

**MEJO**  
The MELOW Journal of World Literature  
Volume 1: 01: July 2016

**ISSN: Applied For**

A peer refereed journal  
published annually by

**MELOW**

(The Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literatures of the World)

## **Towards Praxis: Literature, Society and Politics**

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**MEJO**, or the MELOW Journal of World Literature, is a peer-refereed journal brought out biannually by **MELOW**, the **Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literatures of the World**. It is a reincarnation of the previous publications brought out in book or printed form by the Society right since its inception in 1998.

**MELOW** is an academic organization, one of the foremost of its kind in India. The members are college and university teachers, scholars and critics interested in literature, particularly in World Literatures. The Organization meets almost every year over an international conference. It seeks to maintain academic standards, encourages and grooms younger scholars, and provides a forum for senior scholars in literature.

The essays presented at MELOW conferences are screened, selected, edited and published by a Board of Editors especially appointed for the purpose. Whereas in the initial years the Society favoured a book publication, in subsequent years it was a journal that was published annually. With the changing times, MELOW decided to move on to online publication. The result is MEJO.

Dear readers, this is the first issue of MEJO, the MELOW Journal, but it is the outcome of almost two decades of experience in editing, proofreading and publishing. An e-journal has its own challenges and we, at MELOW, are coping with our challenges the best we can.

For us it is a new beginning and – like all beginnings – it is to be warmly welcomed. There is a lot to be done and many more milestones ahead. With the support of all our readers and members, we shall keep on striving.

The first issue of MEJO (Volume 1: no. 1) came out in July 2016 with half of the essays selected from presentations made at the 15<sup>th</sup> MELOW Conference held at GGS Indraprastha University, Dwarka, Delhi, in February 2016.. This issue, Vol 1: no. 2: March 2017, brings together the remaining selection from the conference presentations.

EDITOR

## About MELOW

MELOW (The Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literatures of the World) was first set up in 1998. It is an academic organization, among the foremost of its kind in India. The members are college and university teachers, scholars and critics interested in literature, particularly in world literatures, and literature across borders of time and space. The organization meets every year over an international conference. It seeks to maintain academic standards, encourage younger scholars and provides a forum for senior scholars in literature.

This is the first volume of the MELOW revamped journal which has existed in hard print for about a decade. The present issue comprises a selection of papers presented at the 2016 MELOW Conference in Delhi. A second issue of this volume is slated for January 2017.

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**Professor Isaac Sequeira**

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Professor Isaac Sequeira from Hyderabad, who worked at the Osmania University and was closely associated with the ASRC, Hyderabad, was a mentor and patron to several generations of academics in India. His sad demise in 2006 created a void hard to fill. We, at MELUS-India/MELOW, wish to keep alive the memory of our Patron and guiding light who played a key role in all the activities of our organization.

We have set up an Isaac Sequeira Memorial Fund out of which a cash prize of Rs. 5,000 is awarded for the **best paper presented at our conferences** (see details below).

With effect from the 2010 conference, there is a **Special Invited Lecture** by a person of eminence funded by the Isaac Sequeira Memorial Fund.

Several individuals have come forward to offer contributions towards the corpus and donated generously to the ISM fund. Donations of Rs. 1,000 or more may be sent in cash/by draft **payable to MELOW at Chandigarh**. Contributions may be mailed by registered post/courier to Prof Anil Raina, Dept of English, Panjab University, Chandigarh - 160014.

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- In the memory of Prof Isaac Sequeira, MELUS-India / MELOW annually awards a prize for the best paper presented at its conference. The award comprises a certificate and a cash prize of Rs. 5,000.
- The competition is open to Indian citizens who are members of MELUS-India or MELOW. The participant/delegate should be less than forty years of age at the time of the conference. The abstract and complete paper should be submitted by the stipulated deadlines before it is presented at the conference.
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An article submitted for publication in our journal should be actually presented at the MELUS-MELOW Conference. It should be an original scholarly work, not presented or published elsewhere.

The final selection will be done by the editorial board constituted for each volume/issue of the journal and its decision will be final. The article should also comply with the theme of the conference.

The guidelines for documentation are as follow:

Manuscripts should be submitted electronically typed in Microsoft Word (Times New Roman 12 font) in double spacing with 1" margin on both sides of the page. E-mail id for submission of manuscripts is [melusmelow@gmail.com](mailto:melusmelow@gmail.com)

The article should follow the *MLA Handbook* format (7<sup>th</sup> edition) wherein all references are placed in the body of the text (e.g. Hassan 15 or Toffler xi) with an alphabetically arranged "Works Cited" list at the end. Kindly note, reference footnotes/endnotes are not permissible. Articles not following this format of documentation will be summarily rejected. Some sample entries:

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"Chandigarh." Map. Google Maps. Google, 15 May 2012. Web. 18 May 2012.

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## The Politics of Translating: UpiMejhen and the Cryptic of 'Dopdi'

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**Abstract:** This paper interrogates the cultural nuances of naming the central character as Draupadi in Mahasweta Devi's story, "Draupadi". Draupadi is a very culturally connotative and loaded name which has a whole lot of collective conscious history of a culture associated with it. The paper poses a crucial question: why did Mahasweta Devi choose to draw from the dominant Hindu text when she was writing about tribals? Does she deliberately re-write this episode with a political agenda? Upi in her inability to be co-opted into the dominant metanarrative stands apart with her historical-political specificity as a tribal. Is Dopdi a construct in translation by Mahasweta Devi to topple, depose and question the prevailing order for women who become victims of forced invasion? Mahasweta Devi deliberately draws on literature as a political tool and puts this tribal woman to question the 'normative' and mainstream discourse of morality. Referring to the same text this paper would also shed light on the politics of inclusion/exclusion in translation and comparative literature.

**Keywords:** Mahasweta Devi, politics of inclusion and exclusion.

Names are a telling point in a text, they are instruments of memory and thematically very relevant. My paper revolves around the choice of the name Draupadi by Mahasweta Devi. Why did she choose to call a tribal by that name? Draupadi is a very culturally connotative and loaded name which has a whole lot of collective conscious history of a culture associated with it. A reader is bound to intuitively respond to it. The broad framework or schema of knowledge operates at all levels and affects our reading. The thesis of my paper revolves around the question as to why Mahasweta Devi chose to draw from the dominant Hindu text when she was writing about tribals. Does she deliberately re-write this episode with a political agenda? Upi in her inability to be co-opted into the dominant metanarrative stands apart with her historical-political specificity as a tribal. Is Dopdi a construct in translation by Mahasweta Devi to topple, depose and question the ways of prevailing order for women who become victims of forced invasion? Upi chooses to transgress the limits of honor by defining for herself a morality which is unprecedented. Does Mahasweta Devi deliberately draw on literature as a political tool for her interventions and hence makes this tribal woman, who is the most distant from the main stream, question the given framework of morality? Before setting out to find answers to these questions I would draw your attention to the fact that I have chosen to extend the term translation which is used in the narrow sense of a textual scripted text to a process whereby a culture other than one's own is translated in a target scripted language. Here I am referring to Mahasweta Devi's Bengali short stories and interventionist journalism with a long commitment to the tribals; I am treating her interventions as translations and Spivak's retranslation or 'transcreations' with a political agenda. Referring to the same text I would also discuss the politics of inclusion/exclusion in translation.

MahaswetaDevi has used her writings to render the plight of the tribal population invisible to Indian mainstream. She has explored in her fiction the history of Santhals, Hos, Oraons, Kurunis, Mundas and other tribal communities. Since 1976, she has been actively involved in the struggles of tribal and underprivileged communities in the border areas of the three adjacent provinces of Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal, especially in the districts of Mayurbhanj, Medinipur, Purulia, and Singhbhum.

Though, all human translations, interventions or interfaces are not politically motivated, a pattern of complicity is encountered in the three 'Breast Stories' by Mahasweta Devi. They share a pattern in the names of the protagonist; Dopdi, in 'Draupadi'; Jashoda, in 'Breast Giver' and Gangor, 'Behind the Bodice'. All the names have been drawn from the Hindu Mythology. Spivak herself admits, 'The ancient Draupadi is perhaps the most celebrated heroine of the Indian epic *Mahabharata*. The *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* are the cultural credentials of the so called Aryan Civilization of India. The tribes pre-date the Aryan civilization of India. They have no right to heroic Sanskrit names' (Spivak 10). What is then the motive behind Mahasweta Devi's act of translating a tribal into Draupadi?

Sometimes the overture of the translator or recreator problematizes the source text in the most unexpected ways. In the process of reaching out to the 'other' there is a kind of co-opting into one's own by the writer. According to Edward Said, translation becomes a useful tool to domesticate the undecipherable. It should rather be an epistemic tool to make the unexplored available; after all knowledge is not produced in one language only. It should put a spoke in the hegemonic wheel of dominant culture. Mahasweta Devi's 'Dopdi' does exactly this.

Spivak at one place mentions 'I cannot take this discussion of deconstruction far enough to show how Dopdi's song, incomprehensible and trivial (it is in fact about beans of different colours), and ex-orbitant to the story, marks the place of that 'other' that can be neither excluded nor recuperated' (4). Dopdi's tribal song is a proof of identity that cannot be translated or recreated; neither by Mahasweta Devi nor by Spivak. There is something incommensurable in the act of translation, something untranslatable.

The postscripted part of the final section of the story 'Dopdi' which has no precedent in the metanarrative of the *Mahabharata* is the part that emerges as the tour-de-force of the story. The story becomes powerful not because of its comparison with the metanarrative but because of its very specificity when Dopdi says she is in a place where she will finally act for herself in not 'acting' in challenging the man to (en)counter her as unrecorded objective historical monument. 'We are sure of the derivation of Dopdi from Draupadi as we are of the author's hardly implicit point of view. The story of Draupadi, the narrative efficient cause of the battle of the great epic Mahabharata, is well known in India. God had prevented male lust from unclothing her. And she had five husbands. This Dopdi, gang-raped by police, refuses to be clothed by men in office' (Spivak ix). This subversion defies translation into the global lingua franca; it defies all kinds of intellectual suppression. Inextricably mingling historico-political specificity with the sexual differential in a literary discourse, Mahasweta Devi invites us to begin questioning the given and the established norms for women. Quoting SaugataBhaduri's inference that "translation thus always moves from the 'literal' to the



‘littoral’, the shadowy, the liminal, forever disturbing and disorienting stabilities.” Translation has within it the function of both legitimizing dominant positions as well as a certain subversive potential; it can destabilize discourses by taking them face to face with the other, and its relationship with power. Saugata Bhaduri deals with the relationship between translation and power extensively in his *Translating Power*, and the following may offer a good summary of the threefold nature of the same. First, it can be one of straightforward repression, as instances of which one can mention two somewhat different strategies that translation as repression may adopt. The first of these is exemplified by the colonial and neo-colonial strategy of annihilating local cultures by translating the colonizer’s forms of knowledge in local tongues and imposing them on the colonized, thus repressing, replacing and rendering redundant modes of indigenous scholarship and culture. There can be a translation of *resistance*, where its repressive and hegemonic potentials notwithstanding, translation can be subversively appropriated towards enablement, as to illustrate from the same context though translation is the vehicle to essentialize the colonized other in the colonizer’s imagination. This apparently tokenistic showcasing can itself be taken advantage of for voicing the concerns of marginalized to a wider trans-cultural audience. Similarly, though translation may be the vehicle of inundating a local culture with the normative ideas of the center, the resultant exposure of erstwhile insulated groups to socio-cultural forms of other communities can lead to reformatory enablement. Thus, it becomes essential to study the relationship between power and translation, especially in its triadic forms of repression-hegemony-resistance.

Though Mahasweta Devi intends to present politics of domination, caste oppression, material violence, inhuman torture, repressive discourse, overarching hegemony, historical marginalization, and engineered exclusion, in her attempt she unknowingly co-opts the singularity into the mainstream dominant culture. Her aim should have been to engage with the diversified human and cultural experiences instead of casting it in a mold of legitimation through a comparison with the continuing patriarchal expansion. If difference is understood and enacted as self-containment and concomitant self-complacency, then there is a problem with regard to the concept of mutuality. Thus, the single-focus category “Indian” cannot be accepted without deconstructing its accompanying politics. As readers of literature one should be aware of the fact that nationalism and fundamentalism of any type is built on regimentation and exclusion. In constituting the normative, discourses often marginalize certain experiences or subjects as the other. To understand this process of “othering” one has to study mainstream canons critically.

Upi chooses to transgress the limits of honor by defining for herself a morality which is unprecedented. Mahasweta Devi is unsuccessful in underpinning the points of departure that make generalizations regarding Indian culture suspect. Even though the parallel of the mythological Draupadi is a constant point of reference in the story but there are still points of departure that make generalizations of Indian culture suspect. She is able to highlight the new spheres of values and establishes the constitutive nature of ambivalence. Mahasweta’s story re-writes the episode from the metanarrative. The men easily succeed in stripping Dopdi— in the narrative it is the culmination of her political punishment by the representatives of the

law. She remains publicly naked at her own insistence. This inversion is all fine but what bothers the reader is why does Mahasweta Devi draw from the *Mahabharata* to write a story about a tribal? Though she speaks from the perspective of the 'other,' she herself is trying to co-opt the subaltern UpiMejhen; which is a name Dopdi chooses herself to camouflage her identity as an activist. Spivak argues in her foreword that Draupadi is a name given to her by her Brahmin mistress, corrupted through usage becomes "Dopdi". Spivak dwells on the distortion of the name in the aboriginal context. I would however counter by questioning Mahasweta Devi and Spivak as to why in the first place should they 'corrupt' a tribal by giving her a name that is alien to her culture? Could the story have had the same impact if it was titled UpiMejhen, for instance? Could not Mahasweta Devi have an effervescence of a tribal name? But Upi is at a distance from the political activism of the male and the gradual emancipation of the bourgeois female.

There is no denying the fact that the relation between art and life has altered in a fundamental sense that invalidates several of the universal discourses and assumptions. The manner in which literary forms emerge or decline, the way literary texts are received and internalized by society, language functions as a site of legitimating creative acts of sublimation or subversion. Here Mahasweta Devi deliberately co-opts the tribal woman into the mainstream to debunk the same. There is a comparison of the two distant cultures one Aryan and the other tribal to bring into focus the resistance of being tamed by the dominant patriarchy.

Comparative literature, according to Steven Totosy de Zepetnek, has an ideology of inclusion of the 'other' – be that a marginal literature in its several meanings of marginality, a genre, various text types etc. Yet, it underscores the importance of previously marginalized or ignored linguistic and artistic expressions and forms that are an integral part of human experiences in our polyglot world. Mahasweta Devi too serves to 'sterilize' the master narrative of the nation's past off the rural class/gender/subaltern presence. Her narrative comprises ideological/nationalist, and colonizing/decolonizing frames. She releases the heterogeneity and restores some of its historical and geographical nomenclature.

In "Draupadi," the low-caste and the female gender act as weapons for counter-offense and counter-resistance. Spivak's intention is to effect an epistemic transformation of the concept of the monolithic 'third-world woman' by drawing attention to the mechanics of investigating the subaltern consciousness. With the nexus of theory and politics of Spivak's 'gendered subalternity,' "Draupadi" depicts how a marginalized tribal woman derives strength from her body and her inner feminine core to fight against her marginality. Here, the woman's body becomes an instrument of vicious denunciation of patriarchy and hegemony which are ironical, counter-canonical, anti-literary, and contradictory. Simone de Beauvoir says, "If the respect or fear inspired by woman prevents the use of violence towards her, then the muscular superiority of the male is no source of power" (212).

Mahasweta Devi aptly said in her Ramon Magsaysay award acceptance speech in 1997 that, "My India still lives behind a curtain of darkness, a curtain that separates the mainstream society from poor and the deprived. But then why my India alone? As the century comes to an end, it is important that we all make an attempt to tear the curtain of darkness, see the

reality that lies beyond and see our own true faces in the process.”Mahasweta Devi has used fiction not only to resurrect forgotten episodes of India’s tribal and feudal past but to highlight acts of local resistance to aggression and oppression. Deeply stirred by how the tribals and the poor have been pauperized and abused, she set for her the task of savagely exposing the realities and structures of social and economic exploitation. In refusing to mystify what she sees, she shocks her middle-class readers into confronting a social cancer in Indian society. Thus, her story ‘Dopdi’ ruffles us from the complacency of our cultural insularity. Mahasweta Devi is an activist writer in the age of globalization. Her writings consistently highlight the need for the prevention of cultural hegemony and homogeneity.

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## **Survival and Identity: A Study of Elie Wiesel's *Night* and Primo Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz***

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**Abstract:** The Nazis sought to exterminate the entire Jewish race by resorting to unprecedented dehumanization which did not limit itself to corporeal destruction but sought to annihilate their intellectual and spiritual existence. Holocaust literature in the form of memoirs and autobiographies has offered a powerful perspective on human suffering through unadorned, ruthless facts and uninflected historical accounts. It also portrays the efforts of the survivors to comprehend the meaning of the Holocaust. The paper seeks to study two memoirs written by Holocaust survivors – *Night* by Elie Wiesel and *Survival in Auschwitz* by Primo Levi. Wiesel's emotional and thought-provoking memoir deals with the issues of survival, identity, death, morality and religious faith. Primo Levi's account is a subtle blend of compassion and detachment. The paper explores the endurance and indefatigability of humanity in the face of dismal, inhuman conditions. Any strict matter-of-fact retelling of the experiences will inevitably be compromised since memoirs are filtered through fickle and unreliable memories. However, these two memoirs have tried to reconstruct the past and make it coherent. I maintain that these two books are a poignant testimony of Holocaust survivors, reaffirming their will to live. The literature depicting the historical experience of Nazi crimes has been instrumental in creating awareness among the masses regarding the magnitude of its fiendishness and the need for establishing standards of human rights, incorporating them into international law.

**Keywords:** Memoirs, survival, identity crisis, religious faith, human rights awareness.

Holocaust is one of the most thoroughly documented events in world history and yet remains incomprehensible and unrepresentable. The word 'Holocaust' evokes images of stacked corpses, mass graves, horror-stricken faces of helpless victims uncertain about the impending doom awaiting them, and the incinerators reducing human bodies to smoke. The Nazis sought to exterminate the European Jews by resorting to unprecedented dehumanization which did not limit itself to corporeal destruction but sought to annihilate their cultural, intellectual and spiritual existence. Elie Wiesel writes, "It is obvious that the war which Hitler and his accomplices waged was a war not only against Jewish men, women, and children but also against Jewish religion, Jewish culture, Jewish tradition, therefore Jewish memory" (*Night* ii). Had it not been for writers like Wiesel, Anne Frank, Primo Levi and others, the Holocaust would have become a historical event that mankind did not want to acknowledge or remember because of the pain, and the vicarious shame and guilt it evoked. It was not until much later that things began to change and the proclivity to shake off self-induced amnesia set in.

Holocaust literature in the form of memoirs and autobiographies has offered a powerful perspective on human suffering by presenting unadorned, ruthless facts and uninflected

historical accounts. The present paper seeks to study two memoirs written by Holocaust survivors – *Night* by Elie Wiesel and *Survival in Auschwitz* by Primo Levi. Their postwar lives belong to a completely different order of reality and hence are not dealt with in memoirs which limit themselves to experiences and memories inside the deadly concentration camps.

Memory is the key concept in the writing of memoirs. An offhand approach towards the concept of memory makes it seem static and rooted in past - a memory of something that has happened and banded in time. However, researchers Jan Assmann and Aleida Assmann have addressed the dynamic character of memory which connects the three temporal dimensions: recollection in the present, it addresses the past, but always points towards the future. Jan speaks of the durability and symbolic aspects of cultural memory, emphasizing their role in the construction of identities. He defines cultural memory as “the faculty that allows us to build a narrative picture of the past and through this process develop an image and an identity for ourselves” (Meckien). Cultural memory, according to him, refers to objectified and institutionalized memories in the form of texts, rites, monuments, celebrations, objects, sacred scriptures and other media that can be stored, transferred and reincorporated throughout generations (Meckien). Taking the concept of cultural memory in the Israeli-Jewish context, it can be said that these memoirs help in crystallizing the collective traumatic experiences of the Jewish past and the construction of twentieth-century Jewish identity.

Any form of literature gives in to artistic demands, slackens off narratives, and compromises the details of actual events. However, the horrors of Auschwitz, Buchenwald or any other concentration camp defy any artistic amplification since this seems ethically unacceptable, even sacrilegious to under-represent or misrepresent the atrocities of the Holocaust. David Patterson, the author of a recent study of Holocaust memoir literature, argues that even the reading of such works has a sacred function: the reader “must become not an interpreter of texts but a mender of the world, a part of the recovery that this memory demands” (12).

The present study explores the commonalities as well as divergence in the experiences, religious beliefs and stylistic techniques adopted by two veteran writers, Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi in dealing with the Holocaust. These are individual as well as representative accounts of the collective experience of all victim Jews. The literature depicting the historical experience of Nazi crimes has been instrumental in creating awareness among the masses regarding the magnitude of its fiendishness, stressing on the crying need for the establishment of human rights standards and their integration into international law. Wiesel once said, “I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented” (Wiesel, “Acceptance Speech”).

Wiesel’s first book, *Night* is a somber, moving memoir of his faith-shattering experience in the death camps. It was published first in France and later—after much resistance due to its painful subject—in the United States. Slowly, it was catapulted to fame and has since been read by millions of readers. Wiesel says of this book, “*Night* was the foundation; all the rest is commentary. In each book, I take one character out of *Night* and give him a refuge, a book, a tale, a name, a destiny of his own” (Cargas 3). Though Wiesel was skeptical about the

reception of the book, yet the urge to share his experience is an overriding determinant in the writing of the book. He says, "I am not so naive as to believe that this slim volume will change the course of history or shake the conscience of the world. Books no longer have the power they once did. Those who kept silent yesterday will remain silent tomorrow" (*Night* v-vi).

Wiesel along with his parents and three sisters was deported to Auschwitz, Buna, and Buchenwald in 1944 at the age of fifteen. Wiesel was a deeply religious Jew who studied Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament) and the Cabbala (a doctrine of Jewish mysticism). There he and his father were separated from the mother and the girls. Early on, Wiesel's mother and youngest sister were killed by the Germans, and before the prisoners were liberated by the Allies, his father died of malnourishment and mistreatment.

The gruesome conditions inside the camp are minutely drawn by Wiesel. Jewish arrivals are stripped, shaved, disinfected, and ill-treated with almost unimaginable brutality. Sonder-Kommandos, the Kommandos working in the crematoria, are forced to place their own fathers' or brothers' bodies into the furnaces. The prisoners are forced to run through snowy nights in bitter cold over a forty-two mile route to Gleiwitz. Elie binds his bleeding foot in strips of blanket. Inmates who falter are shot. The gold crown of Elie's tooth is extracted using a rusty spoon in the lavatory, throwing to the wind any human concern or rules of hygiene. Constant persecution robs people of their human and moral values. Corrosion of ethics and morality is the inevitable side-effect of such cruelty. Human comradeship, friendship, filial love, and piety seem to be crumbling under the weight of appalling human conditions. *Night* reflects his struggle to come to terms with his father's regression into childhood. Wiesel is too afraid of the guards who wield clubs indiscriminately. When his father is beaten mercilessly at the end of his life, Elie remembers that he had not moved because he was afraid. It is implied throughout the text that silence and passivity are what allowed the Holocaust to continue. However, Wiesel's writing of *Night* is an attempt to break the ice of silence and to endow the reader with a sense of 'what' happened in order to prevent anything so horrible from ever happening again.

It has been often said of the Holocaust that any language is insufficient to explain the 'unimaginable' and 'unspeakable' dehumanization that took place inside the walled spaces of Auschwitz, Buna, Buchenwald and other death-producing camps. The rules inside Auschwitz defy all logic and rationality; driven by cruelty, whims, and fancies of SS officers. Wiesel maintains, "Hunger—thirst—fear—transport—selection—fire—chimney: these words all have intrinsic meaning, but in those times, they meant something else" (*Night* iii). Levi also maintains, "Then for the first time we became aware that our language lacks words to express this offence, the demolition of a man" (*Survival* 26). The language falls short in explaining the excruciating trauma the inmates suffered where words used in common parlance acquire utterly different meanings and connotations. Nevertheless, the inmates try to hold on to their own language as a vehicle to defy the Nazis and retain their cultural and human identity.

Wiesel's experiences in the camp garrote his understanding of the nature of God, who, apparently refuses to rescue or imbue theological significance to the seemingly surreal event.

The frustration and helplessness in the wake of imminent death compel an inmate to recite Kaddish, the prayer for the dead. Wiesel laments, “I don’t know whether, during the history of the Jewish people, men have ever before recited Kaddish for themselves” (*Night* 33). Elie Wiesel’s faith was grounded in the idea that God is all pervasive and that his divinity touches every aspect of our lives. However, Elie’s belief in an omnipotent, benevolent God keeps wavering in the camps. He struggles with the question of fasting on Yom Kippur. He also writes, “As for me, I had ceased to pray. I concurred with Job! I was not denying His existence, but I doubted His absolute justice” (*Night* 45). He expresses regret when he forgets to say Kaddish (a mourner’s prayer) for his deceased friend Akiba Drumer. He calls himself “an observer, a stranger” (*Night* 68) when watching others pray. Refusing to fast on Rosh Hashanah, he turns eating “into a symbol of rebellion, of protest against Him” (*Night* 68). Hence, the predicament of using religion as a defining characteristic of Jewish identity is one of the major components of *Night*.

Despite Wiesel’s self-professed disbelief in God at various instances, his constant use of religious metaphors undercuts what he says. When Wiesel prevaricates having to forego his new mud-smeared shoes which escape the attention of the guards, he says, “I thanked God, in an improvised prayer, for having created mud in His infinite and wondrous universe” (*Night* 38). Elie even refers to biblical passages when he denies his faith. At the death of his father, he bemoans that there were no prayers at his grave and no candles were lit in his memory. His thoughts imply that faith and doubt rest in his heart simultaneously and keep wrestling with each other. In an interview in 2012, when Oprah Winfrey had asked Wiesel about God’s silence and the world’s silence, Wiesel remarked, “God’s silence. At least God can say, “Who are you to understand me?” But the world’s silence is different. I don’t understand it to this day”.

Among other horrors, Wiesel and his fellow prisoners are forced to walk past the fresh corpses still hanging and watch the hanging of a young boy by the Germans. The child is still alive when he files past the scaffold and hears someone behind him wonder aloud, “Where is God? Where is He?” And I heard a voice within me answer him: “Where is He? Here He is — He is hanging here on this gallows. . . . That night the soup tasted of corpses” (*Night* 65). The executed child may be symbolic of God himself who has perhaps chosen to remain lifeless and silent in the midst of deadening violation of human dignity.

According to Gary Henry, the work of Elie Wiesel is a courageous, sustained protest against indifference. And, whatever may be its impact on mankind, it has allowed Elie Wiesel himself to remain human. Wiesel has been honored with the Nobel Peace Prize, an appointment to the President’s Commission on the Holocaust, and the Congressional Gold Medal of Achievement. Elie Wiesel and his wife, Marion, established The Elie Wiesel Foundation for Humanity and the official website of Elie Wiesel’s Foundation states that mission of the foundation, rooted in the memory of the Holocaust, is to combat indifference, intolerance, and injustice through international dialogue and youth-focused programs that promote solidarity, understanding and equality. Wiesel helped organize and found the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. He hopes to broadcast his belief that persecution is an experience all people must recognize and protest against.

Though Wiesel and Levi narrate their memories of the Holocaust sincerely, yet there are differences in the treatment of the memoirs considering their different social, economic, geographical backgrounds, and also due to the difference in their age at the time of detention in the camps. Levi renders his memoir comprehensible in lucid, unpretentious prose without floundering into sentimentality whereas Elie's account is more personal and compassionate. Levi insists that his role as a scientist, chemist, and technician was complementary and not contradictory to his status as a writer and humanist. As he remarked in an interview with American writer Philip Roth, "In my own way I have remained an impurity, an anomaly, but now for reasons other than before: not especially as a Jew but as an Auschwitz survivor and an outsider- writer, coming not from the literary or university establishment but from the industrial world" (*Survival* 185). Whereas Wiesel's memoir reflects ambivalence though leaning more towards belief in God's existence in the midst of atrocities afflicted by the Nazi perpetrators, Primo Levi's memoir can be seen as a work penned by an agnostic. He is set apart from the other Jews in the Lager and does not really identify as a Jew, rather as an Italian of Jewish descent. He does not participate in the religious or cultural activities unlike other inmates who somehow attempt to affirm their heritage in the forms of storytelling or reciting Jewish religious prayers. Nevertheless, despite Levi's secularism, his humane essence still remains alive which manifests itself in the way he along with Alberto and Lorenzo helps other inmates.

Primo Levi was a twenty-four-year-old Italian Jew when the Fascist Militia captured him on December 13, 1943. He had joined Italian Resistance Movement against Fascism before being deported to Auschwitz. Levi was imprisoned there for 11 months until the camp was liberated by the Red Army in 1945. Levi writes, "This is hell. Today, in our times, hell must be like this. A huge, empty room: we are tired, standing on our feet, with a tap which drips while we cannot drink the water, and we wait for something which will certainly be terrible, and nothing happens and nothing continues to happen" (*Survival* 22). Levi explains how shoes become a vehicle of persecution because inmates are deliberately forbidden to put on the sizes that fit them properly. The poorly fitted shoes cause immense pain later as Levi writes, "Death begins with the shoes; for most of us, they show themselves to be instruments of torture, which after a few hours of marching cause painful sores which become fatally infected" (*Survival* 34).

The cultivation of an understanding of difference with others and nurturing the bonds of friendship prove very fragile under conditions of adversity, a situation that Levi laments very much in the memoir. Besides describing day-to-day atrocities, Levi's description of the ten days left in that camp before the Red Army arrived seems to be the most harrowing part of this book. The camps are abandoned, the Germans are gone. There is no ration and all around are stacks of corpses piled high. People are still dying. It is during this time that Levi also falls acutely ill but manages to survive and return to his home in Turin. According to Frederic D. Homer:

For Levi, the Lager remains an irrational universe, for it cannot be reconciled with the existence of God. Levi, in several of his short stories, creates a god who is trying to devise man as an intelligent creature at home in his surroundings. This god, Levi's inventive



surrogate, is always devising experiments with human nature. “God” continually fails before the material conditions of existence (33.)

Levi does not believe that God intervened on behalf of any of the survivors; as he says in *The Drowned and the Saved*, the best people were not the survivors. To encapsulate, Auschwitz was a death camp in which the prisoners would not last more than three months. When all was done, none of the prisoners would be left alive, and nobody would know what had happened there. Levi writes that “the entire history of the brief ‘millennial Reich’ can be reread as a war against memory, an Orwellian falsification of memory, falsification of reality, negation of reality” (qtd. in Homer 28). Also, the façade of civilization is very flimsy and there is a sadistic and instinctive tendency toward violence, but Levi believes that at the same time powerful influences can be built in by the strength of education and civilization. Levi obviously believes that reinforcing civilization and education against violence is crucial; the battle must be fought. Levi himself was fortunate to have made strong bonds with some inmates which were not selfish or opportunistic rather based on true solidarity. The Italian bricklayer Lorenzo Perone, finding himself in the camp as a slave laborer, befriends Levi and refuses to build shoddy walls. He slips Levi and Alberto extra rations of bread and soup for six months and becomes a model of pure and uncontaminated humanity. Levi writes:

I believe that it was really due to Lorenzo that I am alive today; and not so much for his material aid, as for his having constantly reminded me by his presence, by his natural and plain manner of being good, that there still existed a just world outside our own, something and someone still pure and whole, not corrupt, not savage, extraneous to hatred and terror; something difficult to define, a remote possibility of good, but for which it was worth surviving. (*Survival* 121)

Levi’s memoir has profundity enough to make readers aware of the existential angst common to entire humanity. Frederic D. Homer writes, “Whether we are attacked by life as Levi was, or live lives of quiet contemplation as an ascetic, we are constantly faced with agonizing choices. Levi’s work prepares us to think about possible futures as well as how to face the everyday trials of life—so ordinary to others and often so desperate to ourselves” (4). However, Levi never forgot the void and derangement of his camp experience which probably resulted in his eventual suicide. All the same, his works inspire a voluminous stream of scholarly studies and academic conferences in all the major languages of the world. His influence can be found in such disparate places as pop music and literature, films and theater. The title of Tim Blake Nelson’s 2001 film *The Grey Zone* comes from a chapter in the book *The Drowned and the Saved*. The film narrates the story of the Jewish Sonderkommando in the Auschwitz death camp in October 1944. Despite his apparent suicide, the following lines of Levi seem to sum up his philosophy of life and his continuing legacy in the world: “Now nobody can know for how long and under what trials his soul can resist before yielding or breaking. Every human being possesses a reserve of strength whose extent is unknown to him, be it large, small or nonexistent, and only through extreme adversity can we evaluate it” (qtd. in Homer 17).

While the devastation and the illegitimate annihilation of millions of human lives can never be edifying or constructive, the literature generated in response to the Holocaust, particularly the memoirs of survivors, explores the fortitude and indefatigability of humanity. It is sad but true that throughout history many breakthrough advancements in the arena of international human rights have been the result of catastrophic wars claiming millions of lives. However, all prior developments in this regard seem diminutive considering the impact of the Holocaust on the creation of the international law of human rights (Buergethal 3). More and more international tribunals and institutions have been and continue to be created to give autonomy to individuals to assert their international human rights directly against state-sponsored machinery that has violated them. This paper concludes on a note of hope and optimism through a quote by Margaret Atwood: “I hope that people will finally come to realize that there is only one ‘race’ – the human race and that we all are members of it” (qtd. in Brown 24).

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## Land Ethics in the Poetry of Robert Frost

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**Abstract:** The role of the poets, if Octavio Paz, the Mexican Nobel Laureate is to be believed, extends to “prevent the end of history”. In the trying times of ecological crisis, the present paper takes up an ecocritical perusal of the poetry of one of the most cherished poets of America, Robert Frost, in order to find out how effective literature, poetry in particular, remains in the face of changing times. Frost’s characters make a living out of nature. So, it is necessary to know what attitude guides their actions in their dealings with nature – “anthropocentric” or “biocentric”? Do the characters in his poetry show any sort of ethical responsibility to the nonhuman natural world? Can his poetry make any fruitful contribution in fields of environmental education or Environmental Ethics? The endeavour, on the whole, is to find out if his poetry propounds “an ecological vision” that can be helpful in preventing the impending apocalypse staring humanity in the face.

**Keywords:** Ecocriticism, Biocentrism, Environmental Ethics, Land Ethics.

The poets... teach us that literature is an enormous, ever increasing, wonderfully diverse storehouse of creative and cooperative energy which can never be used up. It is like the gene-pool, like the best ecosystems. Literature is a true cornucopia, thanks to the continuous generosity of the poets, who generate this energy out of themselves, requiring and usually receiving very little in return over and above the feedback from the creative act itself. (William Rueckert 116)

There is no doubt about the relevance of literature in any age as there can be none about the “generosity of the poets.” Poets, as all writers and artists, are the keepers of the society’s conscience, giving voice to what is wrong and what is right in the society, chronicling it and holding up a mirror to the society when it goes astray. It is perhaps because of their role as conscience keepers that Ray Dasmann in *Planet in Peril* says that, “It is the business of those who direct the activities that will shape tomorrow’s world to think beyond today’s well-being and provide for tomorrow” (qtd. in Rueckert 105).

What necessitates the generosity of the poets today is the fact that humanity is on the verge of apocalypse or “ecological suicide,” as Rueckert calls it. What started as the destruction of nature, led by man’s paradoxical attitude toward nature, boomeranged on man and now has reached a point of no return. The varied reasons that have misled man in his perception of himself and nature range from religious to philosophical to literary traditions within the Western culture. The time, however, now is not to ponder over the reasons that have led man toward his self-destruction, but, as Dana Phillips very wisely says, “Today’s cultural energy

must be largely devoted to coping with the negative effects of yesterday's; the symbols and successes of fifty years ago are often today's environmental disasters, and may prove harder to repair or unmake than they were to create, hard as that may have been" (222).

So, in order to harness something positive from the cultural energy, we take refuge in literature and join hands with the ecocritics, most of whose efforts are directed towards evaluating "texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis" (Richard Kerridge 5). This paper analyses Robert Frost's poetry with the intention of finding out if, as a response to the present environmental crisis, his poetry is coherent and useful. In Frost's case it becomes all the more pertinent to find out whether his poetry reveals the right kind of relationship with nature or environment that the people can live by, as the characters in his poetry make a living out of land. Finally, the whole exercise is to find in his poetry a model towards a new "ecological vision."

"In ecology," William Rueckert has very rightly pointed out, "man's tragic flaw is his anthropocentric (as opposed to biocentric) vision, and his compulsion to conquer, humanize, domesticate, violate and exploit every natural thing" (113). The Western civilization is looking for a new ethics, "with responsibility for nature lying at its centre (ecocentric view)" and at the same time, "a more realistic philosophy," which according to John Passmore, "is the only adequate foundation for effective ecological concern" (136, 141). Aldo Leopold's "land ethics" has found some acceptance in environmental ethics as a more realistic philosophy of nature which is based on more practical conception of nature that takes into consideration the changed environment.

It is interesting to note, as Michael J. McDowell has asserted in his essay that Frost's characters "conduct themselves according to a sort of unspoken land ethic" (97). Frost's characters, like the gum gatherer in the poem by the same name, find it immoral to take from nature more than "necessary for immediate, personal need" (McDowell 97). McDowell finds in Frost's poetry that his characters are fully aware that it is "the scale on which human beings go against nature [that] makes all the difference in the world" and moderation in their dealings with nature seems to be the right way to live, as it is in "New Hampshire" (98), the people cannot think of things like "Diamonds/And apples in commercial qualities"; "It never could have happened in New Hampshire." They can't even think of their own gold in "commercial quantities" and there is:

Just enough gold to make the engagement rings  
And marriage rings for those who owned the farm.  
What gold more innocent could one have asked for? (162, 113-115)

Greed has no place in Frost's poetic world. In the "Christmas Trees," when a stranger from the city comes to the owner's (of the Christmas trees) door to buy his "young fir balsams," the person is amazed because he hadn't thought of his woods, which he calls "my woods," as "Christmas trees." He was not tempted, even for a moment, to sell them because it would have left the landscape of that place barren. He knew the importance of those trees for that place

To sell them off their feet to go in cars  
And leave the slope behind the house all bare,  
Where the sun shines now no warmer than the moon. (17-19)

The trees act as a shield from the direct heat of the sun and balance its warmth. He lets the stranger have a look at his trees but he is determined from the very beginning that the stranger should not expect that he is going to let him have them. His determination becomes stronger when the stranger puts the worth of his thousand trees at thirty dollars

...thirty dollars seemed so small beside  
The extent of pasture I should strip... (47-48)

The person seems to be guided by his duty towards maintaining the harmony of that place by not falling into the trap of commercialization. It is difficult for an outsider to comprehend the ethics of a place.

Frost's poems show that not to succumb to one's greed assists in maintaining a harmonious relation with nature. One of the speakers in "Blueberries" finds Patterson to be quite selfish for hoarding all the blueberries for himself and his large Loren family. However, the other speaker finds Patterson working in compliance with nature and it is right, too:

...It's a nice way to live,  
Just taking what nature is willing to give,  
Not forcing her hand with harrow and plow. (54-56)

Lorens consider it their sole right to pick berries from that place and the speaker justifies their behavior. The speaker "won't complain" because, according to the ethics of the land they live in, it is wrong to transgress into the fields of others; boundaries ought to be maintained.

According to the ethics of the place, to claim other's property might be wrong, but the traveller in "Unharvested," earnestly wishes

May something go always unharvested!  
May much stay out of our stated plan,  
Apples and something forgotten and left,  
So smelling their sweetness would be no theft. (11-14)

He was tempted to deviate from his "routine road" by "a scent of ripeness from over a wall" and he stopped before an apple tree "that had eased itself of its summer load, / and of all but its trivial foliage free." The apples in "one circle of solid red" showed the bounty of the harvest for the owner. Therefore, the traveller feels "smelling their sweetness would be no theft." The apples, thus, became a source of pleasure for people other than their owner.

To Leopold, it is human instinct to appreciate natural beauty. While making his famous statement, "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise", he has been urging his reader to take

into account not just economics but what is ethically and aesthetically right as well (224-25). Some things are valued for their purpose other than the utilitarian aspects. The utilitarian streak of man can be corrected by making him realize that nature has its intrinsic value; it exists for purposes other than utility.

In the Introduction to *A Sand County Almanac*, Aldo Leopold has written that “the land can survive the impact of mechanized man and man can reap from it the esthetic harvest it is capable, under science, of contributing to culture only when the humans see land as a community to which they belong and may begin to use it with love and respect” (viii). He found it “inconceivable ... that an ethical relation to land can exist without love, respect, and admiration for land” (223). He proposed treatment of land as an extension of ethics. “All ethics,” according to Leopold, “so far revolved around a central premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts” and “[t]he land ethic,” according to him, “simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land.... In short, a land ethic changes the role of Homo sapiens from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow members, and also respect for the community as such” (200).

The “our” and “ours” that Robert Frost has used in his poems in relation to his brooks, fields and place do not tell about his persona’s dominion over the place, rather it brings out the sense of community that his characters share with the objects in nature. His characters are particularly fond of their brooks and know the course that their brook would take. Take for instance, the speaker in the poem “Hyla Brook” who knows that by June the Hyla brook would have “run out of song and speed” and all that would remain of the brook would be “A brook to none but who remember long.” Still, the speaker feels “We love the things we love for what they are” because of the bond with them. (119)

In the autumn season all the wells in the place have dried up and the persona along with a group of his friends sets out “to seek the brook”; they need no excuse to draw water from the brook:

...because the fields were *ours*,  
And by the brook *our* woods were there.  
(“Going for Water” 18, 7-8, emphasis added)

They lead a life of dependence on the entities of nature – the fields, the woods and obviously the brook. Because the speaker and his friends, all belong to the same place and are bound by the same values, they share the same experience:

Each laid on other a staying hand  
To listen ere we dared to look,  
And in the hush we joined to make  
We heard, we knew we heard the brook. (18, 17-20)

They all could hear the brook and relate to it because as Philip Gerber writes, “Clear running water [was] emblematic of the life-gift of the natural world” for all of them (159). They all realized their dependence upon running water “not only for material subsistence” but it was also for all of them something “in nature we are from” and, therefore, they felt it their duty that “the woods-hidden brook” must be kept clear and flowing at all costs (Gerber 162). The couple in the poem “West-Running Brook” also realizes the importance of the brook in their life: “It is from that in water we were from / Long, long before we were from any creature” (40-41).

The characters in Frost’s poetry, in their dealing with their land, bring out the same qualities which Ray Dasmann has attributed to “ecosystem people,” the communities which have “the practical knowledge of the place they live in: those are communities ‘totally dependent, or largely so, on the animals and plants of a particular area,’ deeply accustomed to that area and in stable, sustainable relation to the local ecosystem” (qtd. in Kerridge 137). In Frost’s case, the other elements of nature like the brook, the mountains, the fields, etc., can also be added with whom the characters in his poetry share an intimate relationship.

The characters in Frost’s poetic world possess the wider conception of community, an attitude which is the proper content of Environmental Ethics. And this conception of community comes from the fact that they recognized their dependence on nature. In Frost’s note to F. S. Flint written in July, 1913, he asks Flint:

Did I reach you with the poems[?] . . . Did I give you the feeling of and for the independent-dependence of the kind of people I like to write about[?] (qtd.in. Sanders 74)

The people Frost wrote about led a life of dependence on their landscape. The characters in his poetry see themselves as members of the environmental community and appreciate their dependencies on natural elements.

The people are considerate towards the non-animate entities. They extend the same love and concern to their animals, which they domesticate for purposes other than merely earning money from them. Andrew Cohen in his essay “Dependent Relationships and the Moral Standing of Nonhuman Animals,” raises the sceptical issue whether dependent relationships among human beings and nonhuman animals can justify an animal’s moral standing and he is optimistic that “if dependencies generate reasons for extending direct moral consideration, such reasons will admit of significant variations in scope and stringency” in the ethics that govern man’s relation with animals and which make man treat animals only as resources to be exploited (1).

In the poem, “The Housekeeper,” John’s dependence on cocks and hens is for monetary purposes: he earns his living by cock fighting. But even when he is offered good money for his cocks and hens, he is not willing to sell them

He never takes the money. If they’re worth  
That much to sell, they’re worth as much to keep (140-141).



His dependence on cocks and hens for money might be a yardstick to justify his refusal to sell them. But his denial to sell them for more money and the way he has instructed the other people to treat his animals with care, speaks of the moral standing he accords to his animals. As claimed by the woman

...You don't know what a gentle lot we are:  
We wouldn't hurt a hen! You ought to see us  
Moving a flock of hens from place to place.  
We are not allowed to take them upside down,  
All we can hold together by the legs.  
Two at a time's the rule, one on each arm,  
No matter how far and how many times  
We have to go.( 124-131)

John does not treat his domesticated animals as resources to be exploited but as a part of the community in which they have moral standing and consequently a moral value and, therefore have a right to be treated in a just way.

J. Baird Callicott thinks that “we do in fact have duties and obligations – implied by the essentially communitarian premises of the land ethic – to domesticated animals, as well as to wild fellow-members of the biotic community and to the biotic community as a whole” and, as members of what Mary Midgley calls the “mixed” community, “Farm animals, work animals, and pets have entered into a kind of implicit social contract with us which lately we have abrogated” (29). This might explain the unusual behaviour of the cow in the poem “The Cow in Apple Time.” The cow has, perhaps, been forsaken by its owner because “her udder shrivels and the milk goes dry” and now

She runs from tree to tree where lie and sweeten  
The windfalls spiked with stubble and worm-eaten.  
She leaves them bitten when she has to fly.  
She bellows on a knoll against the sky. (7-10)

The owner has been mean, but this is not the way animals are usually treated in Frost's poetic world. In Frost's poetry, people consider domesticated farm animals as an essential part of the “mixed” community and this is demonstrated in the poem “The Runaway,” in which a colt is out in the open while it is snowing. Being a domesticated animal the colt is not used to such weather:

I think the little fellow's afraid of the snow.  
He isn't winter-broken. It isn't play  
With the little fellow at all. He's running away.  
I doubt if even his mother could tell him, 'Sakes,  
It's only weather.' He'd think she didn't know! (9-13)

The people have deep concern for the domesticated animal

Whoever it is that leaves him out so late,  
When other creatures have gone to stall and bin,  
Ought to be told to come and take him in. (19-21)

The colt is out in the open in the winter and the people who look at him are angry at the owner who has let the colt out in such an inclement weather.

Even when the people inhabiting Frost's world are not dependent on animals or birds for whatsoever reason, they treat them with concern considering it their moral duty as revealed in the poem "The Exposed Nest." The speaker found the persona bent low in the poem. First, he thought that he was up to some new play. Then, he thought he was busy with his hay but he found that his real concern was

...a nest full of young birds on the ground  
The cutter bar had just gone champing over  
(Miraculously without tasting flesh)  
And left defenseless to the heat and light.  
You wanted to restore them to their right. (13-17)

Though they

...saw the risk we took in doing good,  
But dared not spare to do the best we could  
Though harm should come of it; so built the screen  
You had begun, and given them back their shade.  
All this to prove we cared. (27-31)

Val Plumwood has found that "special relationships with, care for, or empathy with particular aspects of nature as experiences rather than with nature as abstraction are essential to provide a depth and type of concern that is not otherwise possible." "Care and responsibility for particular animals, trees, and rivers that are known well, loved, and appropriately connected to the self are," according to her, "an important basis for acquiring a wider, more generalized concern"(7).

Thus, in Frost's poetry, all the components of the environment are bound in a community. His poetic world is inhabited by the people who extend moral consideration to all animate as well as non-animate entities. They possess an ecological attitude which is conducive to fostering an ethical outlook towards nature. In their relationship with the environment, Frost's characters are guided by their land ethic which can help conventional Western philosophy focus on the "broad human ethical responsibility to the nonhuman natural world" (Callicott 223). Frost's poetry can be helpful in various fields of action such as environmental education, sustainable development and most importantly in environmental ethics. Thus, Robert Frost's incessant role as a conscience-keeper for a whole generation of Americans,

literature lovers, lovers of nature and now even for the custodians of planet Earth, stands irrefutable.

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## ***Right of Way* as a Political Document**

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**Abstract:** The Asian Women Writers' Collective (AWWC) published their first anthology, *Right of Way*, with The Women's Press in 1989 in London. A core group of eight members in the organisation conducted workshops, secured funding and gave Asian women a platform for self-expression. Its aim was to reduce the isolation of Asian women, hitherto unpublished, through the workshop process. They all sought visibility, credibility, and access to institutions, publishers, and other groups in the community. The workshop method was useful to them as that was the only way towards self-discipline. For most of the original ten members and others, the time devoted to writing had to be managed and since there was no money, it turned out to be a complex process. The book consists of short stories and poems by new authors. The workshops read aloud, discussed and debated to focus on good writing that had a special resonance for the Asian woman in Britain whose voice was unheard. For instance, the poem "Blood Lust to Dust" by Rahila Gupta, is dedicated to Balwant Kaur, an Asian woman murdered by her husband in front of her children at a South London refuge. The poem was also read at the Balwant Kaur memorial campaign. The Asian Women Writers' Collective published five different anthologies subsequently and many of their writers continue to be related to Asian writing, drama and film today. *Right of Way* is a historic document, a political act of considerable strength, created at the height of a hostile political environment in Britain. The paper assesses the role played by such collective movements and suggests a way forward.

**Keywords:** Women's Press, Asian, women, collective, workshop, outreach, racism, funding, class, stereotype, balancing.

One of the richest body of English writing has come from Britain, and women of Asian origin have made a prominent contribution to it, though their male counterparts get more visibility everywhere. As with most multicultural writing, the 1980s was the period of its finest bloom. But to find not one, not two, but a whole bunch of writers collectively publishing through a progressive women's press in a more or less hostile environment, lacking financial backing is indeed a remarkable literary event. This paper seeks to identify the The Asian Women Writers Collective (AWWC) which published their first anthology, *Right of Way*, with The Women's Press in 1989 in London as a literary landmark.

The anthology consists of short stories and poems by eight new authors: Rahila Gupta, Ravinder Randhawa, Rukshana Ahmad, Sibani Raychaudhuri, Kanta Talukdar, Shazia Sahail, Meera Syal and Leena Dhingra.

The lines from the poem “Blood Lust to Dust” by Rahila Gupta seems to encapsulate the essence of the anthology, and express its manifesto through images of release, the lifting of a lid, and the raised fist. This poem was read at the Balwant Kaur memorial campaign:.

You will not be consigned to dust  
Time must not heal  
Nor memory conceal  
Your blood will not congeal  
Our actions  
This is not one more obituary,  
Not one more nail  
Sealing the covers of our oppression  
This is but the lifting of the lid  
That made us go on seething  
Come, we will show men what fear is  
When courage stalks a woman’s raised fist. (pp. 133-134)

Balwant Kaur was brutally stabbed to death in front of her children by her husband after she escaped to a shelter. This paper traces the growth, development and dissolution of this collective, first, and aims to critique the literary content of the first collection. Besides the literary and socio-cultural aspects of this work, I would also like to discuss the sustained effort of maintaining a collective identity and social activism which survives even today among many of these writers, although in a different form.

A brief history of the genesis of *Right of Way* will be interesting at this point. Writers, activist and outreach workers from London and the districts got together in 1984 under the initiative of Ravinder Randhawa with the support from Black Ink, and funding from first the Greater London Council, then the Greater London Arts Association and finally the Lambeth Council. Rahila Gupta, Rukhsana Ahmad and five other women writers joined to write and read each other’s works at workshop sessions. Soon a collective was formed which invited poets and writers of colour for readings and attracted the attention of women writers from other Asian countries of origin. 1988-89, was a very productive year for the AWWC, with as many as 40 programmes including celebrations on International and Asian Women’s Day, Gay Pride, public readings or *mehfils*. The AWWC conducted workshops and writing courses for specific purposes like writing for television that year. Activity of the Collective continued slowly and sporadically till the Lambeth Council completely withdrew its funding in 1996. Working from home, with one underpaid assistant, the Collective ceased to function by the end of that year, to the grief of readers and members alike.

A core group of ten members in the organisation conducted workshops, secured funding and gave Asian women a platform for self-expression from the late 1980s. Its aim was to reduce the isolation of Asian women, hitherto unpublished, through the workshop process. They all sought visibility, credibility, and access to institutions, publishers, and other groups in the community. The workshop method was found useful to them as that was the only way

towards self-discipline. For most of the original ten members and others, the time devoted to writing had to be managed and since there was no money it was exceptionally challenging.

Some of the major practical challenges before the writers were: taking care of daycare facilities for the members' children; writing without "the elitist notion of being born with a talent" as said in the Introduction (p. 5); also dispelling the romantic notion of being able to produce inspired writing after managing career and home. A common problem the writers shared was that of continuing to write steadily and with a disciplined target in order to meet the Thursday evening reading sessions. Translating, deciding on artistic criteria, meeting at a common political and social position acceptable to the increasing number of members were other seemingly arduous tasks, performed with a lot of debate, discussion and an open-minded approach. Yet Ravi Randhawa and her group were successful in publishing their first collection in 1988 with Women's Press, and then their second work,

*Flaming Spirit*, published by Virago in 1994, had its own editorial demands: it had to still reject and suggest modifications to years of work which more or less fulfilled the collective's agenda to committed and new writing. The rigours of publishing also took away the main focus of the collective: "of developing writing in the community, of doing outreach work with Asian women in a wider context." (p. 5). These writers bring out the oppression of people caught in any typical closed society as well as criticize the intolerance and indifference of the white community.

The style is generally pithy, the tone remains gentle yet firm as in ShaziaSahail's and SibaniRaychaudhuri's writing, occasionally ironic or dry as in Randhawa's stories. MeeraSyal's "The Traveller" (96-105) is a bit of a surprise, following much of a SunitiNamjoshifabular structure in a story of a travelling bird-woman and its nurturing of a young girl. However it is written with an infinitely gentle mockery about the real world from which the bird-woman had escaped. The poetry in this volume is clearly protest poetry with its irony, sarcasm and anger suitable for a general readership unused to much verbal or metrical jugglery and gimmicks of imagery. Especially noteworthy are ShaziaSahail's poems, "Buying Romance" (154), "Face" (149), "Veils and Windows" (131). SibaniRaychaudhuri writes expressing disillusionment about the contemporary British Asian girls carrying dreams of careers until they are sixteen and must start queuing up for just jobs and the dole, in her poem "Careers" (18), or about African women addressed by Indian women on a shared history of oppression called "A Letter Long Overdue" (61).

The short stories and poems are based on themes closest to the lives of the writers themselves. Only three stories are set in India: the rest are all about their lives in the diaspora. They deal with themes close to women's hearts, like the process and the aftermath of motherhood: the physical changes, the psychological changes, abortion, miscarriage, confronting the challenge of a physically disabled child, cot-deaths and abandonment. There are numerous stories that deal with love and betrayal, and race being one of the many challenges to happiness. Discrimination at the workplace, the perils of a closed society, the double lives led by young Asian girls at home and away, are some of the other themes.

Overall, there is no stridency and no virulent attack against race or gender stereotypes, thus the literary quality of these stories and poems is quite high.

In terms of language and style, the stories and poems are innovative and experimental, they remain genuine products of the Workshop experience during which stories and poems were read aloud and revised according to the pool of suggestions, and were re-read, and approved before they were ready to be published. The authors wished to portray with authenticity the real lived experiences of the host land and the home, thus they were ruthless with inconsistencies or anything that jarred, and anything that smacked of bias and prejudice. The language has smatterings of Hindi but no glossary was appended to the book. The verse is also very controlled and terse, and is redolent of the harsh realities pertaining to loss and heartache. Baby Talk I and II (pp. 67- 68) is memorable, speaking of the sense of loss of the mother of a disabled child. MeeraSyal's story "The Traveler" (96-105) is written with a poetic sensibility completely alien to anything written by her. It creates a mythical traveler bird-woman who is free to travel and to relieve and rescue others in exploitative situations.

What happened to these writers and what are they doing today are some of the vital questions that arise. Authors like ShaziaSahail and KantaTalukdar have not been part of later brigade of writers who emerged on their own after the Workshop, but are scholars and writers in different areas, associated with NGOs and the academia as independent writers. However among the debutantes, many later writers like Rahila Gupta, MeeraSyal, Ravinder Randhawa, Rukshana Ahmad, SibaniRaychaudhuri and Leena Dhingra have continued to write.

Ravinder Randhawa was born in India and grew up in Warwickshire. In 1984 she founded the Asian Women Writers Collective, which published two major collections: *Right of Way* (1989), and *Flaming Spirit* (1994). She is a frequent speaker at universities in the United Kingdom and abroad, and is also a member of PEN International. She was the Royal Literary Fund Fellow at Tonybee Hall and is currently a Fellow at St. Mary's College, University of Surrey. She is the author of the acclaimed novel, *A Wicked Old Woman* (1987), the teenage novel *Hari-jan* (1992), and the highly praised *The Coral Strand* (2001) and has contributed short stories to many anthologies in the UK, USA and Europe, as well as non-fiction articles.

MeeraSyal has won many awards for writing, like the Betty Trask award and an MBE. She wrote three novels, *Anita and Me* (1996), *Life Isn't All Ha HaHeeHee* (1999), and her latest, *The House of Hidden Mothers* (2015), besides the screen play for the film *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993) and some others. Meera Syal is now better known as a British comedian, writer, playwright, singer, journalist, producer and actress. Syal rose to prominence as one of the teams that created *Goodness Gracious Me* and became one of the UK's best-known Indian personalities portraying Sanjeev's grandmother, Umami, in *The Kumars at No. 42*. She was appointed Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) in the 1997 New Year Honours and in 2003 was listed in *The Observer* as one of the fifty funniest acts in British comedy. MeeraSyal was appointed Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in the 2015 New Year Honours for services to drama and literature.

Rukshana Ahmad is a novelist, translator and playwright. Her novel, *The Hope Chest* (Virago, 1996), is not particularly well known. But Ahmed is more popularly known for her many plays, including the recent *Mistaken . . . Annie Besant in India*, 2007, and for her work adapting plays by other writers for BBC Radio, such as Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, and Nadeem Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers*. These have achieved nominations and short lists for many prestigious British awards. To promote Asian women playwrights, in 1990 she cofounded the Kali Theatre Company in London with actor Rita Wolf. She is the chair and founding trustee of the South Asian Arts and Literature in the Diaspora Archive in the United Kingdom ([www.salidaa.org.uk](http://www.salidaa.org.uk)), and an advisory fellow for the Royal Literary Fund at Queen Mary's College, University of London.

Sibani Raychaudhuri wrote *Bengali Poetry-English Poetry*, along with Ruth Read, in 1988. She also published *Daughters of the East*, a compilation of stories and poems written in Bengali, English and Urdu by local women in Tyneside, in 1990. Leena Dhingra remains a notable figure in Asian television and writing circuit with her novel *Amritvela*, 1988. She graduated from the University of East Anglia with an MA in Creative Writing in 1991 and a PhD in 2001. She has appeared in soap operas like *Doctors*, *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders*, *Doctor Who*, *Life Isn't All Ha HaHeeHee*. Leena Dhingra has also acted in the film *East is East*.

Rahila Gupta and Ravinder Randhawa together managed the AWWC and Rahila Gupta was a member of the Management Committee of Southall Black Sisters, and a leading feminist activist. She is a freelance journalist who has at least thirty articles of note to her credit. She is co-writer of Kiranjit Ahluwalia's autobiography and as a member of the Southall Black Sisters, and she played a significant role in ensuring that a woman, who had fired and killed her husband in his sleep, was stylized as a heroine in her book *Provoked*, later made into a film by Jug Mundra. Her latest book on illegal immigrants as the modern British slaves is *Enslaved. The New British Slavery*, published in 2008.

Other writing by immigrants enjoys much publicity and visibility, though it may be of indifferent literary standards. The collective, however published two short volumes *Read On* (1990) and *If I Say No* (1991), along with their newsletter *Chitti* before *Flaming Spirit* came out in 1994. A reassuringly large number of women joined the group within a few years of their first publication, showing the highly positive response within the limited sphere of creative writing found as in any given society.

The response to this collection came from Asian and Non-Asian readers and researchers more than reviewers, and there were conferences and seminars within the circle of coloured writers at which some writers were invited. Meera Syal was noticed as good publishing material as was Ravinder Randhawa, but most of the other writers remain unknown and unread afterwards and thus fell into oblivion. A special issue of a journal published in Germany called *Hard Times* was dedicated to South Asian presence in British culture. One must remember the fame and popularity of Rushdie and Hanif Qureishi at this time, that itself generated a pale shadow of interest in black women's writing in Britain's literary circuit. But



today, to get the copies of these issues one must necessarily contact the used catalogue of Amazon.com, preferably from the U.K. It's important to know that women writers of Asian origin have made an archive, a repository of artistic and written material which could be viewed or read online as well as physically, at SALIDAA, South Asian Diaspora Literature and Arts Archive, which has almost disintegrated recently, though its online archives can be accessed through Culture 24 (<http://www.culture24.org.uk>). The way this early text, *Right of Way*, is archived and referred to over and over again validates the need for writing this paper to commemorate leading texts that have changed the way we look at the world, and ourselves.

This effort is now continued with an organisation called VAANI which is also charity-funded and publishes poetry and writing by Asian women both online and offline. *Same Difference* is the anthology VAANI published in 2010. Other than that they organise Meet the Author, Workshops, Competitions, Cultural events along with publishing a newsletter, since 2005. This it may be said that VAANI and SALIDAA carried the mantle of the AWWC forward, giving Asian women writers the right of way in the busy traffic of diaspora writing. However, one may wonder if there is any future for these writers in terms of global presence? When will a Preethi Nair become internationally recognized through syllabi, awards, reviews, film adaptations Booker nominations etc? In fact, when will the writers' presence be felt even in bookstores and catalogues?

We cannot stop at an assessment of the 1989 text: we need to examine the history of these movements, their inadequacies, their responses to other groups, and their reception by the mainstream and book circuits. Hanna Siddiqui, an activist with the Southall Black Sisters, a black women's group in West London, for over eleven years, and campaigner for women's rights, anti-racism and other civil and human rights, writes in her essay:

What of the future? The strength of black feminism lies in political activism and alliance building between black women, and with white feminists, anti-racists, secularists and those on the left who support their position. Mainstreaming our concerns is crucial if we are to have our voices heard, as difficult as that task is. Our common agenda has to be that of empowering black women and ensuring that women truly have the freedom to define their own identities and choose their own destinies. Perhaps then we can proudly say that we have come of age. (95-96)

Probably this was the main problem of the collective movement: insularity, lack of alliance building with other black and ethnic minority (BME) groups, which, though it was a major part of the initiative in the beginning, petered out in the end. In fact there are many grey areas of collective women's movements in the history of Asian migrations, and this group also follows a similar trajectory.

Diane Margolis develops a framework for cross-national comparisons of contemporary women's movements. She argues that "there cannot be one correct feminism". (379). She suggests that there are many factors that shape a particular movement: the international context, cross-national influences, the nature of the state, the absence or presence of other

movements, the effects of conservative or liberal political environments, the effects of centralization or dispersion within the movement itself and on feminist involvement in political parties and elections. Though it does not fall within the scope of this article to analyse each of these, a reference must be made to a few of these factors across the history of Asian women's collectives in Britain, and other diasporic spaces.

Tariq Jazeel for example, writes about an early Sri Lankan Women's Association in the UK which had distinctly colonial overtones in its formation. He explores "the collective practices of members of a London-based, upper middle-class/elite Sri Lankan women's association, formed in 1949"(19) especially members' privileged backgrounds, which brought them closer to the mainstream as opposed to women from the lower classes and non-elitist backgrounds. Thus the 'collective'-ness (emphasis added) of the association is lost.

Though this was not quite the case with AWWC, there was an enormous academic emphasis on the membership and organisational front, which brings with it a certain kind of elitism, and which might have caused some kind of distance to have crept up from the ground realities. Rigours of creative norms were numerous, and the collective reading process remained excessively cumbersome. Also, funding issues always caused such associations to disintegrate. Thus the assumption that a collective will flourish on the creative steam of a few talented women is flawed and idealistic.

It is interesting to examine other causes too. In Dina Okamoto's analysis, she extends theoretical models of ethnic boundary formation to account for the shifting and layered nature of ethnic boundaries. She explores how organizing along an ethnic boundary affects collective efforts at the pan ethnic level: it may be affected by competition with other ethnic or racial groups, and occupational and other kinds of segregation among Asian subgroups depresses the rate of pan-Asian collective action. The results also show that "intra- group competition discourages pan-Asian collective action, and organizing along ethnic lines generally facilitates it"(811) .Though her extremely well-quantified research is based on Asian Americans, these factors are critical determinants of the success and failure of collective action among Asian groups.

Irene Perez Fernandez finds, in relation to writers like Andrea Levy, Zadie Smith and Monica Ali, that there is "a certain reluctance to consider them as British writers and a tendency to label their work as being closer to that of post-colonial authors for 'conveniently' thematic reasons" (146). The label sits aptly on the writers of the Asian Women Writers Collective too. Though they write about contemporary Britishness, except Monica Ali, they are referred to in seminar papers and conference themes more than reviews, booklists, or shelves and displays in stores. However, male writers are always making it to the awards lists, their texts are being filmed, and are awarded prizes. NirmalPuwar assesses the impact of two academic workshops held exclusively for South Asian women scholars and academicians. She states that "In an atmosphere of racism and indifference, without these opportunities the work of South Asian women could easily be undermined by the quiet discouragements of talent killers" (137). The same is true of fiction writing, and *Right of Way* and *Flaming Spirit*, and other publications of the AWWC have to be appreciated because without them, so many

voices would remain unheard. Similar enthusiasm needs to be expressed by VAANI, an online Asian writers' and other artists' portal with a literary magazine, and other organisations, without which creative expressions of the.

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## **Dalit Literature: An Intervention in ‘Caste’and ‘Literary Aesthetics’**

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**Abstract:** In the contemporary socio-cultural and political scenario, ‘caste’ has taken the centre stage in critical analysis. Writings on caste and about those suffering as the result of this hierarchical and discriminatory system have entered the mainstream academia under the rubric of ‘Dalit Literature.’ These writings have not only challenged caste system, but have provided a new dimension to the understanding of the aesthetic value of literature. Noted Dalit writers such as Om Prakash Valmiki, NamdeoDhasal, and BaburaoBagul have broken the conventional understandings of ‘literature’ by including disturbing images and languages in their writing. Most importantly, they have portrayed the Dalits as subjects of analysis rather than objects of interpretation. Studies have been conducted on the thematic and structural aspects of Dalit literature, and a major attraction about Dalit literature has remained its ‘activism’ aspect. But how far has it influenced our views about caste and about literature? Do we see Dalit literature as invoking a self reflection among non-Dalits about their perception/assumptions about Dalits? Or, does Dalit literature remain in the arena of ‘by Dalits and for Dalits’? In the light of these questions this study aims to investigate the effectiveness of Dalit literature in bringing about a change in society as well as in the understanding of the aesthetic value of literature.

**Keywords:** Dalit Aesthetics, Caste, Dalit Standpoint, Resistance Literature

Commenting on what constitutes ‘Dalit literature,’SharankumarLimbale in his seminal book, *Towards an Aesthetics of Dalit Literature* (2004) writes,

Dalit writers believe that Dalit literature is a movement. They see their literature as a vehicle for their pain, sorrow, questions, and problems. But when readers read the works of Dalit writers exclusively as ‘literature,’ the common ground between the writer and the reader is disturbed. (105)

Dalit literature disturbs the ‘pleasure’ value of canonical literature by bringing in ‘disturbing’ images and language. Hence, the common understanding of ‘literary aestheticism’ as referring to ‘beauty’ and ‘artistry’ is violated by Dalit literature.

Popularised by the Dalit panthers such as NamdeoDhasal and BaburaoBagul, Dalit writings have entered the mainstream academia under the rubric of ‘Dalit Literature.’ Studies have been conducted on the thematic and structural aspects of Dalit literature, and a major attraction about Dalit literature has remained its ‘activism.’ But how far has it influenced our views about caste and about literature? Do we see Dalit literature as invoking a self-reflection among non-Dalits about their perception/assumptions about Dalits? Or, does Dalit literature remain in the arena of ‘by Dalits and for Dalits’? In the light if these questions this study aims

to investigate the effectiveness of Dalit literature in bringing a change in society as well as in the understanding of the aesthetic value of literature.

Often marked as a ‘discourse of pity’ (Limbale vii), literary and cultural representations of the lower castes and tribals have mostly been based on writings by Mulk Raj Anand (in his novel, *Untouchable*), and Premchand (in the short story, “Kafan”), both of which depicted lower castes as either victims or heartless brutes. In the contemporary scenario, when Dalit studies has become part of the mainstream academia, these authors’ writings have not only come to be critiqued because of their stereotypical representations of the lower caste people, but also due to their upper caste identity which removes them from the ‘reality’ of caste oppression. Thus, questions have not only been raised as to whether the Dalits can speak for themselves, but also about who can speak for them.

Dalit literature draws its components from Jyotiba Phule and B. R. Ambedkar who, through their extensive writings and actions, promoted a massive resistance to the institution of caste. However, as Arjun Dangle in *The Poisoned Bread* points out, the Dalit voices during the Ambedkarite period were expressed mostly through traditional oral folk arts such as songs, *tamasha*, and *jalsa*. It was during the 1950s when the first batch of Dalit youths graduated from college and set up a literary body, the Siddharth Sahitya Sangh that Dalit voices emerged through writing. Access to education, therefore, becomes instrumental in building a voice of dissent through literature. One of the major issues raised by Phule and Ambedkar was how Brahmanism, by restricting knowledge to specific castes, prevents lower caste people from having access to education. Phule by establishing schools for lower castes and for women, and Ambedkar by becoming a living manifestation to show how knowledge gives power, emphasized the importance of education for the socio-cultural and political emancipation of Dalits. They argued that until and unless people of the lower caste know what scriptures and *shastras* are about, they will not be able to formulate resistance against the oppressions they face. They also pointed out that this education should be influenced by western methods because traditional Sanskrit education is imbued with brahmanical ideals. In his short story, “Mother,” Baburao Bagul shows how brahmanical education imparted in the Sanskrit language, causes epistemic violence. Such education not only promotes brahmanical ideals and strongly establishes the caste system, but also makes the knowledge and language of Dalits invalid.

The Dalit literary and political boom in the 70s and 80s thus brought a vehement challenge for these brahmanical standards. Their writings, full of slang and everyday language, forced the readers to recognize the existence of caste system which seems unfamiliar in the contemporary urban setups, but is very much present in our daily lives. Dalit literature arose out of such discontents where it sought to challenge not only the caste system but also literary representations of Dalits. Thus, Dalit literature became a mouthpiece of voice resistance.

This ‘resistance’ does not simply create a separate body of literature. The aim of Dalit literature is to intervene into the existing hegemonic literary canon and revise it so that multiplicity of forms, styles, and languages are accepted as ‘literature.’ It is the hegemony of Brahmanism and its claims of superiority of knowledge that Dalit literature, both in real life

and in the literary sphere, aims to challenge. In fact, the very term ‘Dalit,’ coming from Marathi, suggests those who are oppressed or ground down. Underlying the term, therefore, is a sense of political awareness, rejection of state-created categorization, and rejection of caste system where caste-names perform a major role in determining and perpetuating caste hierarchies. This rejection also challenges the originary concept which links caste to birth and profession. By adopting the term ‘Dalit,’ it is at the same time presenting a critique of essentialist nature of categories and proclaiming conscious political resistance.

For Dalits, therefore, literature and activism go hand in hand, and literature becomes a tool to voice dissent. Sharmila Rege in *Writing Caste/ Writing Gender* argues that “the intention [of Dalit testimonies] is not one of literariness but of communicating the situation of a group’s oppression, imprisonment and struggle” (13). While I would like to go one step further and claim in the line of Limbale that Dalit literature has challenged the concept of ‘literariness’ as understood in the canonical sense, what becomes apparent through Rege is that literature for the Dalits is nothing short of activism.

In a memorial lecture delivered in IIT Kanpur, Ritu Menon, the editor of Women Unlimited, a leading feminist publishing house in India, called our attention to dissenting voices as instrumental in challenging hegemonic systems pervading our society. In protest against the Dadri lynching, a number of eminent Indian writers gave up their awards given by the government. Commenting on the right to dissent and the right to life, Nayantara Sahgal emphasized that intellectual life is not about abstract ideas. An intellectual life provides an interior view of the social structures that often remain repressed. Dalit writers perform the function of organic intellectuals in creating political consciousness among the masses. Their writings are wrought with political agenda.

Bama in *Karukku* points out how writing is an act of personal and political struggle. Emphasizing the necessity of collective resistance, Bama writes

There are other Dalit hearts like mine, with a passionate desire to create a new society made up of justice, equality and love. They, who have been the oppressed, are now themselves like the double-edged *karukku*, challenging their oppressors. . . . Instead of being more and more beaten down and blunted, they must unite, think about their rights, and battle for them. (xxiii-xxiv)

What is important is the recognition of their voices. Rather than representing the Dalits as mute victimized others, it is necessary to identify the locations and instances of resistance. Moreover, the portrayal of their daily lives becomes instrumental because for Dalits, every day is a struggle for survival. It also challenges the canonical notion as to what counts as subject matter of literature. Speaking from the standpoint of Dalits, Dalit literature challenges literary expectations and posits them as subjects of the narrative rather than objects.

But what are some of the characteristics of Dalit literature? Limbale in *Towards an Aesthetics of Dalit Literature* critiques the triadic concept of ‘satyam’ (the true), shivam (the sacred), and sundaram (the beautiful), which have remained a benchmark to assess aesthetic value of literature in the Indian literary sphere, while underscoring its brahmanical nature. These

concepts construct a system of knowledge that is rooted in Brahmanism, and promotes sankritization. In this process, not only are Dalit people's lives and languages marked as unworthy of use, they are marked as invalid.

Pointing towards the subversive capacity of Dalit literature, Raj Gauthaman puts forward his argument with reference to the use of language by Dalits. He argues that it is a conscious attempt to disrupt the upper caste language proprieties and to expose and discredit the existing language, its grammar, its refinements, and its falsifying order as symbols of dominance. The poems by Namdeo Dhasal take a mutinous stance by using slangs, colloquial language. In "Hunger" he writes:

Hunger  
Which came first, seed or tree?  
Hunger you make things too difficult  
Hunger just tell us what breed this monkey is  
And if you can't  
Then we will screw  
Seventeen generations of you  
Hunger, you and your mother . . .

This articulation is very different from the romanticised portrayal of pain by Mulk Raj Anand. Dhasal's poem hits us. It hits the hegemonic assumptions that one's caste, acquired through birth, is an unchangeable factor. What Dhasal shows is that caste, in fact, is a dynamic social construct, created and historically perpetuated by the dominants to serve their purpose. Thus this poem challenges the literary criteria as well as the system of caste. Rather than portraying Dalits as mute victims silently bearing pain, this poem shows active resistance which arises from political consciousness. This resistance is not an individual revenge. It is a collective challenge towards the very structures that dictate the inequalities in our society. Moreover, it gives prevalence to the colloquial form of language.

Laura Brueck, in *Writing Resistance: The Rhetorical Imagination of Hindi Dalit Literature*, comments that Dalit literature is marked by realism. The purpose of Dalit literature in using realism "is to get their readership to acknowledge the ethical conflict at the heart of [the stories] and then to recognize it reflected in the world around them and ultimately transform it into a new reality of a just society" (99). This argument of realist representation ironically goes back to authenticity claims fixing Dalit literature as the expression of Dalits by Dalits. The claim of authenticity is dangerous because it posits Dalit literature as having a separatist agenda and puts the responsibility of talking about caste only on those who are born as Dalits. The approach presents Dalit literature as 'another' form of literature. Such additive methods prevent Dalit literature from having any effect on the existing literary practices and social structures. By making 'Dalit' an identity-based, given category, it falls into the very trap it tried to challenge, i.e., the originary concept provided by Brahmanism. It also prevents any coalition from happening between different groups for a more effective politics. Moreover, simply narrating experiences is not a political act. One needs to understand that experiences are deeply rooted in the social and the ideological, and are

constructed by them. Hence, we cannot take the experiences at face value. We need to question how those experiences are created, and what the implications are.

Therefore, I see Dalit literature as promoting a Dalit standpoint, a perspective from the point of view of the Dalits. Sandra Harding defines standpoint as a conscious political position which examines how knowledge and power are related. Arguing that dominant epistemologies provide only a partial view, Harding believes that the standpoint of the oppressed provides a more holistic view because it takes into account both the oppressor and the oppressed. In her Introduction to *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader*, she writes:

Standpoint theory's focus on the historical and social locatedness of knowledge projects and on the way collective political and intellectual work can transform a source of oppression into a source of knowledge and potential liberation, makes a distinctive contribution to social justice projects as well as to our understanding of preconditions for the production of knowledge. (10)

Dalit literature not only intervenes into dominant brahmanical epistemologies by proving Dalit experience as a valid source of knowledge, it tries to redefine the socio-cultural and the academic definitions of what counts as 'knowledge.' The Dalit standpoint thus unfolds the power politics operative in structures of caste and literature. In both cases, the systemic brahmanical control determines who can have control over caste and literary expression and what is worthy of articulation. Thus, to bring Spivak's concept, it is not that the Dalits cannot speak. The structures are built in a way so that their voices are never heard. Dalit literature through its 'unconventional' methods is building scope for the formulation of a new aesthetic and making space for the unheard voices to speak out.

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## ***Rasa* for Self-Censorship: Towards a Post-Theory Praxis**

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**Abstract:** Post-theory is a resistance to the ontological certitude imposed on any body of knowledge. Ontological certitude is an act of reducing the identity of the other to what you think it is. It destroys the potentiality of the other possibilities inherent in the substance thereby giving the identity of the substance a sense of finality. The Other keeps on escaping the framework of the identity that we ascribe to it. If we understand a body of knowledge in a particular way it is not because that body of knowledge inherently or naturally demands that understanding, rather it is because we employ certain specific conditions of reading to understand that episteme. Founded on the Deleuzian idea of differential ontology, Post-theory aims to dismantle the current organization of the episteme in order to actualize the vast reservoir of potentials inherent in it. To put it very crudely, Post-theory is an attempt to unravel the hitherto unthought-of in any body of knowledge by moving beyond the present conditions of understanding. So it stresses the need for incessant experimentation with episteme thereby constantly exploring the possibility of becoming. Anti-essentialist and anti-foundationalist, it is also a political praxis, at war with all sorts of identities, representations and permanent organizing principles, which ties the subject to a particular essence, fosters essentialism, and destroys the possibility of change.

Keeping in mind the postulates of Post-theory, this paper attempts to take a break with the conventional understanding of the concept of *rasa* as a theory of aesthetics, and demonstrate that it was also a tool for censoring the voices of dissent in art and literature. A close-reading of the concept of *rasa* reveals that it contains an anti-essentialist ethos that disrupts the state of being. This praxis attests an attitudinal shift concerning the ontology of any episteme and the dissipation of an unhealthy cathexis that checks “creative transformation”.

**Keywords:** Post-theory, *rasa*, *dhvani*, Indian literary criticism.

Literary theory brought about a revolutionary change in literature by providing the practitioners of literary criticism with numerous entry-points to a text. It, as Barry rightly points out in *Beginning Theory*, came in response to the liberal humanist approach to literature which held the view that the meaning of a text is monolithic in nature in all spatio-temporal locations. With the emergence of theory during the post-war period, the focus of criticism shifted from its fetish for authentic meaning to difference in meaning. Theory showed that a text does not contain any meaning in itself; rather the meaning is constructed by the reader so no meaning can be privileged as authentic. Yet another contribution that

theory has made to criticism is its revision of the concept of literature. If traditional literary criticism had set its focus only on certain types of writing by making a strict division between the literary and non-literary use of language, theory sees everything as a piece of literature. The practitioners of theory often prefer to replace the term 'literature' with 'text' to avoid the evocation of the traditional definition of literature which demands certain prerequisites for a piece of writing to become literature. According to Terry Eagleton "there is no essence of literature, whatsoever" (8), and the idea of literature is functional rather than ontological. What he means is that anything can become literature if we want them to be so. In short, in theory anything can be a text, let it be a poem, a novel, a street sign, an arrangement of buildings on a city block or a style of clothing. So far theory has been used as a tool to read a text from multiple vantage points. We have already seen that each time a text gets deconstructed a new system of knowledge about that text gets generated.

If everything is a 'text' for theory, then what about theory's own position as a text? Post-theory takes its cue from this question. So far theory has been considered a tool to deconstruct texts, and post-theory blurs this distinction between theory as a subject and text as an object. In Post-theory, the theory itself turns out to be a text. By constantly deconstructing the narratives of theory, post-theory rejects the sclerosis of theoretical writing, "the hardening of theory's lexical and syntactical arteries" (McQuillan 9). Post-theory can be defined as a resistance to the ontological certitude imposed upon any theoretical position. The exponents of post-theory see it as a desiring machine and a theoretical framework, as Deleuze puts it, as a Body without Organs. To understand the idea of BwO, it is important to know what a body is. A body can be defined as a whole composed of parts which proffer the whole a particular essence by standing in some definite relation to one another. And the connection that these parts make with each other to give the body an essence is not permanent. The parts have the capacity to change their relation with each other as they get affected by other bodies. When there is a change in the relation of these parts, the essence of the body also changes. Everything that exists in this world is a body, a whole composed of various parts where the parts stand in a definite relation to one another. A theoretical position is also a body. The ontological status that a theoretical position presently possesses is the result of the relation that these parts maintain with each other.

A Body without Organs is a body where the relation between these parts (that compound a body) keeps on changing, thereby resisting the ontological certitude. "In other words, the BwO is opposed to the organizing principles that structure, define and speak on behalf of collective assemblage of organs, experience or states of being" (Parr 33). What initiates changes on the surface of BwO is a desiring machine. Deleuze's concept of desire is a challenge to both the psychoanalytical conception of desire as an insatiable lack regulated by Oedipal law as well as the idea of desire as pleasure. Deleuze on the other hand says that desire is a productive force that endlessly experiments with the organizational patterns of parts to create new bodies. It is continuous and oriented towards its process or movement rather than a teleological point of completion.

For Post-theory, a theoretical framework is a Body without Organs, i.e. an assemblage that does not have a permanent pattern of organisation on its own. Post-theory functions as a

desiring machine that constantly and endlessly experiments with the narratives of theory to bring about new organizational patterns. Ferdinand de Toro in his *Explorations in Post-theory: Towards a Third Space* opines, “It [Post-theory] is a constant questioning of the ontological status of knowledge” (Toro 112). Martin McQuillan observes that Post-theory is a situation that one can never get to. In other words, it is directed towards continual becoming. He says, “Post-theory is a set of thinking which discovers itself in a state of constant deferral, a positioning of reflexivity and an experience of questioning which constantly displaces itself. . .” (McQuillan 12).

A keen awareness of these principles of Post-theory always encourages a critic to challenge the preferred readings of the institutionalized canon in theory. This project makes such an attempt on Indian literary theories which have not yet come out of the canonical readings prescribed for them. In his introduction to *Ardhantaranyasam*, Sreejan teases out two extreme dispositions towards what we call Indian Literary theories which we can name Anglicist and Orientalist. The Anglicist approach to Indian literary theories sees these theoretical positions as obsolete and exotic, and exhorts to focus exclusively on the western literary praxis. For them, the native is irrational and the western is rational and logical. This contemptuous disposition of the Anglicist group towards oriental disposition is very much the aftermath of the imperialist discourse on the east which brands the orient as exotic, barbaric and irrational. Opposite to Anglicist camp is the orientalist approach. Those who hold an orientalist approach to Indian literary theories show a strong desire to take recourse to the classical knowledge in its primitive form. They are driven by the desire to reclaim an identity and a knowledge system that are Indian. These two dispositions—Anglicist and Orientalist—will not make any productive effort in the arena of Indian literary theory because they either blindly reject it or valorise it in its primitive form. Sreejan says, “I would not say that we should boycott the western ideas. Nor would I agree with the view that we should take ancient Indian ideas in their purest form” (Sreejan 15). Rather what we need, he says, “is the creation of new knowledge out of these ancient critical practices.” This can be made possible only by putting them in conversation with the spirit of the moment.

Sreejan holds that our reluctance to put our native philosophical positions in an active dialogue with other systems of knowledge stunted their growth. He neatly summarises his plan in the following words:

Suppose somebody generates a new thought from the ideas of Barthes, either by deconstructing them or by connecting them with other ideas. I call such a move an original and unique contribution. What matters is not where the knowledge comes from, but whether a new system of knowledge is produced. What I mean is that instead of considering our ancient epistemologies as the ultimate truth, we need to see them only as the beginning of the endless reconsiderations and deconstructions that are to come in future. (14-15).

Taking its cue from this idea of Sreejan, this paper attempts to create a new stream of knowledge about *rasa* theory, showing how the idea of *Kavyasastrin* general and the

concepts of *dhvani* and *rasa* in particular coupled with the concept of *aucitya* or decorum function as a tool for pre-production censoring for the author.

Anandavardhana's Dhvani School is an important movement in the history of the concept of *rasa* propounded by Bharata. *Dhvani* came as a response to what Bharata has left unspoken about *rasa* in his *Natyasastra*—what is the most important aspect that constitutes *rasa* in a work of art? According to Anandavardhana, the most important element that constitutes *rasa* is *dhvani* or poetic suggestion. *Dhvani* is the tertiary meaning of a word (*vyanjana*) which is suggested through either primary meaning (*abhidha*) or secondary meaning (*laksana*). To cite an example of *dhvanikavya*, we can look at a poem that Anandavardhana gives in his *Dhvanyaloka*.

You are free to go wandering, holy man  
The little dog was killed today  
By the fierce lion making its lair  
In the thicket on the banks of Goda river

(Anandavardhana 16)

The explicit meaning of the poem is that the holy man can wander around on the banks of Goda River. But what the poem actually suggests is a prohibition: i.e., although the dog that used to nag the mendicant is no more, the fierce lion that killed the dog is still roaming around on the banks of the Goda River so that the mendicant should not go there. A lot of similar suggestive poems can be found in *Dhvanyaloka*.

The question that I would like to ask here is this: Is *dhvanikara* at liberty to express whatever s/he feels like? Anandavardhana says that *dhvanikara* cannot be let loose to suggest whatever one feels like. The ultimate aim of *dhvani* is the creation of *rasa*, and if what is suggested cannot create *rasa*, then *dhvani* cannot serve its purpose. So *dhvanikara* should make sure that what is suggested should not cause *rasabhasa* or hindrance to *rasa*. *Rasa*, according to Anandavardhana, is closely linked to the decorum of the society. Decorum is always a disciplinary mechanism to regulate the behaviour of individuals in any society. By observing a strict adherence to the rules of propriety, *dhvanikavya* stays away from actions that call into question the existing social praxis. By asking the author to stick to decorum, Anandavardhana is preventing the writer from dealing with topics and styles that subvert the status quo. In the ancient period, especially during the period from 6<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> century AD, there was a belief that a strict adherence to *Kavyasastra* which dictates what and how to write is necessary to produce good literature. What was at work under the veneer of the guidelines to produce good literature was, in fact, a desire to thwart any attempt that goes against the interest of the dominant force. In *Dhvanyaloka*, Anandavardhana enumerates a whole lot of situations that a writer should avoid to keep up the decorum and stay away from hampering the *rasa*.

Anandavardhana holds that the plots, whether they are invented or borrowed from known sources, should be subjected to rigorous vetting in terms of decorum: "If in a plot adopted from a well-known source, the poet is faced with situations conflicting with the intended

sentiment, he should be prepared to leave out such incidence, inventing in their place even imaginary ones in conformity to the intended sentiment” (74). The idea of decorum of which the strict adherence was said to be necessary to avoid *rasabhasa*, in reality, functioned as a surveillance mechanism to frustrate any anti-authoritarian move. Bhojadeva gives a range of examples of literary works whose plots have been revised to conform to the laws of decorum in the society and to avoid *rasabhasa*. In the classical age in Indian history, art and literature were patronized by the kings. So the idea of decorum which is said to avoid *rasabhasa* was conveniently used to protect the interest of the ruling class. In *InrdoshaDasaradha*, Rama is exiled not by his father King Dasaradha, but by two magical creatures imitating his father and his step-mother Kaikeyi. In Bhatta Narayaka’s *Veni-samhara*, Dushasana’s blood is drunk not by Bheema, but by a demon who has taken possession of him. All these alterations in the plot cemented the idea that the king cannot make a mistake, unless he is controlled by some metaphysical forces.

According to Anandavardhana, breach of the laws of decorum shows that “the poet’s want of education is very great” (72). In a nutshell, conforming to decorum is considered a sign of poetic excellence as well as a way to avoid *rasabhasa*. The ruling class that patronized literature during the classical age achieved two goals through the idea of *rasa* in conjunction with propriety. First, they could prevent people who were reading these literatures from questioning the status quo. Since all the texts valorised and conformed to the existing social practices, the readers did not have the option to think about an alternate way of living or the politics of their current life. Secondly, through the constant consumption of literature that strictly followed the rules of decorum, the readers modelled their lives according to the interest of the dominant force. This shows that *dhvanikavya* is not a purely aesthetic entity where the poet can suggest whatever s/he feels like, rather it was a political tool to model the behaviour of a generation.

The rules of decorum that Anandavardhana invokes in *Dhvanyaloka* are borrowed from Bharata’s *Natyasastra*. Anandavardhana opines whatever Bharata has said about the decorum of the character’s delineation of emotions in drama is equally applicable in poetry also (Bharatha 72). In “The Origin of Drama” in *Natyasastra*, Bharata observes:

The drama teaches the path of Virtue to those who carry on their duty. The modes of love to those eager to get it fulfilled; it admonishes the uncivilized and the ill-natured ones; encourages self-control of those who are disciplined; makes the crowd bold; the heroic ones are given more incentives, the men of poor intellect are enlightened and the wisdom of the learned is enhanced. (9)

This very clearly shows that *Natyasastra* is not only a treatise on dramaturgy which guides the author as to how to produce an excellent drama; it is rather a powerful tool to censor the writer and socially condition the spectators.

To corroborate this argument, I would like to show how the hegemonic forces try to fashion female subjectivity by generating the ideal model of woman. Bharata lays down a lot of laws for the representation of female characters in a drama. He classifies female characters into

three broad categories namely *uttama* and *adhama*. Bharata defines the *uttama* types of heroines as follows:

The superior female character is a woman of tender nature. She pays heed to superior persons' advice. She is never cruel. Bashful by nature and good in her manners, she possesses natural beauty nobility and similar qualities. She is grave and forbearing. (513)

This description shows that the *uttama* kind of woman is obedient to authority, and does not go against the prevalent social order established by the dominant force. Bharatha says that she is bashful, which shows that she does not like to be in a public space. Being forbearing, she can silently put up with suffering. While talking about *devi* (divine) kind of women who fall in the category of *uttama*, Bharatha mentions that *uttama* woman is of middling sexual desire. It points to the fact that a woman who explicitly expresses her sexual desires cannot be considered a woman of superior character. In short, a woman of good quality is always subservient to others.

Since Bharata opines that the inferior male and female characters share common traits, I think it is appropriate to take a glance at the characteristics of inferior male characters to know how he sees the women of inferior quality.

The inferior male character uses harsh words. They are ill mannered and base in their mental spirit. They do not hesitate to commit crimes. They are irascible and violent. They engage themselves in useless activities too. Haughty in manner, they are ungrateful. They do not hesitate to dishonour venerable person. They are... treacherous and eager to commit sinful deeds. (514)

From this description of the inferior male character, we can infer that an inferior female character is outspoken, ill-mannered, violent, and a daredevil. *Asura*, *Raksasa* and *Pisaca* categories of women also belong to the *adhama* kind of women. To get a clear idea about what an *adhama* character is, let us take a glance at the features of these women that Bharatha enlists. The woman in this category transgresses laws of piety, is fond of wine and meat, very proud or fickle minded, always irritable and hot tempered, harsh, and quick to quarrel. A woman is said to possess the nature of a *Raksasa* if she has large and broad limbs, red wide eyes, and coarse hairs. A woman of *pisaca* category behaves atrociously during sexual dalliance; has a loud voice; roams around at night in parks and gardens; and is fond of liquor, meat and oblations.

From this description, it is quite obvious that a woman who is assertive and expressive; who is not subservient to the status quo of the society is considered an *adhama* kind of woman. Bharata mentions that an *adhama* sort of female character cannot become the central character of a drama as she is a bad example for the society. He is driven by the conception that an ideal woman should always be obedient and submissive. By dictating the author to present a woman who is obedient, submissive and unassertive as the ideal character, Bharatha was conditioning female subjectivity in such a way that a woman does not transgress the authority of men and the dominant class. By propagating the notion that conformity to these

*Kavyasastris* necessary to become a creative writer of first grade, the ruling class was in fact trying to win the writer's consent to create literary models, characters and contents that conform to their interest.

From this analysis, what becomes clear is that the formulation of a literary substance follows a strict pre-given structure. This kind of a prescriptivism based on elitism is highly conservative and suppresses the emergence of alternative ideologies. According to Deborah Cameron "Prescriptivism could refer to any form of linguistic regulation, but in practice, it is strongly associated with those forms that are most conservative, elitist and authoritarian" (Cameron 185). This prescription (of methods and modes of writing) decides the nature of the treatment of the content in a *kavya* even before it is produced. In other words, even though the name and the local habitation of the characters and the objects change from *Kavya* to *Kavya*, the essence underlying them is maintained by decorum in accordance with their position and status. By specifying the nature of the literary content and its context, the must/ -must-not-be-expressed through *rasa* and *dhvani*, Bharatha and Anandavardhana retain a strong control over expression. In this sense, *dhvani* and *rasa*, along with its purely aesthetic values, become a prescription of ideal writing/speech/expression.

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## Judith Wright: Voice of the Aboriginals

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**Abstract:** Judith Wright has empathetically taken up the cause of the aborigines in her poetry. As a voice of the aboriginals, she wrote about the violence of long-term colonialism plaguing the land of Australia. She went forth and struck like a warrior at the mightiest white egos, reminding them of the atrocities committed in the continent. It was the struggle of the aboriginal people that inspired her to write. She celebrated aboriginal survival in the face of adversity, lamented prejudice and oppression, and offered an optimistic view of the potential for interracial harmony in the country. She was committed to fight for the land and the aboriginal people, and used her writing as a weapon on behalf of the aborigines. She gave a message to the world about what was happening in her land and thus with her writings opened a new, hitherto undefined area in Australian poetry. Her poems offer an insight into the face and soul of the country. She gave voice to those Aboriginal people who had suffered and died from oppression and dispossession without being heard across the land. Wright is the first white Australian poet to publically name and explore the experiences of the indigenous people. Her work is provocative and emotional.

**Keywords:** Aborigines, Silence and voice, Usurpation, and Oppression

Poetry is one of the principal arts of life, the most universal which has the ability to connect reason and emotion, relate us to and the country and society in which we live. The present paper attempts to elucidate and analyze the poetry of the leading Australian poet Judith Arundel Wright for the cause of aborigines. She is a major voice who, as a social activist, has emphatically taken up the cause of the aborigines in her poetry. This essay attempts an intensive study of her poetic text, *Collected Poems*.

Australia, the “oldest continent” or the “Last of Lands”, which was discovered in 1770 by Captain Cook, was for ages inhabited by the Stone Age men who had since been exterminated or driven into the interior by English convicts, administrators, and settlers. The original inhabitants of Australia are known as aborigines who were of Asian origin and were without a written dialect for about 40,000 years. Traditionally, more than five hundred tribes were hunters and food gatherers, each with a different dialect. During the colonial and Postcolonial era, gold attracted immigrants of all nationalities to Australia. Overall the Australian aborigines went through several stages of oppression and dispossession as they first lost their land, then their culture and identity, and finally the evidence of their prior occupation. Australian literature is influenced by a combination of British, American, and native sources. The Australian writer probably has to cope with three aspects: as an alien or an exile, as a seeker of new freedom and adventurer in a new land, and as a native person who considers himself a human being to live at peace with himself and his environment. Prominent Australian writers include A.D. Hope, Kenneth Slessor, Gwen Harwood, Henry

Kendall, Les Murray, Charles Harper, Patrick White, and Judith Wright. Kevin Hart a poet and critic remarked that Wright's first collection of poetry, *The Moving Image*, exhibits the importance of Australian history, place, and environment in Aboriginal culture. Australia is a racist country where the poets care for Australian consciousness and cosmopolitanism in their poetry, which can be divided into three main periods: the nineteenth century marked by the efforts of Charles Harper and Henry Kendall, twentieth century up to the Second World War, and the period from 1940 to the present.

The Australian landscape entered the realm of poetry and the movement was called *Jindywarobak* that is a certain kind of consciousness through which it was realized that there was something missing in the landscape. This feeling of something missing in the Australian landscape directed the attention of the Australian poets to the myths and the lores of the Aborigines. For instance, the *Alchera* myth of the *Arunta* tribe fascinated a number of poets. According to this myth, spirits continued to dwell in the places where they had lived their incarnated lives. Thus, the Aborigines found their way into the Australian poetry. Even non-indigenous Australians wrote on Aboriginal themes including Thomas Kennelly, Donald Stuart, and Judith Wright. For instance, Hugh McCrae, Kenneth Slessor, Shaw Neilson, David Campbell, Vance Palmer, Xavier Herbert, Eleanor Dark, Eve Langley, Frank Dolby Davidson, Kylie Tennant, Mary Gilmore, Roland Robinson, Kath walker, and Judith Wright abide deep within the Australian soil and culture. In the modern era, the Aborigines of Australia, the Maoris of New Zealand, the Laplanders of Finland, the Indians of Peru, and the natives of Canada have been ventilating their demands through many literary and socio-political movements.

Judith Wright, one of Australia's most distinguished and best loved poets, is an ardent conservationist who unites in her poetry a vision of wholeness, a synthesis of body, mind, and spirit that stands counter to the alienation of modern life to the literature under the influence of the imagists and symbolist Ezra Pound, Amy Lowell, W.B. Yeats, and T.S. Eliot. She was the first woman appointed to the council of Australian National University, President of Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland, and Patron of many social organizations including Amnesty International. She received several awards including Grace Leven Prize (1950), Australian World Prize (1984), and Human Rights Commission Award for her poetry volume *Collected Poems*. Besides poetry, she wrote her autobiography, *Half a Lifetime*, critical works as *Preoccupations in Australia*, stories, children Books, essays, and biographies. She was a prolific Australian poet, critic, and short-story writer, who published more than fifty-six volumes of poetry and short stories in her writing career of more than thirty years as a published poet.

Eve Fesl, a *Gabi Gabi* woman, defines the term in the Aboriginal Law Bulletin: "The word Aborigine refers to an indigenous person of any country if it is to be used to refer to us as a specific group of people, it should be spelt with s capital "A" that is Aborigines." The most popular tribes are *Anangu*, *Bama*, *Koori*, *Murri*, *Noongar*, *Nunga*, and *Palawah*. Judith Wright's poetic mind has a pioneering conscience for the complete understanding of the land and the European Australians' relationship with the aborigines—the first inhabitants of the country. The dispossession of the aborigines by the White man induced introspection in her

poetry as she unveils the shadow over the dark truth full of terrible wrongs inflicted on these original inhabitants: Where does it all begin?/ If evil has a beginning/it may disclose it, meaning” (Wright 324). She confesses, “The ground we walked on as children, in which our food grew and from which we gained a living, once had been wet with Aboriginal blood (34). She was the first white Australian poet to publically name and explore the experiences of indigenous people in her eminent poem “Nigger’s Leap, New England.”Based on a particular incident of European reprisal in New South Wales in 1844, the poem recalls how the hapless Nigger’s pursued to the top of the “lipped cliff,”“screamed falling in flesh” from those heights and then were “silent.”

Swallow the spine of range; be dark, O lonely air.  
Make a cold quilt across the bones and skull  
that screamed falling in flesh from the lipped cliff  
and then were silent, waiting for the flies.

....

Did we not know their blood channelled our rivers?  
and the black dust our crops ate was their dust?  
O all men are one man at last...  
... And there they lie that were ourselves writ strange. (15-16)

Wright has commented that the story of Nigger’s Leap became deeply symbolic for her. Veronica Brady proposes that although this story is one that most people would rather forget or “shuffle back into a violent and miserable past,” for Wright “that dark cliff head, with the depth of shadows below it in the gulfs, is still a potent place” (Brady 94). The sentiments recorded in these lines are a good example of what J.J. Heal has termed as the “we-phenomenon,” an expanded consciousness that acknowledges collective responsibility for a particular event of history that sees the victim as a segment of the self-inflicted wound. Her poem “Bora Ring” is a splendid expression about the vanishing as well as the vanished race. It deals with the annihilation of Aboriginal culture by White settlement.

The song is gone; the dance  
is secret with dancers in the earth,  
the ritual useless, and the tribal story  
lost in an alien tale. (Wright 8)

The poem “Four Poems from New Zealand” (396) shows her concern for the “Maori” tribe and “Nigger’s Leap, New England” cries and mourns over the vanishing race “Coolamon.”Theme of colonial throes, masculine orientation, and consciousness towards Aboriginal vexation get reflection in a number of her poems, where these humble tribes become objects of wonder and contempt.

Judith Wright celebrates the primary act of imaginative possession, the legendary figures of Australia’s white past investing the land with their visions and love, in her pioneering pastorals. These poems are overlaid with biblical association. In the poem “For New England,” in a characteristic movement, the focus shifts from the winter landscape to an

ancestral figure within the cottage, and forward again to the poet, the bearer of these memories:

Many roads meet here  
In me, the traveler and the ways I travel.  
All the hills gathered waters feed my seas  
Who am the summer and the mountain river;  
And the long slopes concurrence is my flesh  
Who am the gazer and the land I stare on;  
And dogwood blooms within my winter blood,  
And orchards fruit in me and need no season  
But sullenly the jealous bones recall  
What other earth is shaped and hoarded in them. (22)

Even here, a sense of division between poets 'English and Australian inheritances' troubles her identification. She considers aborigines to be the real inhabitants of Australia, who were treated with contempt and condescension by the whites. She shows respect to the struggle aborigines endure for their continued existence and considers the aborigines to be superior beings in context to strength and perseverance.

The aboriginal theme in the poetry of Wright acquired a moral dimension and became a symbolic interrogation of exploitation and dispassion as illustrated in the poem "They": "They look like people/ That's the trouble" (349). Judith Wright transfers her imaginative and poetic values – of wisdom, intuition and creativity – across to the dark tribes; the aborigines are dark in a symbolic as well as a literal sense. As a sensitive person, Judith also projects upon certain graveness in the colour and attitude of aborigines in the symbolic poem, "The Dark Ones":

On the other side of the road  
the dark ones stand.  
Something leaks in our blood  
like the ooze from a wound,  
the night ghosts of a land  
only by day possessed  
come haunting into the mind  
like a shadow cast (354-55)

Judith Wright shares a poetic, symbolic, and metaphysical appreciation of aboriginal culture. The Poem, "Two Dreamtimes," is a magnificent example of her real concern and honest feelings towards her childhood friend, Kath Walker, an aboriginal:

Kath my sister with the torn heart....You were one of the dark childrenI wasn't allowed to play with -riverbank campers, the wrong colour,(I couldn't turn you white). So it was late I met you,late I began to knowthey hadn't told me the land I lovedwas taken out of your hands. (315)

Though she was never allowed to speak and play with the aborigines, yet she makes conscious effort to observe and depict their thought process in her oeuvre. She emphatically takes up the cause of aborigines in her poetic world. Wright intimately observes the life of the aborigines and shares her poetic, symbolic, and metaphysical appreciation of their culture. “Brigalow Country” portrays a lonely world of the tribe and their grief over the loss of the joy of life:

Never get no money  
for when I go hungry,  
never get no kisses  
for when I feel sad-  
rooted like the brigalows  
until I’m dead. (135)

Judith Wright emphasises in clear terms the fundamental disjunction between white and black Australians, a gulf which is described as being nearly impossible to bridge as the whites are “born of fire, possessed by darkness” (426). She condemns the whites as “twisted to the hearts of men - dark powers possess them”. She appeals to them to “Burn the distant evil doer, the unseen sinner” (426) but “it is man who leans a deafening ear” (319). Wright brings out the pain of the aborigines that will disturb the peace of the whites. She questions “how shall mind be sober,/ since blood’s red thread still binds us fast in history?” (12). She wonders whether the whites realize the impact of the invasion on the lives of the aborigines and “Does each repent the thing the last has done/ though claiming he rejects it?” (241). Assessing the impact of the encounter with a primitive culture, she writes, “Why should the blacks, with that soft obstinacy that was almost gaiety, thus invite their own murder?” “Kill us, for we can never accept you,” the blacks said; “Kill us, or forget your own ambitions” (156). The description of an empty landscape full of memories of the Aborigines increases the sense of usurpation and the feeling of guilt is intensified. Wright’s indication of interference and suppression of her white ancestors express the savageness that has made the aboriginals “Haunted and alone” (135). Cross-culturally speaking the feeling of arrogant guilt of the white’s inhuman attacks in contrast the Aboriginal’s love for a peaceful life is depicted in “At Cooloola”

Those dark-skinned people who once named Cooloolah  
knew that no land is lost or won by wars,  
for earth is spirit; the invader’s feet will tangle  
in nests there and his blood be thinned by fears. (140)

Judith Wright articulates her sympathy while depicting the plight of the aborigines. In the poem “Trapped Dingo” she writes, “they crushed out your throat the terrible song/ you sang in the dark ranges” (9). Those “dark” tribes after being dragged out of their land took refuge from the squatters and the mounted native police, in the great scrubs and ranges of Dawson, Mackenzie, and Isaac rivers. Left to wander, lost and alone in the annals of Australian history, their escapes sprang up into mythical stories. The bushes in the forest seem to

become a place of escape, a place to find peace, a place to find work and pride in oneself. Brutal killings and forced exile of the indigenous people by the Whites take picturesque image in “Trapped Dingo.” It is the picture of the “Wild singer” whose verse dies away with the race:

and clay stops many a warrior’s mouth, wild singer.  
Voice from the hills...  
..  
death ends the verse you chanted; here you lie. (9)

“Australia 1970” displays the weight of denunciation in a venomous society of conquerors. “For we are conquerors and self-poisoners/ more than scorpio or snake/ and dying of the venoms that we make/ even while you die of us” (288). Wright’s ironical remarks over the shameful acts of her ancestors in “Victims” reveal her anguished soul:

They are ageing now, some dead.  
In the third-class suburbs of exile  
their foreign accents  
continue to condemn them. They should  
not have expected more.  
Their faces, common to human kind,  
had eyes, lips, noses.  
That in itself was grave  
seen through such a flame. (402)

“They” are the doomed society which remains buried in the dust and “They were already/ a coat of ash seared in” (224). Aborigines’ peaceful living is ironically reflected in “To My Brothers.” “The previous owners put up little fight,/did not believe in ownership, and so were, scarcely human” (406).

Judith Wright also portrays the attitude of aborigines to adapt to the situation. She has profound respect for the sacred dimension of ordinary life and ordinary Australians. Upholding the ethical and gracious sense of human dignity, she advises the whites to be like a tree that “leaps up and makes a world/to reconcile the night and day,/to feed the bird and the shining fly” (87). Wright gives a message to both the races to unite and forget the wrong doings. She states her point, “Perhaps nothing exists but our faults?/At least they can be demonstrated.” She further writes, “we invent both light and dark: that is man’s fate” (251). In “The Builders,” she salutes the surviving spirit of life, “This is life’s promise and accomplishment- . . . Seeds falls there now, birds build, and life takes over” (45). She asserts that time has come “to be out of this dream” (276) and “to learn and to unlearn,/absorb and fight” (327). In the poem “The Body,” Wright hopes for harmonious co-existence of whites and blacks as they both appreciate their inter-dependence:

I am your blundering kind companion.  
I am your home that keeps out bitter weather.  
I am the perilous slow deposit of time’s wisdom.

You are my threat, my murder. And yet, remember.  
I am yourself. Come, let us live together. (146)

Wright states that her purpose in reintroducing the aborigines into the mind of Australians was not so much to recall the violence of the European take-over but to make white Australians realize that “You must go by the way he went” (113). Judith’s early poems “Australia 1970” and “At Cooloolah” on aboriginal theme are laments and they gain urgency from the sharp influx of “guilt” experienced by the Whites. The poems like “Brig low Country,” (“Carnarvon Range,” “The Ancestors,” “The Lost Man,” “The Beach at Hokitata,” “Jacky Jacky,” “Victims” deal with Aboriginal past, their tribes, and rituals.

Guilt, as the burden of history, is felt in the division between the settlers and the land itself, despoiled by greed and incomprehension of the white settlers. Judith Wright confesses:

These hills my father’s father stripped;  
And, beggars to the winter wind,  
They crouch like shoulders naked and whipped-  
Humble, abandoned, out of mind. (140)

In her poetry, the guilt of living on a land filled with the ghosts of those who had been murdered is evident in the poem “Walker in Darkness”:

The sea he swims in is the sea where other men drown;  
the shore he walks is the white sand of their bones.  
The forest is full of monsters and mad ferns,  
and no man comes there but those who die, who mourn,  
or who desire to be bore. (110)

Her poem “Double Image” is about the recognition of the darkest aspects of the human nature, feelings, and impulses that are in common with the ancestors and presumably all humanity. It is a visceral poem that recounts the speaker’s vicarious participation in the most brutal, almost bestial fight to the death with another when she was within her “kinsman’s flesh” and experienced his wounds as if they were her own:

“My kinsman’s flesh, my kinsman’s skull  
enclosed me, and our wounds were one”  
....  
Till from these centuries I wake,  
naked and howling, still unmade,  
within the forests of my heart my dangerous kinsman runs afraid. (196)

Her poem “Eli, Eli” reads as a transhistorical lament for the consequences of human acts of violence. It shows the lack of sense of responsibility the whites had towards humanity which caused the gap between the two cultures and made the blacks adamant to not accept the

whites, “to hold the invisible wand and not to save them-/this was the wound, more than the wound they dealt him” (44).

Another splendid description of the unacknowledged historical past of the blacks and the prevailing hatred between the whites and black people due to their colour get a historical

Projection in “The Dust in the Township”:  
and now with the tribes he is gone down in death.  
to us who forget the sweat of Dick Delaney,  
and the humpy and scalding sunlight and the black  
hate between the white skin and the black. (63)

Wright considers racial discrimination as “Our enemy” (292) because it creates the feeling of superiority. Like Toni Morrison, she realizes the pain suffered due to colour discrimination. In the poem “Half-Caste Girl” she depicts how the girl like Pecola longs to enjoy her life but the “wallaby skin” stands as a hindrance:

Little Josie buried under the bright sun  
would like to open her eyes and dance in the light.  
Who is it has covered the sun and the beautiful moon  
with a wallaby skin, and left her alone in the night? (19)

The dispossession of the aborigines by the white men induces introspection in her poetry as she unveils the shadow over the dark truth full of terrible wrongs inflicted upon the aborigines. In the poem “Homecoming” she addresses the whites to take the blame and make amends: “Brother, we dare not fail our load. Now brace/.../Shoulder the weight. Stride on. Open the door (228). In her revolutionary poem “For the Loved and the Unloved” Wright blames the whites completely for their ill-doings. She also makes them recognize their darker aspects which is eventually ruining their lives, “The roads unwind within us... the thread by which we travel”(126) She believes that by simply ignoring the fate of the natives, white Australians will never be able to rid themselves of an uneasy guilt for what they did to the former inhabitants of Australia. Wright makes the whites realize the “sully wound” of the aborigines and “that the sting going in/hold’s the poison from other’s sores” (223). Wright cannot tolerate the affliction and misery of the aborigines. In the poem “Vision” she declares that it is just “knowledge” that can “teach him more humility” (200). Her poem “Two Sides of a Story” is a naked projection of immoral attacks and shameful strategies of whites and the vicissitude of the natives at the hands of their cruel oppressors:

We see you still through a mist of sentiment,  
Galmahra, songman, born at a time so unlucky,  
In your tribe’s last days, and you the last of their poets’  
And doomed to be given the nick name Jacky Jacky. (256)

Being sensitive, she cries out pathetically in the poem “Halfway”: “I am neither one thing nor the other, nor here nor there” (290). She confesses in an interview to Ramona Koval that a



poet has an artistic-cum-social duty to perform and resolve the various conflicts and evils of society: "I have always wanted to make up to people for the ills they suffer ... what we have done to the aborigines is definitely the worst thing we have done since we came here, and we have done plenty of bad things (30 June 2000 not mentioned in the bibliography).

Judith Wright makes cognisant efforts to bridge the existing gap between the whites and blacks. Wright makes a statement that the natives are human beings who deserve respect and humane treatment. Critics like H.P. Heseltine support the vision of life depicted in her later poetry and assert that "she has made the harder choice of seeking, through private struggle, to writing from poetry a new vision of the world" (Wilde 829). In the poem "Carnarvon Range," she resorts to singing for the tribes who have now become silent: "Carnarvon Creek / and cliffs of Carnarvon, / your tribes are silent" but "I will sing for you" (Wright 134). Comforting the tribal fellows, she says, "I hold your hand,... I cannot mend-/ your time's not mine, your place strange to my place" (124). In the poem "Letter to a Friend," she shares her feelings with the aborigines:

the mourner speaks to the mourned,  
the murderer speaks to the murdered.  
To you whom I have killed,  
...  
to you at least I should speak the truth. (56)

In the poem "Walker in Darkness," she depicts the query in the heart of the aborigines: "where shall I look for my light, and how shall I find/ my heart in your dark land?" (110) Wright also depicts the state of mind of the aborigines and reflects upon the darkness that empowers them. The poem "To a Child," she states her concern for the aborigines who are losing faith: "I think of this for you./I would not have you believe/the world is empty of truth/or that men must grieve" (107). Her advice to them is to live fearlessly: "Walk your dark streets alone but without fear," (85) even though you "go by the darkest road" (100). To show her concern for the aborigines, Wright in 1991, resigned as a patron of the Wildlife Preservation Society because of its failure to support aboriginal land rights. Strong in her denunciation of mistreatment of the aborigines, undermining the social fabric of Australian life, Wright attended a march in Canberra for a reconciliation between white Australians and the aboriginal people shortly before her death at the age of eighty-five. She tried to kick-start a movement for reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians in the 1980s which gathered steam in the 1990s. However with her experiences she learnt that reconciliation is not a matter of charity for the oppressed but rather a realization. As true humanists, she fought adamantly for the rights of the aborigines and strove for the integration of both the cultures. The poetry of Judith Wright depicts the urgency and exigency to bring the whites and blacks on the same platform where there is no ban or bias. The aboriginals are also expected to view the culture of the whites with veneration. This shall bring in a new phase of cultural communication and help to build a majestic life. Her poetry is a plea for a peaceful co-existence of whites and blacks in the marvellous land of Australia.

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## **Taming the Heliogabalus: Sociological Relevance of Literature in the Contemporary Chaosmos**

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**Abstract:** As writers, critics, researches and sociological analysts, we often wonder whether works of literature have really had an impact upon the mind and conscience of modern and postmodern human beings? The obvious answer is Yes. Even superpower nations and diverse countries across the globe, have produced writers whose landmark works have shaken the conscience of mankind about its future survival. Apocalyptic literature, increasingly written in the aftermath of World War II, has projected possible future wars and nuclear cataclysms as the grim doomsday syndrome. The ethos of “mass society” as reflected in works of literature, unfolds itself as the sociological ambience of consumerist politics, global hegemonistic appropriations, and dehumanization. Present-day man is an Orpheus who consents to his dismemberment, after committing “hubris”: this is what literary writings have increasingly come to portray since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and even earlier. Such works “blend word and flesh into the dance of existence.” In context of these preceding observations, the paper makes an attempt to justify the symbolic “symbiosis” between human living and the existence of mankind. Some well-known literary works are cited as the creative, stirring reflection of a Polyphemus knocking upon the “doors” of present-day mankind. Ostensibly, literature and sociological realities get inextricably welded, as warning messages of writers of literature.

**Keywords:** Mass Society, Chaosmos, Apocalyptic realities.

The ancient Roman Emperor Heliogabalus was known for his demonic eccentricities. It is said that Heliogabalus would invite guests to a feast and would feed them sumptuously. These unwary guests, after being fed graciously on rich food and wine, would be taken like innocent lambs and put inside the belly of a huge iron bull. Fire would be burnt under the belly of the iron bull and in this beastly and inhuman manner, these unsuspecting, innocent guests would get roasted alive. In this paper the word “Heliogabalus” is used as a transferred epithet for our society, which provides all sorts of technological developments and then roasts us alive.

With due apologies to John Keats who said, “Beauty is truth, truth beauty/that’s all ye know, and all ye need to know,” it would be appropriate to say: “Literature is life, life literature, that’s all we know, and all we need to know.” From time immemorial, writers across countries, regions, cultures, and societies have reflected in their works the failings, depravities, eccentricities, and oddities of their respective ages. Literary writings invested with the politics of location in a globalized context, have compelled humans, governments, and institutions to ponder over misgovernance, exploitation, poverty, hunger, disease, corruption, and similar other ills and afflictions which we witness in the contemporary

postmodernist ambience of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Literature and life have a symbiotic relationship, and no writer ever wrote or ever writes in isolation from his age. Literary writings become universal monuments of the human spirit and have a reflective, compelling influence upon the minds, intellects and thought processes of readers across cultures, ethnicities, sects, etc. A good number of texts written across the globe have frequently come under the scanner of literary theory, philosophy, anthropology, and psycho-analysis. The study of inter disciplinary texts and allied issues is generating a lot of euphoria, especially the manner in which it constitutes a methodology and technique of making up the world which otherwise presents a chaosmos or a diachronic spectrum with ever increasing eccentricities of “Heliogabalus,” the Mass society. These divergent texts help us make sense of the chaos.

With the advent of Postmodernism the symbiotic relationship of literature and society has undergone a sea-change; it reverses the trends and features of modernism, thereby creating a highly volatile, unstable, and unnerving ethos of mass society. This society, as discussed and argued by sociologists, psychologists, and iconic analyzers of human society, keeps on changing. Consumerism and consumerist politics in combination with such a society constitute a symbolic iron bull which exists even now and continues to “roast alive” contemporary humans across the globe. In the present times, as all of us know, cyber-technology, digital techtonics have revolutionized the thinking, mind-sets, and behavioral parameters of people living in even less under-developed countries. The contemporary chaosmos is basically a *jungle* in which the symbolic poltergeists continue to rattle the existence of 21<sup>st</sup> Century man. The present-day Heliogabalus is already super-active and baring its ferocious teeth simply to gobble mankind mercilessly.

Presently, we the denizens of the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, are living in the age of demonic apocalypse or apocalypse of despair. In the aftermath of the Second World War, writers come to realize that modern man has developed and acquired the potential to destroy his world many times over, e.g., the use of nuclear bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan. We, as writers, critics, researchers, and sociological analysts, often ponder over this stark reality, whether works of literature have really had an awakening impact upon the mind and conscience of modern and postmodern humans? The obvious answer is “Yes.” Superpowers and other countries across the globe have produced writers of all genres whose landmark works have shaken the collective conscience of mankind, especially about its future survival. Wasn’t it Albert Einstein who once remarked that the Third World War would be fought with bows and arrows? Total annihilation of human civilization in the holocaust of a nuclear war is a foregone conclusion, and umpteen works of fiction, poetry, drama, and, of course, science-fiction, have illustrated in their respective narratives the stark shaking scenario of contemporary man’s fate in the eventuality of nuclear global cataclysm. Coupled with this comes the dehumanizing “ethos of Mass Society,” a society which changes overnight and does not render itself to any assured definition. In such a society, ostensibly the one we are living in these days, consumerist politics, global hegemonistic appropriations, and the theft of the self become intrinsic components of our day to day existence. Ihab Hassan in the iconic work *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature* says: “Radical questions engage the total quality of our life; they are questions of being. Often they

arouse large hopes: to change consciousness, to banish death from our midst. They have a radical innocence” (xvii). It is such “radical questions” which came to haunt and stir the conscience of modern and postmodern readers. Across the globe these readers became increasingly aware of the imminent dangers that hover over their very survival.

In *Cat's Cradle*, a Bokonon Calypso goes like this:

Tiger got to hunt,  
Bird got to fly,  
Man got to sit and wonder  
why, why, why ?  
Tiger got to sleep,  
Bird got to land,  
Man got to tell himself:  
He understand

These lines amply illustrate the mental, spiritual, and intellectual effeteness of modern man and his mental bankruptcy. Similarly, in the last two lines of “The Second Coming,” W.B. Yeats writes: “And what rough beast, its hour come around at last, slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?” Apocalyptically, it is not the “Second Coming” of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, born again to usher in the “Golden rule of the Messiah,” but it is the “Beast,” symbolically unbridled blatant evil under the aegis of Satan, that is going to govern the affairs and the fate of modern man.

Yeats’ anger presents a revelation against the ravages of a scientific and technological society which glorifies itself on its progress. It is no accident that so many ordinary people refer to the present day world as a “madhouse” which exhibits “the qualities of an individual going through nervous breakdown” (Toffler 365).

The myth-making technique of W. H. Auden’s *Shield of Achilles* presents a mix of contemporaneity and antiquity to depict the vast panorama of futility and anarchy which is modern human civilization. Needless to say, it is a similar blend we witness in Eliot’s *The Waste Land*. Such works continue to provoke our own questions, compel us to retrospect and reflect over our future survival on this already endangered and ecologically impoverished planet.

Coming to fiction, it is in a large number of novels, mostly American, that similar apprehensions have been woven into the role-playing matrix of narratives. All such works, as already pointed out, not only force us to think over our foreseeable future with grim prognosis, but constantly, with a fair modicum of self-reflexivity “blend word and flesh into the dance of existence” (*Orpheus* 5) and explore the “relationship between fiction and the age old conceptions of chaos and crisis”(Kermode 1) and inextricably weld sociological realities into the very matrix of their respective narratives.

Some well-known literary works cited in the paper, present the creative, stirring reflections of a Polyphemus knocking upon the “doors” of the present day mankind. These works stir our

conscience and compel us to reflect grimly over the apocalyptic realities which confront mankind. A few examples will amply illustrate this contention: Kurt Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions*, *A Man without a Country* and *Hocus Pocus* to name only a few. In *Hocus Pocus*, Eugene Debs Hartke, the protagonist, lives in the fictional present "which is the year 2001 A.D" and being a postmodernist narrator he reflects a "neo-gnostic immediacy of mind" (Hassan, *Modernism* 4). His is a detoxified self, afflicted as it is with issues of innovation and renovation, creation and recreation, or simply invasion. All these terms denote the vocabulary of problematization with which the present day postmodernist human self has to wrestle. Any of us can be a Debs Hartke, and Hartke himself says: "The year is 2001. If all had gone the way a lot of people thought it would, Jesus Christ would have been amongst us again, and the American flag would have been planted on Venus and Mars. No such Luck" (Vonnegut, *Hocus* 1).

The apocalyptic types – empire, decadence and renovation, progress and catastrophe – are fed by history and underline our ways of making sense of the world where we stand, in the midst (Kermode 29). When we read literary works written in modern and postmodern times, such works, more often than not, raise certain fundamental issues related to our own existence as denizens of a scientifically and technologically advanced age. Immortal works of iconic writers like Albert Camus, Franz Kafka, Samuel Beckett, Jean Paul Sartre, Alvin Toffler, and many others, including the immortal Bard himself, leave a reader with no option but to introspect, reflect, and reassess his or her existential choices, preferences, habits, behavioral patterns, and what not. Playing their stringless lyres, modern and postmodern writers enchant us "with their twin melodies." We "dream of bright life or unspeakable sleep" [Hassan, *Dismemberment* 4]. Postmodern humans of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as literary works emphasize, are akin to the dismembered Orpheus, who after being killed by the Maenads and after his head is thrown into the river Hebrus, continues to sing on a lyre without strings.

All the above enumerated facts have become socio-cultural-cum-socio-psychological realities with social-networking sites like WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, etc, repudiating silence, subverting language, convention, and artistic form. Literary works, across genres, often "ring" startling "bells" to make us acutely conscious about a modern and now postmodern "Heliogabalus" eager to fill our "bellies" with a sumptuous feast" only to destroy us later, like the virus of "Big-brain culture" in Kurt Vonnegut's *Galapagos* (PAGE NO.). That's exactly, as contemporary writers express in their thought-provoking works, what postmodern mass-society precisely does with unsuspecting people like us.

R.W. Emerson's words in "The American Scholar" sound pertinent in context of what American Literature, or other literature teaches us in context of life, living, choices, preferences etc:

We do not meet for games of strength or skill, or the recitation of histories, tragedies and odes, like the ancient Greeks; for parliaments of love and poesy, like the Troubadours; nor for the advancement of science .... Thus far our holidays has been Simply a friendly sign of the survival of the love of letters amongst a people too busy to give letters any more. As such it is precious as the sign of an indestructible instinct.

Perhaps the time has already come when it ought to be and will be something else.  
(467)

With the quicksand unstable ethos of Mass Society, Manju Jaidka rightly points out that “In this rapidly changing world we are constantly called upon to re-consider, revise and reformulate our opinions. Recent history in particular, has taken us all on a roller-coaster ride” (Raina 13).

Late modern and postmodern works of literature compel us to keep pace with the ethos of mass society, a society constantly in a state of flux, changing overnight and bewildering one and all. Fall of the twin towers of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 gave birth to a host of writings of diverse writers keen to make us aware of the kind of world we are now living in. Jaidka also points out that with “the de-bordering and re-bordering, with the changing cultural and political demarcations, literary boundaries must also change” (Raina 14). The boundaries of human thinking are also rapidly changing. Societies, cultures, affiliations, loyalties, go on assuming new contexts, contours, and configurations. Books on all these realities get published day-in and day out. How can any rational, educated and conscious postmodern human being keep himself aloof from all these realities? Literature and life, existence and erudition, academia and intellectualism are now two sides of the same coin. It also signifies an important formulation which is an urgent need to reconfigure creative boundaries besides the truth that literature and literary texts, with innate power of transforming the world have been and are being used as tools of empowerment to arm readers with the ability to negotiate the sweeping changes in context of economic, cultural, and historical truths. In spite of this known and practically seen counterproductive scourge, humans go on adopting an apocalyptic, rather cataclysmic posture over the myth of Progress, Nationalism and Chauvinistic-cum-demonic “muscle-flexing.” Be it scientists, politicians, statesmen, thinkers, policymakers, foreign policy planners, and advisors, all of them are accepting beliefs and implanting courses of action that can hardly result in anything but global suffering. A host of terror groups and organizations seem to be possessed by evil, with one common agenda: brutal torture and killing of innocent people. There are horrendous rapes and murders, child abuse, brutal killing of innocents, and in the words of Northrop Frye in his essay “Archetypal Criticism,” this world has become “the world of the nightmare and scapegoat ... the hell that man creates on earth.” A large number of literary works written at present have these very satanic threats to the future survival of mankind, as the main message-cum theme. Can we afford to shut our eyes to all these stark realities stalking us as humans?

Finally, it would be pertinent to say that literary works, since the ancient epic-ages of *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, *Aeneid*, *Gilgamish*, and many more lesser known ones, have enlightened us through the ages and awakened our sixth sense of “the ethics of resilience.” Presently, our current postmodern times have attained a hyperreal dark shade of inspiration and action, of reflexivity and historicity, which in combination inscribe and subvert “the conventions and ideologies of the dominant cultural and social forces of the twentieth century” (Hutcheon 207) and continue to do so now in the second decade of the

21<sup>st</sup> century. Such stark realities get often expressed, highlighted, and strongly conveyed in literary writings across all dominant genres.

This essay began with a quote from Keat's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and I would like to end it with a Keatsean phrase, which very befittingly says: "that which is creative, must create itself," as literature has a compelling influence upon mankind. Not only does it add an "aesthetic touch" to human life, it also refines the sensibilities and serves a serious purpose of "constructedness."

The world of literary writings is a magical one as it is democratic, spontaneous, and a well-packed extravaganza, having something or some solution for every chaos and crisis. Only an ignoramus, with an Ostrich-like attitude would be oblivious of such compelling realities and undeniable truths.

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## **Know-How of Background and Literary Breakdown**

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**Abstract:** Literary analysts have not always agreed upon the importance of contextual knowledge. The New Critics, for example, were quite hostile to the notion that one should look at the literary period or the life of the author as a way of explaining a literary work. This paper proceeds from the view that a literary work is not self-sufficient to its own interpretation and indeed never could be so. Instead, I will maintain that a historicized interpretation, alive to the historical context, genre, author and other facets is more productive than one centered on the work in isolation. Contextual information can help a reader produce more subtle and complex interpretations of a primary work. Moreover, there is plentiful research that suggests contextual knowledge is crucial to basic acts of comprehension that are the foundation of sophisticated interpretations. The development of tentative hypotheses, linked with a recursive and self-aware strategy will help students build links between texts and produce richer interpretations. This paper is based on a research held on first year Engineering Students. In order to generate evidence about how students evaluate the relevance of contextual information, a series of two interviews with seven respondents were carried out on an individual basis. Both interviews followed a tradition in studies of expert reading and comprehension by using a talk-aloud protocol fused with on-line analysis to work through the text.

**Keywords:** Discourse analysis, Ozymandias.

This paper proceeds from the view that a literary work is not self-sufficient to its own interpretation and indeed never could be so. In a class of Personality Development, I placed Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem "Ozymandias" on the reading list. This is a canonical poem that would be well known to an older generation but which was completely unfamiliar to my first year undergraduate Engineering students.

I was not surprised that the students did not know who Shelley was, or anything about the beliefs, politics or chronology of the Romantic Period. With some help they could get through a basic reading of the poem and most were able to capture some sense of the irony of a boastful inscription when all else had been destroyed by time. Without a concrete background knowledge of the author, or the political context in which the work was written, some observations could still be made, although they tended towards the very general aspects. Basic comprehension is possible without a specialized contextual knowledge, but sophisticated readings required in a literature course, need far more than this.

A well-recognized challenge while reading literature is that a common culture and the assumed reader of much literature no longer exist, at least within an undergraduate setting. The diversity within cohorts and inequalities and other variations in educational experience meet with a greatly expanded canon to ensure that the context of any work of literature is likely to be poorly understood, at least in the initial phase. Literary analysts have not always

agreed upon the importance of contextual knowledge. The New Critics, for example, were hostile to the notion that one should look at the literary period or the life of the author as a way of understanding a literary work. However, there is a lot of research that suggests that contextual knowledge is crucial to basic acts of comprehension that are the foundation of sophisticated interpretations.

Comprehension and discourse studies have examined the issue of general world knowledge and interpretation in considerable detail. Cook and Guerard (2005), Rizzella and O'Brien (2002) and Henry (1990) are some examples of study into the role of general world knowledge in discourse processing. Afflerbach's "The Influence of Prior Knowledge on Expert Readers' Main Idea Construction Strategies" (1990) has been an influential example of these kinds of studies which work from a cognitive perspective to emphasize the importance of contextual knowledge in reading and comprehension. Empirical studies that probe into the expert/novice reader differences also point to the intricate relationships between cognitive processing, memory and prior knowledge. The foundational study in this area is that of Bransford and Johnson (1972) who argue that prior knowledge schemas are important in recall and other processing functions. They presented readers with abstract passages. Readers who were given no explanation of the context of the passage had poor recall of the ideas presented (2.8/18 ideas). Those who were told prior to reading had far better recall (5.8/18 ideas). Those who were told after reading the passage recalled only 2.7/18 ideas. Without a pre-existent schema into which the information could be inserted, its meaningfulness was much reduced.

Given the importance of contextual knowledge to basic comprehension, memory tasks and the production of sophisticated interpretations one would expect that literary instructors after the New Critics would sense that the provision of background information is crucial. In my teaching I discuss websites and other material that assist interpretation of the literary work at hand. But like many, I find this has effects that are far from being uniform. The more perceptive students utilize the information, but the others are less capable and unable to perceive its relevance and thus remain largely ignorant.

One of the tragic ironies of attempting to ameliorate absences in knowledge that interfere with comprehension of a text is that those same absences may interfere with the assimilation of the contextual texts. Concerned with how literary expertise develops, Jock Macleod positions the role of contextual knowledge as something secondary to strategies and practices that generate an interpretation. Indeed he warns of the 'swamping' of students with contextual information. It is unlikely that the information will 'swamp' the students; rather, they will regard it as irrelevant and let it roll over them. However, he is right to point out that students will have difficulty understanding the relevance of background information. A more tendentious claim that MacLeod makes, however, is that students who are unable to develop some sophistication in the analysis of literary works will gain no benefit from contextual materials. Students unable to make a fair fist of analyzing a poem (or other literary text) will have limited understandings of the wider concerns that typically shape courses in literary studies, for instance, an author's corpus, a literary genre or period, literature in its social, historical or ideological contexts (27).

Contextual information about an author, a historical period or a genre will help produce deeper interpretations. As Braten, Stramse and Britt note, most of the studies into multiple document use have focused on the discipline of history (6), although there are recent studies in law and medicine (7). Literary studies as a discipline needs to take up the question of how literature students assemble and connect multiple texts. In particular, little is known about how readers link historical, political and other material to their analysis of a literary work. Expert literature analysts do this without a second thought and seek to pass on this expertise through displaying the finished product to students; Knapp suggests that literature lecturers continue to act as oracles to students, keeping the actual knowledge-generating strategies obscure (56). Linking Shelley's political beliefs to 'Ozymandias' is simple for a skilled literary critic; however for a student it may be nearly impossible to build the relationship. The literary critic will understand something of Shelley's radical beliefs and what constitutes radicalism in the context of the post-Napoleonic British environment. The seasoned analyst may then link Shelley's disgust with the British administration to the poem; all great powers are destroyed with the effluxion of time and so too will the British establishment one day fall. For a developing literature student, making these connections may involve Herculean difficulties. The very concept of 'politics' may be problematic for a generation that is depoliticised. The meaning of 'radicalism' within the context of the times, when calling oneself a democrat could lead to incarceration, may again be very difficult for a student, whose historical perspective may be very 'flat'. When students cannot make these connections they will regard the additional material as irrelevant and will quickly dispense with it. 'Relevance', then, becomes a marker of how well connections are being made, and 'irrelevance' suggests a connective failure. In order to have a better sense of how students attempt to link contextual information to a literary work, the author carried out a series of interviews with students.

In order to generate evidence about how students evaluate the relevance of contextual information, a series of two interviews with seven respondents was carried out on an individual basis. Both interviews followed a tradition in studies of expert reading and comprehension by using a talk-aloud protocol fused with on-line analysis to work through the text. The think-aloud method has been used widely in studies of expertise (Ericsson and Simon, 1984) to provide data about the problem solving strategies undertaken in text comprehension. Graves (1996, 392-393) also outlines the wealth of studies which have used talk-aloud protocols to investigate text comprehension and literary reading. Allied to the talk-aloud protocol is on-line interpretation in which the developing understanding of the text is described by the reader and generates data about real-time semantic processing of texts. The first interview with 'novice' respondents is in part an exercise in on-line responses, in which respondents move through a poem line by line verbalizing their attempts at analysis. Though this study did not employ some of the stricter methodologies of some cognitive studies of discourse analysis as described in Ericsson and Simon (1984) and Fredericksen (1986), it does pay attention to the generation of propositions and the establishing of frames that these studies recognize as important.

In the first interview “Ozymandias” was read through and the student gained a basic understanding of the poem, although exact uniformity was not possible. They also exited the interview with the knowledge that ‘Ozymandias’ was the supposed Greek name for Ramesses II, and that the poem had been published in 1818. This preparatory interview ensured that the later relevance judgments were based on as similar a primary reading as possible.

In the week between interview one and two, the interviewees were asked to access three websites that contained information about “Ozymandias”. They were asked not to read any other material about the poem. The respondents had read the websites before the second interview and brought hard copies with relevance rankings marked. They had been asked to grade each paragraph with a mark from 1 to 3, representing a scale of relevance from high to low. Together with a talk aloud exercise, this was designed to show what elements of the secondary reading were considered relevant to forming a deeper interpretation. The three web pages had a variety of foci which might be described as:

### **Ramesses Information**

1. Authorial biography
2. Historical and publishing context

The first web page centered on the figure of Ramesses II. It recounted his military victories, family relations, his desire to construct monuments and the ruins that yet remain. The penultimate paragraph described the ‘discovery’ of Abu Simbel by Johann Burckhardt in 1813 and the penetration of the temple complex four years later by Giovanni Belzoni. The date of 1817 offered the possibility of a chronological connection to the poem which had been written in 1817 but published in 1818. The final paragraph commented on the 1974 discovery that the mummified remains of Ramesses II were suffering from a fungal infection, and that the body had to enter France for treatment using an Egyptian passport that listed his occupation as ‘King (deceased)’.

The second page contained biographical information about Shelley, his unconventional lifestyle, writings and political leanings. Of particular interest was the penultimate paragraph which recorded his reaction to the Peterloo massacre, his heightened resistance to the British government and his hopes that a peaceful reform could forestall an inevitable revolution. The third page contained material about the British Empire, a growing British Egyptomania, contemporary contemplation about the rise and fall of empires and a comparison of ‘Ozymandias’ with Horace Smith’s poem on a similar theme. There is no absolute basis of relevance to which the respondents’ relevance judgments may be compared. The initial interpretation of the poem will have a deep effect on relevance determinations, which was why the interviewees were to leave the first interview with a similar understanding of the poem. While the interpretation has an effect on relevance determination so too does the more general interpretive frame. For instance, an interpreter who is author-focused will be more likely to find page two more relevant. A reader more open to using other literary works as a comparison may find page three of greater interest. However, it is unacceptable to simply suggest that all interpretations are of equivalent value. My judgment as an expert reader is

that the third page clearly contains more relevant material than the other two pages, but this is inflected by my interpretative frame. This frame is (roughly) historicist, in that I am interested in the period in which the poem was written, its connections to the culture of the time, and, in the particular case of “Ozymandias,” whatever political connotations it may have.

A brief summary of the results of this survey may be given. Overall, the seven respondents over-valued the relevance of the first web page with dealt with Egypt. Obviously, topicality had a strong role to play here; the poem is set in Egypt, therefore more information about Egypt and Ramesses was presumed to be helpful. In fact, that is not the case. Without either being proscriptive or completely ignoring the possibility of innovative approaches, it is fair to say that knowing about Ramesses’ military victories or fortunes of his close relatives does not help one interpret the poem. In the language of relevance theory, some interviewees find a sufficient *cognitive effect* from superficial, topical relationships (see Sperber & Wilson). They stop at this point and wider interpretation becomes impossible. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1993, 176) found that studies of summarizing and note-taking suggest that students tend to retain or reject textual information on the basis of superficial indicators of its importance rather than on the basis of interrelationships. Thinking-aloud studies of readers show that the less able ones attend mainly to topics and details rather than to overarching propositions.

Bereiter and Scardamalia point out that this kind of schema in which rapid pickup and reproduction of information is dominant is at odds with the kinds of knowledge-building schemas in which interpretation plays a significant role. It is not surprising then that students were fixed upon the Site 1 information about Ramesses as being immediately relevant, even though it cannot be used in any high level interpretation of the poem. As Bereiter and Scardamalia note (1993, 168-169), this immediate best-fit matching of new information to old may lead to inexpert learners jumping to conclusions on the basis of the little they have already learned, making subjective judgments about importance, constructing simplistic interpretations and becoming captivated by items of tangential interest (1993, 170). The great danger of new knowledge is not that it cannot be understood, but that it is assimilated too easily. For example, the student who learned that Ozymandias was the Greek name for the Egyptian Pharaoh Ramesses II reads the poem through the frame of ‘Egypt’. This tended to limit the possible interpretations, ignoring metaphorical and political significances and distorting relevance recognitions when background information is encountered.

More perversely, even though most of the respondents reached a sophisticated understanding of the poem in which Ramesses is metonymic of all tyrants and temporal powers, they nevertheless considered most of Site 1 of high or moderate relevance. The cognitive effect in the recognition of the contiguity of Ramesses in the poem and in the contextual material is too much for even a sophisticated reading. The students valued Site 2, the information about the author was of moderate relevance, which was roughly in accord with my views. But Site 3, which dealt with European Egyptomania and the related thinking about the rise and fall of empires, was considered of low relevance by the students, in contrast to my judgment. If even sophisticated, metaphorically aware readings do not guide one toward relevant sources that might further develop such a reader, then the claim for the utility of secondary readings

would be thin. But Bereiter and Scardamalia observe that successful readers and writers engage in a recursive movement between the relevant elements of domain knowledge, and the particular texts, and that this movement is an important constituent of expertise (1991,178). Most of the student respondents remained stuck within their initial and basic interpretation of the poem; this acted as a frame for relevance judgments about the secondary material. The poem was in some sense *about* Ozymandias, or, in the terminology of Perfettiet. al., their situational model was paramount. This caused them to respond to Site 1 strongly, but did not establish a recursive relationship between the poem and the contextual material. One of the interviewees, on the other hand, developed a tentative hypothesis regarding the poem. She initially felt that the poem evoked the triumph of Ramesses; if his kingdom was in ruins it was also true that his constructions and monumental boast were the only things that had survived the passage of time. However, she was able to explain that this interpretation was one with which she was unsatisfied and which was abandoned after reading Site 3. She returned from Site 3 to generate a much more sophisticated reading of “Ozymandias.”

Why is her relevance recognition much more productive than the other students? She is not swayed by topical contiguity, and the superficial connections between the poem and the site. Why this is so is not completely clear, but it does correlate with her level of academic success which was higher than the other interviewees. The key difference seems to be that her responses displayed a significant metacognitive component; not only did she employ a recursive heuristic but she was aware that she did. Her ability to move to a much richer analysis of the poem shows that what might be considered an initial defective competency in dealing with the irony of the poem is more than compensated by her possession of a framework for further investigation, an ability to move between context and poem and a metacognitive awareness.

Absence in cultural knowledge that enables deeper interpretations is a continuing problem in literature studies. Literary instructors need to elucidate and make overt the habits of mind they have developed but which are obscure to students. The development of tentative hypotheses, linked with a recursive and self-aware strategy will help students build links between texts and produce richer interpretations.

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## The Power of Discourse in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*

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**Abstract:** This paper studies the discourse embodied in Mulk Raj Anand's novel *Untouchable* (1935) which presents a scathing criticism of the caste system as prevalent in the upper caste Hindu society through the events of a particular day in the life of Bakha, a sweeper boy and an untouchable. This will attempt to study the power of the discourse in the context of this novel that reduces the political forces, economic forces, ideological control and social control to aspects of signifying processes. The paper explores the power of the discourse embodied in the literary text through its didactic message to bring about changes in the status of the untouchables in the Hindu society by offering a logical solution of introducing new technologies like flush toilets which would lead to the eradication of social stigma related to their profession of cleaning toilets. The research paper will show that all knowledge is an expression of the 'Will to Power' and there is no absolute truth or objective knowledge in the light of this text. It will exhibit that a particular piece of philosophy or scientific theory is 'true' if it fits the description of truth as laid down by the intellectual or the political authorities of the day, by the members of the ruling elite or by the prevailing ideologues of knowledge. The paper will also attempt to elucidate the historical dimension of discursive change in the light of the above-mentioned text.

**Keywords:** Discourse, power, political forces, economic forces, ideological control and social control, Mulk Raj Anand.

In the field of Humanities, "discourse describes a formal way of thinking that can be expressed through language and is also a social boundary that defines the statements that can be said about a topic" (Discourse). The novel *Untouchable* (1935) by Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004) espouses the social issue of untouchability, presents a scathing criticism associated with the scourge of caste system in the Hindu society, calls for its eradication from it through technology and offers a panacea in the form of flush toilets to liberate the untouchables not only from the social stigma related to their profession but also from the shackles of the caste-system. The novel is a petrifying exposé of the day-to-day life of Bakha who is an untouchable, a toilet-cleaner by profession and a representative of the lowest caste. This one day in the life of Bakha is replete with tragedies which are a result of the social discrimination practised in the upper caste Hindu society towards the untouchables. If we examine the living condition of Bakha and the various oppressive and tragic incidents encountered by Bakha in one day of his life we get a dehumanized and thwarted picture of the untouchables. Bakha lives in the dirty, filthy outcastes' colony at the outskirts of the city Bulashah. He begins his day with abuses from his father Lakha He has to clean the toilets for the high caste Hindus. Bakha's sister Sohini has to wait longer to draw water from the well of the upper caste Hindus. Pundit Kali Nath gives Sohini water from the well out of turn but

asks her to come and clean the courtyard of his house in the precincts of the temple on a daily basis with the dishonourable intention of violating her modesty. Bakha aspired for school education but sooner or later he becomes aware that he is not entitled to be educated as he is the son of a sweeper and his entry in a school may pollute the children of the caste Hindus who study there. The betel-leaf-seller throws the 'Red-Lamp' cigarettes that Bakha buys rather than handing it over to him. The jalebis that Bakha buys paying four annas are thrown to him by the confectioner at the Bengali sweetmeat-seller's shop rather than handed over to him in order to avoid defilement by touch. His accidental collision with a Hindu merchant, his caste superior, ensues humiliation in the form of a slap from the caste Hindu. Bakha is expected to clean the temple courtyard but is not allowed to enter the temple for the risk of polluting the holy place beyond purification and when he dares to do so he is chased out of the temple. Bakha feels oppressed by all these humiliating experiences and wants to rebel against tradition and the shackles of the caste-ridden society. He searches for salvation that will help him overcome the disastrous effect of the caste-system. In despair, he meets Colonel Hutchinson who is a priest from the church and wants him to convert to Christianity after confessing his sins. But his wife shouts at him for bringing an untouchable to her house and as a result Bakha runs away from the church. He then goes to Golbagh to listen to Gandhi's speech and feels better when Gandhi expresses his wish of being reborn as an untouchable, calls the untouchables 'Harijans' as well as cleaners of the Hindu religion and asks them to stop accepting food for the work that they do.

Gandhi's speech does not offer a solution to Bakha's problem; he cannot escape from the profession of cleaning toilets, sweeping streets or carrying dung which is the main source of the social stigma to which people of his caste are subjected. Finally, he finds a solution to his problem through the conversation between Iqbal Nath Sarshar, a modernist poet, and B.N. Bashir, a lawyer, in the idea of introducing flush toilets, water closets and main-drainage throughout India which will emancipate the untouchables from the social stigma of their profession, thereby liberating them from untouchability. This novel is a discourse that conveys a strong, social message and embodies the idea of ending the excesses of the caste-system, spreading awareness about dignity of labour and restoring respectability to the scavengers. The novel advocates the use of technology, that is, introduction of flush toilets to liberate the untouchables and to create an egalitarian society with social mobility even for the lowest of the low. This abstract construct assigns meaning to the various incidents happening in the life of Bakha and other characters in the novel which are all semiotic signs that combine to form sequences in order to communicate a specific and repeatable message, that is, caste-system is a malaise of the Hindu society and it should be eradicated to establish an egalitarian society with equal opportunities for one and all (*Untouchable* 1-148).

The Constructionist Theory of Meaning and Representation proposes an idea that physical things and actions exist but they only take on meaning and become objects of knowledge within a discourse. On the other hand, Michel Foucault argues that since we can only have knowledge of things if they have a meaning it is through the discourse not through the things which produces meaning (Hall 73). The power of the discourse in the context of this text, *Untouchable*, reduces the political forces, economic forces, ideological control and social

control to aspects of signifying processes. The writing of the novel by Mulk Raj Anand took place in the pre-independence India and was a result of a family tragedy that had been triggered by the excesses of the caste system. The author's aunt had committed suicide after being ostracized by her family for having shared a meal with a Muslim woman. The text was written with the purpose of generating awareness among the readers of the text, rendering a stark portrayal regarding the stringent caste-system and class-system existing in the Indian society of the times. The politics of the text is aimed towards bringing about a change in the Indian society by eradicating the social stigma associated with the untouchables as a result of their profession. Thus, the text projects a technological solution in the form of flush toilets as a means of liberating the untouchables from their misery. Moreover, this solution is supposed to have ramifications in the real world in terms of draconian laws and policies that would help in restoring the rights of the untouchables to them.

The discourse that is embodied in this text is not only against the caste-system with its excesses or about the rigid class system prevalent in the Indian or more specifically Hindu society but also about their economic ramifications and restricted social mobility for the downtrodden and the oppressed. Bakha is never allowed to educate himself on the pretext that if he goes to a school the caste Hindus will never send their children to the same school for fear of defilement. Since education is the basis of economic advancement and social mobility, Bakha is deprived of an education.

The text through the power of its discourse brings about ideological control and social control in the context of Indian culture and society. The discourse that opposes oppression resulting from caste-system and class-system brings about ideological control by introducing the idea of dignity of labour, by foregrounding the identity of the marginalised and the dispossessed male subaltern subject as a subject with agency and voicing the concern regarding the manifold oppression of a marginalised female subject in terms of caste, class and gender in the Indian cultural set-up. It brings about social control by portraying caste-system and class-system as an evil prevalent in the society that should be eradicated thereby establishing an egalitarian society. The injustices that are done on Bakha as a result of the lopsided caste-system and class-system such as the living condition of Bakha on the outskirts of Bulashah, the back breaking poverty of Bakha despite the essential service that he renders to the society by cleaning toilets and latrines, Bakha's aspiration to lead the comfortable life of an Englishman that can go as far as keeping an article of furniture of European design, that is, a broken cane chair, the caste Hindus avoiding being touched by him, he being deprived from getting himself educated and he not being allowed to enter the temple for praying are grave offences which help in exposing the plight of the untouchables. This in turn helps to turn the tide against the excesses of the caste-system and the class-system thereby making the need for eradication of the existing caste-system and class-system imperative. Lakha, Bakha's father, serves as a foil to Bakha because despite bearing the brunt of social discrimination in the society on account of untouchability he has accepted it and unlike Bakha has never searched for a solution to it. Thus, the ideology proposes freedom from such shackles of the caste and the class by introduction of flush toilets thereby proposing a change in the traditional ideology and the traditional society leading to its makeover.

The novel proposes that all knowledge is an expression of the 'Will to Power' as Bakha's knowledge regarding the possibility of introducing flush toilets gives him a new lease of life and it brings to him a promise of freedom from a shackled and dark existence as an untouchable. This new technology can release him from the abominable profession that has a social stigma associated with it. The inception of flush toilets makes him feel powerful as it gives him the hope of a better life with a respectable identity.

Foucault states that there is no absolute truth or objective knowledge (Seldan 71). The novel projects that there is no absolute truth or objective knowledge as Lakha has borne the brunt of the same oppression of the caste-system and the class-system as Bakha, which becomes evident in his narration of an episode from his life through a flashback technique. It tells us about Lakha's predicament to get medicines from Hakim Bhagwan Das for his child Bakha when he was very ill and had high temperature. He initially tries to reach Hakim Bhagwan Das through a babu but he refuses Lakha and insults him by saying that he does not want to take a bath again for having been defiled by an untouchable. He tries reaching the Hakim through other people who were visiting the Hakim's dispensary but no one pays heed to him. He keeps waiting near the heap of rubbish that he had collected and feels bitter about the fact that he cannot purchase medicines for his son although he is ready to spend his hard earned money. He is concerned about his son's plight and starts praying to God. He goes back home where his wife who is tending to his sick son who is on his death bed. He rushes back to the Hakim's house, falls on the Hakim's feet and begs him to attend to his son. The Hakim insults him by calling him a 'Bhangi' and a 'Chandal' (Anand 73) as he has been defiled by Lakha's touch. Lakha servilely apologizes to the Hakim and requests him again to attend to his son. The Hakim relents and starts writing a prescription. At that point of time Bakha's uncle comes shouting that Bakha is passing out. Lakha rushes home to his son and is soon followed by Hakimji who attends to Bakha and saves his life (Anand 71-74). Lakha narrates the incident and mentions that actually the caste Hindus are kind people but religion prevents them from touching the untouchables, thereby exhibiting his deep-rooted sense of inferiority and the docile acceptance of the laws of fate. Thus, Lakha unlike Bakha seems to have accepted the oppression and discrimination practised in the Indian society as a result of the flawed caste-system and the rigid class-system. It proves that the truth of Bakha is to rebel against the excesses of the caste-system and the class-system and to search for a solution to encounter those excesses whereas the truth of Lakha is a docile acceptance of the very same excesses.

For Bakha, who belongs to the next generation, this is not acceptable. He rebels against the excesses of the caste-system and the class-system and looks for a solution to encounter those excesses which Lakha had accepted. So the system and dogma of untouchability is not a fixed structure. Lakha could not challenge it but Bakha could.

As per Foucault a new discourse or episteme will arise at a later historical moment substituting the existing one and opening up a new discursive formation and producing new discourses with the power and authority as well as truth to regulate social practices in new ways (Hall 74). The novel exhibits that a particular piece of philosophy or scientific theory is 'true' if it fits the description of truth laid down by the intellectual or the political authorities

of the day, by the members of the ruling elite or by the prevailing ideologues of knowledge. Lakha's docile acceptance of the diktats of the caste-system is a result of the socio-religious conditioning that he has undergone as religion too at that time advocated strict adherence to the diktats of the caste-system whereas Bakha's search for a solution regarding the excesses of the caste-system is a result of the progressive and the modernist wave related to technological advancement that sweeps through the land. Moreover, Lakha's belief in his inferiority is based on the description of truth as laid down by religion and endorsed by it whereas Bakha's belief in the technological solution and the superiority of his identity is based on the description of truth as laid down by the intellectual or the political authorities of the day and endorsed by them, such as the poet-cum-journalist Iqbal Nath Sarashar and Mahatma Gandhi. This example also elucidates the historical dimension of discursive change that is manifested through Bakha's social and technological conditioning which is in stark opposition to Lakha's socio-religious conditioning.

The novel through its discourse has played an iconic role in consciousness-raising regarding the miserable plight of the untouchables in pre-independence India which was the result of the injustices that were inflicted on them. It highlights the need to redress their grievances and to end their oppression. With time there were many policy changes in post independence India. Many draconian laws were revised and a provision in Indian Constitution was made to end discrimination against the untouchables, to restore their rights, give them a new identity, and proper representation in the mainstream Indian society by providing them adequate opportunities related to education and employment so that social mobility is possible for them. But still many more measures are to be adopted to ameliorate their condition. The text's production is thus symptomatic of the time when India was nearing her independence with the aspiration of becoming a Nation State that would believe in Equality and access and development for all.

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