center, States/UTs & Non-Governmental Organizations/Voluntary Organizations is in the ratio of 60:30:10 for States, 80:10:10 for North Eastern States and Himalayan States, and 90:0:10 for UTs. It helps women to manage both their career as well as their family responsibility, promotes gender diversity at workplaces and promotes gender equality and democracy by increasing participation of women in the economy.

Conclusion:

In this study, the changing dynamics of masculinity and gender norms in the socio-economic context of modern India have been critically examined. Using a descriptive and qualitative approach, the research shows how the labor market, policy interventions, and broader societal transformations are reshaping traditional gender roles. The results highlight the persistence of gender-based disparities in labor force participation, income distribution, and access to opportunities, even in the face of significant advancements through government programs and rising female representation.

According to the report, deeper institutional and cultural changes are required to attain real gender equity, even though structural measures like the POSH Act, Arunodoi Scheme, and Beti Bachao Beti Padhao have made a substantial contribution. In order to foster more inclusive and egalitarian values that uphold the agency of both men and women in economic spheres, masculinity as a societal construct must change.

It is crucial to view gender as a dynamic interaction influenced by social norms, cultural narratives, and economic

policies rather than as a static category as economies continue to globalize and technology changes the nature of employment. Developing effective policies that advance equality, give voice to underrepresented groups, and create a more inclusive and just society requires addressing these intricate linkages.

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Feminine Wisdom and Ecological Resistance: Neytiri as an Ecofeminist Icon in *Avatar*

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Abstract

This paper intervenes with a critical approach to film *Avatar* (2009) by James Cameron in the light of ecofeminism, especially using the character of Neytiri who is part of Na'vi people. Ecofeminism can be seen as search of the profound connections between women oppression and nature exploitation that are the results of patriarchal and capitalist subordination. Neytiri appears as a representative of the ecofeministic ideology as one who has an extreme connection to the environment of Pandora in spiritual and utilitarian ways. Her personality bullies egalitarianism and is antagonist to the violent plundering agendas of the Resource Development Administration (RDA), a mercenary-industrial outfit that relies on the resources of Pandora. The article takes into account the intellectual criticism of the depiction of female characters and the indigenous society in popular cinema but puts emphasis on the development of Neytiri, her choices, and her speech that resound loudly echoing the values promoted by the ecofeminism. The character portrayed by the Neytiri describes the topics regarding the defense of nature, power of women, and protest against

colonialism and capitalism. The conclusion shows possibilities and limitations of ecofeminist messages in a commercial cinema and how *Avatar* gives valuable insight into contemporary arguments on ecological and gender justice in an industry that follows its commercial dynamic and ethical obligations of cross-national film production.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, neytiri, avatar, environmental guardianship, gender.

Introduction:

Avatar (2009) by James Cameron is remarkable not only due to its breathtaking graphics but also to its powerful environmental sentiment. The movie decries the greed of industry, an irresponsible use of resources and a military spread. The film *Avatar* set on the green, bright planet, Pandora, underlines the imperialist nature of human colonizers and exalts the NaVi, native residents, to the planet as nature saviors. Cameron himself termed the movie as science fiction commentary of the history of colonialism with obvious comparisons with the history of European conquests and systematic exploitation of indigenous individuals, especially in the Americas. The Hometree is destroyed mercilessly which represents the colonialism thereupon accustoming the native land and culture. With its anti-colonialist and environmentalist themes, *Avatar* ended up becoming a universal phenomenon, making it an important text to ecofeminist analysis even though it has been criticised regarding some of its narration decisions.

Ecological feminism, also known as ecofeminism, links the oppression of women to an exploitation of nature, and identifies both as the developments of the patriarchal and capitalist systems. Ecofeminism supports equality between the

sexes and environmental sustainability by promoting care, cooperation and valuing the natural rhythms of domination and hierarchy. It claims that social issues and environmental ones go hand in hand, that gender justice cannot be obtained at the expense of ecological well being, and that environmental revival cannot overlook social injustices. Ecofeminism signifies an existing radical criticism of our contemporary society by revealing the mechanisms through which the power regime systematizes both the discrimination of the entire groups of people on the basis of their gender and ecological degradation.

The use of ecofeminism on *Avatar* demonstrates more than the environmental themes on the surface. Neytiri is an ecofeminist because she has a spiritual connection to the nature of Pandora, she is an eco-feminist, given she leads the society, which is not Patriarchal, and she is the one who resists the domineering RDA forces. Nevertheless, there are several critical remarks about the movie; the scholars can characterize it by simple representation of the native identity, gender stereotypes, and colonial images. The analysis presented is intended to be a fair critique taking into consideration Neytiri as an example within the ecofeminist context and at the same time consider the limitations of the story line of *Avatar*.

Literature Review:

The development of Ecofeminism arose after the 1970s, being a crossbreed of feminist theory and environmental activism in response to the destruction of the environment and its overwhelming effects on fellow females. The concept originated with French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne in her 1974 work *Le Féminisme ou la Mort* (Feminism or Death). D'Eaubonne argued that the root cause of the exploitation of both women and nature is patriarchy. Therefore, in order to resolve ecological crises, gender inequality must also be

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addressed. It was further set forth by Rosemary Radford Ruether in the book *New Woman/New Earth*, the novel where she alleged that women are oppressed by the same patriarchal and hierarchical order, which also demeans nature. She demanded a common idea of justice, which would serve gender equality and ecological stability, fostering that humans live in harmony with the environment. In a work by Susan Griffin called *Woman and Nature, the roaring inside her* (1978), western society is reproached in the historical victimization of women as well nature with reference to their common relations of oppression.

The Death of Nature (1980), a book written by Carolyn Merchant, looks at the permutation of the notion of nature as a nurturing motherly creature to a mechanistic entity that exists to exploit. Merchant testifies that this shift legitimized the domination of nature as well as women under patriarchal capitalism. In *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development* (1988), Indian scholar Vandana Shiva concentrates on the relation between environmental destruction, colonialism and oppression of women. The use of both patriarchy and capitalism has been highlighted, and Shiva stresses that both women and nature are exploited by both capitalist ideals and patriarchal systems in parts of the Global South. She points to the importance of indigenous knowledge and rural women in conservation while emphasizing the need to use ecofeminist activism at the grassroots level to fight ecological and social injustices.

Analysis:

Ecofeminism: The Connection between Women, Nature, and the Patriarchate Exploitation:

The essence of ecofeminism revolves around the conviction that women subordination and nature exploitation are seriously entangled issues and both have a patriarchal and

capitalist heritage. These systems also work by ruling with power hierarchies that allow all kinds of oppressions. The worldview that ecofeminism introduces is different altogether; grounded on respect, care and interdependence between both people and nature. It also promotes harmony and reciprocity of dialoging instead of dominance and control which are regarded highly in patriarchal societies.

Another important idea in ecofeminism is the so-called principle of epistemological privilege, which states that because of prevailing lived experiences, women, and particularly those subjects in marginalized groups, have special insights on social and environmental injustices. This view does not regard biological determinism and rather appreciates the knowledge that arises out of oppression and marginalization. It is possible to use this framework in the case of Neytiri, who is the character of *Avatar*. Neytiri is never shown as a caricature of natural and inherent female wisdom but of a cultural guide and an instrument in preserving nature due to the identity and experience of her people. This explanation positions her next to ecofeminism, shifting past essentialist images of her and focusing on her ecological/social consciousness.

Intersectional Ecofeminism: Colonialism, Gender, Race, and Class:

Global responses Ecofeminist thought early in its development was challenged by other women as well as young women of color, and by Global South scholars who pointed out instances of cultural imperialism and failure to consider interstices of race, class, and colonialism. Feminists reproached early ecofeminists on taking insufficient account of the lived experience of being poor, forced to do bad jobs, and experiencing racism as women on the margins. Moreover, the

movement was accused by some of being a misappropriation, or romantic levitation of indigenous cultures.

As a reaction, modern ecofeminism has become a more intersectional theory that sees that gender oppression and its relationship cannot be divided into race, class, sexuality, and ethnicity. This broader concentration encompasses criticism of capitalistic exploitation, racial oppression, and heteronormativity. Borrowing some concepts of queer theory, it acknowledges sexuality as a major axis of oppression.

When we use this intersectional lens to *Avatar*, we also notice not only the environmental concerns and gender but colonialism and racial oppression as well. However, despite criticism of the film due to utilization of the white savior trope and simplification of indigenous cultures, an intersectional ecofeminist reading can be considered. It would make it possible to criticize the dual forces of colonialism exploitation, the greed of the capitalists, the devastation of nature as well as gender relationships in the film.

Peculiarities of Ecofeminism: Cultural approach vs. Materialist approach:

A wide variety of schools of thought fall under ecofeminism and these have been broken down to two main strands which are cultural and materialist. Cultural ecofeminism is a positive attitude to women and nature and tends to focus on women as nurturers and their affection with the earth, even on the edge of essentialism. It is inclined to associate the female identity with ecological nurturing and spirituality. Conversely, materialist ecofeminism criticizes two causes of environmental destruction: capitalism and patriarchy which were the driving force behind oppression towards women. It concentrates on such problems as work-related, economic abuse, and devaluation of reproductive and carework. Massive

personalities such as Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva have developed this critical analysis where oppression is put aside in perceptual, biological or spiritual terms.

This culturally-materialist distinction offers a tool that can be used to analyze *Avatar*. The character of Neytiri is liable to be viewed in both ways. When her relation to nature is represented, either as instinctive or spiritual, it coincides with the cultural ecofeminism that has the specter to tip over into essentialist stereotypes. But in case her fighting against colonization of Pandora resources such as unobtainium is referred to as political and tactical, then the interpretation is directed to the materialist eco-feminism in the opposition to capitalist imperialism.

This dualism puts forward the question of whether *Avatar* serves as a vehicle of truly transformational ecofeminist message on the one hand or whether it represents romanticization of nature and native identity, on the other. Although the film is headed in the direction of connecting to the effort directed to environmental resistance, its heavy use of idealized images and savior narrative makes it difficult to align itself with more in-depth, materialist ecofeminist criticism.

Neytiri and the Symbol of Ecofeminism:

The character of Neytiri played by Zoe Saldana in the film *Avatar* directed by James Cameron can be comprehensively defined as an effective representative of ecofeminism, as this idea acts not only as an ecological awakening but as a feministic trend. Unlike the usual female typecasts in movies, Neytiri is not the secondary character who is only used as a love interest. Rather, she symbolizes a profound spiritual and biological resonance to the Pandora environment. *Avatar* presents ideal interaction between the humans and the

nature, through Neytiri, which is quite in contrast to the invasion of human invaders who are capitalist, colonial and patriarchal. This can be related to the gist of ecofeminism (movement) that equates the subordination of women to the exploitation of nature, both based on patriarchy.

Closely connected and inseparable with the ecosystem of Pandora and the revelation of her spirituality with the nature is undoubtedly one of the greatest characteristics of the ecofeminist nature of Neytiri. This indicates an awesome way through which *tsaheylu* (sacred connection) is established between Na'vi as well as animals by their neural braids with nature. *Tsaheylu* is not a tool, but rather an emotional and spiritual attachment between people, as far as Neytiri believes. It portrays the ecofeminist perspective that human beings are not separate and distinct in relation to nature but nature is part and dimension of it. Such an eco-spiritual address is further validated by Neytiri and her belief in Eywa, the god of life and mother of all living things on Pandora, which grants nature respect, dignity, and personhood, which contrast with the anthropocentric ideologies of human beings and their ability to exploit nature as a resource.

Broader Ecofeminist Narrative of Avatar and Critiques of Avatar:

Avatar (2009) by James Cameron may be introduced as an aesthetically pleasing, eco-friendly movie with the strong anti-colonial message and in this way, it is an adequate object of discussion on the ecofeminist discourse. In its core, *Avatar* represents a story between the two worlds, one world is the Na'vi, primordial people of Pandora who live together with their natural, thriving world, and the other world is the humans, the capitalist, industrialists, and patriarchal population. Pandora represents ecological plenitude and interdependence and the

human corporations and military are symbolic of the exploitative powers that ecofeminism criticizes: those that commercialize and abuse nature, all the more so the disadvantaged groups.

Ecofeminism lays stress on innate importance of nature and the interrelated oppression of women and nature. *Avatar* communicates this by showing a spiritual and biological link between the Na vi and Eywa, the life force of the planet. This philosophy is echoed in the ritual called tsaheylu by the Na vi, the reason being a neurological connection planting animals and the environment to which they are very attached to. This relationship is a manifestation of the ecofeminist idea according to which technology does not have to be harmful; it can bring to respect and harmony between man and nature. By contrast, humans use virulent, extractive technologies to mine Pandora to unobtainium, which represents patriarchal exploitation.

Nevertheless, with all these very powerful ecofeminist undertones, *Avatar* has been highly criticized by academic minds, activists, and cultural critics. Among the criticisms, there is the use of the white savior. The hero, Jake Sully, a white man protagonist of the earth, turns out to be a Na vi savior and its future leader, which implies that the rescue of the indigenous people will be provided by an outsider. Although the movie criticizes colonialism and ecocide, the efforts to challenge indigenous agency by focusing on an outsider savior to the Na situations instead of giving power to them conceals the message.

There is also another criticism based on the indigeneity. The Na Ni culture is an assemblage of many traditions based on the earth consisting of the Native American, African as well as other traditions in one exoticized and romanticized figure. Through this cultural essentialism, commonly referred to as blueface, various native identities are simplified and

homogenized into a single identity ignoring the complex realities and to repackaging them into an imagined, idealistic picture of the noble savage. These depictions run the danger of wiping out the realities and modernities of native people.

Criticism has also been sparked by some of the things that James Cameron himself has to say like being accused as having a paternalistic attitude towards indigenous causes yet stereotyping in the film. This conflict outlines the contradiction of *Avatar* since although it criticizes colonialism, it occasionally reads in the text a colonial attitude unwittingly created. *Avatar* produces greater contradictions, according to an intersectional ecofeminist view. Intersectionality notes the intersection of several kinds of oppressions race, gender, and class. The movie is a tribute to conservation of balance in nature, and denounces the capitalist exploitation, but tends to relegate voices of women and maintain the system of racial inferiority. Such women as Neytiri and Moat are well-rounded characters, but the plot is based on personal development of Jake Sully, reducing Neytiri to a role of romantic interest and a second-hand leader. The gender imbalance is exhibited in this plot of male interests even in what can be called a seemingly egalitarian and nature-loving culture. What is more, the overuse of the violent action sequences in *Avatar* does not match the ecofeminist messages of living in harmony and coexisting. The emphasis on big battles and explosions takes the danger of glorifying the militarism, and thus overemphasizing the aspect of the ecological harmony.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, Neytiri in the film *Avatar* created by James Cameron portrays the main ideas of ecofeminism by being strongly spiritually and ecologically linked to Pandora and Eywa, leading a society free of patriarchy, and fighting against the ravaging power of the RDA. The movie establishes

the association between the environmental sustainability, feminism and anti-colonial struggle. Although *Avatar* left a lasting cultural mark by creating awareness in the world on issues of environmental and social justice, it turned out to have contradictions, where the stereotypical male/female roles and white savior motif were employed. This conflictiness is indicative of all mainstream film that is torn between maintaining any kind of progressive ideology and reaching as many people as possible. As such, “*Avatar*” is critical and oppressive of power as well. Neytiri is revealed as a flawed but practical representative of ecofeminism giving us an example of how popular media does both rejects and builds social orders. This ambivalence warns against blind consumption of popular culture so that we can enjoy its messages at the same time being aware of its shortcomings.

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