NUB JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

Vol. 4 Issue 1 | ISSN 2707-3483



NORTHERN UNIVERSITY
BANGLADESH
Knowledge for Innovation and Change

NUB JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

Vol. 4 Issue 1 July 2023 - June 2024

Editor in Chief
Professor Anwarul Karim, PhD

NORTHERN UNIVERSITY
B A N G L A D E S H
Knowledge for Innovation and Change

Editorial Board

Chief Patron

Professor Abu Yousuf Md. Abdullah, PhD
Chairman
Northern University Bangladesh Trust

Chief Advisor

Professor Eng. Md. Mostafizur Rahman, PhD
Vice-Chancellor (Acting), NUB

Editor in Chief

Professor Anwarul Karim, PhD
Dean
Faculty of Humanities & Social Science, NUB

Executive Editor

Mohammad Jashim Uddin
Associate Professor & Head
Department of English, NUB

Members

Shihab Uddin Ahmad, Assistant Professor, Department of English, NUB
Md. Shakhawat Hossain, Assistant Professor, Department of English, NUB
Mohammad Mozammel Haque, Assistant Professor, Department of English, NUB
Md. Rabiul Islam, Senior Lecturer, Department of General Education, NUB
Dr. Mohammad Rahmatullah, Senior Lecturer, Department of English, NUB

NUB Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities is a blind peer reviewed multidisciplinary journal publishing original and high-quality articles, research reports, case studies, book review etc. covering a wide range of topics in humanities, and social sciences. It is a yearly journal to be published once (July-June) in each year by Northern University Bangladesh.

Correspondence: All correspondence may be addressed to: Editor in Chief, *NUB Journal of Social Science and Humanities*, Northern University Bangladesh

Telephone : (88) 01755513156, 01755513162
Email : nubsshjournal@gmail.com
Website : www.journal.nub.ac.bd

Published by: Northern University Bangladesh

ISSN: 2707-3483 (Print)
Price : Tk. 250

Cover Design: S. M. Shanzida Yeasmin

Editorial

It is with great pleasure that we present to you the fourth volume of the *NUB Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*. This peer-reviewed journal, published annually by the Faculty of Humanities and Social Science at Northern University Bangladesh, continues to provide a platform for scholarly research that spans a diverse range of disciplines, encouraging academic dialogue on pressing social, cultural, and literary issues.

The research papers featured in this issue reflect the ongoing commitment to intellectual rigor and innovation within the humanities and social sciences. In *Reflections of Necrocapitalism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness*, the author provides a critical analysis of Joseph Conrad's narrative, exploring the undercurrents of capitalist exploitation that transcends geographical and temporal boundaries. This inquiry into necrocapitalism is a timely reminder of the systemic structures that continue to oppress marginalized populations across the globe.

In another paper, *Finding Eliotian Metamorphosis in Kafkaesque World of Absurdism: Life in Modernity in the Selected Texts of Eliot and Kafka*, the intertextual exploration of T.S. Eliot and Franz Kafka offers a profound look at the existential dilemmas of modernity. The paper traces how both authors reflect alienation and absurdity of human existence, situating their works within the broader socio-cultural context of the early 20th century.

Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* is re-examined in *Folklore as Strategy: Shylock's Persona and Power Politics*, where the paper highlights how folklore influences Shylock's character and how his persona becomes a vessel for political maneuvering. This study delves into power dynamics, both personal and societal, through a cultural and political lens.

The psychological underpinnings of power and control in Victorian society are explored in *Psychological Anarchism of Victorian Rulers: Perspective of Robert Browning's 'My Last Duchess'*. This analysis highlights the tension between personal desire and societal expectations, shedding light on the complexity of human emotions and motivations in the Victorian era.

The Plight and Agony of the Downtrodden as Depicted in Untouchable and Padma Nadir Majhi: A Comparative Study offers an insightful exploration of the lives of marginalized communities in India and Bangladesh. Through a comparative lens, this paper examines how both Mulk Raj Anand and Manik Bandopadhyay portray the suffering and resilience of the downtrodden in their respective novels.

In a more contemporary setting, *Technology Integrated Instructional Intervention to Develop EFL Writing Skills: A Study on Tertiary Level Learners in Bangladesh* explores the role of technology in enhancing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) skill, specifically focusing on writing at the tertiary level in Bangladesh. The study offers practical implications for educators in integrating technology effectively in the classroom.

Another important contribution is *Justification of Socio-economic Rights of Street Children in Dhaka City: A Study of Farmgate & Agargaon Areas*, which highlights the socio-economic struggles of street children in Dhaka, advocating for the recognition and protection of their rights in the urban context.

Reshaping Superhero Narratives: Representation of Postcolonial Female Characters in the Marvel Cinematic Universe examines the evolving representation of women in superhero narratives, particularly within the postcolonial context. The paper focuses on how Marvel's cinematic universe reimagines female characters as powerful agents of change.

Lastly, *Exploring the Subaltern Agency: A Study on Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things* offers a fresh perspective on the novel, analyzing the agency of subaltern characters and their resistance against the hegemonic forces that shape their lives.

This edition of the journal would not have been possible without the tireless efforts of our Chief Patron, Professor Abu Yousuf Md. Abdullah, PhD, Chairman of Northern University Bangladesh Trust, and the esteemed members of the Editorial Board. I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to Dr. Rahmatullah, Eshrat Anjum, Tabussum Sumaiya, and Nafisa Nafrin Afra for their invaluable support in proofreading and ensuring the quality of this publication.

As we continue to uphold our commitment to intellectual discourse, we hope this volume will inspire further research and reflection in the fields of social sciences and humanities.

We invite our readers to engage with these papers, and we look forward to contributing more thought-provoking research in future editions of the *NUB Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*.

Editor in Chief
NUB Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities
Northern University Bangladesh

NUB Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities

Contents of Vol. 4, Issue 1

Sl.	Title of the Articles	Author(s)	Page
1	Reflections of Necrocapitalism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*	Ahmed Yousuf Ayatulla	09-18
2	Finding Eliotian Metamorphosis in Kafkaesque World of Absurdism: Life in Modernity in the Selected Texts of Eliot and Kafka	Eshrat Anjum Md. Saber-E-Montaha	19-33
3	Folklore as Strategy: Shylock's Persona and Power Politics in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*	Mohammad Jashim Uddin Professor Dr. K Ahmed Alam Dr. Zakir Hossain Talukder	35-45
4	Psychological Anarchism of Victorian Rulers: Perspective of Robert Browning's 'My Last Duchess'	Dr. Md Zahidul Islam Dr. Sazzad Hossain	47-54
5	The Plight and Agony of the Downtrodden as Depicted in *Untouchable and Padma Nadir Majhi*: A Comparative Study	Dr. Syed Afzal Hossain	55-65
6	Technology Integrated Instructional Intervention to Develop EFL Writing Skill: A Study on Tertiary Level Learners in Bangladesh	Md. Akramuzzaman	67-88
7	Justification of Socio-economic Rights of Street Children in Dhaka City: A Study of Farmgate & Agargaon Areas	Md. Rabiul Islam	89-104
8	Reshaping Superhero Narratives: Representation of Postcolonial Female Characters in the *Marvel Cinematic Universe*	Tasnim Alam Mukim Fahima Tasnim	105-117
9	Exploring the Subaltern Agency: A Study on Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*	Hafizur Rahman	119-132

Reflections of Necrocapitalism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*

Ahmed Yousuf Ayatulla[1]

Abstract

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* not only exposes the doublespeak within the doctrine of European colonialism in Africa but also reveals the harsh picture of the incredible inhumanity and brutality of colonial enterprises. The depiction of the discourses of civilizing the 'savage' and the mission of 'trading' with the natives in the text is inextricably linked to economic exploitation, cruelty, torture, and near-slavery. Therefore, this paper attempts to examine the novella from the perspective of necrocapitalism which refers to a form of capitalism that sanctions the accumulation of wealth by systematic subjugation, dispossession, death, and destruction. It argues that the 'methods' of extracting ivory from Congo align with the necrocapitalistic practices. Moreover, it critiques the moral hypocrisy of colonizers by offering additional insights into the economic dimension of the text. To do so, it further attempts to contextualize necrocapitalism in literary analysis by providing an outline that has never been done before.

Keywords**:** *biopower, Conrad, necrocapitalism, homo sacer, state of exception*

Introduction

The Industrial Revolution, the rise of capitalism as an economic system, and colonialism are deeply intertwined. At the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, several European countries establish colonies in Africa and Asia to acquire vital resources, raw materials,

[1] Lecturer, Dept. of English, Bangladesh Army University of Engineering & Technology (BAUET), Qadirabad, Natore-6431, Bangladesh

and cheap if not free labour for their industries to run smoothly. These establishments and expansion strategies are justified and upheld by a complex nexus of discourses, trade networks, and military interventions of the colonizers. Congo, a part of the African continent, is one of such places where the Europeans establish their colony. Congo is first governed by King Alfonso I from 1506 to 1540 and then by Shamba Bolongongo from 1600 to 1620. After that, it is governed by King Leopold of Belgium from 1878 to 1908. Joseph Conrad, as a steamboat captain, arrives in the Congo on 12 June 1890.

Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* captures a fragment of Congo's colonial history. Although it is not strictly an autobiographical novella, Conrad's experiences of his journey to the Congo, his observations, and his reflections are recorded in the narrative voice of Marlow. Through the protagonist Marlow, Conrad explores the moral bankruptcy of the colonizers by presenting the processes of subjugation and extermination of the colonized backed by various discourses that justify such atrocities. In the novella, it is seen that immediately after reaching there he notices inefficiency and brutality in the stations of the Company for which he works. Furthermore, he depicts the inhumane treatment of the natives and the destruction of the environment in the name of 'trade'.

The word 'trade' in the context of the novella becomes ironic because it is one of the many hegemonic discourses that are produced to justify the deplorable activities of the colonizers. Though trade refers to a reciprocal system of economic exchanges to generate profit, it becomes a system of exploitation and violence in the colonial context. Instead of trading, the colonies become a space where death becomes a currency in the service of profit because the natives are sacrificed at the altar of capitalism for the relentless pursuit of profit. Thus, the text becomes a site of necrocapitalistic practices that unravel the entangled relationship of colonialism, capitalism, power, and death.

Therefore, this paper is intended to delve deep into the shared relationships of colonialism, capitalism, subjugation, death, dispossession, and destruction. To do so, it is divided into several parts that address various aspects of necrocapitalistic practices present in the text including a theoretical framework of necrocapitalism that adds to the understanding of the text from a new perspective. This article has been prepared by following qualitative research methodology where the primary source is Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and the secondary material includes different books, journal articles, and online sources.

Theoretical Framework

This section of the article attempts to contextualize necrocapitalism in the field of literary criticism by providing an outline of the concept that was first formalized by Subhbrata Bobby Banerjee in an article titled "Necrocapitalism". Banerjee acknowledges that his conceptualization of necrocapitalism is underpinned by the works of Giorgio Agamben and Achille Mbembe (Banerjee 1544). He uses Agamben's idea of 'states of exception' and Mbembe's idea of 'necropolitics' (Banerjee 1545). As both Agamben and Mbembe are indebted to Foucault's idea of biopolitics, these ideas are

also discussed to the extent that the whole section provides a synoptic understanding of the concept of necrocapitalism for literary analysis.

To begin with, Foucault's concept of 'biopolitics' refers to the power of the sovereign to regulate the life of the population "through an entire series of interventions and regulatory controls" (Foucault 139). Foucault termed the power which is exercised in this context as 'biopower'. Foucault argues that "this power over life evolved in two basic forms" which share a cluster of relations (139). The first form is "centred on the body as a machine: its disciplining, the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic control" (Foucault 139). In other words, the practices of biopower involve treating the human body as a machine so that it can be more efficient and productive to serve the capitalist economy. This optimization of the use of the human body is achieved through disciplinary regulations to integrate it into larger systems such as factories, different job sectors, and so on.

Again, the second form is "focused on the species body, the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes: propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary" (Foucault 139). In the second form of development, the focus shifts from the individual body to the population in general. The regulation of shared biological processes such as births, health, and mortality is central to the practices of biopower over the population because such regulation contributes to the sustenance of productivity. To summarize, Foucault propounds that biopower is exercised through biopolitics, which constitutes a series of regulatory discourses on the human body and life in general, by the sovereign to regulate the life of the population.

In the case of Mbembe, although he uses Foucault's ideas of biopower and biopolitics, Mbembe departs from Foucault and develops it further by focusing more on the regulation of death whereas the former focuses more on the regulation of life. Mbembe extends Foucault's argument and suggests that the sovereign power decides who can live and who must die in addition to the regulation of their life. Thus, he conceptualizes it as 'necropolitics' because the emphasis is put more on death while exercising biopower. Thus, he defines it as "contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death" (Mbembe 39). To clarify, it refers to a condition where individuals or a particular group of people are forced to die or get exposed to harmful situations by sovereign power that uses different coercive methods such as violence, exploitation, and warfare. He supports this by saying that "the ultimate expression of sovereignty largely resides in the power and capacity to dictate who can live and who must die" (Mbembe 66).

At this point, before starting the discussion of Agamben's concept of 'the states of exception' and the culmination of all these concepts into necrocapitalism, it is essential to note how Foucault, Mbembe, and Agamben perceive the idea of sovereign power. Interestingly, these three scholars perceive the sovereign power in the same way as it is

centred on the practice of biopower though the contexts of such entity and its functionalities differ for them significantly. To Foucault, sovereign power is a "juridical being" that is characterized by "the right to take life or let live" (135-36). Mbembe echos Foucault's idea characterizes sovereign power as "to exert one's control over mortality and to define life as the deployment and manifestation of power" (66).

Agamben cites Karl Schimt and suggests that the sovereign power is an entity that can declare "the state of exception" (1). Although it might sound different, the condition of "the state of exception" echoes both Foucault and Mbembe's ideas. It becomes clearer when he explains it as follows:

> …it is the sovereign who, insofar as he decides on the state of exception, has the power to decide which life may be killed without the commission of homicide, in the age of biopolitics this power becomes emancipated from the state of exception and transformed into the power to decide the point at which life ceases to be politically relevant (Agamben83).

Agamben further clarifies his idea of the state of exception by suggesting that it refers to "the suspension of juridical order" that "defines law's threshold or limit concept" and is enacted by the sovereign to manage a situation that cannot be categorized by the traditional legal forms and structures although the process itself is legitimized by hegemonic discourses (4-5). He gives an example of The Patriot Act of America, implemented in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, that allowed the government to monitor all the activities of American citizens with different surveillance programs without any legal consequences. Thus, the life of the citizens is regulated and corresponds to the practices of biopower.

Furthermore, Agamben considers the state of exception as a legal instrument and establishes the intersection of biopolitical and juridical-institutional models of power where an individual's legal and political rights and even access to life can be controlled by the sovereign. Thus, the individual is stripped of all privileges to "bare life" and achieves the status of *homo sacer* who can be killed without any consequences (Agamben 48). However, according to Agamben, the relationship between the sovereign power and the state of exception is paradoxical because "the sovereign is, at the same time, outside and inside the juridical order" (17). In other words, the sovereign is not accountable to anyone for the declaration of a state of exception for its gain.

Coming back to Banerjee, his conceptualization of necrocapitalism is the culminating point of biopolitics, necropolitics, and the idea of sovereign power because he defines it as "contemporary forms of organizational accumulation that involve dispossession and the subjugation of life to the power of death" (Banerjee 1542). To put it more simply, necrocapitalism is a form of capitalism where an entity generates profit using different coercive methods to suppress a particular group of people to the extent of killing them without facing any consequences. Here, the organizational accumulation of wealth is of course practiced by those who assume the position of sovereign power, and the people who are subjugated, dispossessed, and killed assume the position of *homo*

sacer. Another important thing to note here is that although Banerjee defines it as a contemporary practice, he also traces such practices in the period of colonial expansion. While locating such practices in the colonial context, he also connects it with the idea of 'the state of exception', and argues as follows:

> Violence, dispossession and death that result from practices of accumulation occur in spaces that seem to be immune from legal, juridical and political intervention where permanent transgressions of sovereignty seems to more the rule than the exception (1547).

To Banerjee, colonial spaces are the "permanent state of exceptions where sovereignty became an exercise of power outside the law" whereas warzones, ghettos, and concentration camps are considered as the state of exception in contemporary (1549). According to him, if the sovereign power is assumed by the colonizers during the colonial period, it is now assumed by multinational corporations (1565). His argument logically follows that if the colonized assume the position of *homo sacer* during the colonial period then the people living in warzones, ghettos, and concentration camps assume the same position in the contemporary world.

From the discussion above, it can logically be concluded that if an attempt is made to analyze any literary text from the perspective of necrocapitalism, several things must be taken into consideration. Firstly, there must be instances of economic exploitation using coercive methods that subjugate, dislocate, and kill a vulnerable group. Secondly, the existence of a sovereign power that enacts biopolitics and a group of people who become the victims and emerge as *homo sacer* must be traced and explained. Thirdly, the discourses that are produced to justify 'the states of exception' declared for economic exploitation must be deconstructed. In addition to these remarks, this section concludes with an acknowledgment that this is only just a preliminary framework of necrocapitalism for literary analysis and needs more scholarly attention from academicians for future development.

Discussion

If the theoretical framework outlined beforehand is applied in the context of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the practices of necrocapitalism become very evident because the Company for which Marlow works operates in Congo to generate profit and does so by using different coercive methods. Therefore, the Company as an organization assumes the position of the sovereign power. Furthermore, the area of Congo where it operates becomes a permanent state of exception because anything that is done there is above the law. Moreover, the people who live in the area take the position of *homo sacer* because they are stripped of all their rights, considered either as machines or as animals, and are eventually killed. Finally, the hegemonic discourses of 'civilizing the savage' and 'trade' that justify this state of exception share the nature of the discourses produced in the context of biopolitics/necropolitics.

The fact that colonial expansion is fuelled by capitalistic ambitions and economic exploitation, and is achieved by violent measures becomes very clear in different parts

of Marlow's narrative. In the very beginning of the novella, Marlow reflects upon the purpose of colonial ventures and reveals both the economic motive of colonial enterprises and the violent measures enacted to achieve it when he implies that the people who leave their homeland and go to other places are "hunters of gold or pursuers of fame, they all had gone out on that stream, bearing the sword, and often the torch, messengers of the might within the land" (Conrad 19).

Of course, the idea of carrying the sword is not to protect themselves from dangers but to subjugate their colonial subjects. Marlow's reflections echo the same sentiment as that of Jan Coen, Governor General of the Dutch East Indies Company, when he says, as cited in Banerjee, that, "trade must be driven and maintained under the protection and favor of your own weapon. Trade cannot be maintained without war, nor war without trade" (Banjerjee 1543).

Furthermore, when he meets the old doctor of the Company for his health check-ups, the doctor glorifies the 'business' of the company although Marlow feels otherwise as he considers the city in his first impression as "whited sepulchre" (Conrad 25). Here, the word sepulchre refers to death and confinement and the phrase is a reference to the biblical book of Matthew where it means something that is beautiful on the outside but is full of horrors inside. It signifies both the moral hypocrisy of colonialism and the horrific actions that underlay the foundation of it.

Furthermore, Marlow considers the house where the office of the company is stationed as "a house in a city of the dead" (Conrad 27). Yet again, this signifies that the city is built upon the death of individuals comprising both the colonizers and the colonized. The claim that the colonizers are sacrificed too along with the colonized to build the city might seem surprising. However, it is true mainly because of two reasons. First, Marlow's conversation with the doctor reveals that the doctor does not see the employees, whom he examines before employment, a second time. Here, he hints at the possible death of these individuals because there are numerous examples of Europeans breaking down both physically and mentally while serving in the colonies. Second, the death of Kurtz also indicates that sacrifices are made on both sides to run the exploitative system of capitalism that underlay the process of colonization.

Conrad marks a sharp contrast between the space of the city and the attitude of the people who are living there with the space of the colony and the people who work in it. The people of the city make every attempt to mask the exploitative nature of so called 'business' or 'trade' of ivory whereas the people who work in the colony show a more straightforward attitude towards the process of plundering the ivory and exploiting the natives. It is seen in the attitude of the Accountant of the first station. He shows disgust at the groans of a sick person who is brought near him. He is disgusted at "the groans of this sick person" because these groans "distract his attention" (Conrad 36). Furthermore, he adds that it becomes "extremely difficult to guard against clerical errors in this climate" (Conrad 36). It clarifies the purpose of the colonial venture and its emphasis on

the cost of sustaining it. It is a deliberate ignorance of the sacrifices of the people who are forced to keep the machine running.

Another significant remark that reveals the true motive of colonialism and its moral bankruptcy is about the Eldorado Exploring Expedition. It is stated that they are there "to tear treasure out of the bowels of the land" and "they had no moral purpose at the back of it" and even the explorers are compared to the "burglars breaking into a safe" (Conrad 51). From these instances, the exploitative and capitalistic motives of colonialism become very clear.

Moreover, the "methods" of doing 'business' or 'trade' of the Company; especially of Kurtz, that keep the colonial machine running include subjugation, dispossession, and death of the Congolese thus tantamount to the practices of necrocapitalism. Marlow, while waiting for supplies in the first station, notices how the natives are tortured and killed. He notices people in chains with visible wounds signifying brutal torture by the employees. Marlow's account of the natives testifies to this as he says, "I could see every rib, the joints of their limbs were like knots in a rope; each had an iron collar on his neck, and all were connected together with a chain whose bights swung between them, rhythmically clinking" (Conrad 33). When these people are unable to provide services, they are abandoned and left to die in despair. He notices a particular place near the station "where some of the helpers had withdrawn to die" (Conrad 34). He also calls a particular place in the station as "the grove of death" (Conrad 37). Therefore, the colonial space, according to Marlow, becomes a place "where the merry dance of death and trade goes on in a still and earthy atmosphere" (Conrad 31).

Perhaps, Kurtz's "methods" of doing 'trade' surpass all the agents of the Company in terms of brutality. In relentless pursuit of ivory, he conducts brutal raids in different areas near the Inner Station. "The heads of the rebels" that adorns the fence posts around the station expresses his methods very well (Conrad 88). Kurtz, unlike others, does not hesitate to show that his 'business' is done through intimidation and violence. Kurtz's methods become clear when he suggests, "Exterminate all the brutes". Therefore, it becomes clear that the Company generates profit at the cost of the life of the Congolese and their methods align with the necrocapitalistic practices.

Then, it is important to explore how the Company assumes the position of a sovereign power. It is indeed a "juridical entity" that declares a "permanent state of exception". It achieves sovereignty in its exercise of power both over the space and the native Congolese because the Company practically creates a state of exception in the areas controlled by it and gives licenses to its employees to decide the regulations of life and death of the native. It becomes evident when it is seen that Kurtz, the notorious agent of the Inner Station, goes unpunished for his atrocities and methods of collecting ivory. It is as if the Company as a sovereign power has commissioned Kurtz to commit homicide. The other agents also function with impunity in that space.

More instances of unaccountability and lawlessness are noticed in different parts of the narrative. The Brickmaker of the Central Station testifies to the unaccountability and impunity bestowed upon by the Company as a sovereign entity. Marlow says, "The business entrusted to this fellow was the making of bricks—so I had been informed; but there wasn't a fragment of a brick anywhere in the station, and he had been there more than a year—waiting" (Conrad 43). Marlow further discovers that the Manager envies Kurtz's success and fears that he will be ousted by him. So, the Manager deliberately postpones Marlow's journey by sabotaging the boat and shows indifference about acquiring the supplies that are needed to fix it. Kurtz dies because they are too late to reach him. However, the Manager does not face any consequences and the Company seems only to care about the letters that are left by Kurtz. So, it can rightly be said that the areas of Congo where the Company operates become the states of exception where the legal order is deliberately suspended only to ensure the handsome supply of ivory.

In such a state of exception, it becomes clear that the natives attain the position of *homo sacer* because they are stripped to bare life, treated brutally, and killed without any consequence. They are also described using derogatory terms that are historically used to characterize the *homo sacer*. Marlow, along with other colonizers, considers them as 'barbaric' and 'savages'. They incur the images of death and diseases as Marlow uses words such as "pestilent' and 'sordid'. Marlow's further remark further testifies to this when he says that, "they were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now— nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom" (Conrad 34). Marlow uses the images of animals and racist slurs while presenting the natives. Certain words and phrases that are repeatedly use include "black shapes", "black shadows", "bronze figures", "wild", "creatures" and "ant". Marlow also says, "they howled and leaped" (Conrad 84). Marlow even objectify them when he compares his helmsman with a "machine". These remarks surely grant these helpless natives the status of *homo sacer*.

These atrocities in the spatial setting of the narrative are justified mainly by two discourses. First, there is the discourse of 'civilizing the savage'. Then the second discourse is of 'doing business or trade'. By far, the irony and hegemony of the second discourse are already revealed. Regarding the first discourse, it can be said that it is perhaps the most crucial one to understand the beliefs and practices of the colonizers and how they serve in declaring the state of exception.

In the office of Kurtz's disciple, Marlow notices "a small sketch in oils, on a panel, representing a woman, draped and blindfolded, carrying a lighted torch" (Conrad 44). The sketch reveals a number of important aspects of European colonialism in Africa. The woman in the sketch is a representation of the Europeans and the torch in her hand symbolizes the light of civilization, enlightenment, knowledge, religion, and culture. The blindfold symbolizes how the Europeans are deliberately overlooking the consequences of their project.

This is of course connected with bigger discourse known as the "white man's burden" that propounds that the white men must civilize the savages. Here, 'savages' are those people who live in their colonies. The effects of such a discourse are multifaceted. It surely justifies the state of exception that is created in the colonies. We see a number of people including Marlow whose perceptions of the colonial project are either governed or altered by it.

At the beginning of the novel, we see that Marlow's aunt is very happy to see that Marlow is able to contribute to the project of the light of civilization to the 'darkest' corner of the world. Although Marlow tries to hint that the Company operates in Africa solely for its own profit, her aunt does not pay attention. Similarly, Kurtz's Intended whom Marlow meets at the end of the novel also lives in the fiction created by the discourse. She believes that Kurtz is a great man and died while doing something great. But in reality, we observe Kurtz's heinous crime against humanity.

Although Marlow sees the inherent irony and hegemony of these discourses, he is not completely free from the grips of these discourses. He is there to earn money just like other members of his Company. Thus, he is also involved in the 'business'. Secondly, the ways Marlow perceives and describes them are nothing but the reproduction of the same remarks that are propounded by the discourse of civilizing the savage. However, it is through Marlow we see the inherent hypocrisy of the discourses that are used to justify the generation of wealth by subjugating and killing the Congolese people.

Conclusion

Although the contextualization of necrocapitalism in the field of literary criticism requires further exploration, this article only attempts to put forward a preliminary framework that can be applied a number of texts if not all that deal with the subject of colonialism. It suggests that tracing necrocapitalistic practices involves identifying the colonizers as the sovereign, the colonial space as a state of exception, the colonized as *homo sacer*, and the discourses that underpinned the justifications of the continuation of the colonial process.

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that Joseph Conrad's novella aptly explores the capitalistic ventures of colonial enterprises among many other issues that are addressed in the academic discipline of Postcolonialism. While doing so, it not only reveals the economic dimension of the text but also shows how such ventures employed brutality, justified lawlessness, and commissioned mindless murder in the colonies where the Company assumes the role of the sovereign, the Belgian Congo becomes the state of exception, and the Congolese fit achieve the status of *homo sacer*.

Works Cited

Agamben, *Giorgio. Homo Sacer. St*anford University Press, 2020. eBooks, https://doi.org/10.1515/9780804764025.

---. *State of Exception*. University of Chicago Press, 2004. ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA70821005.

Banerjee, Subhabrata Bobby. "Necrocapitalism." *Organization Studies*, vol. 29, no. 12, 2008, pp. 1541-1563, https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840607096386.

Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*, Friends' Book Corner, 2008.

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality*. Penguin Books, 1976, www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/currentstudents/undergraduate/modules/fulllist/special/endsandbeginnings/foucaultrepressiveen278.pdf.

Mbembe, Achille. "Necropolitics." *Public Culture*, vol. 15, no. 1, Jan. 2003, pp. 11–40. https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-15-1-11.

Finding Eliotian Metamorphosis in Kafkaesque World of Absurdism: Life in Modernity in the Selected Texts of Eliot and Kafka

Eshrat Anjum[1] Md. Saber-E-Montaha[2]

Abstract

It is the artist's unique ability that allows them to transcend the human world in a way that explicates and broadens our knowledge of the unknown. When writers find themselves surrounded by unfathomable perils and suspicions, they must serve as iconoclasts, challenging the supposed certainties of their work, and pouring out their present predicaments or emotions. This pressing issue introduces us to the uncharted originality of Kafka in *The Metamorphosis* and the creative essence of Eliot in "The Waste Land" and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock". Both artists transcend conventional notions of literature, creating tension in the reader through absurd character interactions and the distorted, fragmented environments that permeate their respective works. This paper aims to explore the thematic parallelism between the works of T. S. Eliot and Franz Kafka, encapsulating the human condition in the modern world. Furthermore, it examines how these two authors serve as literary representatives of the chaotic and disoriented modern era, questioning conventional thoughts on human actions and behavior. Both have contributed to shaping the concept of absurd literature, inviting readers to explore a strange new realm and observe how it reflects the human condition as portrayed by Eliot and Kafka.

Keywords*: alienation, estrangement, modern man, surrealism, unconscious*

[1] Lecturer, Department of English, Northern University Bangladesh

[2] Graduate Teaching Assistant, Department of English, University of North Dakota

1.1 Introduction

Martin compares Lovecraft to "a group of revolutionary writers," including Eliot, Joyce, and Kafka, noting their combined use of "disturbing, atmospheric, and even otherworldly elements of the 'literary grotesque'" alongside "philosophical and stylistic experimentation" (Martin 82). Kafka's world, marked by enigma and darkness, fosters the 'Kafkaesque'—a realm where modern existential dilemmas resonate, despite its discomfort. Similarly, Eliot's poetry, such as *The Waste Land*, integrates fragmented images of modern civilization, addressing contemporary crises and engaging with literary tradition. Both Kafka's and Eliot's works reflect universal modernist and absurdist sentiments, portraying modern man's struggles with fragmented and absurd reality. I. A. Richards praises Eliot's depiction of post-war desolation and futility (as cited in Lewis 129), while Ryan K. Donada highlights Kafka's creation of an "absurd" world (Donada). Kafka's characters, notably Gregor Samsa, navigate their fates within an absurd reality characterized by fragmented and disoriented imagery.

Both Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* and Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* and *The Waste Land* explore modern crises of identity and authority. Gregor's transformation and Prufrock's identity crisis reflect existential anxieties and societal alienation. Kafka's disoriented images and fragmented narrative align with the modernist and absurdist approaches discussed by Michael D. Sollars (Sollars 73). Eliot's poetry captures a pervasive sense of disillusionment with modern urban decay, as noted by I. A. Richards (as cited in Lewis 129), while Prufrock's struggle with societal expectations highlights his social marginalization. This paper examines how Kafka and Eliot address absurd and modernist perspectives on life's crises, revealing their intersection in portraying authority and existential confusion. Kafka's narrative leaves readers haunted by glimpses of absurd reality, while Eliot's work navigates the tension between modern decay and the quest for meaning, echoing the universal themes discussed by Ryan K. Donada (Donada).

1.2 Literature Review

The bizarre modernistic and surrealistic absurdism in the works of both T. S. Eliot and Franz Kafka attempts to embark on the darkness and meaninglessness that encompassed the twentieth century, offering a genuinely provocative depiction of their creative, imagined, torturous, and nightmarish portrayal of the cosmos. Their approaches provide a profound commentary on the fragmented and disordered nature of contemporary life. Stephen Coote's analysis of Eliot's *The Waste Land* highlights the poem's portrayal of "terrible dreariness," marking it as a representation of not only "desolation" but also "anarchy and doubt" (Coote 74). Coote emphasizes how the poem reflects the widespread disillusionment following World War I, capturing a sense of spiritual and existential barrenness that characterizes modern civilization.

Kafka's work, particularly *The Metamorphosis*, is examined through the lens of auditory effects and narrative techniques. Kata Gellen argues that Kafka's use of

seemingly meaningless noise in his narratives symbolizes broader crises of knowledge and narration within the modernist framework (Gellen 4). Kafka's stories often grapple with ambiguous sounds and surreal elements that underscore the existential crises of modernity. Similarly, Eliot's *The Waste Land* employs fragmented imagery and sensory experiences, such as "the babble of voices" and "the sensation of tobogganing down the mountains," to evoke a modern world marked by horror and spiritual desolation (Cookson and Loughrey 13). This use of sensory details complements Eliot's depiction of a civilization in decay and a profound sense of lifelessness.

Further analysis by scholars like Heller sheds light on the surrealistic and modernist elements in both authors' works. He expands on Kafka's portrayal of existential despair, describing it as reflective of a "pallor and thinness" that captures the ambiguity and alienation inherent in modern existence (Heller 240, 250). Kafka's depiction of humanity's spiritual degradation, characterized by a reduction to mere matter within a techno-capitalist reality, is further elaborated by Michaelides, who argues that this reduction highlights a profound loss of ethical purpose and individual agency (Michaelides 101).

Despite extensive scholarship on Eliot's and Kafka's works, there is a notable gap in research examining the intersection of their writings through the frameworks of absurdism and modernism. Analyzing their texts from these perspectives could unveil new dimensions in understanding their portrayals of the meaninglessness of modern life and human suffering. This review suggests that such an investigation could provide deeper insights into how Eliot and Kafka captured the existential struggles of their time, offering a nuanced exploration of their depictions of a disordered and fragmented world.

1.3 Methodology

The study, centered on modernist and absurdist themes in literature, employs a multi-faceted research approach. Primary sources include T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, and Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (translated by Susan Bernofsky). To develop reasoned explanations, the research incorporates a range of meticulously documented secondary sources, each contributing to the formulation of key points. An anachronistic approach is used to collect information from various secondary materials, including online articles, journal articles, PDFs, dissertations, and videos. Prominent academics have been consulted to address controversial ideas and establish a robust research context. The research also integrates period-specific newspaper articles and interviews, alongside critical analyses, reference materials, book reviews, and online resources to support pedagogical interpretive discussions. Additionally, insights derived from discussions with the thesis supervisor and sibling about the research project have been carefully integrated, emphasizing the interplay between absurdism, modernism, and the crisis of modern existence.

2.1 Anxiety, Nothingness, and Absurdism: From Soren Kierkegaard to Albert Camus

Absurdity, a key theme in existentialist thought, reflects the tension between humanity's search for meaning and the indifference of the universe. From Kierkegaard to Camus, philosophers have explored this conflict, which became central to modernist literature. Thomas Nagel highlights absurdity as the gap between human ambition and the lack of a meaningful "larger context" (Tartaglia 45; Nagel 718-719). For Camus, absurdity arises when our need for meaning is unmet, as the universe remains silent (Tartaglia 47). This existential crisis fosters feelings of alienation and meaninglessness. While Martin Esslin sees absurdism as a call for personal interpretation amid value loss, Ionesco ties it to the denial of life's purpose when detached from metaphysical roots (Esslin xix; Saleem 72). Viktor Frankl, in contrast, advocates for finding personal meaning and responsibility (Onwuatuegwu 5546). Camus suggests accepting the absurd and finding freedom, though Kierkegaard deems this response "demoniac madness" (Onwuatuegwu 5547).

2.2 Modernism: An Iconoclastic Approach to Victorian Nationalism and Cultural Absolutism

Modernism marked a clear break from Victorian traditions, embracing new forms of expression in response to the cultural disillusionment following World War I. Modernist movements like Dada rejected conventional notions of truth, order, and rationality, instead reflecting the chaos and fragmentation of modern life. As modernism evolved, its various strands, from nihilism to systematization, reflected a broader cultural shift from stability to uncertainty. Writers like T.S. Eliot and Gabriel Josipovici critiqued traditional literary forms, arguing that they were inadequate for capturing the complexities of modern existence. Josipovici highlighted modernism's sense of belatedness, suggesting that older artistic forms no longer suited the modern condition (Josipovici). Eliot's works, such as The Waste Land, challenged Victorian ideals by focusing on alienation, fragmentation, and subjective experience, reflecting the disillusionment of post-war Europe (Levenson 28).

2.3 Application of Absurdism and Modernism in Literature

Absurdism in literature portrays characters grappling with existential dilemmas in an irrational and disordered world. Franz Kafka's The Metamorphosis and T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land exemplify these themes, using fragmentation and surrealism to express the absurdity of modern life. Kafka's Gregor Samsa embodies absurdism through his inexplicable transformation, reflecting alienation and existential crisis. His struggle, devoid of reason or resolution, mirrors modern life's meaninglessness. Similarly, Eliot's The Waste Land captures post-war disillusionment through its fragmented narrative and portrayal of urban alienation. The "Unreal City" of London, with its mechanical, lifeless inhabitants, represents the moral decay and despair of modernity (Eliot 31). Both writers use absurdism and modernism to challenge traditional notions of coherence, highlighting the futility and isolation of the modern human experience.

3.1 The Absurdist Predicament and Modern Man in Eliot and Kafka

3.1.1 "The Waste Land" and the Metaphorical Ideas of Impotence

Initially viewed by Gilbert Seldes as disjointed, "The Waste Land" is later recognized for its emotional structure, reflecting a world that has lost its meaning and fertility (as cited in Hinchliffe 12). Through recurring imagery and allusions, Eliot echoes Kafka's reshaping of perceptions, using cyclical structures to represent stagnation. The poem's fragmented form, marked by war and notions of impotence, captures modern existential despair: "What is that sound high in the air / Murmur of maternal lamentation... Unreal" (Eliot 45). Like Kafka's oppressive worlds, Eliot's dismal atmospheres and alienated characters express post-World War I trauma.

Eliot's use of fragmented consciousness mirrors Kafka's narrative style in "The Trial" (Antakyalioglu), with both writers portraying the modern individual's existential disorientation. In "The Waste Land," Tiresias offers a detached view of modern life's crisis, blending intellectual and emotional suffering. Eliot's works, from "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" to "Four Quartets," depict the modern man's search for meaning in a fragmented world, where intellect clashes with emotional sincerity (Sarkar 54; Oser 48; MAMBROL; Wolff 149).

3.1.2 Kafkaesque World of Absurdism and Trapped Modern Man in Utter Solitude

Kafka's portrayal of alienation and existential despair highlights the gap between consciousness and existence, individual aspirations, and the search for metaphysical truth (Gilman 7-8). The "Kafkaesque" world blends absurdity and sinister elements, reflecting the distorted reality of oppressive, mundane settings (Grec 3). Kafka's impact extends to Surrealism and Existentialism, with his works resonating through themes of alienation and distorted perceptions (Cohn 19).

In *The Metamorphosis*, Gregor Samsa's transformation symbolizes the existential desolation of modern man, reflecting eternal torment and alienation (Michaelides 104). His metamorphosis serves as a critique of the modern condition, illustrating sickness as both symptom and remedy (Sarkar 64). Kafka's universal appeal lies in his ability to illuminate the human condition, with Gregor's entrapment symbolizing broader existential struggles that resonate beyond fiction (Alkhafaji 16034).

3.2 Alienation, Shame, Dejection, and Disillusionment in Modern Life

3.2.1 The metaphorical transformation of Gregor: Alienation and lost identity

French existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre argues that the origin of alienation lies within the experience of shame. He says:

> By the mere appearance of the other, I am put in the position of passing judgment on myself as an object, for it is as an object that I appear to the other... I could feel irritation, or anger before it as a bad trait of myself which gives to my expression an ugliness or baseness which

> I do not have, but I could not be touched to the quick. Shame is by nature recognition. I recognize that I am as the others see me. There is, however, no question of a comparison between what I am for myself and what I am for the other as if I found in myself, in the mode of be-ing for itself, an equivalent of what I am for the other. (Sartre 222)

Thus, in Sartrean terms, shame is a form of consciousness where awareness of others leads to the recognition of oneself as an object of judgment by others, a concept Sartre refers to as "the gaze" (Sartre 252). Kafka illustrates Gregor Samsa's dissatisfaction with his career early in *The Metamorphosis*, despite Gregor's persistent dedication to work even after his transformation into an insect. Upon awakening as a bug, his first thought is about catching his train (Kafka 90). Gregor's alienation extends beyond his physical transformation, affecting his interactions with his family and society. The unchanged appearance of his room reflects his internal disconnection, while a visual description of a lady's picture on the wall underscores this estrangement (Kafka 13).

Henry Sussman, in *The Trial: Kafka's Unholy Trinity*, discusses Kafka's existential struggles, highlighting the tension between his identity and the judgment he imposes on himself through the eyes of others. This process results in self-doubt, isolation, and familial conflict (Sussman 60). The broader human condition is depicted as being ensnared by a materialistic society that imposes ambiguous consequences on personal choices, making unlimited freedom seem burdensome (Prithivirajan 14). Gregor's transformation represents an existential struggle, as he becomes estranged from his identity and alienated from his humanity, illustrated by his reflection on his degrading job (Kafka 16). The narrative ultimately suggests that Gregor's metamorphosis leads to a loss of identity, a departure from existence to essence, as his family moves on without him, choosing to remember him with respect (Kafka 90).

3.2.2 A chaotic universe: Frustration and estrangement in the selected poetry of Eliot

Poets and artists often sought refuge from the harsh realities of the modern world through their work, and Franz Kafka and T.S. Eliot are notable examples. According to Nkemngong Nkengasong in *W. B. Yeats and T. S. Eliot: Myth and the Poetics of Modernism*, the innovation in twentieth-century literature, termed "modernism," arose not solely from the need to create a new tradition but as a response to the harsh conditions of the time. Poetry became a means of escaping the monotony of reality, a way to express psychological states, and a tool for seeking deeper truths (Nkengasong 124). This retreat from reality reflects a broader shift in the 20th century, where individuals faced with societal corruption and personal despair often turned to art as an escape. John Dunne captures this sentiment in *A Search for God in Time and Memory*, noting that modern man experiences "hell and purgatory on earth in the form of despair" (Dunne 261).

T.S. Eliot's poetry vividly encapsulates this sense of modern despair. In *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, the protagonist's frustration is symbolized by the image of a bug pinned to a wall, reflecting his existential angst and entrapment. The poem's lines,

“The eyes that fix you in a formulated frame / And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin, / When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall / Then how should I begin / To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways? / And how should I presume?” (Eliot 15), illustrates Prufrock’s sense of paralysis and his struggle to reconcile his inner turmoil with the external world. Similarly, *The Waste Land* transitions from despair to a glimmer of hope with the concluding phrase “Shantih,” meaning "the peace that passeth understanding" (Eliot 48). However, this potential hope is overshadowed by the poem’s fragmented and bleak narrative. In “A Game of Chess,” the setting underscores themes of isolation and bitterness, paralleling Prufrock’s inaction and the inner turmoil of his characters (Labang 39). Eliot’s work often portrays characters seeking visionary experiences within the chaos, only to confront deeper fears and an internal landscape fraught with dread, reflecting Ronald Bush’s observation of the synthesis of “city and psyche; dread and banality of quotidian experience” (Bush 78). This exploration of modern life's monotony and existential pain underscores the profound disconnection many feel from traditional sources of meaning.

3.3 Dream and Surrealism: The Association of the Modernist Self with the Absurd World

3.3.1 The nightmarish world of unconscious in Kafka’s art of terrifying reality

Freud's concept of "dream work" involves unconscious processes such as condensation, displacement, and dramatization that ultimately fulfill desires within dreams (Freud 74). This mechanism creates a conflict between the latent and manifest content of dreams, as desires are realized in a way that reveals suppressed thoughts (Freud 34, 59). In Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, the protagonist Gregor Samsa’s absurd transformation from man to an insect symbolizes modern man’s latent dissatisfaction with his circumstances, merging the dreamlike with the real (Barfi et al. 107).

Gregor’s fixation on trivial matters, characterized by Arnold Heidsieck as “microscopic realism,” underscores his passive acceptance of a meaningless life (Heidsieck 177). Kafka’s use of allegory critiques contemporary society's disorientation and oppression, reflecting arbitrary violence and existential confusion (as cited in Stuart 2020). Calvin S. Hall and Richard E. Lind argue that *The Metamorphosis* functions as an allegory that, like a dream, requires interpretation to reveal its deeper meaning (Hall and Lind 1970). Camus finds a paradoxical hope in Kafka’s exploration of absurdity, suggesting that despite Kafka’s bleak subject matter, his work inspires profound optimism (Camus 133). However, Thorlby argues that Kafka's work reveals the psychological collapse of conventional thinking, leading to a nightmarish existence where reality and consciousness blur, preventing any clear distinction between the two (Thorlby 94).

3.3.1 Surreal quality of dream in favor of realistic aestheticism in Eliot

Modernist literature frequently portrays dreams as an escape from reality, with Friedrich asserting that modernist poetry seeks transformation rather than mere imitation (Friedrich 56). Dreams are not just fleeting distractions but represent a profound, intangible aspect of the human psyche. Eysteinsson suggests that Modernism aims to uncover deeper truths through "processing by human consciousness," rather than rejecting the external world outright (Eysteinsson 184). This quest for deeper reality is exemplified in Surrealism, which, influenced by Freud's psychoanalytic theories, delves into the "higher reality of certain forms of associations" found in dreams and the subconscious (Breton 36). Surrealist poetry employs techniques like automatic writing to express this alternative reality, embracing the enigmatic and surreal over conventional realism.

Roula-Maria Dib highlights stylistic parallels between T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and the visual work of Surrealist artist Salvador Dalí. Both artists explore spiritual emptiness and desolation through imagery of barren landscapes, insects, and distorted objects. Dalí's paintings, such as 'The Persistence of Memory' (1931) and 'Dream Caused by the Flight of a Bee around a Pomegranate a Second Before Awakening' (1944), resonate with the fragmented and surreal imagery in Eliot's poetry. Eliot's depiction of the "Unreal city/ Under the brown fog of a winter midday" embodies a Surrealist quality, where disjointed elements coalesce into a "cryptic, hideous whole" (Eliot 38).

Dalí's technique of juxtaposing unrelated elements in surreal settings creates a profound and mysterious impact, similar to Eliot's approach. For example, Dalí's 'Three Ages' overlays facial features onto a natural landscape, merging human and natural elements in a surreal manner. This method of blending disparate forms parallels Eliot's use of constant transformation in *The Waste Land*, where characters and symbols shift fluidly within the poem's narrative (Dib).

3.4 A String of Symbols of Fragmented Images: An Inertia-Stricken Core Self from the Ostensibly Dynamic Façade of the Day's Civilization

3.4.1 The sense of existence in stasis imprinted in modern humanity's mechanical actions and the spiritual desolation of existential crisis

Eliot employs various literary devices such as imagery, metaphor, rhythm, and sound patterns to portray individuals caught in mundane daily routines. According to Wylie (1923), *The Waste Land* emerges from "an extremity of tragic emotion," reflected through chaotic voices and a stream of memories and images that express weariness and despair (Hinchliffe 12). Eliot uses devices like single lines, personification, sibilance, and synecdoche to illustrate the devastation of modern civilization. The phrase "The smoky days' burnt-out ends" symbolizes a hollow, purposeless society entrenched in routine. In *The Waste Land*, fragmented images and symbols, such as "newspapers" and

“grimy scraps” in the “Burial of the Dead” section, depict contemporary civilization as decaying and spiritually bankrupt (Rani 88).

Conrad Aiken describes the poem as consisting of "sharp, discrete perceptions and imagery," presenting these elements forcefully and beautifully to create fragmented mirrors and shattered illusions (as cited in Rani 88). Eliot contrasts metamorphosis with the sterility of modern life, exemplified by the myth of Philomela, who is symbolically carved into a lady’s walls, reflecting a spiritually empty and sexually aggressive modern world. Southam (1977) notes that Philomela’s transformation into a nightingale is dismissed in contemporary society as mere noise, representing the alienation of modern man (as cited in Saleem et al. 189). The rat in the poem symbolizes the decay of twentieth-century culture, and the bones represent the hollow existence faced by society (ibid.).

The Modernist motto “make it new” revitalized artistic originality, leading to a blend of past fragments with contemporary issues, which Eliot used to create connections while disorienting the reader, mirroring the chaos of modern urban life (Johnson 102). In *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, modern society is depicted as alienated and trapped in meaningless routines. Prufrock’s isolation and disconnection from meaningful existence are illustrated through the imagery of industrial desolation and trivial social rituals (Rani 90). His repression is expressed through metaphor and imagery, highlighting the superficiality of civilization and his awareness of societal judgments. The poem’s title contrasts with its Dantean epigraph, which critiques modern culture by paralleling Prufrock's internal torment with Dante’s inferno imagery, emphasizing the modern disconnection and inability to express true feelings and desires.

3.4.2 The “Dung-beetle" metaphor, the image of “door” and the mysterious number “three” in Kafka’s Novella

According to Schuman (2015), Gregor Samsa in Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis* undergoes a transformation where his literal self becomes his metaphorical identity (8). The roach or “dung-beetle” that Gregor becomes symbolizes his parasitic mentality, reflecting his insecurity and self-hatred. He longs for his family's emotional recognition, but his repulsive nature prevents him from expecting more than minimal gratitude. The metaphor of a “door” aptly represents Gregor's futile attempts to connect with his family, as he is physically and emotionally confined. He remains close to his family only within the limits of his room, often separated by a closed door, which signifies his isolation and ultimate demise as his body and mind deteriorate together (Moss 42).

The Metamorphosis can be seen as a narrative about the squalid aspects of existence. Drawing on the works of Virginia Woolf and Lytton Strachey, Rosner describes dirt as a symbol of the unspeakable, unseeable, and unwritable aspects of domestic life, including bodily functions, socially inappropriate emotions, and sexual transgressions (69). Gregor’s transformation into a verminous creature underscores his descent into a state associated with dirt and decay. The term “vermin,” as Lucinda Cole

explains, does not refer to a specific biological order but instead represents something inherently disgusting and degrading, further emphasizing Gregor's metaphorical reduction to filth (1).

The symbolic use of the number three is significant in Kafka's narrative, as explored by John Smith. Gregor's room has three doors, and there are three other family members, three lodgers, and three stages to his transformation—denial, acceptance, and decline—each corresponding to one of the novella's three chapters. This repetition of the number three, a symbol often associated with Christianity, particularly the Holy Trinity, reflects the structure of Gregor's metamorphosis. He first denies the implications of his transformation, then accepts his new identity, and finally succumbs to his fate, mirroring the Christian motif of death and resurrection (Smith 220; Posey).

3.5 Freudian Psychoanalysis and Metafiction: Pessimism in Response to the Modern Society and Stream of Consciousness

3.5.1 The forces of collective unconscious with shifting poetic voices in "The Waste Land"

Eliot's *The Waste Land* exhibits metafictional qualities through its extensive use of mythical elements and allusions, reflecting Eliot's integration of poetic form and life. He employs symbols and images that bridge his varied experiences, compensating for the lack of explicit grammatical connections by retaining psychological and lyrical signs. Eliot's use of fragmented imagery, abrupt transitions, wit, allusiveness, and elliptical language reflects his technique of stream of consciousness, aiming to convey complex emotions (Rodríguez 54). The poem's opening, "April is the cruelest month" (Eliot 44), parodies Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* and signals the desolate state of the land, with the mythic cycle ending. This opening is the first of many literary references and fragments that create a sense of cyclical repetition, societal critique, and hypertextuality.

The mixing of elements is evident in the first four lines of Part I, blending "memory and desire" in an April that breeds "lilacs out of the dead land" (Eliot 44). The shift between present and past tense hints at the narrative's metaleptic nature, where the narrating time and story time interchange, exemplifying the stream of consciousness (Rodríguez 54). Eliot's psychological unconscious combines individual and collective memory, reflecting influences from both Freud and Jung. This composite poetic unconscious emerges in the poem's opening lines, where various voices and memories interweave, referencing historical and cultural memories that shape the poem's consciousness (McIntire 169).

The closing line of "The Burial of the Dead," "You! Hypocrite lecteur! – mon semblable, – mon frère!" (Eliot 76), exemplifies intersubjective and intertextual action, confronting the reader and blending the poem's voice with that of dead poets. This illustrates the permeable boundaries between different temporal moments, a key characteristic of stream of consciousness (McIntire 170). Eliot views the past or tradition

as a universal concept, transcending space and time, as Octavio Paz articulates, comparing Eliot's influence on world literature to Klee in painting and Stravinsky in music, highlighting the critical impact of his work (Paz 2).

3.5.2 Delving into the conflicting conscious and unconscious world of Gregor and Freudian id, ego and superego

The Metamorphosis by Kafka exemplifies modernistic fiction through its extensive use of symbols, metaphors, comparisons, personifications, and intertextuality, along with themes of psychoanalysis. Kafka introduces a surreal element—a man transforming into an insect—within a realistic narrative, a hallmark of modernism. This transformation symbolizes Gregor Samsa's sad, dependent human life and his alienation from society. The insect, like Gregor, is unprotected and devalued in the eyes of civilization, reflecting his family's true attitude toward him after the transformation. Gregor's father, once lethargic, becomes an active worker, highlighting the family's shift from needing Gregor financially to viewing him as expendable (Childs 125; Bloom 44).

The novella also explores Gregor's unconscious world, aligning with Freud's theory of the mind's conscious and unconscious divisions. The setting and descriptions—coldness, darkness, and rain—symbolize the unconscious, where Gregor retreats after his transformation. His awakening as an insect represents a shift from conscious awareness to unconscious experience, characterized by repressed desires and fears (Barfi et al. 107). The story's times are mostly at night or in the evening, further emphasizing this unconscious state. Gregor's death, occurring at dawn, symbolizes his transition from the unconscious back to the conscious realm, marking the death of his desires (Kafka 3, 4, 38, 40).

Kafka's use of magical realism, blending the fantastic with the realistic, highlights modernist concerns about alienation in contemporary society. The stream-of-consciousness technique reveals Gregor's psychological complexity as he grapples with his transformation, initially focusing on his job rather than the supernatural events (Barfi et al. 108; Kafka 9). Freud's model of the psyche—id, ego, and superego—also informs the novella. Gregor's father represents the superego, enforcing moral constraints and leading to Gregor's guilt and punishment, ultimately resulting in his death. This punishment, symbolized by the apple thrown by his father, signifies Gregor's forced return to the conscious world and his final, tragic demise.

4.1 Findings

This study reveals that both T.S. Eliot and Franz Kafka effectively utilize themes of absurdism and modernism to critique the complexities of the human condition in the context of a disordered world. By depicting characters who grapple with existential dilemmas, they illuminate the profound sense of alienation and meaninglessness prevalent in modern life. Kafka's portrayal of Gregor Samsa in *The Metamorphosis* serves as a poignant embodiment of absurdity, illustrating the struggle against an

irrational existence devoid of resolution. Similarly, Eliot's fragmented narrative in *The Waste Land* captures the moral decay and disillusionment of post-war society through its depiction of the "Unreal City." Together, these authors challenge conventional notions of coherence and meaning, inviting readers to confront the chaotic realities of contemporary existence while underscoring the enduring relevance of absurdist thought in understanding modernity.

4.2 Conclusion

The literary absurd, as exemplified by Kafka and Eliot, interrogates the possibility of thriving in a world where meaning is elusive, and reality is marred by distortion and danger. In Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, Gregor's transformation into an insect represents a profound existential crisis, highlighting his alienation and the absurdity of his condition (Childs 125). This metamorphosis symbolizes not only Gregor's social and psychological isolation, but also the pervasive sense of absurdity in his life. Similarly, Eliot's *The Waste Land* utilizes fragmented imagery and dream-like settings to reflect the disintegration of coherent reality and the pervasive sense of absurdity in modern existence (Eliot 29). Eliot's depiction of chaotic and surreal elements, such as the seemingly trivial scene of Mrs. Porter and her daughter washing their feet in soda water, contrast sharply with the more intense and disturbing images, creating a complex portrayal of the modern human condition (Eliot 37-38). Both Kafka and Eliot illustrate how their characters' fragmented experiences and unstable environments underscore the inherent absurdity of contemporary life, thus offering a reflection on the challenges of finding meaning in a disordered world (Popova).

Works Cited

Alkhafaji, Weam M. "A STUDY OF ALIENATION IN KAFKA'S THE METAMORPHOSIS AS A MORAL GUIDE FOR THE NEW GENERATION." *Palarch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology*, vol. 17, no. 6, Sept. 2020, pp. 1673-1691, archives.palarch.nl/index.php/jae/article/download/7676/7232/15034.

Antakyalioglu, Zekiye. "At the still point of the turning world:" T.S. Eliot and Gilles Deleuze." *E-rea*, June 2018, www.researchgate.net/publication/325786582_At_the_still_point_of_the_turning_world_TS_Eliot_and_Gilles_Deleuze.

BALAVAGE, ELYSIA. *Annihilation and Utter Night: W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, and a Modern(ist) Old Nihilism*. 2019. The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, PhD dissertation. libres.uncg.edu/ir/uncg/listing.aspx?id=26493.

Barfi, Zahra, et al. "A Study of Kafka's the Metamorphosis in the Light of Freudian Psychological Theory." *Research Journal of Recent Sciences*, vol. 2, no. 10, Oct. 2013, pp. 107-109, www.researchgate.net/publication/330370241_A_Study_of_Kafka's_the_Metamorphosis_in_the_Light_of_Freudian_Psychological_Theory.

Beasley, Rebecca. *Theorists of Modernist Poetry: T.S. Eliot, T.E. Hulme, Ezra Pound*. Taylor & Francis e-Library: Routledge, 2007.

Bloom, Harold. *Franz Kafka's The Metamorphosis*. Infobase Publishing, 2006.

Breton, André. *De surrealistiske manifester. Udvalgt og oversat af Finn Herman efter Manifestes du Surréalisme*. Gyldendal, 1972.

Bush, Ronald. *T.S. Eliot: The Modernist in History*. Cambridge UP, 1991.

Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Translated by Justin O'Brien, Penguin Classics, 2000.

Childs, Peter. *Modernism*. Routledge, 2008.

Cohn, Dorrit. "Castles and Anti-Castles, or Kafka and Robbe-Grillet." *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 5, no. 1, 1971, pp. 19-31.

Cole, Lucinda. *Imperfect Creatures: Vermin, Literature, and the Sciences of Life, 1600-1740*. U of Michigan P, 2016.

Cookson, Linda, and Bryan Loughrey. *Critical Essays on The Waste Land: T.S. Eliot*. Pearson Schools, 1988.

Cools, Arthur, et al., editors. *Kafka and the Universal*. de Gruyter, 2018.

Coote, Stephen. *T.S. Eliot: The Waste Land*. Penguin Books Limited, 1985.

Dib, Roula-Maria. "Essays/Reviews in tandem with the special T S Eliot issue." *Agenda Poetry*, vol. 51, no. 3-4, www.agendapoetry.co.uk/documents/TSEliotOnlineEssays.pdf.

Donada, Ryan K. "The Absurdity of Franz Kafka." *WordPress*, 20 Mar. 2012, metakafkasis.wordpress.com/2012/03/20/the-absurdity-of-franz-kafka/

Dunne, John S. *A Search for God in Time and Memory*. Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame, 1967.

Eliot, T.S. The Waste Land. In *The Waste Land and Other Poems*, edited by Frank Kermode, Penguin Books, 2003.

Eliot, Thomas S. *T. S. Eliot (Selected Poems)*. Edited by Vasant A. Shahane, BOOK WORLD, Selection from *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*

Esslin, Martin. *The Theatre of the Absurd*. 1st ed., Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1961.

Eysteinsson, Astradur. *The Concept of Modernism*. Cornell UP, 1992.

Freud, Sigmund. *On Dreams*. Read Books, Ltd., 2013.

Friedrich, Hugo. *Strukturen i moderne lyric. Oversat af Poul Nakskov efter Die Struktur der modernen Lyrik*. Gyldendal, 1968.

Gellen, Kata. *Kafka and Noise: The Discovery of Cinematic Sound in Literary Modernism*. Northwestern UP, 2019.

Gilman, Sander L. *Franz Kafka*. 1st ed., Reaktion Books Ltd, 2005.

Grec, Emanuel M. "Sense and Sensibility: Topics in Intellectual History of Central and Eastern Europe." *Franz Kafka's personal writings and their philosophical impact on his literature*, Winter Semester 2015-2016, Department of History, Central European University (CEU), Academia, 2016, www.academia.edu/25308896/Franz_Kafkas_personal_writings_and_their_philosophical_impact_on_his_literature_Sense_and_Sensibility_Topics_in_Intellectual_History_of_Central_and_Eastern_Europe.

Hall, Calvin S., and Richard E. Lind. *Dreams, Life, and Literature: A Study of Franz Kafka*. U of North Carolina P, 1970.

Heller, Peter. "The Autonomy of Despair: An Essay on Kafka." *The Massachusetts Review*, vol. 1, no. 2, Winter 1960, pp. 231-253.

Hinchliffe, Arnold P. *The Waste Land and Ash Wednesday (The Critics Debate)*. Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 1987.

Johnson, Evan. "Absurdism: The Catalyst of Self-Dissolution in Samuel Beckett and T. S. Eliot." *Citations Journal of Undergraduate Research*, vol. 18, 2021, www.lagrange.edu/academics/undergraduate/undergraduate-research/citations/14-Citations2021.EJohnson---ENGL.pdf.

Josipovici, Gabriel. "Modernism still matters: Writers such as T S Eliot and Samuel Beckett worked in synchrony with continental Europeans." *The New Statesman*, 6 June 2010, www.newstatesman.com/uncategorized/2010/09/writers-english-modernism.

Kafka, Franz. "Kafka's The Metamorphosis: Metamorphosis of the metaphor' in The Metamorphosis." *The Metamorphosis*, edited by Stanley Corngold, Modern Library, 2013, pp. 158-196.

---. *The Metamorphosis*. Edited by Mark M. Anderson, Translated by Susan Bernofsky, 1st ed., W. W. Norton & Company, 2014.

Labang, Oscar C. "The Horrors of a Disconnected Existence: Frustration, Despair and Alienation in the Poetry of T. S. Eliot." *Wenshan Review of Literature and Culture*, vol. 3, no. 2, June 2010, pp. 33-51.

Levenson, Michael, Editor. *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*. Cambridge UP, 1999.

Lewis, Pericles. *The Cambridge Introduction to Modernism*. Cambridge UP, 2007.

MAMBROL, NASRULLAH. "The Waste Land as a Modernist Text." *Literary Theory and Criticism*, literariness.org, 29 Mar. 2016, https://literariness.org/2016/03/29/the-waste-land-as-a-modernist-text/

Martin, Sean E. "Lovecraft, Absurdity, and the Modernist Grotesque." *Lovecraft Annual*, no. 6, 2012, pp. 82-112, www.jstor.org/stable/26868452.

McIntire, Gabrielle. "Psychology, Psychoanalysis, and New Subjectivities." *The Cambridge Companion to The Waste Land*. Cambridge UP, 2015, pp. 162-177.

Michaelides, Pavlos E. "MODERNITY AND THE EXISTENTIAL METAPHYSICS OF LIFE AND DEATH IN KAFKA'S METAMORPHOSIS." *International Journal of Arts & Sciences*, vol. 9, no. 4, Apr. 2017, pp. 101-118.

Moss, Leonard. "A KEY TO THE DOOR IMAGE IN "THE METAMORPHOSIS"." *Modern*

Fiction Studies, vol. 17, no. 1, Spring 1971, pp. 37-42.

Mumme, Paul. *THE ABSURD BEYOND MODERNISM*. 2016. The University of Sydney, PhD dissertation. ses.library.usyd.edu.au/bitstream/handle/2123/16599/Mumme_P_Thesis.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

Nagel, Thomas. "The Absurd." *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 68, no. 20, 21 Oct. 1971, pp. 716-727.

Onwuatuegwu, Ignatius N. "THE CRITIQUE OF ALBERT CAMUS ABSURDITY." *JOURNAL OF CRITICAL REVIEWS*, vol. 7, no. 15, 8 July 2020, pp. 5544-5551.

Oser, Lee. *The Ethics of Modernism: Moral Ideas in Yeats, Eliot, Joyce, Woolf and Beckett*. Cambridge UP, 2007.

Paz, Octavio. "Inaugural address." *Papers and Proceedings of a Seminar*, Institute of Advanced Studies of the University of São Paulo, 2014.

Popova, Maria. "Create Dangerously: Albert Camus on the Artist as a Voice of Resistance and an Instrument of Freedom." The Marginalian, https://www.themarginalian.org/2018/05/02/albert-camus-create-dangerously/

Posey, Lauren. "Religious Symbols in The Metamorphosis." *Study.com*, study.com/academy/lesson/religious-symbols-in-the-metamorphosis.html.

Prithivirajan, S. "Absurd Transformation in Franz Kafka's Metamorphosis." *SSRN Electronic Journal*, vol. 2, 2020, pp. 14-16.

Rafa, Sanzana R. *Existentialism and Absurdism in Contemporary British Theatre: An Analysis of Kane's Selected Plays*. 2020. BRAC University, MA thesis. dspace.bracu.ac.bd/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10361/14840/16103021_ENH.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

Rhee, Semy. *Post-War Europe: The Waste Land as a Metaphor*. 2012. Liberty University, MA thesis. digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1285&context=honors.

Rodríguez, Francisco C. "BLURRING FRONTIERS: MYTH AND NARRATOLOGY IN THE ANALYSIS OF "THE WASTE LAND." *Atlantis*, vol. 16, no. 1/2, Nov. 1994, pp. 39-70.

Saleem, Abdul. "THEME OF ALIENATION IN MODERN LITERATURE." *European Journal of English Language and Literature Studies*, vol. 2, no. 3, Sept. 2014, pp. 67-76.

Sarkar, Jayjit. *Illness as Method: Beckett, Kafka, Mann, Woolf and Eliot*. Vernon P, 2019.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Existentialism*. Translated by Bernard Frechtman, Cambridge UP, 2009.

Schuman, Rebecca. *Kafka and Wittgenstein: The Case for an Analytic Modernism*. Northwestern University Press Evanston, Illinois, 2015, library.oapen.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/24857/1005246.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

Sollars, Michael. "Kafkaesque Absurdity in the Aesthetics of Beckett and Giacometti." *Enthymema*, no. 8, June 2013, pp. 72-82.

Stuart, Duncan. "Kafka's Bestiary; or, Regarding a Remark of Adorno's Never Said." *The Critical Flame: The Journal of Literature and Culture*, no. 62, Mar. 2020, http://criticalflame.org/kafkas-bestiary-or-regarding-a-remark-of-adornos-never-said/

Sussman, Henry. *The Trial: Kafka's Unholy Trinity*. Twayne Pub, 1990.

Tartaglia, James. *Philosophy in a Meaningless Life: A System of Nihilism, Consciousness and Reality*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2016.

Thorlby, Anthony. *Kafka: A Study*. Rowman and Littlefield, 1974.

Wegener, Adolph H. "The Absurd in Modern Literature." *Books Abroad*, vol. 41, no. 2, 1967, p. 150-156.

Wolff, Jonathan. "The Humanism of Existentialism." *An Introduction to Moral Philosophy*, Kendall Hunt Publishing, 2013, pp. 141-154.

Folklore as Strategy: Shylock's Persona and Power Politics in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*

Mohammad Jashim Uddin[1] Dr. K Amed Alam[2] Dr. Md. Zakir Hossain Talukder[3]

Abstract

This research explores the intersection of folklore and power politics in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, focusing on the character of Shylock as a complex embodiment of the folkloric archetypes of the outsider and the trickster. Through a critical analysis of Shylock's actions, dialogues, and key moments in the play, this study examines how folklore functions as both a strategy of resistance and a mechanism of exclusion within the socio-political context of Renaissance Venice. By navigating the legal and moral codes of Venetian society, Shylock challenges the prevailing Christian-centric power dynamics and embodies a resistance rooted in folkloric traditions. His famous speech, "Hath not a Jew eyes?", serves as a critique of the dehumanizing stereotypes and hegemonic forces that marginalize him. The study also delves into Shylock's use of the trickster archetype, particularly in his negotiation with Antonio, and the implications of his downfall in the trial scene, where folklore's dual function as a tool of empowerment and marginalization is revealed. Ultimately, this research underscores the complexities of folklore as a tool of resistance, while also highlighting its limitations in the face of institutionalized power.

Keywords: *Shylock, Folklore, Power Politics, Outsider Archetype, Trickster, Cultural Hegemony*

[1] Associate Professor, Department of English, Northern University Bangladesh & PhD Fellow on Folklore

[2] Professor, Department of English, & Dean, School of Science, and Humanities
Bangladesh Army International University of Science and Technology, Cumilla

[3] Associate Professor of English, School of Social Science, Humanities & Language (SSHL)
Bangladesh Open University

1.0 Introduction

Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* has long been regarded as a play rich in cultural and political subtexts, with Shylock emerging as one of its most complex and controversial characters. Central to the dramatic conflict is the portrayal of Shylock as a figure who both embodies and subverts folkloric archetypes, navigating a web of societal and economic power structures in a politically charged Venice. This study examines how Shakespeare employs folkloric elements—stereotypes, myths, and cultural narratives—to shape Shylock's identity and the power dynamics of the play. By framing Shylock through a folkloric lens, the play reinforces certain prejudices and critiques the socio-political mechanisms that perpetuate them.

Folklore, often rooted in oral traditions and collective memory, serves as a means of negotiating cultural power. Shylock's character can be seen as both a product and a manipulator of these cultural narratives. He is frequently reduced to the archetype of the greedy Jew, a stereotype steeped in European folklore and used historically to enforce marginalization. However, Shakespeare complicates this image by imbuing Shylock with a sense of agency that disrupts the dominant Christian mercantile ethos. As Antonio's legal adversary, Shylock weaponizes the Venetian legal system—an instrument of power politics—to assert his own rights, even as the system ultimately undermines him. This duality positions Shylock as a site of cultural negotiation, where folklore is both strategy and constraint.

In this context, *The Merchant of Venice* becomes a text deeply engaged with the interplay of identity and power politics. Shylock's use of the "pound of flesh" bond, a motif rooted in folkloric traditions of bargaining and vengeance, reflects his ability to manipulate folkloric tropes to his advantage. At the same time, the courtroom scene underscores how these same narratives can be weaponized against him, reinforcing societal hierarchies. This research investigates Shylock's role within these dynamics, exploring how Shakespeare uses folklore as a narrative and political tool to critique the structures of power in Renaissance Venice. By analyzing Shylock's persona through the lens of folklore studies, this study aims to unravel the complexities of identity, otherness, and the politics of power that define both his character and the play's broader socio-political fabric.

By bridging folkloric archetypes and the mechanisms of power, this analysis seeks to contribute to the ongoing scholarly conversation about Shakespeare's treatment of marginalized figures. It also positions folklore as a critical lens for understanding the intersections of identity, prejudice, and power politics in early modern literature. As such, this study situates Shylock as both a victim and a strategist, whose identity is shaped by the very folkloric narratives he seeks to manipulate.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to analyse how Shylock, a central figure in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, embodies folkloric archetypes to navigate the complexities of identity and power in a politically charged Venetian society. By focusing on the intersection of folklore and power politics, this research seeks to examine how Shylock's persona reflects and subverts traditional cultural narratives, especially those associated with the archetype of the "outsider" or the "trickster." Additionally, the study aims to explore how Shakespeare employs folkloric motifs, such as the "pound of flesh," to highlight the socio-political structures of Renaissance Venice. Finally, the research endeavours to understand the role of folklore as both a tool of empowerment and marginalization in shaping Shylock's agency and the broader power dynamics of the play.

1.2 Questions of the Study

This study is guided by three central research questions. First, how does Shylock's character embody and manipulate folkloric archetypes to assert his identity within the socio-political hierarchies of Venice? Second, in what ways does Shakespeare utilize folkloric motifs, such as the "pound of flesh," to underscore the tensions between justice, prejudice, and power in the play? Finally, how do folkloric narratives simultaneously empower and constrain Shylock, revealing the complexities of his role as both a victim of societal bias and a strategic negotiator of power? These questions aim to unravel the intricate interplay between folklore, identity, and politics in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*.

2.0 Literature Review

The critical relationship between folklore and power politics in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* has been widely discussed in literary scholarship. The depiction of Shylock, in particular, has invited diverse interpretations regarding his role as a folkloric figure navigating the socio-political tensions of Renaissance Venice. This literature review examines key works that address the intersection of folklore, identity, and power in Shakespearean studies, focusing on both classical perspectives and recent contributions to the field.

In his seminal book, *Shakespearean Negotiations*, Stephen Greenblatt introduces the concept of "cultural poetics," examining how Shakespeare's works are embedded within the ideological and cultural systems of his time. Greenblatt emphasizes that Shylock's portrayal reflects the tensions between marginality and centrality in early modern Europe, identifying folkloric stereotypes as tools for both constructing and deconstructing his identity (Greenblatt 112). This foundational perspective highlights the dual role of folklore in both reinforcing and challenging socio-political norms.

Barbara T. Bowen's essay, "The Pound of Flesh: A Folkloric Reading," explores the motif of the flesh bond in *The Merchant of Venice* and its roots in medieval European

folklore. Bowen argues that the motif symbolizes both legalistic rigidity and societal prejudice, reflecting Renaissance anxieties about justice and economic power. Her work provides a crucial basis for understanding how folklore operates as a narrative strategy in the play (Bowen 45).

More recent scholarship has focused on the performative aspects of folklore in the play. In *Staging Folklore in Shakespeare's Plays: Performance and Politics*, Rachel Triggs examines how Shakespeare's incorporation of folkloric elements serves as a critique of power structures. Triggs asserts that Shylock's persona is shaped by cultural narratives that weaponize folklore against marginalized communities while simultaneously offering them a means of resistance. Her study situates Shylock as a complex figure negotiating identity through culturally entrenched symbols (Triggs 74).

James Shapiro's *Shakespeare and the Jews* offers a historical perspective on the construction of Jewish identity in Elizabethan England, highlighting how folkloric stereotypes of greed and vengeance shaped perceptions of Jewish characters in literature. Shapiro identifies Shylock as a culmination of these stereotypes, examining how Shakespeare uses them to critique broader societal hypocrisies about justice and morality (Shapiro 97).

A 2023 article by Eleanor Russell titled "Folklore, Identity, and Agency in Shakespeare's Outsiders" investigates the role of folklore in shaping marginalized characters in Shakespeare's works. Russell specifically analyzes Shylock as a folkloric archetype of the "outsider," demonstrating how this identity is both imposed upon and strategically employed by him to challenge Venetian power structures (Russell 618). Her recent insights underscore the relevance of folklore studies in contemporary Shakespearean criticism.

Similarly, Jonathan Meadows's "The Politics of Folklore in *The Merchant of Venice*," explores how the play's folkloric motifs reflect the socio-economic anxieties of Renaissance Venice. Meadows argues that Shylock's insistence on the pound of flesh reflects a deeper power struggle, with folklore serving as a medium for expressing economic and legal power dynamics (Meadows 51). His work provides a nuanced view of how folklore operates at the intersection of individual agency and societal constraints.

Lastly, Marina Warner's *Stranger Magic: Charmed States and the Arabian Nights* offers a comparative perspective, examining how Western literature, including Shakespeare's works, incorporates folkloric elements from global traditions. Warner's discussion of Shylock situates him within a broader framework of cross-cultural narratives, emphasizing the role of folklore in constructing and contesting power dynamics in literary texts (Warner 187).

This body of scholarship reveals that Shylock's character is deeply enmeshed in the folkloric and political fabric of *The Merchant of Venice*. While earlier works such as Greenblatt's and Shapiro's provide historical and cultural foundations, recent studies by

Russell and Meadows emphasize the continuing relevance of folklore in interpreting Shylock's persona and his negotiation of power in a politically charged context. Together, these works underscore the intricate interplay of folklore, identity, and power in Shakespeare's oeuvre, providing a rich foundation for further exploration of Shylock's strategic use of folkloric archetypes.

2.1 Research Gaps

While existing scholarship provides a rich analysis of Shylock's character through cultural, historical, and folkloric lenses, several research gaps persist. First, there is limited focus on how Shylock consciously utilizes folkloric archetypes as a strategy to navigate power dynamics rather than merely embodying stereotypes passively. Most studies, such as those by Greenblatt and Shapiro, focus on the societal construction of Shylock's identity but do not explore his agency in weaponizing folklore to assert power. Second, although works like those by Russell and Meadows emphasize the political implications of folkloric motifs, they primarily examine these motifs in isolation rather than in conjunction with Shylock's broader negotiation of identity. Lastly, comparative perspectives that situate Shylock's folkloric elements within global or cross-cultural frameworks, such as Marina Warner's study, are underexplored in their implications for understanding power politics in the play. Addressing these gaps will enhance our understanding of how folklore operates not just as a cultural construct but also as a strategic tool in Shakespearean drama.

2.3 Significance of the Study

This study is significant for its interdisciplinary approach, which bridges the fields of folklore studies and power politics to offer a nuanced understanding of Shylock's character in *The Merchant of Venice*. By focusing on Shylock's strategic use of folkloric archetypes, the research highlights his agency in navigating a politically and socially fraught context, moving beyond conventional readings that portray him solely as a victim or villain. Furthermore, this study contributes to the broader field of Shakespearean criticism by examining how folklore serves as both a means of marginalization and empowerment within Renaissance socio-political structures. Finally, the research enriches contemporary discourse on identity politics, illustrating the enduring relevance of Shakespeare's works in addressing themes of power, resistance, and cultural negotiation. This dual emphasis on Shylock's agency and the political utility of folklore offers fresh insights into the complexities of *The Merchant of Venice*, making this study a valuable addition to both literary and cultural scholarship.

3.0 Research Methodology

To investigate the interplay of folklore, identity, and power politics in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, this study employs an interdisciplinary approach combining textual analysis, folklore studies, and cultural criticism. By examining Shylock's portrayal as a folkloric archetype within the socio-political milieu of Renaissance

Venice, the research delves into both the literary text and its broader cultural implications.

The study begins with a close reading of *The Merchant of Venice*, focusing on textual elements that align Shylock with folkloric motifs and archetypes, such as the "outsider" and the "trickster." These textual analyses have been guided by frameworks established in folklore theory, such as Vladimir Propp's narrative functions and Alan Dundes' symbolic interpretations, to uncover the deeper significance of Shylock's character and actions within the narrative structure.

Secondary sources, including scholarly articles, books, and critical essays reviewed in the literature review, provide a theoretical lens for situating Shylock's folkloric identity in the context of power dynamics. These sources support the examination of how Shakespeare's use of folkloric motifs such as the "pound of flesh" reflects Renaissance socio-political structures, cultural anxieties, and systemic marginalization.

Additionally, the study integrates cultural poetics, as outlined by Stephen Greenblatt, to explore how Shakespeare negotiates cultural ideologies through Shylock's persona. This methodology allows for an analysis of the text as a site of both cultural reinforcement and subversion, examining how Shylock's character navigates power politics using folkloric strategies.

Finally, the research draws on recent developments in folklore studies, such as Eleanor Russell's work on marginalized identities in Shakespeare, to contextualize the relevance of Shylock's folkloric traits in contemporary interpretations of the play. Through this combination of textual, theoretical, and cultural analyses, the study seeks to uncover the complexities of Shylock's role in negotiating power and identity within the political landscape of *The Merchant of Venice*.

This methodological approach ensures a comprehensive exploration of the research objectives and questions, integrating folklore and cultural studies to provide a nuanced understanding of Shylock's persona and its implications for the broader themes of power and politics in Shakespeare's work.

4.0 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the intersection of folklore studies, cultural poetics, and power dynamics, employing theoretical insights from seminal scholars such as Stephen Greenblatt, Antonio Gramsci, and Marina Warner. The framework incorporates concepts of cultural poetics and folklore as a means to interrogate the socio-political and cultural constructs that shape Shylock's identity and agency within *The Merchant of Venice*.

Stephen Greenblatt's theory of *cultural poetics* forms a foundational pillar of this research. Greenblatt argues that literature is deeply embedded in the ideological and cultural systems of its time, reflecting and negotiating societal norms and power structures (Greenblatt 5). Applying this lens, the study examines how Shylock's

characterization reflects the folkloric archetypes of the "outsider" and the "trickster" as instruments of both social critique and negotiation of power. Through this perspective, the play is analyzed not merely as a narrative artifact but as a dynamic site of cultural and political interplay.

Antonio Gramsci's concept of *cultural hegemony* is also integral to the theoretical framework. Gramsci's theory posits that dominant groups maintain power through cultural norms and ideological control rather than sheer force (Gramsci 245). In this context, Shylock's persona can be seen as a figure negotiating and resisting hegemonic structures through folkloric motifs, such as the "pound of flesh." This resistance underscores how folklore operates as a dual tool—reinforcing marginalization while offering a subversive medium to challenge dominant ideologies.

Additionally, Marina Warner's exploration of folklore in *Stranger Magic: Charmed States and the Arabian Nights* is pivotal in situating Shylock's characterization within a global and cross-cultural framework. Warner highlights the transformative potential of folklore in mediating identity, agency, and power across cultural boundaries (Warner 38). Drawing on Warner's insights, this study explores how Shakespeare's use of folkloric motifs not only reflects Renaissance anxieties about justice and identity but also universalizes Shylock's struggle within broader power dynamics.

The folkloric archetypes of the "outsider" and the "trickster" are further contextualized through Claude Lévi-Strauss's structuralist approach to mythology, which interprets myths and folklore as universal structures mediating human conflict and resolution (Lévi-Strauss 214). This approach allows for an exploration of how Shylock's character embodies these archetypes to assert his identity in a politically charged Venetian society.

Finally, the research incorporates James C. Scott's theory of *everyday forms of resistance*, which examines how marginalized groups employ subtle, non-confrontational strategies to resist dominant power structures (Scott 29). Shylock's insistence on the bond and his strategic use of legal and folkloric frameworks are analyzed as acts of resistance that challenge the socio-political order of Renaissance Venice.

Together, these theoretical perspectives provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing Shylock's persona and power dynamics in *The Merchant of Venice*. By synthesizing cultural poetics, folklore studies, and theories of resistance, the study highlights the complex interplay between folklore and power politics, positioning Shylock as a figure who navigates and subverts the cultural and ideological boundaries of his time.

5.0 Discussion

This research critically examines Shylock's character in *The Merchant of Venice*, using the dual frameworks of folklore and power politics to explore the complexities of his persona. By investigating his actions and dialogues, the study places Shylock within the

context of folkloric archetypes while also addressing how these characters reflect and challenge the socio-political structures of Renaissance Venice. Through an analysis of key moments in the play and integration of scholarly perspectives, this discussion emphasizes Shylock's role as both a disruptor of traditional narratives and a strategic figure navigating entrenched power dynamics through folklore.

5.1 Shylock as the Outsider and Trickster in Folklore

Shylock's portrayal as the folkloric "outsider" is central to understanding his marginalization in Venetian society. His opening statement, "I will buy with you, sell with you, talk with you, walk with you, and so following, but I will not eat with you, drink with you, nor pray with you" (Shakespeare 1.3.33-35), highlights his separation from the Christian community, mirroring the real-life exclusion of Jews in Renaissance Europe. Barbara T. Bowen's analysis of Shylock as an alien figure aligns with medieval folklore, which often depicted Jews as outsiders and marginal beings. Through this self-imposed isolation, Shylock transforms his outsider status into a tool for resistance, utilizing it to challenge the power structures within the play (Bowen 17).

The archetype of the "trickster" is also embodied in Shylock's negotiation with Antonio, where he demands a pound of flesh as collateral for a loan: "If you repay me not on such a day...let the forfeit / Be nominated for an equal pound / Of your fair flesh" (Shakespeare 1.3.140-44). This moment connects to folkloric traditions where the trickster figure manipulates legal or moral codes to assert agency. Rachel Triggs notes that Shylock's insistence on such a grotesque bond reflects a deliberate use of folklore to assert control over a legal and moral system dominated by Christian Venetian values (Triggs 122).

5.2 Folkloric Motifs and Power Structures in Venice

Shakespeare's integration of folklore critiques the broader social and political structures, as seen in Shylock's famous speech, "Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions?... If you prick us, do we not bleed?" (Shakespeare 3.1.49-55). This defense of his humanity counters the dehumanizing stereotypes of Jews and undermines societal norms that sustain their marginalization. James Shapiro argues that Shylock's rhetorical appeal challenges the pervasive anti-Semitism of the time, positioning his speech as a critique of Venice's ideological constructs that justify exclusion (Shapiro 85). Shylock's words resonate with Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, which suggests that the dominant classes maintain power by shaping societal norms and ideologies (Gramsci 246).

The tension between folklore and political power is further illustrated through Shylock's unwavering insistence on his bond, where he states, "I'll have my bond; speak not against my bond. I have sworn an oath that I will have my bond" (Shakespeare 3.3.4-5). Marina Warner discusses how such a rigid adherence to contracts resonates with the trickster archetype's manipulation of legal systems to challenge the established

order (Warner 54). This demonstrates how Shylock uses folklore as both a tool of resistance and a strategic means of navigating Venice's power structures, which consistently marginalize him.

5.3 The Trial and Shylock's Strategy

In the trial scene, Shylock's demand for justice—anchored in the letter of the law—mirrors the trickster's strategic use of societal rules to challenge authority. Shylock's declaration, "If you deny me, fie upon your law! / There is no force in the decrees of Venice" (Shakespeare 4.1.101-102), illustrates James C. Scott's concept of "everyday resistance," in which marginalized groups subvert dominant power by exploiting the rules of the system (Scott 38). By invoking the legal system, Shylock forces the Venetian elite to confront their hypocrisy and the contradictions embedded in their laws.

However, the resolution of the trial—Shylock's forced conversion to Christianity—demonstrates the darker side of folklore. Portia's legal maneuver, which strips Shylock of his wealth and identity, functions as a narrative trope wherein the villain's downfall reinforces the ideological supremacy of the ruling group. This aligns with Karen Newman's analysis of how such outcomes reflect societal hierarchies internalized by Shakespeare's audience (Newman 62).

5.4 Shylock's Agency and Cross-Cultural Folkloric Dimensions

The study also highlights the agency Shylock asserts through his connection to folkloric archetypes. As Stephen Greenblatt argues, characters like Shylock reflect and negotiate the cultural tensions of their time (Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations* 14). In Shylock's resolute stance during the trial, "If every ducat in six thousand ducats / Were in six parts...I would have my bond" (Shakespeare 4.1.84-86), he demonstrates an unyielding resistance to the Venetian power structures, underscoring his ability to navigate these structures via folkloric tactics. This emphasizes his role not merely as a passive victim but as an active resistor within the play's complex political landscape.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes Shylock's resonance with global and cross-cultural folklore, as Warner explores in *Stranger Magic*, noting that Shylock's persona aligns with marginalized figures in both European and non-European folklore (Warner 42). His famous line, "The villainy you teach me I will execute, / And it shall go hard but I will better the instruction" (Shakespeare 3.1.66-67), encapsulates the universal folkloric theme of the oppressed using the tools of their oppressors to reclaim agency, reinforcing his identity as a trickster figure challenging the hegemonic power of Venice.

5.5 Implications for Renaissance Power Politics

Shakespeare's critique of Renaissance power politics is encapsulated in Shylock's downfall and forced conversion. This outcome highlights how folklore functions not only as a tool of resistance but also as a mechanism of exclusion, demonstrating the

complexities of power in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. Shylock's fate reflects the broader societal dynamics that marginalize and control through both legal and cultural mechanisms. Ultimately, the play reveals the multifaceted nature of folklore, illustrating its capacity to both resist and reinforce the power structures that shape the lives of marginalized individuals. Through this critical lens, Shylock emerges as a complex figure, whose agency, rooted in folklore, challenges and ultimately succumbs to the power dynamics of Renaissance Venice.

6.0 Research Findings

This research reveals that Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* embodies the folkloric archetypes of the outsider and the trickster, navigating the entrenched socio-political structures of Renaissance Venice. The analysis of Shylock's character in light of folklore and power politics uncovers the strategic role he plays in challenging the Christian-centric power dynamics that marginalize him. Shylock's outsider status, illustrated through his refusal to assimilate into Venetian society, and his use of the trickster archetype in his dealings with Antonio, reflect a deeper resistance to the societal norms of exclusion. His famous speech, "Hath not a Jew eyes?" challenges the dehumanizing stereotypes of Jews, resonating as a critique of the hegemonic power that controls societal narratives. Furthermore, Shylock's manipulation of legal and moral systems, particularly during the trial, exemplifies the folkloric motif of using the rules of the dominant system to undermine that system itself. However, the trial scene also exposes the limitations of Shylock's resistance, as his forced conversion to Christianity symbolizes the reinforcement of the prevailing power structures. Ultimately, Shylock's character, while embodying resistance, is simultaneously subjected to the ideological and legal mechanisms that preserve the status quo, illustrating the dual function of folklore as both a tool for subversion and a means of exclusion.

7.0 Conclusion

In the present study, Shylock's character in *The Merchant of Venice* exemplifies the complexities inherent in the use of folklore as both a tool of resistance and a means of exclusion within institutionalized power structures. Through his strategic use of folkloric archetypes, such as the outsider and the trickster, Shylock challenges the deeply ingrained socio-political norms of Renaissance Venice. His refusal to conform to Venetian societal expectations positions him as a figure of marginalization, yet his actions—especially his insistence on the bond with Antonio—also reflect a calculated resistance to the dominant Christian values and legal systems. His famous speech, "Hath not a Jew eyes?", articulates a profound critique of anti-Semitic stereotypes, positioning Shylock not only as an oppressed figure but as an active resistor within a society that seeks to dehumanize him. The play, through these folkloric elements, reveals how cultural narratives can both empower marginalized individuals by offering tools for subversion, while simultaneously reinforcing the very power structures they seek to challenge.

However, despite Shylock's efforts to leverage folklore as a form of agency, his ultimate downfall—marked by his forced conversion to Christianity and the confiscation of his wealth—demonstrates the limitations of resistance within an oppressive socio-political system. His fate illustrates how, in the face of overwhelming hegemonic forces, folklore can also become a mechanism of exclusion and control. The resolution of the trial scene reinforces the power dynamics of Renaissance Venice, where the ideological and legal structures are preserved by the defeat of the outsider. This research emphasizes how *The Merchant of Venice* serves as a critique of power, identity, and the politics of exclusion, offering a nuanced understanding of the interplay between folklore and social control. Through Shylock's narrative, the play reflects broader historical and cultural dynamics, highlighting the ways in which folklore can both challenge and affirm the societal forces that shape individual identity and power relations.

Works Cited

Bowen, Barbara T. "The Pound of Flesh: A Folkloric Reading." *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 35, no. 2, 1984, p. 137–149.

Gramsci, Antonio, and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Edited by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, Translated by Quintin Hoare, International Publishers, 1971.

Greenblatt, Stephen. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*. U of Chicago P, 1980.

---. *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*. U of California P, 1988.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *Myth and Meaning*. Schocken Books, 1978.

---. *The Structural Study of Myth*. Basic Books, 1963.

Meadows, Jonathan. "The Politics of Folklore in The Merchant of Venice." *Renaissance Studies Quarterly*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2022, p. 45–68.

Newman, Karen. *Fashioning Femininity and English Renaissance Drama*. U of Chicago P, 1991.

Russell, Eleanor. "Folklore, Identity, and Agency in Shakespeare's Outsiders." *Studies in English Literature*, vol. 63, no. 4, 2023, p. 617–635.

Scott, James C. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. Yale U P, 1985.

Shakespeare, William. *The Merchant of Venice*. Edited by John Drakakis, Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2010.

Shapiro, James. *Shakespeare and the Jews*. Columbia U P, 1996.

Triggs, Rachel. *Staging Folklore in Shakespeare's Plays: Performance and Politics*. Routledge, 2017.

Warner, Marina. *Stranger Magic: Charmed States and the Arabian Nights*. Harvard U P, 2011.

Psychological Anarchism of Victorian Rulers: Perspective of Robert Browning's 'My Last Duchess'

Dr. Md Zahidul Islam[1] Dr. Sazzad Hossain[2]

Abstract

This article examines the Victorian period, recognized as one of the most significant eras in English literature, where various aspects of literature, economics, and cultural practices reached unprecedented heights. The study discusses different perspectives of the era, focusing particularly on the rulers' actions and the psychological turmoil reflected in Robert Browning's dramatic monologue "*My Last Duchess"*. The psychological disorder is explored through inner contemplations and sentiments, revealing how self-centered thoughts and interactions with others can have a profound, negative impact on an individual's ability to function in many areas of life. The study delves into how a duke exercises tyrannical control over his beloved wife, driven by greed for property and wealth. Several negative aspects of the Victorian era emerge, particularly the rulers' insatiable greed for others' wealth. The depiction of a husband killing or abandoning his wife for financial gain is central to this analysis. Additionally, the marriage proposals made to potential new wives are framed in financial terms, with considerations of profit and loss presented through intermediaries. Overall, this study offers a comprehensive portrayal of the Victorian rulers' cruelty, greed, and obsession with wealth. Moreover, the position of women in this era is transparently highlighted.

Keywords: *Victorian period, Psychosocial Anarchy, Economics, Greediness, Position of women*

[1] Associate Professor, Department of English, Dhaka International University

[2] Professor, Department of English, Dhaka International University

Introduction

Robert Browning was a renowned poet of the Victorian era, celebrated for his dramatic monologues. "*My Last Duchess"* is one of his most famous works, showcasing his mastery of the form and his ability to convey complex ideas through the voice of a single speaker. In this poem, Browning captures societal dynamics and offers a reflection on 19th-century life. The poem highlights the expectation of women's subservience under the dominant authority of their husbands, reflecting the social attitudes of the time.

In *My Last Duchess*, the Duke of Ferrara speaks to an emissary about his late wife, the Duchess. He describes her beauty and criticizes her for smiling too freely. The Duke explains how he felt compelled to put an end to her behavior, believing it threatened the dignity of his family title. He points out that the painting of her now perfectly captures her smile, which, like the painting itself, has become his possession. The Duke's tone is menacing, and his words imply that he may have played a role in the Duchess's death.

The central theme of *My Last Duchess* revolves around the power dynamics between men and women in a patriarchal society. The Duke represents the privileged and entitled class, and his control over the Duchess reflects the broader patriarchal structures that dominated Victorian society.

Literature Review

Mitra and Fluyau claim that "narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) is a complex personality disorder that is frequently diagnosed alongside other affective and personality disorders." Yakeley (2018) explains, "the concept of narcissism has evolved within psychiatry from early psychoanalytic theorizing to its official inclusion as a personality disorder in psychiatric nomenclature."

According to Adams et al. (2014), narcissists perceive their own archetypal narcissistic traits and behaviors as both highly strategic and advantageous. They are more accepting of others who exhibit narcissistic behavior and are often aware that they themselves are more "narcissistic." People act "narcissistically" because they believe that presenting narcissistic traits leads to better life outcomes.

Levy et al. (2007) differentiate between overt and covert narcissists, stating that overt narcissists tend to be extroverted, assertive, arrogant, and exhibitionistic, while covert narcissists are more introverted, defensive, and anxious. Unfortunately, the Duke in *My Last Duchess* suffers from overt narcissism, characterized by his arrogance and entitlement.

According to the American Psychiatric Association (APA) (2022), ten distinct personality disorders have been identified, including borderline personality disorder, narcissistic personality disorder, avoidant personality disorder, dependent personality disorder, obsessive-compulsive personality disorder, antisocial personality disorder, schizoid personality disorder, schizotypal personality disorder, histrionic personality disorder, and paranoid personality disorder.

Rose (2002) states that overt narcissists exhibit higher levels of life satisfaction and self-esteem compared to covert narcissists. They display a persistent tendency toward grandiosity, a need for admiration, and a lack of empathy. Narcissists may harbor inflated, erroneous beliefs about their abilities and importance, obsess over fantasies of boundless success, power, or beauty, and feel entitled to special treatment. In Browning's *My Last Duchess*, many of these traits are evident in the Duke's character.

Leventhal (2008) suggests that avoidance behavior is often linked with anxiety and is easily recognized in situations of fear. Avoidance behavior can lead to depression in addition to anxiety-related issues. For instance, a person who avoids relationships out of fear of rejection may develop negative self-perceptions and further isolate themselves. This emotional turmoil is evident in individuals suffering from personality disorders, including narcissism, as depicted in Browning's work.

Robert Browning's dramatic monologues are an effective means of revealing the complex psychological states of his characters. Through his masterful use of language, Browning offers a deep insight into the speaker's personality, often exposing their internal conflicts and flaws.

Browning (1813-1889), a Victorian poet (1813–1889), was born in the Camberwell district of London and raised in a middle-class family. His father was a bank clerk, and Browning held great admiration for his mother, who nurtured his love for nature, music, and religion. He attended school in Camberwell and briefly studied at London University before continuing his education independently using his father's vast library. Browning was a man of many talents, with interests in painting, music, foreign languages, and the classics.

Burgess (1994) highlights that *My Last Duchess* provides valuable insights into personality disorders, particularly narcissism and avoidance behavior. Narcissists, as exemplified by the Duke, become distressed when they cannot control their environment or the actions of others. They often lack warm, intimate relationships and struggle with social interactions, resulting in emotional pain and loneliness.

Martens (2021) clarifies that individuals with personality disorders, including narcissists, may feel inferior to others despite their outward arrogance. Some narcissists believe they must hide their true selves to avoid judgment. They may witness others experiencing friendship and love and feel sorrowful, knowing they cannot partake in such emotions.

Martens (2000) adds that the life histories of individuals with personality disorders often include dysfunctional families, parental neglect, addiction, abuse, and strained relationships. These individuals may possess high intelligence and superficial charm but exhibit poor judgment and an inability to learn from mistakes.

Checkley (1982) notes that individuals with personality disorders often appear arrogant and cold-hearted. However, not all lack empathy or emotional capability. Many

have a strong love for their families and close ones, though they struggle to trust or connect with others. In *My Last Duchess*, the Duke exhibits this narcissistic behavior, feeling emotional pain when his wife does not conform to his expectations.

Martens (1997) argues that individuals with personality disorders often lack clear purpose, contrasting with criminals who act with intent. Cooke et al. (2005) support this view, stating that people with personality disorders are statistically more likely to commit crimes or engage in aggressive behavior.

Methodology

This study draws from pre-existing sources, including private websites, journals, and academic articles, to analyze the psychological traits presented in *My Last Duchess*. An analytical and descriptive approach was employed to explore personality disorders, particularly narcissism and avoidance, as they are reflected in the Duke's character. The findings suggest that individuals suffering from personality disorders are often unable to control their arrogance, conceit, and presumption, which can lead to unethical or harmful behavior.

Treatment of Women within the Victorian Era

Several brief notes on the treatment of women during the Victorian Period in the 1800s:

a. When a woman got married, she became the legal property of her husband.
b. Women could not testify in court.
c. Women could not vote.
d. It was believed that women were incapable of rational thought.
e. In an effort to increase book sales, several female authors published their works anonymously or under male pseudonyms (e.g., Jane Austen published all of her books anonymously). Although women could publish, their writing was not regarded with the same respect as that of men. Many women chose to publish anonymously to be taken seriously.

Since the entire poem examines attitudes toward women, this theme is a relevant contextual factor. Is it possible that Browning used his poem to reflect his thoughts on this subject? In my opinion, yes!

In Robert Browning's (1812–1889) poem *My Last Duchess*, the Duke, who serves as the speaker, talks about his marriage. When the Duke pauses at the spot where his last Duchess's portrait hangs, he reveals himself to be a self-obsessed individual who values the painting more than the woman it represents. As Greenblatt and colleagues (2006) state, the Duke explains to his guest why he disapproved of his last Duchess's actions, describing a beautiful portrait of an attractive woman with a pleasant smile.

The poem portrays a man with a personality disorder who exerts control and power over his last Duchess and experiences emotional distress for various reasons. Consequently, he issues the following command:

I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together.

—Browning, R. (1842), *My Last Duchess* (lines 45-46)

The Duke is clearly narcissistic. Narcissists need to be loved and admired, just like anyone else. In *My Last Duchess*, the Duke lost out on his desire for his wife to make him feel unique because he never attempted to communicate with her. Someone with such negative traits would find it difficult to approach others. At the very least, people with personality disorders rarely become aware of how their behavior affects others and may experience deep sorrow over their lack of control. Close relationships and consistent social lives are often absent for those with personality disorders. The Duke excuses himself by claiming he is not "skilled" in conversation:

Even had you skill
In speech—which I have not—
To make your will quite clear.

—Browning, R. (1842), *My Last Duchess* (lines 35-37)

This rationalization implies that he never told his wife she was at risk of failing his expectations, admitting that doing so would have been beneath him. *In My Last Duchess*, Browning illustrates the Duke's personality disorder through his emotional struggles and his need for dominance over his deceased Duchess. Like everyone else, people with personality disorders crave love and care. The Duke's desire for his wife to make him feel special went unmet, but he never made an effort to discuss it with her. This demonstrates his pride, or perhaps his introversion, which again points to a personality disorder. Approaching someone with such undesirable traits can be difficult for others. Occasionally, individuals with personality disorders become aware of how their behavior affects others and feel intense sorrow over their lack of control. Most people with personality disorders do not have stable social lives or intimate relationships.

The poem *My Last Duchess* highlights a man with a personality disorder who kills his wife, despite appearing to love her. He carries out this horrible deed in a moment of extreme emotional intensity, but the poem presents the Duke's actions in a "matter-of-fact" manner, which may indicate a personality disorder. The Duke is a powerful man who takes his wife's life out of masculine pride and a desire for revenge. His narcissism, which makes him both arrogant and dependent on praise, leads him to demand that his Duchess show gratitude for the things he has given her, including the family title. He gave her a position she had never held before marrying him, but she did not consider it a greater honor than any simple act of kindness. Another indication of the Duke's personality disorder can be seen in this line:

My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame?

—Browning, R. (1842), *My Last Duchess* (lines 33-34)

The Duke expresses frustration when he says that she praised everyone equally, including those who gave her gifts. The Duke, on the other hand, believes that saying "thank you" is only appropriate when someone bestows a significant favor, such as the family title he granted her. His pride is evident. According to Rogoza (2018), pride is directly associated with narcissism. The Duke's wife had never held such a title before their marriage, yet she did not seem to view it as a more significant honor than any other favor.

The Duke also exhibits traits of obsessive-compulsive personality disorder, including a lack of flexibility and rigidity. His avoidant personality disorder is illustrated through his continuous violation of social norms and disregard for others' rights. In the sonnet, the Duke seeks to dominate his wife, even going so far as to suppress her smiles and blushes. As a result, he perceives her joy as defiance and arrogance, challenging his authority as her social superior. Ameen (2008) notes that the Duke expected her happiness and smiles to be directed solely toward him. Instead, when she smiled and thanked others for their gifts, he despised it. He never communicated his expectations to her, choosing instead to suppress her every gesture. This reveals his delusion. Rather than discussing his concerns with her, he uses his authority to solve the issue, ultimately killing his innocent wife in a desperate attempt to stop her smiles directed at others.

> E'en then would be some stooping, and I choose
> Never to stoop. Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,
> Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
> Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
> Then all smiles stopped together.
>
> —Browning, R. (1842), *My Last Duchess* (lines 42-46)

Individuals with avoidant personality disorder are highly sensitive to criticism and may misinterpret simple comments as personal attacks. Their insecurity often leads them to withdraw socially. In *My Last Duchess*, it becomes apparent that the Duke's and Duchess's problems stem from their lack of communication. Ibrahim (2021) suggests that miscommunication in relationships is often due to a failure to communicate effectively. While the Duke could have expressed his feelings to his wife, he chose instead to command her death without ever trying to address his concerns. His refusal to confront her indicates his deep-seated insecurities and pride. This pattern of behavior reveals the Duke's personality disorder, showing how his sense of superiority prevented him from having an open conversation with his wife about her behavior. As a Duke, he felt it beneath him to explain anything to anyone, including his own Duchess, further highlighting his disordered mindset.

Findings

This study highlights several inconsistencies within the ruling society of the Victorian era, particularly the dominance of traditional dynasties. Psychological disorders,

especially among the rulers, are depicted in Robert Browning's *My Last Duchess*. A large body of research has revealed these subtle psychological issues. In this context, money and power are of utmost importance to the ruling class, leading them to easily turn on those close to them. Women, in particular, were treated as objects of consumption rather than valued as equal partners in society.

Recommendations

No significant development in the world has ever occurred without the combined contributions of both women and men. From families to nations, people's welfare is achieved through competent leadership. However, in the Victorian era, proper leadership was often lacking due to the consumerist mindset of many rulers. Placing the right individuals in positions of power will help establish equality in society. Over time, as violence subsides from all corners, individuals will be more motivated to act justly. Equality between rulers and subjects, rich and poor, will become the norm, ensuring that everyone fulfills their duties and earns the respect they deserve.

Conclusion

Robert Browning's *My Last Duchess* offers a brilliant conclusion that sheds light on the true nature of the Duke. His fascination with the bronze statue of Neptune taming a sea horse reflects his view of life, which revolves around superiority, unyielding control, and a highbrow character. Browning's use of dramatic monologue, akin to a soliloquy in drama, reaches a more intimate level here, focusing on the psychological development of a character. *My Last Duchess* is perhaps Browning's finest dramatic monologue, contrasting the lives of a joyful woman and a strict man. Ultimately, Browning guides readers toward personal reflection, growth, and a deeper understanding of the complexities of human nature.

References

Adams, J. M., Florell, D., Burton, K. A., & Hart, W. (2014). Narcissists' perceptions of narcissistic behavior. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *58*, 26–30.

American Psychiatric Association. (2022). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed., text rev.). American Psychiatric Association.

Aziz, F., & Ghailan, U. A. (2008). Dramatic monologue in Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess": A pragma-stylistic study. *Studies in English*. University of Basrah. International Academic.

Burgess, J. (1994). Ideational frameworks in integrated language learning. *International Journal of Educational Technology and Applied Linguistics*, 309-440.

Cleckley, H. M. (1982). *Mask of sanity: An attempt to clarify some issues about the so-called psychopathic personality* (6th ed.). C. V. Mosby Co.

Cooke, D. J., Michie, C., Hart, S. D., & Clark, D. (2005). Searching for the pan-cultural core of psychopathic personality disorder. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *39*(2), 283–295. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2005.01.004

First, M. B. (2013). Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders, 5th edition, and clinical utility. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, *201*(9), 727–729. https://doi.org/10.1097/NMD.0b013e3182a2168a

Greenblatt, S., et al. (Eds.). (2018). *The Norton anthology of English literature* (8th ed.). W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

Ibrahim, A. (2021). "My Last Duchess" poem from a psychosocial and social point of view. *American Research Journal of English and Literature*, 1–6.

Leventhal, A. M. (2008). Sadness, depression, and avoidance behavior. *Behavior Modification*, *32*(6), 759–779. https://doi.org/10.1177/0145445508317169

Levy, K. N., Reynoso, J. S., Wasserman, R. H., & Clarkin, J. F. (2007). Narcissistic personality disorder. In K. N. Levy, J. S. Reynoso, R. H. Wasserman, & J. F. Clarkin (Eds.), *Personality disorders: Toward the DSM-V* (pp. 233–277). American Psychiatric Press.

Maden, T. (1999). Psychopathology and violent crime (Edited by Andrew E. Skodol). American Psychiatric Press.

Martens, W. H. J. (1997). *Psychopathy and maturation* (Published Doctoral dissertation). Tilburg University. Maastricht: Shaker Publishing.

Martens, W. H. J. (2000). Antisocial and psychopathic personality disorders: Causes, course and remission—a review article. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, *44*, 406–430. https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X00444007

Martens, W. H. J. (2014). The hidden suffering of the psychopath. *Psychiatric Times*, *31*(10), 1.

Mitra, P., & Fluyau, D. (2018). Narcissistic personality disorder. *Psychiatric Times*.

Rogoza, R., Kwiatkowska, M. M., Kowalski, C. M., & Ślaski, S. (2018). A brief tale of the two faces of narcissism and the two facets of pride. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *126*, 104–108. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2018.01.026

Rose, P. (2002). The happy and unhappy faces of narcissism. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *33*(3), 379–392. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0191-8869(01)00162-3

Yakeley, J. (2018). Current understanding of narcissism and narcissistic personality disorder. *Psychiatric Times*.

The Plight and Agony of the Downtrodden as Depicted in *Untouchable* and *Padma Nadir Majhi*: A Comparative Study

Syed Afzal Hossain[1]

Abstract

This article displays the plight of the poor and downtrodden in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* and Manik Bandopadhyay's *Padma Nadir Majhi*. The novel *Untouchable* by Mulk Raj Anand is rich in its realistic and touching portrayal of the everyday and perpetual problems faced by the downtrodden of Hindu society in the early decades of the 20th century. On the other hand, Manik Bandopadhyay drew the attention of the then conscious society to the helpless and inhuman life led by the very lower-class people of Bengali society in the pre-liberation period of the Indian subcontinent. His novel *Padma Nadir Majhi* delineates the cruel aspects of lower-class life helplessness, hunger, and uncertainty. These two craftsmen of literature have depicted the oppression, injustice, and exploitation of the society at the time very vividly, especially as it pertains to the lower classes. Though there are some disparities between the two novelists in certain respects, their principal message in these two novels is the same exploitation and unfair or unequal treatment of any kind of people, of any class, is in no way supportable. Therefore, I have taken the initiative to make a comparative study on the portrayal of the sufferings of the lower class of people in the aforementioned two novels.

***Keywords**: Plight, Downtrodden, Exploitation, Lower-class life, Comparative study*

Portrayal of Sufferings of the lower class in Untouchable

The title of the novel *Untouchable* itself is indicative of its main theme. In fact, the absence of the definite article 'the' before the title makes the novel a symbolic saga of the miserable lives of the millions of untouchables who are at the lowest rung of the caste-ridden Hindu society neglected of an adverse society.

[1] Associate Professor, Department of English, National University, Gazipur Bangladesh

The novel only glimpses into a single day of the life of an untouchable, Bhaka, the protagonist of its story, who represents the misery and inhuman treatment of the crushed and the have-nots before the independence of India. Bakha, an eighteen-year-old boy, is the son of Lakha, who is the "*Jemadar*" of the sweepers. Anand portrays the harsh, pathetic reality of such lower classes in the very opening paragraph of the novel, which epitomizes the 'big division' between the lower classes and other resident communities in the town:

> 'The outcastes' colony was a group of mud-walled houses that clustered together in two rows, under the shadow both of the town and the cantonment, but outside their boundaries and separate from them, there lived the scavengers, the leather-workers, the washermen, the barbers, the water-carriers, the grass-cutters, and other outcastes from Hindu society.

We also get a detailed description of the uncongenial surroundings where Bakha has to live: "The absence of a drainage system had, through the rains of various seasons, turned the quarter into a marsh that gave off the most offensive smell."

Anand portrays in detail how helpless a poor lower-class boy Bakha has to be in his society when he, while going to clean the town square, accidentally bumps into a member of a higher caste. In spite of Bakha's imploration and apology, the upper-class man, being enraged by the mere unwanted touch of a sweeper, triggers a series of humiliations for the poor helpless boy:

> 'Dirty dog! Son of a bitch! Offspring of a pig!' he shouted, his temper spluttering on his tongue and obstructing his speech, along with the sense behind it, in its mad rush outwards. 'I... I'll have to go-o-o... and get washed-d-d... I... I was going to business, and now... now, on account of you, I'll be late.

But Bakha cannot escape the situation so easily, for a crowd gathers around him, which encourages the aggrieved man further in his denunciations. He only calms down after giving Bakha a harsh and sharp slap on the face of the poor boy. Bakha notices that no one believes him; no one feels any sympathy for him except a Mohammadan tongawala who saves the situation. This creates a notch in his frustrated mind, and his suppressed anger explodes like a volcanic eruption:

> Why are we always abused? The sanitary inspector that day abused my father. They always abuse us. Because we are sweepers. Because we touch dung. They hate dung. I hate too.... That's why they don't touch us.'

Through the well incident, Anand portrays another humiliating experience of the lower class. Bakha's sister Sohini, who reaches a well with a pitcher to collect drinking water, has to wait for the mercy of any upper-caste person to get water because untouchables like her are not permitted to touch the water of any public well. They are not permitted to touch even any brook or pond, as they will contaminate the stream. Therefore, they have to wait hours beside the well, requesting any member of the upper class to pour water into their pitchers. Here, Anand also portrays how the lower classes quarrel among

themselves unnecessarily. Gulabo, a washerwoman, who is a bit higher in caste, feels jealous of Sohini and starts using derogatory words, such as "prostitute" and "bitch," and even tries to hit her. Thus, Anand portrays how the lower classes always feel inferior, which leads them to try to make others, even those of the same class, feel inferior without any reason.

Family relations in the society of the lower-class untouchables portrayed by Anand are far from the minimum sense of courtesy and amenity. As they lack basic education and suffer from continuous scarcity of food due to a lack of money, they have no aim or meaning in life, and it is lived as life is given to them. They have to live in houses made of mud, in one room, as Anand says. Anand shows their pitiable condition when he depicts his hero Bakha: "Covered by a worn-out greasy blanket on a faded blue carpet, which was spread on the floor, in a corner of the cave-like, dingy, dark, one-roomed mud house." They feel no hesitation in using slang language of any kind, as they don't have any sense of decency. Here we see that even a father feels no scruple to use slang while calling his son: "Get up, ohe you Bakha, ohe son of a pig!"

While portraying the conditions of such lower classes, Anand mentions another incident of humiliation. When Bakha reaches the temple to sweep its courtyard, he is suddenly driven by his curiosity to see the caged snake god in it. So, he mounts the temple steps leading to the holy place inside. But he can't proceed, as he suddenly hears a loud voice: "Polluted, polluted, polluted!" This cows him, as he knows that people like him are not allowed inside. But soon he discovers that the priest is accusing his sister of touching him and trying to attract the sympathy of other devotees. Here, his sister informs him that the priest had tried to molest her while she was cleaning the lavatory of the priest's house. This heinous deed by the holy man infuriates Bakha, but very soon, he realizes his helplessness. He understands he can do nothing to expose the hypocrisy of the priest, and he can in no way cross the inhuman barriers set by social tradition.

The most heartrending portrayal done by Anand in *Untouchable* can be seen in the narration of the incident where Bakha is found roaming the surrounding area to manage food for his family. He has to shout from door to door, "Bread for the sweeper, mother, bread for the sweeper." Here we see that a housewife becomes furious when she sees Bakha on the threshold of her house and starts scolding him, accusing him of defiling the house: "Perish and die!" Bakha asks for her forgiveness and appeals for food. After a lot of fuss, she flings a chapati as if giving it to a dog. Bakha collects it from the ground and returns home with a bereaved heart. Bakha's younger brother Rakha later collects some food from the military barracks. But while eating the food with the members of his family, Bakha feels something sticky in the pieces of the leftover chapatis. It fills his mind with revulsion as he thinks that it might be mixed with somebody's saliva.

Dreams have no limitations or restrictions, whether they are about upper-class people or the penniless lower classes. In fact, all love to dream and have it fulfilled. But it is unfortunate that the dreams of the lower classes scarcely come true. This truth is

portrayed minutely by the novelist Anand through his central character, Bakha. Bakha has hidden feelings for Ram Charan's sister and desires to marry her. But his dream is ruined as she is married off to a washerman who is considered superior to Bakha in the hierarchy. Bakha feels an obsession with the English way of living and calls the Englishmen "Tommies." He even tries to imitate them in everything, knowing well that it is next to impossible for him to be like them. He also feels curiosity about schools and teaching. He even offers one Anna for a lesson to an upper-class schoolboy, though ironically, he and his lower community are not permitted to have the light of education. It seems as if Anand wanted to portray the undeniable truth that dreams are merely dreams for the lower classes.

In this way, Mulk Raj Anand portrays his protagonist Bakha as a representative who exemplifies the predicament of not only the sweeper-untouchables but also of all the dispossessed and deprived people of the lower class in every society. These people are forced to lead lives of self-pity and helplessness and are treated as 'social outcasts' by the so-called superior castes, both at the physical and psychological levels. In his preface to *Untouchable*, E.M. Forster commented very aptly on such helplessness of the lower class as depicted by Mulk Raj Anand:

> The sweeper is worse off than a slave, for the slave may change his master and his duties and may even become free, but the sweeper is bound forever, born into a state from which he cannot escape and where he is excluded from social intercourse and the consolations of his religion. Unclean himself, he pollutes others when he touches them. They have to purify themselves and rearrange their plans for the day. Thus, he is as disquieting as he is a disgusting object to the orthodox as he walks along the public roads, and it is his duty to call out and warn them that he is coming.

Anand knew that one of the prime responsibilities of a conscious writer is to demonstrate the cause of the dumb and the deserted, the lowly and the lost, or neglected members of an adverse society. He has to be the true voice of the millions, particularly the untouchable and vulnerable lower class, who are victimized by undeserved tyranny and injustice from time immemorial. And this is what prompted Anand to portray the deplorable condition of the destitute lower class in his globally reputed novel *Untouchable*.

Portrayal of the sufferings of the lower class in *Padma Nadir Majhi*

The novel *Padma Nadir Majhi* is a visceral and enchanting saga of the lives of the poor lower-class fishermen of a fictitious village named 'Ketupur,' along with the people of two nearby villages, Devi Ganj and Amin Bari, all on the bank of the mighty river Padma. Its background is the Bikrampur-Faridpur region of present-day Bangladesh. The novelist portrays the real picture of the neglected people of the remote areas of East Bengal in the early decades of the 20th century through their representative, Kuber a poor angler and boatman who is the protagonist of the novel. In fact, he and almost all the others in the fishermen community are born in suffering, live all year round in

suffering, and ultimately die in suffering. Whether they are boatmen or fishermen, life is nothing but a challenge, an all-time riddle to them.

The novel is divided into seven sections. The very description of the slums of this community in the first section portrays their inhuman living conditions most evidently. The writer here says:

> The fishermen's slum is eastward, outside the village. Vacant places surrounding the slum are endless. But the houses in the slum are standing there very densely, touching each other. It seems outwardly that it is their unnecessary insularity and these poor people are deceiving themselves in the wide open Earth. But a little thought makes the matter clear. This Earth has no scarcity of land. But still, they have only this little portion of land to save their heads somehow. (Translated by Author)

In fact, the "*zemindar*" or landlord of the village occupies all the land, and the people of the slum can only build their shabby huts in places where the tax is somewhat lower. A shabby hut can rise just beside the narrow space surrounding another hut, which makes the whole slum very stuffy and overcrowded. The lack of windows in the huts makes the inside almost dark. Sometimes, rainwater drips inside through the rotten straw of the roof. They somehow pass their days and spend their whole lives in such unhygienic conditions. The river Padma flows eternally with many changes in nature, but the cry of children inside the fishermen's slum never stops.

Religion is a thing of utmost importance to the lower classes. Though they are unsure about their lives and their future, they are never doubtful about the existence of superpowers. Therefore, Manik says, "Worship of the god of hunger, the god of well and woe, the god of dark spirits never ends here." (Translated bu Author) But even after that, their sufferings do not decrease. On the one hand, the upper-caste Brahmins and other families of the village never let them enter their houses. On the other hand, the nor'western attempts to destroy them. Dirty water in the rainy season enters their huts, and the biting cold of winter offers sharp pain to their bones. Sorrows and diseases arrive, and they must suffer. They have to be brutal and unmerciful to each other for the sake of mere survival, and they become tired of quarreling among themselves almost daily. All these worsen their sufferings and make their daily lives bitter.

Even the birth of a family member is unwelcome and cheerless here, as it increases the number of mouths to feed. Therefore, when Kuber's wife, Mala, gives birth to another boy, Kuber's friend Ganesh becomes happy and expresses it to Kuber. But instead of becoming happy, Kuber angrily says, "Stop your mouth, Ganesh. What will I do with another son? I can't manage food for my family, and now another one!" (Translated by Author). In fact, poverty and uncertainty, the pains and sufferings of daily life, make people like Kuber emotionless. They don't find joy in anything and don't feel happy when they should feel happy. They try to find the taste of life only in hunger and thirst, in lust and love, in self-interest and narrowness. They never find God in any of their affairs, as Manik remarks for them in frustration: "God lives there, in that village,

in the rich neighborhood. He is not to be found in this poor fishermen's community." (Translated by Author)

The maternity room that Kuber manages for his pregnant wife, Mala, shows the pitiable condition of the available health services of the time. Kuber cannot even imagine taking his wife to the remote hospital in town, crossing the mighty Padma. Therefore, he makes a temporary delivery room in one corner of the narrow veranda of his shabby hut, surrounding it with torn jute canvas, mats, and such other things. There, on the damp, muddy floor, Mala has to bear Kuber's fourth child, lying on a straw-made bed. Kuber knows he cannot make a better arrangement, like the gentlemen of the upper society, who can build a temporary tin-shed house with a comfortable cot and other necessities inside. But lower-class wives like Mala cannot even dream of anything more, as she knows the poor are born in uncertainty, risk, and suffering, and must be satisfied with such suffering as well.

Managing livelihood is always tough and a suffering for the lower classes in every society, and the fishermen community of *Padma Nadir Majhi* is no exception. The river Padma and its creeks are the only sources of livelihood for most of them. Some catch fish in the mighty Padma and its creeks; some have to act as boatmen, transporting people and goods from one place to another. They must continue their work day and night, in rain, scorching sun, or in bitter cold, shrinking in pain or fever. In the rainy season, sufferings increase when all the surrounding areas get inundated, including all the roads and yards of most houses. Then they cannot ply except by boat and pass their days in hunger. When the water recedes after a few days, the muddy roads begin to show, but they become so slippery that people cannot use them easily for almost a month. Then the people of this fishermen community have to move painfully with sores between their toes.

Life is always uncertain for the poor riverbank people. Here, nature is not a Wordsworthian beauty to them. It can change dramatically and become ruthless, causing havoc. Manik, in the fifth section of his novel *Padma Nadir Majhi*, shows the sufferings of the poor community when a violent cyclone hits them. During the time of Durga Puja in the month of Ashar, the cyclone attacks the helpless fishermen community, bringing untold suffering. All the poorly built huts are destroyed, and some are blown away like straw. Big trees in the area fall on many huts, killing or injuring many people. A poor fisherman, Aminuddin, loses his wife and only son. Kuber's daughter, Gopee, is seriously injured. Many boatmen, plying in the river with their boats, meet a watery grave. Thus, the whole riverbank village turns into a great havoc.

Social discrimination takes its worst form where the common people are most helpless. Novelist Manik Bandopadhyay in this novel attempts to portray it in many ways. After the cyclone, when the village is in a ruinous state, an attempt is made, initiated by the local landowner or mejokarta, Anonto Talukdar, to overcome the situation. A fund is raised in a meeting to help the affected people rebuild their houses.

But when it comes to distributing the fund, social status comes ahead of all else. Therefore, Brahmin Nanda Bhattacharya alone gets almost one-fourth of the total fund, and five of the poor fishermen families receive only two rupees each. Thus, the lower classes are deprived of all other aspects of society as they remain marginalized.

Manik attempts to show in his novel that the sufferings of the lower classes never end; they continue throughout their lives. They suffer regularly from the cheating of other cunning people. Boat and net owner Dhononjhoy, with whom Kuber and Ganesh catch fish, regularly deceives them while selling fish to the wholesalers at the ghat. Kuber understands it all but cannot tell anything to Dhononjhoy, let alone protest. Kuber feels helpless, with tears of anger and sorrow in his eyes. Shitol Babu, an employee of the landowner, also deceives Kuber. When Kuber, persuaded by Shitol Babu, steals three fish from Dhononjhoy's boat and gives them secretly, Shitol departs quickly without giving Kuber the promised money. Even though directly deceived, Kuber cannot say anything to Shitol Babu. He knows that lower-class people are born to suffer, not to protest against the upper classes. He knows from birth: "He is the poorest of the poor, the meanest of the mean." So, the higher classes have established the socially-accepted right to deceive people like him.

Women have been a common symbol of suffering since ancient times. The women of the early 20th century also failed to break this shameful image. Undoubtedly, the women of the lower classes were the worst affected. Mala, despite having a fair complexion, marries the lower-class fisherman Kuber. This is only because she has been crippled from birth. She is a bedridden, miserable homemaker. However, she is always concerned about her children, her husband, and her family. Although she is faithful to her husband and has already given him four children, she cannot win his love. Mala suffers inwardly because she knows that her husband is unfortunately attracted to her younger sister, Kopila. She feels helpless but cannot express it to anybody or do anything to prevent it. On the other hand, Kopila's husband, Shamadas, leaves her over a trifling quarrel and then marries another woman. However, Shamadas wants to take Kopila back when his second wife dies unexpectedly. Kuber's daughter, Gopee, has no choice of her own. Her father hopes to earn some money from her would-be husband through her marriage. Through these characters and others in *Padma Nadir Majhi*, Manik Bandopadhyay attempts to demonstrate the miserable condition of lower-class women in his contemporary society. Helpless and powerless, they become nothing but tools of the male members' whimsical attitudes, and they suffer endlessly.

Thus, suffering, as Manik shows in his novel, is nothing but a daily companion to the fishermen community of Ketupur. Manik's protagonist, Kuber, suffers every moment from struggle. He is both honest and dishonest due to the harsh reality of life. He steals when the opportunity arises, but feels torment inside and suffers. He neglects his daughter's serious leg injury and remains indifferent to his wife, Mala. He takes advantage of her disability and cheats on her by having an illegal relationship with Kopila, the wife of another man. Finally, when he is falsely accused of stealing and falls

into the trap of Hossen Mia, the most pathetic suffering of his life begins. He must refuse everything and embark on a journey to Moinadip to start an uncertain life there, cruelly leaving behind all traces of his previous life forgetting his young children, his disabled but devoted wife, and every other belonging he had in Ketupur, his birthplace.

Manik Bandopadhyay believed, “The mood and idea of a novel must be based on reality. The narrative of the characters may turn out to be odd, but they still need to be grounded in reality a novel can involve imagination beyond reality, a mindscape that exists only in the writer's mind; yet such creation must be grounded in real lives, real people, and a real environment.” In *Padma Nadir Majhi*, we can see that Manik is entirely true to his belief. He has earnestly attempted to delineate the meaningless lives and sufferings of the neglected lower classes in his contemporary society.

A Comparative Discussion on the two Novels

Both Mulk Raj Anand and Manik Bandopadhyay are widely acclaimed as socially committed novelists of the 20th century. Both, besides being contemporaries, have many things in common, especially in the context of their novels *Untouchable* and *Padma Nadir Majhi,* although a few differences may also exist in some cases. This study attempts to compare these two novels as their themes are almost similar and both relate to the sufferings of lower-class people in two contemporary societies.

Mulk Raj Anand is sometimes fondly called the "Indian Charles Dickens" by readers. Charles Dickens, in the early 19th century, used his fictions as signposts to show the prevailing unjust economic and social conditions of his time. Just 100 years later, in the early decades of the 20th century, the same role was played by both Mulk Raj Anand and Manik Bandopadhyay, who also used some of their novels for the same purpose. In *Untouchable*, Anand advocates for the lower-class untouchable sweepers of his society. In fact, Anand is the first among the Indo-Anglian novelists to depict the age-old sufferings, oppression, and humiliation of the untouchable community. Similarly, Manik Bandopadhyay has also delineated the untold agonies of the remote lower-class fishermen community for the first time in Bengali literature. Deprivation, helplessness, cruelty, faithlessness, uncertainty, and all other sufferings of poverty have never found such a forceful expression in any other Bengali novel as in *Padma Nadir Majhi*. Therefore, considering the subject matter, one can find many similarities between these two contemporary novels.

At the very beginning of *Untouchable*, Anand shows the unhygienic environment in which the untouchables have to live. The novelist illustrates that, being outcastes, they must stay away from civilized society and live by the side of the public toilets in the town. For years, they must live in congested, mud-walled, dirty houses with greasy blankets on the floor and torn, faded carpets. The same type of description is found in *Padma Nadir Majhi*, where Manik depicts the slums of the fishermen community. The poor fishermen are completely separated from the other villagers. They must live in very congested, mud-built huts with a dark and damp atmosphere inside. Thus, in both novels,

the novelists meticulously show the unlivable, unhygienic environment in which the lower-class, poverty-stricken people must live and die.

Anand became actively involved in left-wing politics when he was in England. Manik Bandopadhyay also did the same and joined the Communist Party of India. Both novelists believed in Communism and equal rights for all. In *Untouchable*, Anand, through his protagonist Bakha the son of a sweeper puts forward a forceful demand for equality for all classes of men. Manik, in *Padma Nadir Majhi*, also expresses the same desire when he shows the cry of the deprived fishermen community through his protagonist Kuber and other characters. Like Bakha, Kuber also understands that he is being deceived by others but cannot protest against any injustice. Both suffer inwardly from mental anguish because unfair social rules silence them they see everything, tolerate everything, but cannot speak out.

In *Untouchable*, Bakha is slapped with acute humiliation when he unwillingly touches a higher-class person and gets accused of defiling the man. His imploring apology cannot save him. People of his community are not allowed to enter the temple, let alone the houses of upper-class people. Because they are untouchables, their presence and mere touch are considered to defile anything they come in contact with. In *Padma Nadir Majhi*, we see that the upper classes of the village bear the same kind of mentality. Therefore, the novelist writes, "On one side, the Brahmins and other higher-class gentlemen push them away; on the other side, the nor'western tends to destroy them." It means that both nature and society do not consider them human beings, but rather hateful objects. Thus, both Anand and Manik regretfully show that the lower-class sweepers and fishermen have no one of their own; they are exploited by others in times of necessity.

In *Untouchable*, Bakha suffers without any fault of his own. Again, his sister Sohini becomes the victim of caste exploitation by a woman from a slightly higher class. She is sexually harassed by a priest of the temple, and surprisingly, she herself is accused of defiling the holy man without any wrongdoing on her part. Thus, they are accused everywhere without committing any offense. In *Padma Nadir Majhi* as well, we see that Kuber receives a severe shock when he is falsely accused of stealing money from Pritom Majhi. Without any fault, Mala suffers when she sees her husband engaged in an illegal relationship with her younger sister. Thus, both novelists attempt to show that the helpless lower classes are the easiest to be accused and cheated.

Anand shows in his novel how the lower castes manage their daily bread in an inhuman way, roaming from door to door. They are unsure whether they will receive anything or how much they will get. As they are not permitted inside, they have to wait outside the houses of upper-class people like dogs to collect any leftover chapatis, which are thrown on the ground to avoid physical contact. Sometimes they can collect food from the cantonment area, where leftover dishes are also available. Thus, Anand emphasizes that the worst people of society must eat the worst food. Managing food is, therefore, always a matter of uncertainty for them. In *Padma Nadir Majhi* as well, we see

that the poor fishermen work day and night, in rain and sun, to manage their daily bread. Hunger is their constant companion, and they often have to borrow daily necessities from their poor neighbors. Sometimes they pass the day with only a handful of fried rice or flattened rice. Sometimes, they have to steal or play tricks to collect food, as Sidhu does at the village fair. In this way, both novelists have shown that the grim reality of poor life is managing food for their families.

Scarcity of basic needs is seen in the lower-class families in its acutest form. It is vividly portrayed both in *Untouchable* and *Padma Nadir Majhi*. Bakha's father, Lakha, cannot meet the doctor in his chamber to save his ailing son and waits outside for a long time. He pleads with many people for help, but no one assists him. In *Padma Nadir Majhi* as well, we see the sorrowful picture of the lack of necessary treatment. Kuber cannot think of taking his crippled wife to the hospital. He even neglects his daughter's serious leg injury because the hospital is far away from the fishermen's slum. Bakha, the representative of the untouchables, has a fascination for school, but he knows that it is next to impossible for him. Similarly, the fishermen in *Padma Nadir Majhi* cannot even manage clothes for their naked children, let alone education. However, Anand does not end his novel with Bakha in total frustration. Bakha's frustrated mind is cheered up when he listens to an encouraging speech by Mahatma Gandhi, who talks about the plight of the untouchables and mentions his mission to see them emancipated. Bakha also becomes hopeful for his future when he hears from Sarshar, a met, that the imminent arrival of the flushing toilet in India will automatically mark the end of their profession. On the other hand, Manik Bandopadhyay also ends his novel by showing Kuber, the frustrated protagonist, having hope for a new life in a new land called Moina Dip.

Thus, from the comparative discussion above and other related discussions earlier, it can be said that there are many similarities between these two novels, especially in the portrayal of lower-class people and their daily sufferings.

Conclusion

Responsibility, humanism, and concern for the lower-class people are portrayed very realistically in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* and Manik Bandopadhyay's *Padma Nadir Majhi*, respectively. The sufferings, humiliation, and wretchedness of the poor, along with their struggle for a better future, are described in great detail in both these novels. The depiction of the pathetic condition of the untouchable sweepers and helpless fishermen can certainly serve the purpose of raising the consciousness of the educated and well-off sections regarding the problems of social and economic injustice prevailing in society. In fact, with these novels, both novelists began the literature of the downtrodden in the Indian subcontinent. Both are undoubtedly pioneers among 20th-century Anglo-Indian and Bengali novelists in expressing love, sympathy, and compassion for the inferior classes of society.

References

Anand, M. R. (2014). *Untouchables*. Penguin Classics.

Hossain, M. A. (2018). Social picture and livelihood of the boatman in M. Bandopadhyay's *Padma Nadir Majhi: An Ecocritical Study*. International Journal of Social Science Studies, 6(6). https://doi.org/10.11114/ijsss.v6i6.3287

Jalaluddin, B. L. (Ed.). (2011). *Padma Nadir Majhi* (22nd ed.). Kamrul Enterprise.

Kantha, B. (2020). *The boatman of Padma: An existential elixir for the politics of poverty*. Asian Critical and Interdisciplinary Education and Literature Journal, 3(2). www.acielj.com

Kumar, R. (2017). Social problems and class exploitation in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*. *Quest Journals*, 5(10), 8-9. www.questjournals.org

Mastud, S. S. (2017, March 6). *Mulk Raj Anand's Untouchable: An exploration into inner space*. ResearchGate. https://www.researchgate.net

Mortuza, S. (2018). Manik Bandopadhyay: A hunger artist. *The Daily Star*. https://www.thedailystar.net/in-focus/hunger-artist-19/05/2018

Munim, R. (2018). The Marxist tradition in Bengali fiction. *Dhaka Tribune*. https://www.dhakatribune.com/magazine/arts-letters/2018/05/15

Nanda, A. (2019). Cruelty and malleability in Manik Bandopadhyay's *The Boatman of Padma*. *Bangla Lit Talks*. Book Review.

Regmi, B. N. (n.d.). Economic adversity and disgrace in *Untouchable*. *NepJOL*. https://www.nepjol.info/index.php/nutaj/article/view/23455

Rai, K. (2017). Main characteristics of the writings of Mulk Raj Anand. *International Journal of Innovative Research and Development*, 5(4). www.ijird.org

Sethi, S. (2020). Mulk Raj Anand, writer for the ages.

Singh, S. (2017). Mulk Raj Anand: Humanism and his art of fiction. *Ashvamegh Journal*, 3(XXXII). https://ashvamegh.net/mulk-raj-anand-humanism-his-art-of-fiction

Sunmugam, S. (2015, November 20). Identity dilemma in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* and Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss: A strategic essentialist reading*. *Procedia—Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 208, 203-222.

Varalakshmi, A. (2017). Portrayal of the poor and oppressed in the select novels of Charles Dickens and Mulk Raj Anand: A comparative study. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 22(7), 28-31.

Veera, V. (n.d.). The portrayal of the lower-class people in Mulk Raj Anand. *Academia.edu*. https://www.academia.edu/10223391/The-Portrayal-of-the-Lower

Zanke, S. P. (2019). Caste and class conflict in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* and *Coolie*. *Zenodo*. https://zenodo.org/record/2540848#YRjbH4gzYzw

Technology Integrated Instructional Intervention to Develop EFL Writing Skill: A Study on Tertiary Level Learners in Bangladesh

Md. Akramuzzaman[1]

Abstract

The aim of the study is to investigate the effectiveness and learners' perception on the technology integrated digital writing applications ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch to develop writing skill among the tertiary level EFL learners in Bangladesh. The study was conducted on 81 and 75 freshmen enrolled in six month long academic English course in a public university in Bangladesh. The purposive sampling was done to select the sample. They were divided into 81 and 75 numbers respectively to get an experimental and control group. The experimental group received online writing instruction using ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch whereas the control group received conventional writing instruction only. In pre-intervention and post-intervention writing test, the experimental group outperformed the control group. The mixed method quantitative and qualitative study shows that instructional intervention through recently developed technological and pedagogic applications can significantly improve the writing skill of the university students of Bangladesh. Moreover, the technological pedagogic intervention through ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch helps develop learners' motivation, engagement and participation significantly. Idea generation, composition organization (coherence, cohesion), grammar and vocabulary-all these aspects of writing are developed, study also finds. The findings of the questionnaire show those issues are also challenging for the learners. Learners also recognized that scaffolding and real-time feedback given by digital writings apps and teachers synchronously are instrumental in developing their academic writing skills. However, learners are anxious about over dependency on digital technology, challenges of technology integration and supplementary feedback of student writing.

Keywords: *EFL writing, academic writing, digital writing apps, tertiary level EFL writing, feedback.*

[1] Assistant Professor, Department of English, Jagannath University, Dhaka

1.1 Inroduction

> Writing is "irksome activity and ordeal to be avoided wherever possible."
> Henry George Widdowson

But it is not easy to avoid writing because in academia, success by and large depends on someone's ability to write an idea in a clear, concise and organized format. As writing cannot be avoided it is better to learn writing. Writing is an expression of clarity and argumentality of the thought of our minds. For teachers, teaching writing is demanding because it requires individual scaffolding and feedback. In Bangladesh teaching writing becomes more daunting because of large class size and limited class time. Moreover, Writing has a pervasive influence on the life of the people, specifically in the life of the students.

Introducing PowerWritingAid and Paragraph Punch among the students is significant because Bangladesh is predominately a low-teach, low-resourced community. Moreover, teaching learning becomes challenging because we cannot make teaching collaborative and interactive due to large class size. Technology-based instructional intervention to improve writing skill can appear with a promise of change in this situation. Especially writing requires feedback more often then any other language skill does. And Introducing PowerWritingAid and Paragraph Punch to provide feedback on students' writing bears the potential to change the situation. It is noteworthy to mention that the fluent, independent, self-regulated and goal-oriented learners' and the underachievers can get benefit equally from evidence-based technology-oriented instructional intervention. Machine feedback system and peer-assessment of student writing are specifically helpful in Bangladesh EFL classroom because the classes are usually overcrowded and class time is limited.

Writing in English is instrumental for a number of different reasons. Academic writing is one of the predicators of university students' academic success, future employability and access to information. It helps to be connected with the rest of the world and organization across the globe. Writing in English also helps for socioeconomic mobilization.

University students with academic writing proficiency in English can often produce good quality writing (Hz et al., 2023). This is much needed because English predominately becomes a language of research publication (Baker, 2019).

In Bangladesh, English is the medium of language in the university education and higher courts of Bangladesh. Although most of the books and paper required to study at the university are in English and the answer in the exams are to be written in English, the students cannot learn Writing in English well due to pedagogical and non-pedagogical reasons. Hence, there is a need to reinforce our attempt to learn writing in English through research findings.

In this background, teaching writing to the university students becomes important and almost all of the undergraduate programs at the universities in Bangladesh offer at least one course to develop academic English. But these courses often are not enough for the students because of many different kinds of reasons. The overcrowded class size is around 80 on average. So, giving feedback timely and checking students' writing are daunting for the teachers. Students often also struggle to find ideas for their writing tasks. Technology integrated writing classes may address students' problems. Recently developed smart phone-based applications such as ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch may be a help in this regard. But students and teachers need to be trained to know how to use them appropriately. But we need to know first how much effective are these apps for the university students of Bangladesh, and what is the perception of the learners on these apps.

2. Purpose of the study and research objective

Different kinds of technology integration can be made to increase quality and quantity of student writing. This study makes attempt to find out the effectiveness and perceptions of two smart phone-and computer-based apps such as PowerWritingAid and Paragraph Punch. The study also looks into the specific impact of PowerWritingAid for grammar, spelling, word choice and clarity suggestion and Paragraph Punch for structure and organization of composition structure. Thus, the present study investigates the following research questions:

RQ 01. What is the effect of using PowerWritingAid and Paragraph Punch to develop writing skill of the university students of Bangladesh?

RQ 02. What are the opinions of the students on using PowerWritingAid and Paragraph Punch in writing classes?

Answering these questions may help us to develop insight on using PowerWritingAid and Paragraph Punch in writing classes of the university students of Bangladesh.

03. Review of the related literature:

The literature review finds out the following issues as relevant to the research question: teaching EFL writing skill, resource for teaching EFL writing, different aspects (cognitive, affective and sociocultural) of teaching writing, difficulties in writing, using digital apps and tools in teaching writing, using PowerWritingAid and Paragraph Punch in teaching writing.

3.1 Among the four language skills, writing is instrumental as it requires more effort and commitment (Abel-Haq & Ali, 2017). Conveying meaning is involved in EFL writing process (Harmer, 2004). Developing ideas on specific topic, composition organization and choosing right kinds of words and grammar (Kim & Kim, 2005) are the areas where students usually struggle. Activities related to learning writing practical in nature are to be learnt by the teacher and learner (Cabrera-Solano et al., 2021). But

many of the EFL writing learners and teachers do not have clear ideas on different approaches of writing instruction. To develop writing fluency, different resources and tools and apps are used by the teachers to develop writing skills of the learners (Fithriani et al., 2018).

3.2 Using digital tools to develop writing skill

Integrating digital applications to develop writing is a rising trend nowadays (Xu et al., 2019). Students write and engage differently in writing activities with the use of technology (Zhang, 2022), and in online classes students write and publish to an authentic audience (Mackee, 2016). Different software, apps, extensions, add-ons, websites and technology are used to assist students' writing (Dahlstrom, 2018).

Comprehensive feedback helps students to develop their writing skill in English. An automated writing evaluation (AWE) system integrating automatic written corrective feedback (AWCF) to detect language error (Ranalli, 2018) are used in this app. Natural language processing (NLP) algorithm are used by artificial intelligence (AI) to evaluate and provide feedback on student writing (Wei, et al., 2023). Feedback provided by the apps helps to reduce teachers' workload and develop learners' autonomy and motivation of writing (Woodworth & Borkaoui, 2020) as well as fluency and accuracy. PowerWritingAid provides immediate feedback related to grammar and word choice but paragraph organization are not covered in its feedback system. So, here is the need for a teachers' feedback because technology cannot provide content based and semantic aspect of students' writing. Paragraph Punch is developed in 2002 to help students develop writing-- topic sentence, paragraph structure, connecting ideas with linking words. It also assists learners to organize their ideas, draft, edit and publish their writing. It can assist student to structure their ideas and create collaborative learning environment (Mei-Lin, 2009).

However, investigating the effectiveness of PowerWritingAid and Paragraph Punch among the students is significant because it is situated predominately in a low-teach, low-resourced community such as Bangladesh. It bears a promise of creating an autonomous, interactive, collaborative writing-skill-developing environment. These tools help student getting immediate feedback on some aspects of natural human language which motivate learners more and reduce teachers' 'workload significantly. The supplementary feedback provided by the teachers makes learning writing more effective.

3.3 Writing as a communicative skill

Writing is "irksome activity and ordeal to be avoided wherever possible" (Widdowson, 1983, p.33) because writing necessitates cognitive, linguistic, affective and sociocultural aspect simultaneously (Pea & Kurland, 1987). Writing requires generating and organizing ideas, making appropriate linguistic constructions, working on the writing mechanics and negotiating meaning with audience (Ezza et al., 2019).

That's why, often anxiety, avoidance and frustration are found in the teacher while teaching writing (Troia & Grahem, 2003). Educational success, future employability and other life pursuits of students may be hampered by the inability to write good quality conposition. In this background, writing teachers are struggling to find best instructional intervention process to help student struggling with writing.

3.4 Instructional intervention to help students' writing better

Instructional intervention in writing is additional instructional support by the teacher to assist underachieving students (Harris and Graham, 1999). All the students equally have ideas, and linguistic, affective, sociocultural and experiential aspects to write (Kirby and Liner, 2013). So, additional support may help the underachievers. However, 'the fluent, independent, self-regulated and goal-oriented learners' (Harris et al., 2002) and the underachievers can get benefit from 'evidence-based intervention' (Ezza et al., 2019). However, in two different ways: metanalysis (MA) and self-regulated strategy development (SRDS) (Santangelo & Olinghouse, 2007) are two approaches by which best effective evidence-based intervention can be found. Metanalysis is analysis about analysis that investigate previously mentioned variables rather than discussing the direction of the results, consider the measure of the magnitude of the effect (Bengert-Drowns, 1993). Metanalysis, thus, specifically deals with its resulting size effect. But SRDS is the evidence-based effective learning activities to help the students struggling with learning composition writing, and teachers struggling with teaching composition writing (Harris and Graham, 2016). It is connected to self-regulating strategies such as planning, revising, organizing and evaluating one's own writing. Students' cognitive, affective and sociocultural aspects are considered in SRDS to develop students' writing quality (Ezza et al., 2019). However, as student-teacher relations are unequal in comparison to power (Hyland, 2000), teachers' feedback does not work. The idea that this unequal power distribution disturbs teacher feedback process is not valid because teacher feedback is a part of comprehensive plan to correct students' cognitive, affective and sociocultural aspects, teacher can discuss with the learners to make the feedback collaborative and interactional, and teachers' effort can make writing task motivating, inspiring and rewarding.

4. Method

4.1 Participants and setting

The purposive sampling is done for the study. The student selected for the study are freshmen of a public university of Bangladesh. They are around the age of 18 on average. They attend the Academic English course as a part of their study in undergraduate program of the university. Among them 90 are male and 68 are female. 100 of them are from the urban and 58 of them are from rural areas. The students are divided into two groups-the experimental group consists of 81 students and the control group consists of 75 students. However, the experimental group instructional intervention by PowerWritingAid and Paragraph Punch and the control group gets

traditional instruction on learning writing without any technology integrated support. They attended the Academic English course for six months. The syllabi, exam procedure, evaluation policy, and course teacher are the same.

4.2 Instrument

A post-intervention proficiency test is administered to both groups in week 22 to compare the level of proficiency of the two groups of learners. The experimental group participants are interviewed to get the qualitative data with semi-structured interview protocol. A rubric for argumentative and descriptive writing was given to experimental group to asses their own and other's writing. The topic sentence, supporting sentences, supporting details, content, unity, organization, mechanics, grammar and vocabulary are the rubrics given to both groups but making them available online for experimental group provides more benefit to them than that of the control group. Both the groups have three contact hours every week resulted in 72 hours of classroom activities in 24 weeks or six months. The validity and reliability of the 5 point Likert-scale questionnaire was checked by pilot test with 15 non-participant students. Some of the errors of the questionnaire was corrected. The Cronbach's alpha was measured to find the internal consistency of the items. We found the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.7.

4.3 Data collection

Phase 1

A literature review on digital feedback providing apps on students' writing, and writing difficulties was done to find the procedural aspect of research intervention.

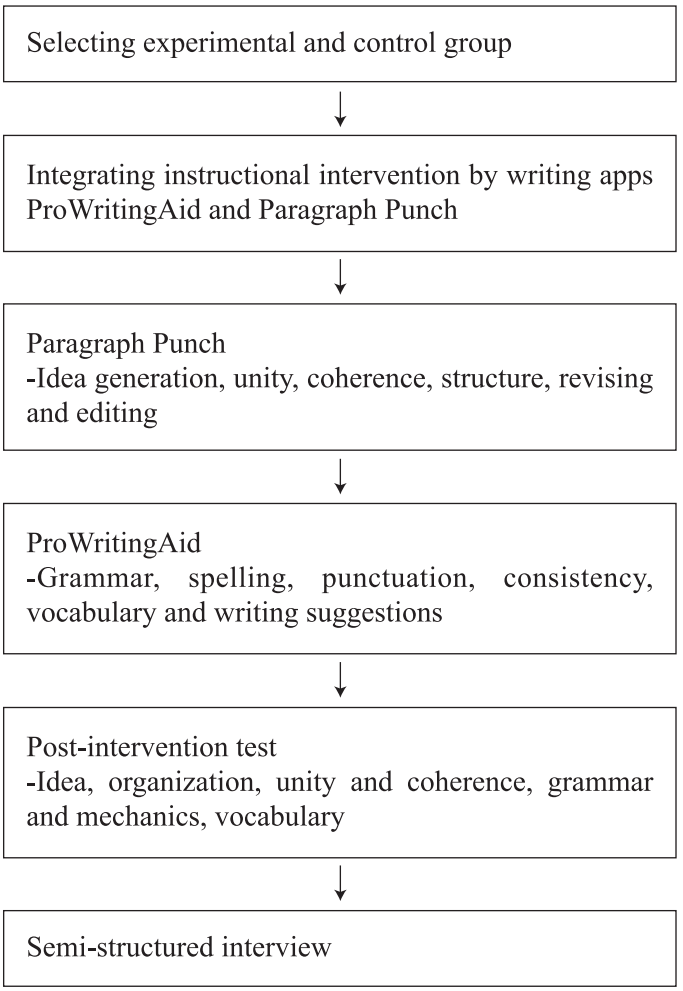
Phase 2

The literature review helps to generate research plan and instrument. The instruments are a post-intervention writing test for both the experimental and control group, a 5-point Likert-scale quantitative questionnaire and a semi-structured interview protocol. These instruments were also validated by three consults who teach witing at different public universities in Bangladesh.

Phase 3

Purpose, procedure, duration and confidentiality of the study were added with the questionnaire. Post-intervention three-hour-long writing skill test, and protocol and a semi-structured open-ended interview were given to the experimental and control groups. Data were collected and processed by calculating mean, average, standard deviation, variance, etc. Descriptive and interpretive statistics are applied to process the questionnaire information. Both the experimental and control group get a 72 hours classes in 24 weeks but the experimental group gets ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch aided teaching instruction whereas the control group gets traditional instruction.

The research design and data collection procedures are described briefly in the following flow chart:



There are many tasks found in the apps. Among them, discussion, submit, online classes and news room are significant.

Discussion is an option and place that make a room for the learners to talk freely on ideas, to share writing techniques, technicalities and organization/structure, to discuss while preparing a draft, or to talk on any issues related to writing. The discussion as a learning activity performs a significant role because ideas are generated, shared and organized through this activity. Measured use of mother tongue whenever needed may help the slow beginner to gain confidence. Teachers' encouragement and peers' positive node and acceptance make learners inspired and confident to come up with

new ideas. Teachers' guidance by least interferences is essential to engage students to the act of developing topic sentence, supporting sentences, supporting details and concluding sentence, organizing and structuring ideas in order, choosing right words, preparing a rubric, using the rubric to comment on and assess learners' writing.

Submit is a tab which takes place where different drafts of writing and feedback on them are submitted and found. Deadlines may be extended whenever requests are made. In the submit option, student can submit their writing tasks either individually or collaboratively. Some tasks are assigned to be submitted individually, some are collaboratively and some tasks are left to the will of the learners. This option will hopefully encourage and inspire to write which is widely assumed to be an individual task but interestingly, the learners learn that writing can also be a collaborative task. Learners individually or collaboratively can produce, modify, add, share and edit writing.

Online classes are the tab where evening classes are taken, all past classes are found and requests for classes can be made. Online classes are taken by synchronous video conferencing and screen sharing apps.

Newsroom is a place where all learning activities, tasks, deadlines, exams and any other information regarding the course are updated.

Rubric-based assessment is an important tool to increase learners'' reflectivity and motivation. Assessment items on different genres of writing are given here so that the learners can follow them at the time of their writing, and assessing and commenting on other's writing as a part of peer assessment which is found to be useful in developing insight on learners' own writing. This rubric-based assessment process helps learners to submit more than one draft to enhance the quality of their paper. At the first stage, content/idea and organization/structure of the composition are assessed, and later draft are assessed to check grammar and vocabulary. Peer-assessment of students writing are specifically helpful in Bangladesh EFL classroom because of the overcrowded class and limited class time. However, learners are required to go through self-checking plagiarism detection tools to avoid plagiarism in their writing. Often writers need to explain their writing areas which seems to be taken from others.

4.4 Data analysis

Descriptive and interpretive statistics are applied to measure means, average, standard deviation, variance, *F*-test and *t*-test to find out the trend and pattern of students' perception on using ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch and traditional classes.

Data analysis was performed using a *t*-test for two samples assuming equal variances. This decision was based on the result of the *F*-test with equality of variances. The *F*-test resulted in a *p*-value of 0.044, hence less than 0.05, showing that there is a significant difference between the variances of the two groups. The assumption of equal variances is not met, so the null hypothesis of variance equality is rejected. (Table 1)

Table 1: *F*-test for Equality of Variances

	Variable 1 (Experimental Group)	Variable 2 (Control Group)
Mean	67.35	47.65
Variance	46.904	41.013
Observations	81	75
DF	80	74
F	4.135	
p-value	0.044	

In this table, $\alpha \leq 0.05$; DF=degree of freedom

However, students writing questionnaire are analysed by mean, average, standard deviation, variance and *p*-test. The qualitative data collected from post-intervention semi-structured open-ended interview questions on students' perception on ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch are recorded, transcribed and translated from Bangla to English. Content analysis was done in six different stages which are developing familiarity with the information, creating preliminary codes, searching for themes. Reviewing those themes, explaining and labelling those themes, and report writing (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Students' perception on using ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch was identified and recognized to reach to some keywords indicating major themes of research findings.

Comparison of students' writing performance scores of the experimental group using technological instructional intervention apps ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch and control group without using ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch are made to see the effectiveness of the apps. Idea, organization, unity, coherence, grammar and mechanics, and vocabulary-on the basis of these assessment rubric a post-intervention proficiency test was conducted on the experimental group and control group. The result of independent sample *t*-test between two groups along with their mean, standard deviation, lowest and highest marks of the test scores of experimental groups and control groups are shown in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Comparison of students' written scores between the experimental group (using digital tools) and control group (not using digital tools)

Score	Number of Students	Total Score	Lowest Score	Highest score	Mean	SD	t	p
Experimental Group	81	100	46	78	67.35	6.849	18.559	**0.000***
Control Group	75		19	55	47.65	6.404		

In this table, $\alpha \leq 0.05$; SD=Standard Deviation; P=p-value

Experimental and control group scores (N=81 and 75) showed significant development in writing skills because of using technological tools. Experimental group scores range from 46 to 78 outperforms the control group scores ranges from 19 to 55. It is noteworthy to mention that the mean post-test score of experimental group scores (M=67, SD=7) was higher in significant level than the control group score (M=47, SD=6), showing development of writing proficiency in significant level among the experimental group.

Table 2 reveals that experimental and control group test scores suggest development of significant level after the use of instructional digital intervention. We find that experimental group spirals up in all rubric items including the mean score. The mean and SD are for ideas (M=13, SD=3), organization (M=13, SD=2), grammar and mechanics (M=13, SD=2), unity and coherence (M=14, SD=2), and vocabulary (M=14, SD=2).

Table 3: Writing test scores of the experimental group after using ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch and control group without using ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch

Criteria	Total Score	Experimental Group			Control Group			p-value
		Mean	SD	Level	Mean	SD	Level	
Idea	20	13.32	2.054	3	9.77	1.476	3	**.000***
Organization	20	12.85	2.019	5	9.49	1.465	4	**.000***
Unity and coherence	20	14.48	2.430	1	10.53	2.164	1	**.000***
Grammar and mechanics	20	13.14	1.973	4	7.96	1.267	5	**.000***
Vocabulary	20	13.56	2.424	2	9.89	1.921	2	**.000***
Total	100	67.35			47.65			

5. Findings

5.1 Quantitative data

Table 4 shows the result of the research question 01. This will answer that whether instructional invention by ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch is effective in increasing students' writing skill in significant level.

Table 4: *t*-test for comparison of the scores betwen the experimental group and control group

	Variable 1 (Experimental Group)	Variable 2 (Control Group)
Mean	67.35	47.65
Variance	46.904	41.013
Observations	81	75
DF	154	
t	18.559	
p-value	0.000*	

In this table, $\alpha \leq 0.05$; DF=degree of freedom

As the table shows that *p*-value (0.01) is less than alpha level (0.05), recognizing a significant difference in the participants performance on the side of experimental group.

5.2 Qualitative data

Students' perceptions towards the integration of the instructional technology such as ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch in writing classes are found positive.

5.2.1 Students' opinion regarding the use of ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch in writing class

To elicit data to find out experimental and control groups' opinions regarding the use of digital technology ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch, a post-intervention interview was taken from both groups. Eight participants among them four were from experimental and four were from control group took part in the semi-structured open-ended interview.

Table 5. Interview result: Experimental group participants

Experimental group participants	Q1	Q2	Q3
01	ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch are easy to use.	Writing online is not easy.	I will welcome to do other courses with online digital apps.
02	We can work anytime anywhere. It is flexible to run.	It is often difficult to write with keyboard.	All courses should be with this course.
03	Better opportunity to write right word and correct grammar.	Hardcopies of assignment should be allowed.	This apps are good for all courses.
04	We can easily generate idea with it.	Only half of the course should be offered online.	Anyone can attend courses with these apps.

Table 5. Interview result: Control group participants

Control Group Participants	Q1	Q2	Q3
01	Writing is monotonous.	Idea generation is often difficult.	Teachers should give us feedback immediately.
02	I need to remember the rubric again and again.	Grammar and vocab are difficult.	We are waiting for teachers' written comment on writing.
03	This course is not comfortable.	I don't know often what to write.	Writing second draft is monotonous.
04	I become anxious because I need to write.	Writing is time consuming.	Teachers should make written comment on second draft.

Using ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch developed a positive opinion among the experimental group who used those technological tools. Both of the apps are giving support in different distinctive areas of students writing. The digital tools are perceived by the learners as interactive and collaborative. The learners were also inspired for active participation and motivated to write because of the immediate feedback and easy-to-use technique. Student 4 reported in this regard,

Data 01: *The step-by-step approach of ProWritingAid helps to be aware of different aspects of composition writing. Even the tool helps me to generate ideas for writing, which is unexpectedly helpful for me. I become more comfortable to write topic sentence, supporting sentences, supporting details and concluding sentence.*

Another student commented,

Data 02: *ProWritingAid apps helps me to find out ideas and structured composition. Before using it, I struggled to write a composition, and often puzzled where to and how to start.*

On the contrary, another students who did not have own smart phone or computer said,

Data 03: *I am in a struggling situation because of generating and organizing ideas on a given topic. I am also hesitant to write topic sentence and supporting sentences. It takes time to write supporting details and concluding sentence.*

From the data 02 and 03 it is evident that learners who do not use digital instrumental apps ProWritingAid and Paragraph punch are still struggling with idea generation, organization, unity and coherence of composition whereas student who are using those educational tools are relatively more confident and comfortable while writing for academic purposes. Therefore, it is evident that using instructional apps helps student write better composition.

Students 01 from experimental group said,

Data 4: *Writing with ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch are interesting because we get support from the technological tools timely. These tools give grammar and clarity*

suggestions also. This feels that there is someone I can consult with on my writing ideas and organization.

Whereas students from the control group remarked,

Data 5: *Writing is like moving into an empty space. You need to think and write all alone. It is boring.*

So, it is evident from the comment of student 1 from control group that writing to the control group is monotonous and lonely task whereas writing to the experimental group with the assistance of ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch is interactive, collaborative and motivating.

Student 3 from experimental group noticed,

Data 6: *In comparison to other English skills, writing is complex because it requires thinking, organizing and expressing them in grammatically correct sentences. ProWritingAid and Paragraph punch equip me with the writing complexity better. They suggest me regarding the mistakes. This is a kind of individual and personalized support.*

Student 4 from control group said,

Data 7: *Often it takes time to get simple feedback from the teacher, we are in the dark regarding the mistakes we made in our writing. It is unencouraging to not to get your error identified. It is like not to get a reader of your writing. You are writing for no reason.*

Student 4 from experimental group said,

Data 8: *The integration of both tools and the teachers' feedback are complementary. Paragraph Punch is there to generate and organize ideas around a topic and ProWritingAid is there to check and suggest grammatical errors, and then teachers' feedback on the quality of ideas and content. Thus, integration of machine and human feedback system are a complete process of feedback helping us to write qualitatively and quantitatively better.*

Data 5 and 6 from the student of control group and data 8 from student 4 of control group make it evident that experimental group who had received immediate feedback from machine-based feedback system felt encouraged to write better and write more. Therefore, using technological tools helps to find an encouraging writing environment.

In the same line, students from experimental group remarked that getting explanations and suggestions helps them generate insight on writing organization, content, mechanics, grammar and language use. So, it is not restricted to error identification and classification only.

Student 1 of control group said,

Data 9: *We need to wait for 1 week or more for feedback from the teacher. Sometimes teachers are not found in teachers' room for providing feedback.*

Whereas student 4 of experimental group said,

Data 10: *we find feedback within 3 days of submission. And in the case of second draft, we get feedback just after the submission.*

Therefore, there is clear evidence that feedback time is significantly reduced because of the use of technological apps ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch.

It is to mention that feedback of first draft is on ideas, content, organization, mechanics, and unity and coherence of writing whereas feedback on second draft is on grammar, spelling, punctuation. Because there is no point of correcting the grammar if the ideas and content are not on the right track. If the contents of a writing are changed, the new sentences will be written and those sentences are to be corrected for their grammar and spelling. So, the contents are to be corrected first, then grammar. Otherwise, new sentences will require grammar and spelling checks again.

The above remark confirms that there is a need of teachers' feedback, machine-based feedback is superfluous in many cases because it cannot connect to the endless free play of signifiers and meanings. So, integration of both technological tools such as ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch, and teachers' feedback is essentially helpful in a comprehensive feedback procedure. The combination ensures active class participation, a better idea generation process, error detection system and content checking process. This also ensures a better writing experience and enhanced involvement in the writing process.

The study also found that integrating ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch, and teachers' feedback help making better outcomes. The study results also revealed that the digital writing intervention ensures a statistically significant level of writing skill proficiency. Ideas, organization, unity and coherence, grammar and mechanics- across all those five writing criteria there is a significant upward trend. And the writing performance average score also revealed a significant upward trend. This happens because of the scaffolding support and guided approach that helps to build structure and organization of compositions (Pujiawati, 2018).

On the same line, student 3 from experimental group remarked that getting explanation and suggestion help them generate insight on writing mechanics, grammar and language use. So, it is not restricted to error identification and classification only.

Student 4 from experimental group said,

Data 11: *The integration of both ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch tools, and then teacher's feedback make us confident as all our errors are identified by others but corrected by us.*

This comment shows that integration of both machine and teacher feedback are complementary.

6. Discussion

RQ 01. What is the effect of using ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch to writing skill of the university students of Bangladesh?

Ideas, organization and mechanics, vocabulary, unity and coherence are the five criteria found to be in a significantly upward trend because of this instructional intervention of ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch. The step-by-step process followed in the apps is responsible for learners' writing development. Guided approach and scaffolding support of Paragraph Punch help the students to develop writing skills better. Pujiwati (2018) also found the same result. Students 3 and 4 remarked that guided approach and scaffolding support are helping them to find confidence in writing.

Grammar and punctuation checking are suggested by ProWritingAid tool and that improves students' writing. Student 2 and 3 of experimental group mentioned it in their interviews. Pitukwong and Saraiwang (2024) also got the same findings that ProWritingAid helps student to correct their errors with the assistance of timely feedback. However, these digital writing tools are effective because of specific timely feedback to students writing. Timely and specific feedback are instrumental in students' writing (Ferris, 2018). This helps the students to engage in active revision process. Taking support from ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch also reduces teachers' workload, and teachers can give more time on the content and organization of student writing. Consequently, this engagement of the students leads toward a more involved teacher-students feedback process (Pitukwong and Saraiwang, 2024).

Research question 02.

What are the opinions of the students on using ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch in writing classes?

Paragraph Punch's step-by-step approach helps the students to generate and organize ideas, construct effective topic sentence, supporting sentences and concluding sentence. Paragraph Punch is an effective tool to provide scaffolding support and guidance to the students for writing. Paragraph Punch guides students to follow different stages of writing and thus, it builds confidence and competence among learners (Yuk et al., 2019).

ProWritingAid does not only identify errors in students' writing. It also provides suggestions to improve grammar, punctuation and spelling. Students further elaborated that they required teachers' feedback on content, unity and coherence. ProWritingAid can not provide feedback on complex areas of feedback such as content, unity and coherence. So, ProWritingAid's feedback on grammar and vocabulary and teachers' feedback on content, unity and coherence are complementary to each other. Combining

digital tool-based feedback and teachers' feedback are instrumental (Nova and Lukmana, 2018). Integration of machine's feedback and teachers' feedback can reduce the limitation of existing feedback system (Woodworth and Barkaoui, 2020).

In addition, integration of ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch makes a more interactive and collaborative writing environment. Student 02 said in this connection that ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch support them to generate, organize ideas and correct grammatical errors, thus, they feel inspired to write more. Therefore, students feel more supported and motivated to write in the collaborative and interactional envioronment. ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch ensure active participation and engagement of the students.

However, overdependence to ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch is not good because students often feel unconfident to write without support of them. This overdependence reduces students' capacity to find their own mistakes, revise and improve their own writing. Whenever someone else is there always to detect students' mistake, they will always depend on that someone to tell them about their mistakes. But learners need to be able to detect their own mistakes to get rid of mistakes. Learners able to detect their mistakes develop understanding and insight about their mistakes. Overreliance on machine error detection system causes weakness in identifying and correcting errors without an external support, and this in the long run resulted in a lower proficiency in writing. Machine-based error detection system also causes a failure to deeply understand underlying rules of language usage and learn from own mistakes (Marzuki et al., 2023).

Another problem is the limitation related to the access to technology. Student 1 and 4 said that they neither have any smart phone nor computer in their home. So, either they need to share it with their friends or go to the resource centre of their departments. Many of the department in the public university in Bangladesh do not have any resource centre with access to computer. Whenever learners use their friends' smart phone or resource centre of the department or university, it is only for a limited time. Moreover, some of the students who have limited access to the technology face difficulty in using ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch apps. In this situation when there is inequality in access to technology, introducing ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch apps may result in widening gap in educational achievement.

07. Conclusion

The study results reach us to the decision that despite some limitations, digital instructional intervention through ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch helps to make students proficient in EFL writing. The study also revealed that the scaffolding support and guidance of the ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch help university students of Bangladesh to generate and organize ideas, organizational structure and grammar. The study also found that the experimental group's EFL writing was significantly improved because of using digital tools such as ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch in

comparison to the control group. The experimental group is also of the positive opinion regarding the use of ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch. The experimental group are found to be more motivated than the control group, and there is sufficient reason revealed from the students' interview to believe that the cause of the motivation is getting timely feedback and interactive options availed through ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch.

The study investigated the result of using digital writing apps ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch in experimental and control group of public university students of Bangladesh. The result clearly showed that students developed better writing skill and possessed positive opinions regarding the use of ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch. But we need to remember that there are some conditions of using digital apps in the writing classes. Firstly, the teachers need to be equipped with knowledge and skill to use the apps appropriately to foster learners EFL writing skill. Secondly, the learners need to have access to the technology otherwise using these apps may widen the educational achievement gaps among the learners. Thirdly, learners may not develop deep understanding and insight on the rules of language use because of the quick machine-based feedback system on grammar. These challenges are to be noticed while digital tools such as ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch are being used to develop learners EFL writing skills. The integration of technology brings hope and promise at the same time, we need to remember that some limitations and challenges are there as well. In conclusion, we can say that technology integration can bring a wind of change in the EFL writing sphere in the low-tech low-resourced community as Bangladesh.

The effect of technology-based instructional intervention on the writing performance of the experimental group participant is consistent with other studies in different context also (Ezza, 2019). But studies on technology-based instructional intervention on the writing performance are not found in Bangladesh context. But Bangladesh has got low-tech, low-resourced, overpopulated classroom and technology can be a promise in the context of EFL teaching and learning.

The study also revealed that even the struggling students are benefitting from the use of technological apps to improve their writing performance. It also approves the fact that even the struggling learners get thoughts, ideas and language to write (Kirby and Liners, 2013). The study also confirms the decision that students can perform better in a target language whenever computer-based materials are used (Faridah et al., 2020). Product-based, process-based and genre-based approaches can be used in technology integrated EFL classes. The study also showed that the instructors usually use PowerPoint presentation (61%), social networks (5%), online shared document (5%), video (4%), and audio and podcast (3%). So, teachers are using technology in small number and limited manner. The technology used in the classes is not interactional in nature rather one way communication happens by the use of technology in the classes.

08. Limitations of the study

The study was conducted in a public university in Bangladesh. The purposive sampling restricts the generalizability of the findings. Moreover, wide research with a greater sample size may help to draw a conclusion applicable to the wider population of the study. The study is cross-sectional in nature, so the changes possibly appear over the time with the instructional intervention are not tracked. So, a longitudinal study may give a more comprehensive generalisable conclusion regarding the use of digital apps ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch to improve students' EFL writing.

The study shows that experimental group outperforms the control group. The findings can be interpreted by explaining different aspects of the study. Technological apps are instructional intervention to bring desired and effective learning of writing. Learners doing writing task with assistance of ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch can write in schedule more flexible to them. So, they feel less monotonous to write. This causes more writing and qualitative writing. Thus, experimental group learns to write better. The experimental group, because of the use of PowerWritingAid and Paragraph Punch, can write anywhere anytime. This helps them to settle down with the writing task more comfortably. The PowerWritingAid and Paragraph Punch can be used on smart phone also, so learners can use them while travelling or somewhere out of home. This helps them to use their leisure time better. Moreover, PowerWritingAid and Paragraph Punch have several tools in the procedure section for instruction and online communication. Specifically, there are four e-tools which helps the experimental participants to perform better. Discussion forum, online classes, rubric-based assessment and online classes are the e-tools seems to be responsible for developing better writing skills among the experimental participants.

Funding: No financial support for the research and authorship of this study is received by the author.

Declaration of interest: The author makes a declaration that there is no competing interest in the research work.

Data availability: The author on request can make available the data generated and analysed during the study.

References

Abdel-Haq, E., & Ali, H. (2017). Utilizing the corpus approach in developing EFL writing skills. *Journal of Research in Curriculum Instruction and Educational Technology*, *3*(2), 11–44. https://doi.org/ 10.21608/jrciet.2017.24458

Bangert-Drowns, R. L. (1993). The word processor as an instructional tool: a meta-analysis of word processing in writing instruction. *Review of Educational Research, 63*(1), 69–93. doi:10.2307/1170560

Braun, v & Clarke, V. (2008). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology.* 3(2), 77-101. http;//doi.10.1191/1478088706qpO63oa

Cabrera-Solano, P., Gonzalez-Torres, P., & Ochoa-Cueva, C. (2021). Using Pixton for Teaching EFL Writing in Higher Education during the Covid-19 Pandemic. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research. 20(9), 102-115*. https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.20.9.7

Dahlström, H. (2018). Digital writing tools from the student perspective: Access, affordances, and agency. *Education and Information Technologies, 24*, 1563-1581. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-018-9844-x

Ezza, E. & Alhuqail, E. & Elhussain, S. (2019). Technology-based instructional intervention in EFL writing classroom. *Cypriot Journal of Educational Sciences.* 14(4), 507-519. https://doi.org/10.18844/cjes.v11i4.3904

Faridah, D., Irianti, L., & Fachriyani, R. (2020). Investigating pre-service English teachers' perception on the use of multimedia in EFL teaching and learning process: Pedagogical implication. *Jadila: Journal of Development and Innovation in Language and Literature Education*, *1*(2), 2019–222. https://doi.org/10.52690/jadila.v1i2.102

Ferris, D. (2014). Responding to student writing: Teachers' philosophies and practices. *Assessing Writing, 19*, 6-23. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asw.2013.09.004

Fithriani, R., Rafida, T., & Siahaan, A. (2019). Integrating online blogging into EFL writing instruction: Exploring students' perceptions. *UNNES International Conference on English Language Teaching, Literature, and Translation* (ELTLT 2018) (pp. 87-90). Atlantis Press. https://doi.org/10.2991/eltlt-18.2019.17

Harris, K. & Graham, S. (2016). Self-regulated strategy development in writing: policy implications of an evidence-based practice. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, *3*(1), 77–84. https://doi.org/10.1177/2372732215624216

Harris, K., Graham, S. & Mason, L. (2003). Self-regulated strategy development in the classroom: part of a balanced approach to writing instruction for students with disabilities. *Focus on Exceptional Children,35*(7), 1–17. Retrieved from https://srsdonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Harris-Graham-Mason-2003.pdf

Hyland, F. (2000). ESL writers and feedback: giving more autonomy to students. *Language Teaching Research,4*(1), 33–54. doi:10.1177/136216880000400103

Hz, B. I. R., Laiya, R. E., Sarumaha, M. S., & Supiyandi. (2023). Navigating English writing proficiency tests in the era of artificial intelligence. *Journal of English Education and Teaching, 7*(3), 480-498. https://doi.org/10.33369/jeet.7.3.480-498

Kim, Y., & Kim, J. (2005). Teaching Korean university writing class. *Asian EFL*, 7(2), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.12691/education-3-7-3

Kirby, D. & Liner, T. (2013). *Strategies for teaching writing*, 4th Edition. Portsmouth: Heinman.

Marzuki, Widiati, U., Rusdin, D., Darwin, & Indrawati, I. (2023). The impact of AI writing tools on the content and organization of students' writing: EFL teachers' perspective. *Cogent Education, 10(*2), Article 2236469. https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2023.2236469

Mei-Lin, S. (2009). *How computer-mediated communication affects ELL students' writing processes and writing performance* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Oklahoma].

McKee, S. (2016). *Using digital writing tools in supporting student writing* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Northern Iowa].

Nova, M., & Lukmana, I. (2018). The detected and undetected errors in automated writing evaluation program's result. In D. Mulyadi, H. D. Santoso, T. D. Wijayatiningsih, D. Hardiyanti, Y. M. Ocktarani, S. Aimah, M. Ifadah, R. Budiastuti, & Y. Nugraheni (Eds.), *Proceedings of 2nd English Language and Literature International Conference: Education 4.0: Trends and Future Perspectives in English Education, Linguistics, Literature, and Translation* (pp. 120-126).

Pea, R. D. & Kurland, D. M. (1987). Cognitive technologies for writing, 277–327. In E. Z. Rothkoft (Ed.), *Review of Research in Education*. Washington, DC: Aera. Retrievd from https://telearn.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-00190542/document

Pitukwong, K., & Saraiwang, S. (2024). Exploring the effectiveness of digital writing tools on Thai EFL students' writing. *Contemporary Educational Technology, 16*(3), ep519. https://doi.org/10.30935/cedtech/14808

Pujiawati, N. (2018). Incorporating Paragraph Punch in EFL writing class. *ELT in Focus, 1*(1), 1-10. https://doi.org/10.35706/eltinfc.v1i1.1367

Ranalli, J. (2018). Automated written corrective feedback: How well can students make use of it. *Computer Assisted Language Learning, 31*(7), 653-674. https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2018.1428994

Santangelo, T. & Olinghouse, N. G. (2009). Effective writing instruction for students who have writing difficulties. *Focus on Exceptional Children, 42*(4):1–20. Retrieved from http://ceedar.education.ufl.edu/wpcontent/uploads/ 2014/10/Article-2.pdf

Troia, G. & Graham, S. (2003). Effective writing instruction across grades: what every educational consultant should know? *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation, 14*(1):75–89. Retrieved from
https://secure.lsit.ucsb.edu/writ/wrconf08/Pdf_Articles/TroiaArticle.pdf

Wei, P., Wang X. and Dong H. (2023). The impact of automated writing evaluation on second language writing skills of Chinese EFL learners: a randomized controlled trial. *Frontiers of Psycology*, 14:1249991. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1249991

Widdowson, H. G. (1983). New starts and different kind of failure. In A Freedman, I. Pringle & J. Walden (Eds.), *Learning to Write: First Language/Second Language*, pp 34–37. New York, NY: Longman.

Woodworth, J., & Barkaoui, K. (2020). Perspectives on using automated writing evaluation systems to provide written corrective feedback in the ESL classroom. *TESL Canada Journal, 37*(2), 234-247. https://doi.org/10.18806/tesl.v37i2.1340

Xu, Z., Banerjee, M., Ramirez, G., Zhu, G., & Wijekumar, K. (2019). The effectiveness of educational technology applications on adult English language learners' writing quality: A meta-analysis. *Computer Assisted Language Learning, 32*(1), 132-162. https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2018.1501069

Yuk, A. C. K., Wui-Xin, F. W., Qin, T. P., & Yunus, M. M. (2019). Using PaW-Modo to enhance paragraph writing. *Creative Education, 10*(2), 429-442. https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2019.102031

Zhang, W. (2022). The role of technology-based education and teacher professional development in English as a foreign language classes. *Frontiers in Psychology, 13*, Article 910315. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.910315

Appendix
Semi-structure interview protocol

Directions

Please give your opinion on the following issues in details.

Part I: Promises

01. What is educational technology?
02. Explain the role of ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch?
03. What are the benefits of using ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch inside and outside of the classroom?
04. Describe different kinds of technology-based educational tools.
05. Explain the idea of integrating ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch in EFL classroom.
06. How can ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch support in EFL learning?
07. What are some important considerations for selecting ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch?
08. Explain the role of ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch
09. What is the future of ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch?
10. How can ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch in EFL teaching can make learning collaborative, engaging and effective?

Part II: Problems

01. What are the challenges associated with integrating ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch in your class?
02. How can you overcome the technical challenge while integrating ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch in your class?
03. How can you overcome pedagogical challenge while integrating ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch in your class?
04. What are the problems in using technology in ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch in your school?
05. What problem do you face while using ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch inside and outside of your class?

Part III: Solutions

01. How can you solve your problem while using ProWritingAid and Paragraph Punch in EFL learning?
02. How can the teacher training related issue be solved?
03. How can we make technological devices available to the students and teachers?
04. How can we solve the school infrastructure related problem?
05. How can we ensure that teacher use appropriate technology?

Justification of Socio-economic Rights of Street Children in Dhaka City: A Study of Farmgate & Agargaon Areas

Md. Rabiul Islam[1]

Abstract

This study aims to identify the real scenario of socio-economic statuses and rights of the street children living in Dhaka city. It is worth mentioning that the street children are the most vulnerable group of human being in Bangladesh. From all corners of socio-economic parameters, they are under privileged and the number of them has been increasing day by day. The street children of Dhaka city are not being given a minimum standard of living that the Constitution of Bangladesh has proclaimed for the people of Bangladesh as the fundamental rights and they have not been secured from any kind of socio-economic rights. In ensuring the fundamental human rights, it is much needed to know the socio-economic conditions of street children. This research delves into justify the situations of street children by some independent variables the data of which are collected from the primary source of tools where a form of questionnaire was used.

Keywords: *Street children, Rights, Socio-economy, Dhaka City*

1. Introduction

It is very evident that no country in the world can develop without the contributions of its population. Children make up a major portion of the total population in Bangladesh. Dhaka, as a mega city, has attracted approximately 32,000 migrants every year, although the push factor also plays an important role in this regard. Among the migrants, more

[1] Senior Lecturer, Department of General Education, Northern University Bangladesh

than three-quarters find shelter in urban slums or do not find shelter at all (Islam, 1997). It is essential that both the state and society have obligations to ensure children's rights. As social beings, children have the right to a standard of living. Unfortunately, street children are not provided with a minimum standard of living, which includes food, shelter, housing conditions, clothing, education, and other fundamental needs of life. Street children are a group of children who are "on the street" or "of the street," living or working either with their families or without them. To justify the socio-economic rights of street children, some parameters have been selected based on primary source data. Children who are healthy, well-fed, and educated grow up to be productive, innovative workers and responsible adults. A large number of children remain uneducated; they are not even fed properly and sleep without shelter or a home at night. Children are entitled to the optimum attention of society so that they can nurture their latent talents and contribute to the development of society.

1.1 Objectives of the Research

The first and foremost objective of this research work is to justify the socio-economic rights of street children in Dhaka city. To ensure the taken objective, the research has been integrated some other following objectives:

a) to identify the socio-economic status of street children in Dhaka city;
b) to know the related factors contributing in sleeping on street among children;
c) to meet the results of living on street among the children in Dhaka city;
d) to focus the challenges of livelihood patterns of street children;
e) to determine the degree of risk for each type of street children including the working conditions, working hours, sleeping conditions, health status, access to education, social and recreational facilities etc.

1.2 Research Methodology:

1.2.1. Determining Research Variables: There are primarily two types of variables have been determined in this research work which are as follows:

A Dependent Variable: The dependent variable of this research entitled "Justification of Socio-economic Rights of Street Children in Dhaka City: A Study of Farmgate & Agargaon Areas" is 'Socio-economic Rights of Street Children in Dhaka City'.

Independent Variables: Independent variables of this research are some social, economic, educational, legal, and cultural determinates by which it can be measured the socio-economic rights of street children. So, independent variables of this research are:

- Economic condition of the street children;
- Social status of the street children;
- Educational statuses of the street children;
- Working nature of the street children;

- Sleeping place and conditions of the street children;
- Access to bath of the street children;
- Access to use of toilet facilities of the street children;
- Occupations of the street children;
- Health situations of the street children;
- Medical facilities of the street Children;
- Drinking water facilities of the street children;
- Other issues related to socio-economic rights of the children such as winter clothing, birth registration, child trafficking, and children prostitution etc.

1.2.2. Sources of Data: This research had been done on primary sources of data which were collected through survey tools. To meet the survey, a form of questionnaire was prepared to collect the relevant data. Along with the primary source of data, secondary source of data was also used to prepare theoretical framework of the research.

1.2.3. Methods of Data Collection and Representation: After preparing the questionnaire, the respondent children of Farmgate and Agargaon areas were interviewed by the researcher on the basis of the questionnaire. 180 street children (for both the areas) were selected randomly to collect the data and the collected data have been presented in different demographic tables.

2. Socio-economic Rights of Street Children in Dhaka City: A Theoretical Framework

It is worthless to say that children are one of the main pillars of future generation of any country. Bangladesh is not exception of that truth. The future depends on how children prepare themselves to enter into the world of work. However, a theoretical framework of 'rights', 'child', and 'street children' have been made below.

2.1. Defining 'Rights':

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy says, rights are entitlements to perform certain actions or state of being entitled to enjoy some basic essentials to lead the life (stanford, 2023). According to Harold Laski, "rights are those conditions of social life without which no man can seek in general, to be himself at his best (Laski, 2023)." Beni Prasad says, "Rights are nothing more nor less than those social conditions which are necessary or favourable to the development of personality (Prasad, 2024)."

There is a considerable disagreement about what is meant precisely by the term *rights* as it has been used by different groups and thinkers for different purposes. In case of who is alleged to have the right? The answer may have include Children's rights, animal rights, workers' rights, states' rights, the rights of peoples etc. (Wikipedia). However, this study

focuses on civil rights of street children which include right to life, equality, liberty and freedom etc. along with equal opportunity to have social life and status.

Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), although not legally binding, provides for the equal rights and dignity of all human beings (UDHR, 1948). Article 22 emphasizes on social security with socio-economic and cultural dignity (UNO, 1948). Along with these, Article 25 (2) of UDHR says that motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance and children are to be protected in the same way (UDHR, 1948). Making children rights fruitful, Article 28 (4) of the Constitution of Bangladesh instructs the state to take a needful action not to be in accordance with the ground of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth (Constitution, 2024). Along with these, Article 27 ensures that all citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law and, of course, street children are not out of this count (Constitution, 2024).

2.2. Defining 'Child' in the Light of Different Acts and Laws:

Section 82 of the Penal Code defines a 'child' in terms of an offence determined by age, specifically a person under nine years of age (Code, 1860). Section 2(f) of the Children and Young Persons Act, 1963 defines a child as a person under the age of 16 years, whereas the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000 defines a juvenile as any person under 18 years of age (Imaan, 2012). Section 4 of the Children Act, 2013 defines a child as a person under the age of 18 years (The Children Act, 2013). Sub-section (1) of Section 89 of the Act focuses on identifying disadvantaged children who reside on the street (Ferdousi, 2024). According to Section 2(63) of the Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006, a child is a person under the age of 14 who is not allowed to work in any industry, workshop, or any other place as a laborer (Act T. B., 2006).

2.3. Regarding 'Child Rights'

Theoretically, children's rights are protected by many Acts, Protocols, Covenants, and Laws worldwide, as well as in Bangladesh. Children have the right to be entitled to a 'name' and family title, education, secure health facilities, safety and security, food, recreation, and, above all, protection from abuse and misconduct. Article 28(4) of the Constitution of Bangladesh gives special favor to children, and Article 31 says that everyone has the right to be protected by law, which cannot be fragmented in any circumstances for anyone, including a child (Bangladesh T. C., 2024). The Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child, 1924, containing five points, emphasizes that "Mankind owes to the Child the best that it has to give" (Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child, 1924).

The five points are as follows:

I. The child must be given the means requisite for its normal development, both materially and spiritually.

II. The child that is hungry must be fed; the child that is sick must be nursed; the child that is backward must be helped; the delinquent child must be reclaimed; and the orphan and the waif must be sheltered and succored.

III. The child must be the first to receive relief in times of distress.

IV. The child must be put in a position to earn a livelihood and must be protected against every form of exploitation.

V. The child must be brought up with the consciousness that its talent must be devoted to the service of its fellow men.

In light of the declaration, every child of any nation is to be protected to secure their fundamental rights.

2.4. Those who are 'Street Children' in this Research Work:

The most popular and well accepted definition of 'street children' is given by UNICEF. UNICEF says, "who is of the street and on the street", that means who works all day in the street pass their times, eat and go back to the family at night for sleep are children on the street and those who work, pass time and sleep on street are children of the street (Chowdhury, 2013). World Health Organization (WHO) defines street children in its 'Module 1- A Profile of Street Children' on four dimensions, such as-

a) a 'child of the street', having no home but the streets.

b) a 'child on the streets', visiting his or her family regularly.

c) a part of a street family. The children of 'street families' work on the streets with other members of their families.

d) in institutionalized care, having come from a situation of homelessness and at risk of returning to a homeless existence (WHO, 2012).

In this study, the children who live on the streets with or without their family have been considered 'Street Children'.

3. Justification of Socio-economic Rights of Street Children Using Various Independent Variables:

The dependent variable, 'Socio-economic Rights,' depends on some independent variables. By analyzing all those independent variables, the socio-economic rights of street children in Dhaka City can be justified. Children constitute almost 40 percent of the total population of Bangladesh, but almost everywhere, they are being neglected (Chowdhury, 2013). In terms of the demographic features of the respondents in the study areas, 123 are male children out of 180 total respondents, and 57 are female children.

3.1. Demographic Statuses of the Respondents:

The research sample was collected from two regions of Dhaka City namely:

i) Farmgate and
ii) Agargaon

Among total number of 180 respondents 110 was from Farmgate and another 70 was collected from Agargaon area. In case of ratio of sex (boys and girls) 68.33 percent is male (boys) and 31.67 percent is female (girls) which shows in the Table No. 1.

Table 1: Distribution of Sample Street Children by Sex:;

Respondents	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Boys	123	68.33%
Girls	57	31.67%
Total	180	100%

Though the girls' respondents are less than the boys but it is observed that the number of female Street Children has been increasing dramatically for last two decades (BBS, 2020).

Table 2: Distribution of Street Children by Age

Age Group	Boys	Percent	Girls	Percent	Total (Boys & Girls)	Total Percentage
5 to 8 years	42	23.33	20	11.11	62	34.44
9 to 12 years	63	35	26	14.44	89	49.44
13 to17 years	18	10	11	6.12	29	16.12
Total	123	68.33%	57	31.67%	180	100%

The above Table shows that 49.44 percent of children is of age group of 9 to 12 years where boys 35 percent and girls 14.44 percent. Between 5 to 8 years of age group children's percentage is 34.44 which contain only 11.11 percent girls' respondents.

Table 3: Distribution of Street Children by Areas

Areas	Boys	Percentage	Girls	Percentage	Total Respondents	Total Percentage on each Area
Farmgate	75	68.18	35	31.82	110	100%
Agargaon	50	71.42	20	28.58	70	100%

3.2. Educational Statuses of the Respondents

Education is the primary means to justify the socio-economic rights of human being as well as the children which is bind by the Article 17 of the Constitution of Bangladesh (Bangladesh T. C.). Article 26 (1) of the UDHR says similar that everyone has the right to education; education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stage and elementary education shall be compulsory (Mondol, 2017).

Table 4: Distribution of Street Children by Educational Status

Educational skills	Boys		Girls		Total	Total percentage
Can read and write	97	78.86%	46	80.70%	143	79.44%
Cannot read and write	26	21.14%	11	19.30%	37	20.56%
Total	123	100%	57	100%	180	100%

Though this table (Table 4) reveals that a vast majority of street children can read and write the percentage of which is 79.44 but it doesn't add any value in their everyday life.

3.3. Working Nature of the Respondents

In determining the socio economic conditions of street children in Dhaka City, the nature of working patterns and on which context they are involved in a particular work is very important which shows in the table below:

Table 5: Distribution of Street Children by Working Patterns

Working Patterns	Respondents	Percentage
Begging	45	25
Collecting wastage from dustbin etc.	40	22.22
Selling flowers/newspapers/fruits etc.	30	16.67
Cooli/Minti	12	6.67
Stealing	15	8.33
Collecting old papers and other things	22	12.22
Others (helper, hawker, shoe polish etc.	16	8.89
Total	180	100%

Table 5 shows that a sizable number of street children is involved in begging (25%) and 8.33% children confessed that they steal food and other essentials from kiosks, street side restaurant, fast food shop etc. where, in some cases, there are strong syndicates and direct instructions of their parents (father or mother). Importantly, most of the street children are more likely to engage with collecting wastage from dustbin as well as to engage collecting old papers and other things such as used water bottle, polythene bags, soft drink bottle, smallest size of metals, plastic substance etc. the percentage of which is 34.44.

3.4. Living Conditions and its Essential Modes of the Respondents

To justify the socio economic rights of the street children, living condition is one of the major factors. Because, the visible effects of socio economic rights of the street children can be attribute by some of its essential modes such as sleeping place, type of sleeping

place, sleeping materials, bath facilities, using toilet and other needs, clothes in winter season, shelter during rain, facing problems during sleeping at night etc. which have been instructed by the Article 25(1) of the Constitution of Bangladesh (Bangladesh T. C.).

3.4.1 Sleeping place of the Respondents

As the street children have no permanent place to sleep, they change their sleeping place in different places time to time.

Table 6: Distribution of Street Children by Sleeping Place.

Place's Types	Frequency/Respondents	Percentage
In a shelter	14	7.78
Under foot over bridge	25	13.89
Foot path	45	21.67
Market	18	10
Parks	15	8.33
Slum and foot path	24	13.33
Besides of Railway	19	10.56
In front of Mosque	7	3.89
On the foot over bridge	8	4.44
Others	11	6.11
Total	180	100%

Multiple replies from 56 children.

The very prominent and prompt answer was 'I sleep on foot path (Rasta)', when a street child was asked in this regard the percentage of which is 21.67. But the actual figure of total respondents of sleeping on foot path, whichever is higher, is 35 percent (21.67% and 13.33%).

After observing the above table, it is seen that a good number of street children are not being considered to get a minimum standard of living and are being fragmented of their rights.

Table 7: Distribution of street children by what they use at sleeping time

Materials they used	Respondents	Percentage
No materials	36	20
Bed Sheet (Katha)	20	11.11
Mat/Madur	9	5
Jute bag / Jute cloth	25	13.88
Polythene	28	15.56
Used polythene poster/Digital poster	43	23.88

Mat and Pillow	4	2.23
Only brick under head	10	5.56
Others	5	2.78
Total	180	100%

It shows that a good number of street children use wastage digital banner during their sleeping time the percentage of which is 23.88. This table stands 20 percent respondents use nothing during their sleeping time.

It proves that even among the street children all have no same equipment to lead their life. 15.56 percent respondents use polythene when they sleep at night whereas 13.88 percent respondents use jute bag/jute clothe that denote the miserable socioeconomic conditions of street children.

3.4.2 Access to bath of the Respondents

Taking bath and getting clean are the essential modes of defining living condition of any section of people in the society. It has also moral and legal obligations. Human rights are enshrined as fundamental rights in Part III of the Constitution of Bangladesh where Article 25 (1) says, everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and wellbeing of himself and his family (Bangladesh T. C.).

Table 8: Distribution of Respondents by Access to Bath

Type to Access to Bath	Respondents	Percentage
Everyday	61	33.89
Once every two days	70	38.89
Once in a week	22	12.22
Twice every week	27	15
Total	180	100%

Table 8 denotes that almost One-third of total respondents take bath every day the percentage of which is 33.89. 38.89 percent respondents replied that they take their bath once every 2 days whereas 15 percent of total frequency answered that they take bath twice in a week which may cause their serious health problems.

3.4.3. Access to Use of Toilet Facilities of Respondents

Table 9: Distribution of Respondents by Access to get Toilet Facilities

Type of Accessibility	Respondents	Percentage
Government Place	42	23.33
Public Toilet	45	25
Open space	52	28.89
Paid toilet	20	11.11
Others	21	11.67
Total	180	100%

Table 9 reveals that a big number of respondents use open space whenever they need to get toilet the percentage of which is 28.89. 25 percent respondents use public toilet for meeting their necessity and 23.33 percent of respondents replied that they use government place for toilet.

3.5. Occupations of the Respondents

Article 23 (1) of the UDHR says, "Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment (UDHR, 1948)." which is bind by the Constitution of Bangladesh (Bangladesh T. C., Article 40). However, occupation and expenses of the respondents can reflect the socio-economic condition of street children that has been shown on the tables 10, 11 and 12.

Table 10: Distribution of Street Children by Weekly Working Days

Weekly Working Days	Respondents	Percentage
4	6	3.33
5	20	11.11
6	52	25.89
7	102	56.67
Total	180	100%

Table 10 shows that a major portion of street children works every day in a week the percentage of which is 56.67. Among others 28.89 percent of street children work 6 days in a week that proved severe and miserable working conditions of the street children.

Table 11: Distribution of Street Children by Weekly

Weekly earnings (Taka)	Respondents	Percentage
200 Tk. to 300 Tk.	12	6.66
301 Tk. to 500 Tk.	30	16.67
501 Tk. to 800 Tk.	41	22.78
801 Tk. to 1200 Tk.	97	53.89
	180	100%

Table 11 reveals that 53.89 percent street children earn Tk. between 800 to 1200 in a week. 22.78 percent of respondents' weekly earnings is 500 to 800 Tk. whereas 16.67 percent street children earn 300 to 500 Tk. per a week.

Table 12: Distribution of Street Children by Expenditure on the basis of Items

Items	Percentage on Total Earnings
Food	76%
Rent	2.5%
Debts	3%
Clothing	2%
Savings	4%
Others (watching movie, police, night guard etc.)	12.5%
Total	100%

Table 12 denotes that the street children earn mainly for fulfilling their food demands where they spend 78 percent of their total earnings. A good amount of money is spent to meet their debts the percentage of which is 3. On the other hand 123.5 percent amount of money they spend for watching movie, giving police, giving night guard and giving Mastan etc.

It is worth mentioning that when a group of people spend almost 80% of their total earnings only for consuming food that denotes their miserable socioeconomic situation and of course they are not capable to enjoy other fundamental and socioeconomic rights.

3.6. Health Problems of the Respondents

Health is an important issue of socio-economic rights of any person. Article 12.2 of ICESCR directs to reduce infant mortality and to improve child health, improving environmental and work place health (ICESCR, Article 12.2, 1966).

Table 13: Distribution of Street Children by the types of Sickness

Types of Sickness	Respondent	Percentage
Fever	85	70.83
Water Disease	5	4.17
Cough	6	5
Headache	15	12.5
Stomach upset/Pain	5	4.17
Others	4	3.33
Total	120	100%

Multiple answers were common.

On this ground it is clear that more than Two-Third respondents (70.83%) promptly replied that they suffered from fever. Whenever they were asked about their sickness it was common answer that they are sick. Along with this it has been observed that each and every street child was suffering from any kind of illness commonly cough, headache, stomach pain, problem in breathing etc.

3.7. Medical Facilities of the Street Children

Getting medical facilities is one of the important factors of socio-economic rights as well as fundamental human rights. This is also bind by the constitution of Bangladesh.

Table 14: Type of Medical Facilities what they usually get

Types of Facilities	Respondents	Percentage
Local Pharmacy	78	43.33
Govt. Hospital/Doctor	38	21.11
Private clinic	2	1.11

Fakir/Kabiraj	15	8.33
Others (Homeopathy	7	3.89
Did not go anywhere	40	22.33
Total	180	100%

It is evident that the tendency to go to local pharmacy to pharmacy medicine for their (Street children) instant cure is prominent of the street children (43.33 percent). In case of not willing to go anywhere, whenever they were asked, the street children answered that there no need to go to hospital Doctor or purchasing medicine for their cure. There two cases found who went to a private clinic (is lamia eye hospital at Farmgate) for their eye treatment. 21.11 percent of total respondents went to govt. hospital to take their free treatment. A good number of respondents went to Fakir /Kabiraj (a person who gives treatment religious means or using leaf/logs of tree) for their treatment specifically who had been suffering from a chronic disease.

3.8. Drinking water Facilities of the Respondents

Source of water of daily activities including drinking water is very important issue of street children in Dhaka City where scarcity of water is very common. Water is a primary means of being sound health and cleanliness of substance they use.

Table 15: Distribution of Respondents by Source of Drinking Water Facilities

Source of Water	Respondents	Percentage
WASA	132	73.33
Tube well	40	22.22
Surface water (Ponds)	8	4.45
Total	180	100%

It is very clear that most of the street children (73.33%) of Dhaka City take drinking water from WASA without boiling which is evidently considered unsafe for health. Among all the respondents 40 persons have reported that they take drinking water from tube well the percentage of which is 22.22. In case of using surface water for drinking only 4.45 percent children replied positively.

Table 16: Distribution of Respondents by Source of Water for Other uses

Sources of Water for Other Uses (bath, clothes wash, clean etc.)	Respondents	Percentage
WASA supply	80	44.44
Tube well	35	19.44
Surface water (ponds)	65	36.12
Total	180	100%

Table 16 presents that street children use water other than drink for various daily activities (bath, clothes wash, cooking, cleaning etc.) which collected from various

sources. 44.44 percent respondents use WASA supply water for their other uses. Among the respondents 36.12 percent street children use surface water most of them collected from ponds or lake. 19.44 percent respondents replied that they use tube well water for their everyday works.

3.9. Other Issues Related to Socio-economic Rights of the Street Children:

3.9.1. Distribution of Street Children who have or have not Winter Clothes

Table 17: Distribution of Street Children on the basis of having winter clothes

Winter Clothes	Respondents	Percentage
Have winter clothes	24	13.33
Have not winter clothes	156	86.67
Total	180	100%

Table 17 remarkably focuses that most of the street children did not have any winter clothing the percentage of which is 86.67. Only 13.33 percent (24 respondents) reported to have winter clothes which also not so adequate to fulfill their needs, as they frequently told. The big number of respondents not having winter clothes faced health hazard falling sick.

3.9.2. Birth Registration

According to the Birth and Death Registration Law, 2006, it is mandatory to show birth certificates for receiving 16 services --passports, driving licenses, TIN numbers, applying for jobs, business identification, admit card for taking public examinations, opening bank account, applying for microcredit, withdrawing governmental allowance and land purchasing and selling (Law, 2006).

Table 18: Distribution of Street Children by Birth Certificate

Status of Birth Certificate	Respondents	percentage
Have birth certificate	162	90
Have not birth certificate	18	10
Total	180	100%

Table 18 shows that the unexpected situation of the birth certificate among the street children majority (90%) of whom have no birth certificate at all. That is why it is evident no street children can get their own benefit from the government as well as from the society.

In the light of the Act birth registration also helps the government to plan for its development activities, as the birth registration statistics helps the government to pinpoint the number of children in the country. When they were asked regarding the issue they even were not so aware about it whether they have right on it or not.

3.9.3. Child Trafficking

Bangladesh is one of the main points of child trafficking including men and women. Women and children from Bangladesh are transported to India and Pakistan, where they are subjected to commercial sexual exploitation or forced labor (Chowdhury, 2013). There are so many syndicates in Bangladesh who forced to street children to beg and bound to participate into criminal activity. However, trafficking within the country is now very common in Bangladesh. Traffickers or recruiters influence to parents or relatives to migrate the children from village or remote area to the Capital city Dhaka using victims' severe poverty. Specifically river erosion, natural calamities, becoming orphan, searching zeal of gorgeous life etc. are the influential factors of being migrated to Dhaka. In some instance, children are sold into bondage by their parents, while others are induced into labor or commercial sexual exploitation through fraud and physical coercion (Chowdhury, 2013).

3.9.4. Child Prostitution

According to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics-BBS (Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) Pilot Survey 2008), there are 4,088 street girl children among 15,702 of total girls sex workers in Bangladesh. It is believed that number is under reported and actual number of child prostitutes is much higher than the statistics (BBS, 2008).

Prostitution has vigorous negative socio-economic impacts. Children forced into prostitution grow with anti-social mentality which makes the society unstable. Along with this, economic exploitation and class stigma help them to be violent towards social norms and values.

4. Conclusion

In the light of above all discussions it is crystallized that the street children are adversely deprived from their socio-economic rights. As a human being they are not being treated to be entitled to get a minimum standard of living. Always they are being used and exploited by the society. The responsible factors of being exploited and put into such unexpected situation are family breakdown, one-eyed policy of step-mother or step-father, severe poverty, river erosion, cheated by the relatives and closed one etc. Street children are the underprivileged section in even slum dwellers of Dhaka City. The number of street children has been increasing gradually day by day. The ratio of boys and girls of the street children is decreasing. In this study, it has been found the percentage of boys is 68.33 and the percentage of girls is 31.67. On the other hand one survey of 2003 showed that the percentage of boys was 97.56 and the percentage of girls was 2.44 on six Divisional Cities. This is a matter of fact that in this study, it has been revealed 25 percent of street children are involved in begging where syndicate plays a vital role. It is very remarkable that more than to-third of total respondents were sick by any means during the interviewing time, though they have no minimum health or medical facilities to get. The study shows 53.89 percent of total respondents earn

maximum 800 Tk. to 1200 Tk. per a week of which 76 percent they spend for taking food (Table 13 and Table 14). The children who came to Dhaka City only for their survival, they are being exploited economically, politically and finally are being maimed for the earning source of a vested interest group. In case of leading their everyday life, the street children have been facing big challenges. This study reveals, out of all 56.67 percent respondents are not capable to fulfill their minimum standard of living working 7 days in a week (everyday).

As wellbeing of health is primary and fundamental right which is pronounced in Article 18 as Fundamental Principles of State Policy in the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, the street children deprived from this right. This study says, a big number of street children did not take bath everyday due to scarcity of water. Unfortunately the street children of Dhaka City even cannot sleep at night on street because of police torture, extortion, lack of sleeping materials, severe cold, or heavy rain etc. So it is worthless to say that the issue of street children must be kept into mind and policy of related matters should be implemented as soon as possible. Now we have to implement the directions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which Bangladesh already ratified in 1990. Along with this implementation of the Children Act, 2013, the Birth and Death Registration Act 2004, the 2012 Human Trafficking Deterrence and Suppression Act (HTDSA) can be the safe guards in ensuring the socio-economic rights of street children.

Work-Cited

Act, T. B. (2006). The *Bangladesh Labour Act.* Dhaka: Bangladesh.

Act, T. C. (2013). *The Children Act, 2013.* Dhaka: Bangladesh.

Bangladesh, T. C. (n.d.). *Article 17, Part II, Fundamental Principles of State Policy, The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.* Dhaka: Bangladesh.

BBS. (2008). *Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) Pilot Survey.* Dhaka: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics-BBS.

BBS. (2020). *National Child-Labour Survey, 2019-2020, Foundation for Research on Education Planning and Development (FREPD) for the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) and International Labour Organization (ILO).* Dhaka: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

Chowdhury, M. E. (2013). *State of Child Rights in Bangladesh 2013* . terre des hommes, Netherlands: Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum (BSAF).

Constitution. (2024). *Article 27), The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.* Dhaka: Bangladesh.

erdousi, D. N. (2024, June 19). *The Daily Star.* Retrieved from https://www.thedailystar.net/news/the-children-act-2013-a-milestone-of-child-protection: https://www.thedailystar.net/news/the-children-act-2013-a-milestone-of-child-protection

Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child, 1. (1924). Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child.

Imaan, N. (2012). *Justice for Children in Bangladesh: An Analysis of Recent Cases, Save the Children in Bangladesh.* Dhaka: Save the Children Bangladesh.

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESC)R. (1966). *Article 12.2.*

Islam, N. (1997). *Addressing the Urban Poverty Agenda in Bangladesh: Critical Issues and 1995 Survey Findings.* Dhaka: Dhaka University Press.

Laski, H. (2023, June 25). *Linkedin*. Retrieved from https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/rights-meaning-theories-different-kinds-concept-: https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/rights-meaning-theories-different-kinds-concept-

Mondol, M. S. (2017). Constitution of Bangladesh and Human Rights: A Comparative Study. *IOSR*

Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) Volume 22, Issue 11, Ver.7 (November. 2017) , 1.

Prasad, B. (2024, May 20). *Linkedin*. Retrieved from https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/rights-meaning-theories-different-kinds-concept-: https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/rights-meaning-theories-different-kinds-concept-

Stanford. (2023, April 21). *https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/rights/*. Retrieved from https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/rights/: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/rights/

The Bangladesh Penal Code, 1860. (1860). Dhaka: Bangladesh.

The Children Act, 2. (2013). *The Children Act, 2013.* Dhaka: Bangladesh.

UDHR. (1948). *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights.* Paris: UNO.

Wikipedia. (2024, June 26). Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rights#Definitional_issues: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rights#Definitional_issues

WHO. (2012). *Working with Street Children, Module 1- A Profile of Street Children, A Training Package on Substance Use, Sexual and Reproductive Health including HIV/AIDS and STDs.* Geneva: World Health Organization.

Reshaping Superhero Narratives: Representation of Postcolonial Female Characters in the *Marvel Cinematic Universe*

Tasnim Alam Mukim[1] Fahima Tasnim[2]

Abstract

This paper visits selected movies and TV series of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) and uses the theory of postcolonial feminism, focusing on Chandra Talpade Mohanty's term "Third World Women" and Dr. Ritu Tyagi's term "Double colonization," to identify how the representation of postcolonial female characters has evolved from the earlier phases of the MCU as mere sidekicks and love interests to main characters and superheroes having more substantial narratives in later phases. Postcolonial feminism redefines women's roles in the non-Third World countries, ex-colonies, and neo colonial countries challenging both patriarchies and Western feminist stereotypes. It explores how the MCU has empowered and reshaped them with the passage of time to resist patriarchal and colonial injustice, stereotypes, and oppressions which shaped their lives and enhanced their character arcs, silencing the misrepresentations done by the white feminists. This paper finds how these postcolonial female characters can be rendered as people having their own culture, heritage, and identity instead of being stereotyped as mere Third-World women, and how their empowerment can redefine and subvert the colonial discourse.

Keywords**:** *Double colonization, MCU, postcolonial feminism, representation, superhero movies*

[1] Lecturer, Department of English, Northern University Bangladesh
[2] Lecturer, Department of English, Northern University Bangladesh

Introduction

Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) began its journey in 2008 with the blockbuster movie *Iron Man 2* (2010). MCU has shaped its venture with significant changes and phases over time. Adapting to the need of time and cultural advancements, it adjusts the themes of various movies and their characters diversely, mainly, the superheroes and the supporting female characters. Additionally, other characters were introduced initially. Moreover, MCU gradually shifted its feminine narration to a serious and diversified depiction of female characters, which is prominent with the advancement of phases. However, the portrayal of American and European female characters and that of Asian, African, Latin, and Indian characters are mismatched at times, leading to the emanation of different character arcs (Moore 190). This diversified portrayal can be identified and critiqued through the lens of postcolonial feminism.

Postcolonial feminism discusses how women are mistreated by white feminists, overlooking the universal sisterhood that was the central idea of all the feminist movements. It is concerned with the representation of women in once-colonized locations and the Western world. It focuses on "double colonization," as Tyagi discusses in her article and shows and how Third-World Women suffer first from patriarchal domination as women, and then they further suffer colonial domination as third-world former colonial individuals. Their suffering broadens with the misrepresentation by Western feminists, as they impose silence on their religious, cultural, social, and political practices. It examines the construction of gender norms in representations and colonial, anti-colonial, and nationalist discourses (Tyagi 45-49).

Chandra Talpade Mohanty has made substantial contributions to our comprehension of how gender, race, and colonial history intertwine. In her influential essay, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," Mohanty critiques the Western feminist portrayal of third-world women. She observes that Western feminists often homogenize and victimize women from developing countries, and it depicts them as passive and lacking agency. As she says:

> An analysis of "sexual difference" in the form of a cross-culturally singular, monolithic notion of patriarchy or male dominance leads to the construction of a similarly reductive and homogeneous notion of what I call the "Third World Difference"—that stable, ahistorical something that apparently oppresses most if not all women in these countries. And it is in the production of this "Third World Difference" that Western feminisms appropriate and “colonize” the fundamental complexities and conflicts which characterize the lives of women of different classes, religions, cultures, races and castes in these countries. It is this process of homogenization and systematization of the oppression of women in the third world that power is exercised in much of recent Western feminist discourse, and this power needs to be defined and named. (Mohanty 335)

She argues against this oversimplified perspective by highlighting the diverse and complex experiences of the third world women. She asserts that Western feminists often

stereotype the experiences and ignore the unique voices, and challenges of women in the third world. According to Mohanty, the term "Third-World Woman" is a construct that perpetuates colonial power dynamics and it fails to acknowledge the autonomy and resistance of women in a non-Western context.

The canon of postcolonial feminism fits with the criticism of the MCU's journey and its timely adaptation of female characters and superheroes. The representation of the Black Widow at the beginning of MCU in the *Iron Man* 2 (2010) movie as a stereotypical, appealing, violent, controlled Russian agent, eventually turned into an independent thinker, a sacrificing soul, and a strong leading female character in the *Avengers: Endgame* (2019) movie where she fulfilled the need of time, breaking the tyranny of patriarchal subjugation.

The *Black Panther* (2018) movie depicts a picture where Okoye is the commander of the most powerful and technologically advanced Wakandan army, and Nakia poses as a secret agent with excellent political skills who works independently. They portray the image of postcolonial feminists being resistant to female subordination. America Chavez, in *Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness* (2022) addresses Latinx ethnicity. She empowers people from historically and culturally lower-class communities. In *Ms. Marvel* (2022) series, MCU introduces Kamala Khan who originates from Pakistan. As a Pakistani-American female Muslim superhero, she explores intersectional identity, resistance to colonialism, patriarchy, and upbringing, thus, upholding her cultural legacy. Again, Kahhori from *What If...?* Season 2 (2024) is a Mohawk woman, and Maya Lopez from *Echo* (2024) originates from the Choctaw tribe, allowing MCU to incorporate inclusivity in depicting female characters. Together, Maya Lopez and Kahhori are demonstrating colonial resistance and postcolonial female identities.

American Captain Marvel and European Captain Britain are introduced in their respective movies as glorious, powerful, purposeful characters, whereas the non-Euro-American characters mentioned above are antithetical to their initial introduction. The journey of these female characters in MCU from being marginalized, degraded, racial, and typical to cultivated, up-raised, conscious, and placed in their own historical, social, and cultural contexts is a multidimensional change that can be seen on screen and observed through the lens of postcolonial feminism.

This paper uses Mohanty’s theory as the foundational framework for analyzing postcolonial feminist issues in MCU. It also visits the reshaping narration of some of the female characters with the initiation of new phases of the MCU that reflect the struggle of postcolonial feminism's core objectives. While studying the evolution of these characters over time in various phases, particularly phase 1, 3, 4, and 5, in MCU, we find how they overcome patriarchal and colonial implications. Therefore, this paper also criticizes the role of intersectionality in shaping their lives and actions, adapting to globalization and cultural exchange.

Literature Review

Chamara Moore, in "Swapping Heels for Capes: The Superheroine Alternative to Racebent Love-interests," wrote about the representation of female characters in superhero media. She explains how female superheroes face the problem of racebending. She expresses that those female superheroes are usually shown as hypersexualized, stereotyped, and sidelined in favor of male characters or love interests. Moore uses the term "racebending" to describe the practice of changing the race or ethnicity of a character, typically from white to other colors (Moore 190). She mentions that such work is not enough to overcome the lack of diversity and representation in the superhero media. Moore provides many examples of female superheroes, such as Wonder Woman, Black Widow, Harley Quinn, Storm, and Jessica Jones. She argued that those black women are often seen as love interests but not heroic, and black female superheroes are either stereotyped or silenced in film adaptations. She talks about some female characters as "Magical Negress" trope, that means the black female characters provide emotional support and guidance to white male protagonists (Moore 196).

Finally, she suggests showing a strong black woman superhero who has her own story and power instead of changing female characters from comics in the film adaptations from white to black.

In "Postcolonialism in the MCU: *Captain Marvel*'s Filtering of Refugee Life Through White Heroism.", Jessie Rogers writes about the postcolonial and feminist themes in the film Captain Marvel. She argues that the film tries to portray the experiences of oppressed and displaced groups, such as the Skrulls, who are refugees from a war with the Kree. According to her, MCU wants to be progressive and inclusive but falls into the trap of being "post-racial and postcolonial instead of anti-racist and anti-imperialist" (Rogers, 21). Rogers compares *Captain Marvel* (2019) to other Marvel films, such as *Black Panther* (2018) and *Thor: Ragnarok*, (2017) and shows how the film revolves around a white female hero in the narrative and how that changes the representation of those who are truly oppressed and displaced. Finally, she also criticizes the film for relying on the theme of a "white savior" like Mar-Vell and Carol (Rogers, 37-38).

In "Black Widow and the Warrior Women of the Marvel Cinematic Universe.", Linda Beail describes the transition or evolution of Black Widow from her first appearance to the last in MCU. Beail writes about how the female characters deal with the issues of motherhood, sexual objectification, conflict, and threats in the MCU. Natasha is introduced as Natalie Rushman in *Iron Man 2* (2010) as a Stark employee. She is depicted as a sexualized figure shaped in Cold War tropes based on deception and femineity. The author tries to explore how gendered presentation was used by the female characters to involve political issues and manipulate their targets. The author also discusses Black Widow's intelligence and moral development in the MCU.

Moreover, the author gives examples of movies like *Captain Marvel* (2019) and *Black Panther* (2018), where female characters are portrayed as equal partners and not just any sexual partners. The author uses postfeminism to analyze other female characters in the MCU further. Beail also explored how patriarchy was imposed on Natasha when the KGB forced sterilization on Black Widow as part of her "graduation" from the Red Room training program. She also discussed the importance of Natasha's role when she sacrificed herself to get the Soul Stone to undo Thanos' snap in *Avengers: Endgame* (2019).

In “From “Grrrl Power” to “She’s Got Help”: Captain Marvel as the Superhero of Second-Wave Feminism”, Kristin Kanthak, analyzes how Captain Marvel shows the ideals and obstacles of the feminist movement in the 1990s. She clarifies the different meanings and interpretations that feminism has for different people. The author shows that feminism has been portrayed as either ignoring or exaggerating the power differences between men and women in the movie. In the article, the author gives a detailed overview of the three waves of feminism and explains how it evolved over time across various contexts.

Kanthak uses the term “the feminine mystique,” which is used to make women follow a norm of femininity that prevents them from having a life outside the care of their home, personal physical attractiveness, and family. In the article, the author also explains how Carol's mentor, Dr. Wendy Lawson, helps her establish the ideals of first-wave feminism, which are the legal rights of women. Moreover, Carol Danvers herself decides to act in such a way that depicts second-wave feminism, which is to challenge gender norms and power structures in the society she lives in (211-223).

Discussion

Phase 01: Origins and Awakening
Natasha Romanoff and Wanda Maximoff

Natasha Romanoff (Black Widow), played by Scarlet Johansson, is a core member of the Avengers in the MCU who has a mysterious past. At first, in the *Iron Man 2* (2010) movie, we can see her as a sexualized femme fatale, which is often a common trope for female characters in action films. Natasha suffered forced sterilization and body changes at the early stages of her life. Relating Mohanty’s term the "Third World Difference," we can see that it symbolizes patriarchal control and exploitation of women’s bodies and can also reflect struggles faced by women in postcolonial societies. From the beginning of her story, she felt untrustworthy, partly because of her origin, racial prejudice and the long-standing Cold War suspicions and stereotypical negative behavior associated with Russians. She was treated as “the other” and considered a threat at times by her own people. On the other hand, the same cannot be said for Peggy Carter, an English white, female army officer introduced in *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011). She is not as distrusted as Natasha due to the historical alliance between the UK and the US. The different treatment of Natasha and Peggy in the MCU portrays white feminism and

historical relationships between countries. It expresses how origin and stereotypes can influence people's trust and behavior towards each other. However, she evolves from a seemingly untrustworthy spy to one of the most reliable and selfless members of the Avengers, who ultimately sacrifices her life for her people in *Avengers: Endgame* (2019).

Wanda Maximoff (Scarlet Witch), played by Elizabeth Olsen, is an immensely powerful and emotional female character whose story is mainly about loss and transformation. She first appears in the post-credit scene in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014) as a test subject in a lab alongside her brother, Pietro Maximoff. Her transformation is a compelling one, as she starts as a negative character, trying to manipulate the other Avengers in *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015). At first, she is completely driven by vengeance and grief since she thinks her family was killed by Tony Stark's weapons manufactured in Stark Industries. Her Eastern European background and the fictional nation of Sokovia can be seen as a postcolonial space, and she struggles with finding her true identity. She fights for her own destiny as men try to control and subvert her powers. Her negative portrayal at the beginning can be associated with how women from postcolonial nations are usually stereotyped. She is portrayed as a troubled individual who is unstable and is unable to control her own powers fully. However, as her story moves on in the televised miniseries *WandaVision* (2021), we can see that she takes control of her power and masters the application of Chaos Magic.

Stuart Hall, in his "Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacy", says,

> I want to absolve myself of the many burdens of representation which people carry around – I carry around at least three: I'm expected to speak for the entire black race on all questions theoretical, critical, etc., and sometimes for British politics, as well as for cultural studies. (Hall 262)

This shows the responsibilities of representation and the expectations placed on people to represent or speak for entire groups. In the context of analyzing these two characters from MCU, we can see Natasha and Wanda fighting against the stereotypical feminine roles of being typical love interests of male heroes or being a traditional damsel-in-distress. Natasha proves to be not a sexual object anymore because she is an independent and highly skilled combatant and spy. On the other hand, Wanda evolves from being an often-stereotyped woman suffering from emotional instability to becoming a powerful and important character in the films. Their roles are not defined by their relationships with the male characters of the MCU, but are defined by having their own identities.

Ora Szekely, in her article "Female Combatants in the Marvel Cinematic Universe", writes, "The world of the MCU is a world in which women—both as major characters and as those in the background—are drastically underrepresented" (443). This explains how most female characters are introduced to the MCU because they are stereotyped as typical female tropes. However, Szekely later mentions the changes, quoting, "On the

other hand, we do see some change over time" (443). She further goes on to examine the final battle scene of *Avengers: Endgame* (2019), where she writes, "Working together, they slash a path through the battle for Danvers, who flies ahead with the Gauntlet under her arm like a large neon football" (452). This can be a nod to the third wave of feminism because the third wave was much more inclusive of women and girls of color than the first or second waves had been as it redefined women and girls as assertive, powerful, and in control of their own sexuality (Brunell).

Phase 03: Resistance and Liberation

Okoye

Okoye and Nakia, first appeared in the film *Black Panther (*2018). They also appear in other MCU movies later. Okoye, played by Danai Gurira, is the former General of the Dora Milaje. Dora Milaje is an elite group of all-female defenders of the Black Panther. She is the most loyal and courageous ally of King T'Challa, the Black Panther and the ruler of Wakanda. She is a combatant and a traditional Wakandan who prioritizes her culture and duty above everything. Nakia, played by Lupita Nyong'o, is a Wakandan spy and a former member of the Dora Milaje. She secretly travels around the world to help people in need. We find her to be a compassionate and adventurous woman who wishes to help mankind by using Wakanda's resources and technology. Together, they face challenges inside and outside Wakanda and prove their loyalty and worth as real warriors.

In the article "Understanding Postcolonial Feminism in Relation with Postcolonial and Feminist Theories" by Dr Ritu Tyagi, postcolonial feminism is referred to as the representation of women in once-colonized countries and Western locations. They suffer from "double colonization" when they experience the oppression of both colonialism and patriarchy (45). She further states that postcolonial feminists have to resist the homogenization of their identities by both colonial and feminist discourses. This can be observed in Okoye and Nakia because they are different from each other in terms of their perspectives because Okoye is quite conservative and traditional. On the other hand, Nakia is more open-minded and global. They both challenge the stereotypical views and prove that they have their own identities and thoughts, which are not defined by colonial oppression or white feminism. Okoye and Nakia have different roles and mindsets from each other in the movie. For example, Okoye is loyal to the nation, whereas Nakia is loyal to humanity. They work for their country by protecting its sovereignty. They seek to establish women empowerment and to emancipate their people from the shackles of oppression, subverting the idea that Tyagi shares through the example of India, writing, "Indian nationalism attempted at controlling female bodies by imprisoning them into stereotypes, where female symbolized the pre-colonial, the traditional, and the untouched domestic spaces" (46).

From analyzing these two African black characters, and relating them to Tyagi's thoughts of "inserting" their "representation" back into their own "historical and cultural

context", we can remark that both Okoye and Nakia successfully challenge "patriarchal dominance" and the stereotype that women should be submissive, weak, and passive by portraying courage, strength, and loyalty (Tyagi 49). Okoye respects the male characters in the movie but she is confident in sharing her opinions and challenging their decisions as well. On the other hand, by helping people in need in their own way, Nakia rejects the idea that women should only have one role or duty as family women. We have seen that Okoye is also one of the few MCU characters who are proud to wear her natural hair shaving her head, rejecting the Western beauty standards that often pressure black women to follow certain styling norms. Moreover, despite being T'Challa's, love interest, she is still an independent and powerful character on her own, defying notions of binaries. Furthermore, Okoye holds the patriotic postcolonial feminist element by commanding a whole army with excellent battlefield expertise. Okoye and Nakia from Wakanda assert a vital, self-reliant, feminine role and establish themselves prominently on the battlefield, cornering all the feminine traits that black women are expected to have, fusing tradition with modern ideas.

Phase 04: Against All Odds

Kamala Khan

Kamala Khan, a Pakistani American teenager, also known as Ms. Marvel, made her first appearance in the movie *Captain Marvel* (2013). It is played by Iman Vellani. Kamala Khan is from Jersey City, New Jersey. Being a mutant and Djin simultaneously, she comes into possession of her grandmother's bangle, which gives her superpowers. Kamala is heavily inspired by Captain Marvel, Carol Danvers, and following her path, she sets out to protect her community. In doing so, unlike Carol Danvers, she has to face the challenges of adolescence and her Muslim-Pakistani-American identity. However, her character has been celebrated for its diversity and representation.

To give an example of how she faces stereotypical judgments of society, she says in episode 1 of the Ms. Marvel (2022) series: "It's not really the brown girls from Jersey City who save the world." (Ms. Marvel 23.55-23.59). The comment from Kamala Khan shows the journey of a teenage Asian Muslim Superhero girl who sets out to save the world, and in doing so, she faces the world that she tends to risk her life trying to save, which is against her. In her fight against the villains, she fights against stereotypes, and the ill judgement of society too. If we consider Tyagi's concept of "double colonization", Kamala Khan, fits perfectly as a postcolonial feminist character who suffers from dual-colonization as she faces racial discrimination for being a woman from a non-occidental area, and she faces an extra set of rules and regulations for being a female child in her family (Tyagi 45).

Focusing on Kamala Khan's private life, we can see that having less freedom allowed from her family, she grows up with a restricted childhood, where she dreams of becoming a marvel. Being a girl from a Muslim family where women usually get less freedom, she faces gender discrimination. We can explore this through the lines quoted

by Ketu Kartak, where the author argued in "Indian Nationalism, Gandhian 'Satyagraha, and the Engendering of National Narratives":

> Gandhi's specific representations of women and female sexuality, and his symbolizing from Hindu mythology of selected female figures who embodied a nationalist spirit promoted […] a 'traditional' ideology wherein female sexuality was legitimately embodied only in marriage, wifehood, domesticity- all forms of controlling women's bodies. (p. 395-96)

Another glimpse of her culture and religion can be reflected in *The Marvels* (2023) when Kamala Khan holds onto her identity, saying "Bismillah" when she starts doing things, especially while fighting alongside Captain Marvel. She also uses her dupatta as her superhero weapon to fight against enemies. In another scene in *Ms. Marvel* (2022), we witness that she celebrates Eid with her family, which is a portrayal of a postcolonial Muslim mindset.

Overall, we can see that the constitution of the universal sisterhood generally fades away as the leading feminists and movements focus entirely on women living in European metropolises and North America. The prominent Western thinkers and feminists accept this stereotypical representation of third world women. As Dr. Ritu Tyagi puts it in her article "Understanding Postcolonial Feminism in Relation with Postcolonial and Feminist Theories":

> This Western feminist discourse defines 'Third World' women as subjects "outside" social relations instead of looking at the way these women are constituted through these social structures. Economic, religious, and familial structures are judged by Western standards; the "typical" Third World woman is thus defined as religious, family-oriented, legal minor, illiterate, and domestic. Through this production of a Third World Other, White Western feminists are discursively representing themselves as being sexually liberated, free-minded, in control of their own lives. (49)

Women having the roots of a third-world country, despite living in European countries or America, face similar "double colonization". Similarly, Kamala Khan from MCU gets different treatment as she holds diverse identities, such as a Muslim girl, a Muslim American girl, a Muslim teenage girl, and a girl with Pakistani lineage. Moreover, she fights not only to save her people but also to be saved from "double colonization". Kamala Khan, maintaining her basic social and religious values while upkeeping her family tradition, comes out as a representative of third-world postcolonial women who offers new light on the portrayal of female characters from third-world origin in MCU (Tyagi 45).

America Chavez

America Chavez, played by Xochitl Gomez, is a teenager from a different universe. Her ability is to punch star-shaped portals to go to other dimensions. She is introduced in *Doctor Strange: Multiverse of Madness* (2022), where we see that she is unable to control her powers. However, she later becomes an important character in the multiverse

after learning to control her powers at Kamar-Taj. This shows how disregarded and overlooked people struggle to find their own place in the world. She breaks stereotypes and provides a powerful counter-narrative to the typical portrayals of Latina women in the media. Thus, she presents herself as a strong and independent superhero. Her backstory from the Utopian Parallel plays as a metaphor for resistance against colonial domination, and it represents a space free from colonial constraints. Her superpowers, including her ability to create star-shaped portals, represents her capacity to traverse boundaries and limitations. America Chavez in the MCU represents postcolonial feminism by breaking down traditional power structures, embracing cultural diversity, and portraying resilience and agency, which makes her a powerful symbol of resistance and empowerment (Brunell).

Phase 05: Cultural Nexus

Kahhori

Kahhori, voiced by Devery Jacobs, is introduced in the MCU animation series *What If...? Season 2* (2023) as a Mohawk native who gets her powers from the Tesseract, one of the six infinity stones to move and use objects with the power of her mind. Her character represents people from an indigenous culture during the pre-colonization period that has rarely been represented on screen.

In episode six of *What If...? Season 2* (2023), we can witness Kahhori fighting against Spanish colonizers which can be considered as a battle of postcolonial feminism against colonial power. Her story starts with her village being attacked by Conquistadores, showing the historical oppression of indigenous peoples. By gaining supernatural powers and using them to protect her community, Kahhori becomes the symbol of resistance against colonial forces. Her strong connection to her Mohawk heritage revolts against the erasure of indigenous identities, and her transformation into a powerful protector shows her strength and resilience. As a young Mohawk woman, she embodies the intersection of gender and indigenous identity, and this sheds light on the unique struggles faced by indigenous women. Kahhori's character upholds cultural identity, displays resilience, and stands as a symbol of resistance and empowerment. This truly reflects the principles of postcolonial feminist theory that is discussed by Mohanty and Tyagi.

Maya Lopez

Maya Lopez, portrayed by Alaqua Cox in the MCU television series *Echo* (2024), is a character who is introduced in the television series *Hawkeye* (2021). In the series *Echo* (2024), her journey basically explores her identity, power, and heritage. She is a native American from the Choctaw tribe. Choctaw is a matrilineal heritage, which means the lineage and inheritance come from the female line (Zorrilla). She even receives her superpower of healing through her ancestors, who are shown at the beginning of each episode in the series. Maya's superpowers here are different from the comic books. In

the comics, she is a regular human being who can mimic anyone and anything, but the series connects her to her cultural identity to a greater extent than in the comics and grants her a superpower. This can be considered as the empowerment of indigenous women in a postcolonial context. We see that Wilson Fisk, known as the Kingpin, raises Maya Lopez from a very young age. Fisk is a powerful villain in the MCU, and he does not always care about Maya. It can be observed that he raises Maya to gain control and power and turn her into a killing machine. He kills Maya's father, and later, Maya realizes that she is not under the care of the Kingpin but under his control and manipulation. This kind of colonization is what we have seen in the case of the Indian subcontinent ruled by England and Africa being colonized by European countries. Again, maintaining the track of Tyagi's concept, we can see that Kingpin's patriarchal oppressive power over Maya can be analyzed as the colonial influence over postcolonial feminism, which she rises to overcome and regain her identity as an independent woman looking for a future without such colonization. Her identity as a deaf and indigenous superhero reflects the complex layers of oppression she faces. This, in return, is a key focus of postcolonial feminism. Maya's deep connection with her community proves her resistance against colonial oppression.

Conclusion:

The representation of female characters in movies and series has evolved over the years. Their character arcs are no longer solely dependent on their male counterparts. This can be especially seen in the case of post-colonial female characters, whose representation has been elevated from being downgraded, looked down upon, and stereotyped to gaining their own agency, heritage, and cultural identities.

A Russian spy, Natasha Romanoff, known as Black Widow, is introduced as a sexually appealing character with an insignificant role in the first movie. Although an ordinary human without any superpowers, she fights alongside superheroes and sacrificed her life for the good of the world, marking her as a worthy hero with her own decision-making and bold characteristics. Similarly, originating from an imaginary colonized country, Wanda Maximoff, known as Scarlet Witch, turns out to be one of the strongest female characters, despite being a postcolonial character and a woman.

Okoye and Nakia, coming from a much-stereotyped black community, show that they are not bound to any patriarchal subordination and can take decisions and actions on their own accord. Moreover, shattering the barriers of gender norms, Kamala Khan raised her voice against the oppressive society and her family to ensure opportunities for third-world women. Despite being marginalized by many, characters like Kahhori, Maya Lopez, and America Chavez, show they cannot be disregarded and stereotyped for their identities, history, culture, and heritage.

Looking back, the viewers can see through the lens of postcolonial feminism that all the female characters mentioned above embody postcolonial feminist elements in them. They have defied double colonization and emerged as significant individuals with their

own stories. Therefore, it can be noticed that there is a significant shift in the MCU and the same can be said for the overall portrayal of postcolonial female characters in the movie industry. This research can enlighten the young generations and edify them to embrace their cultures and heritage without being subverted to colonization in any form. This paper opens the gate for further research on the portrayal of female characters originating from diverse backgrounds in film studies. Similarly, the paper unfolds the opportunity to study the diasporic implications and the psycho-social phenomena on the female characters in MCU.

Works Cited

Beail, Linda. "Black Widow and the Warrior Women of the Marvel Cinematic Universe." *The Politics of the Marvel Cinematic Universe*, edited by Nicholas Carnes and Lilly J. Goren, University Press of Kansas, 2023, pp. 195-210.

Brunell, Laura. "Third Wave of Feminism." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 23 Feb. 2024, <www.britannica.com/topic/third-wave-of-feminism>.

Coogler, Ryan, director. *Black Panther*. Marvel Studios, 2018.

Dacosta, Nia, director. *The Marvels*. Marvel Studios, 2023.

Echo. Created by Marion Dayre and Amy Rardin, Marvel Studios, 2024. TV series.

Favreau, Jon, director. *Iron Man*. Paramount Pictures, 2008.

Favreau, Jon, director. *Iron Man 2*. Paramount Pictures, 2010.

Fleck, Ryan, and Anna Boden, directors. *Captain Marvel*. Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2019.

Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacy." *Cultural Studies*, edited by Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, Paula Treichler, Routledge, 1992, pp. 277-294.

Johnston, Joe, director. *Captain America: The First Avenger*. Paramount Pictures, 2011.

Kanthak, Kristin. "From "Grrrl Power" to "She's Got Help":Captain Marvel as the Superhero of Second-Wave Feminism". *The Politics of the Marvel Cinematic Universe*, edited by Nicholas Carnes and Lilly J. Goren, University Press of Kansas, 2023, pp. 211-223.

Katrak, Ketu. "Indian Nationalism, Gandhian 'Satyagraha,' and the Engendering of National Narratives." *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, edited by Andrew Parker et al., Routledge, 1992.

Kirkpatrick, Ellen, and Suzanne Scott. "Representation and Diversity in Comics Studies." *Cinema Journal*, vol. 55, no. 1, 2015, pp. 120-124. JSTOR, <www.jstor.org/stable/43653488>.

Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." Boundary 2, vol. 12/13, no. 3 - vol. 13, no. 1, Duke University Press, Spring-Autumn 1984, pp. 333-358. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/302821.

Moore, Chamara. "Swapping Heels for Capes: The Superheroine Alternative to Racebent Love -Interests." *Transition*, no. 129, 2020, pp. 190–199. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2979/transition.129.1.16>.

Ms. Marvel. Created by Bisha K. Ali, performance by Iman Vellani, Marvel Studios, 2022. TV series.

Raimi, Sam, director. *Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness*. Marvel Studios, 2022.

Rogers, Jessie. "Postcolonialism in the MCU: *Captain Marvel*'s Filtering of Refugee Life Through White Heroism." *Studies in Popular Culture*, vol. 44, no. 1, 2022, pp. 19–41. *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27204054.

Russo, Anthony, and Joe Russo, directors. *Avengers: Endgame*. Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2019.

Russo, Anthony, and Joe Russo, directors. *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*. Marvel Studios, 2014.

Shortland, Cate, director. *Black Widow*. Marvel Studios, 2021.

Szekely, Ora. "Female Combatants in the Marvel Cinematic Universe." *The Politics of the Marvel Cinematic Universe*, edited by Nicholas Carnes and Lilly J. Goren, University Press of Kansas, 2023.

Tyagi, Ritu. "Understanding Postcolonial Feminism in Relation with Postcolonial and Feminist Theories." *International Journal of Language and Linguistics*, vol. 1, no. 2, December 2014, pp. 45-50.

WandaVision. Created by Jac Schaeffer, performances by Elizabeth Olsen and Paul Bettany, season 1, Marvel Studios, 2021. TV series.

Whedon, Joss, director. *Avengers: Age of Ultron*. Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2015.

Williams, Raymond. "The Analysis of Culture." *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, edited by John Storey, 2nd ed., University of Georgia Press, Athens, 1998.

What If...? Season 2. Created by A.C. Bradley, Marvel Studios, 2024. TV series.

Zorrilla, Mónica Marie. "How Maya Lopez's Powers Changed in 'Echo' When the MCU 'Marvel-fied' Choctaw Folklore." *The Messenger*, 2024, <www.msn.com/en-us/movies/news/how-maya-lopez-s-power-s-changed-in-echo-when-the-mcu-marvel-fied-choctaw-folklore/ar-AA1mSW1V>.

Exploring the Subaltern Agency: A Study on Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

Hafizur Rahman[1]

Abstract

This research studies Arundhati Roy's fiction and non-fiction as representative texts of subaltern historiography. The research area will be confined to Roy's debut novel The God of Small Things. The study will highlight Roy's attempt to examine the subverted roles of the subaltern in constructing the subaltern historiography. A Subaltern historiographic lens will be used as a theoretical framework to carry out the research. Subaltern theory propounded by Gramsci, Ranajit Guha, Oxford (OC), and Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak will be mainly used to validate the study. Generally, the subaltern narrative in literature incorporates the issue of caste and class conflict, the role of patriarchy, colonialism, and colonial legacy, misdemeanor of state apparatuses, subaltern resistance, the role of political and business elites, and the like. In this respect, existing literature has not done justice in representing the potentialities of the subaltern while discussing the agencies and resistance. The present study will fill in the gap in this respect. The present study aims to unveil the gap between the people's history and the perceived or popular history of India. It offers a counter to nationalist or elitist discourse. The study will trace the agency and potentiality of the subaltern. The study will focus on the glorification of the subaltern people rather than stigmatizing them prevailing in the existing literature. The research hopes to form a deeper understanding of Roy's works as well as develop a deeper insight into the subaltern historiography or subaltern discourse. The primary objective of the study is to explore how Roy gives voice to marginalized groups and challenges dominant power structures through her literary works. The study is conducted using critical analysis through in-depth reading and decoding of the meaning of Roy's text. The research discusses recurring motifs and socio-political commentaries pertinent to subaltern studies. The study uses a subaltern lens as a theoretical framework to carry out the research. The research carries a pragmatic value regarding the study of contemporary post-colonial Indian society as Indian society has been reeling under socio-economic disparity, gender discrimination, and marginalization of the untouchables living in India for quite a long time even after 75 five years of its independence. From the subaltern studies point of view, the study provides deeper insights into Roy's commitment to represent the oppressed, attribute voice to the mute, and rewrite the history of the subaltern. This research underscores the transformative potential of literature in tracing the agency, identity and glorifying the marginalized and thereby influencing public consciousness and awareness among the people working in policy-making bodies in the postcolonial Indian state. This study aims to examine how Roy's fictions serve as a platform for representing subaltern voices, their identity, agency, and potentiality by challenging dominant power structures.

Keywords: *Subalternity, Agency, Representation, Dominant Power Structure, Arundhati Roy*

[1]Associate Professor, Department of English, Trust University, Barishal

Introduction

Arundhati Roy, a prominent figure in contemporary literature and activism, has been internally acclaimed for her perceptive portrayal of marginalized voices and critical perspectives on socio-political issues. Arundhati Roy's literary and activist endeavors have undeniably left an indelible mark on contemporary discourse, particularly in the realm of subaltern representation. Through her works, Roy captures the intricacies of marginalized lives and also amplifies their voices defying the dominant hegemonic structures. Arundhati Roy, as an author, fomented people's attention to all sorts of social, political, cultural, religious, and economic malaise of India in her fictional and polemical works. She is an advocate for peace, justice, human rights, preservation of the environment, and human dignity. This paper, titled "Exploring the Subaltern Agency: A Study on Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*," aims to explore the trajectory of Roy's engagement with the subaltern, analyzing the evolution of her narratives of her seminal novel *The God of Small Things* Her debut novel, *The God of Small Things* (1997), which won the Booker Prize, has brought the plights of the subaltern, the marginalized in terms of caste, gender, and socio-economic status to the fore.

In *The God of Small Things (TGST)*, Roy navigates the intricate web of caste and societal norms in India, enunciating the experiences of those relegated to the margins of society. The novel addresses caste and class conflict, patriarchy, colonial legacy, and subaltern resistance. The story of the novel revolves around the south Indian state of Kerala, a miniature of India, which has been reeling under the effects of cross-cultural encounters for long (Hossain,107-33). In the novel, the cross-cultural encounters encompass the native Indian Hindus and the upper-class Syrian Christian settlers. The latter largely represents the colonial legacy dominating over the native lower caste Hindu community called Paravan instead of being converted to Christianity for rice. In *The God of Small Things*, Roy meticulously crafts the lives of characters like Ammu, and Velutha, whose experiences are marked by systemic oppression and negligence of normative society. Velutha, an untouchable, faces various challenges for his caste identity**.** Ammu, Velutha, Rahel, and Estha, the main characters of *TGST* struggle to ascertain their space and identity in the patriarchal, cast-discriminated post-colonial Indian society. They protested and made utmost efforts to resist the atrocities inflicted on them and the deprivation and humiliation they suffered from, in spite of meeting a tragic end.

Problem Statement

As a researcher when I approach Roy's literary oeuvre, some palpable questions sensitize me to discover the reason behind Roy's intention of choosing the central characters of her fiction from the subaltern community. Every reading of Roy's oeuvres vexes me to unveil the factors functional behind their subalternity. Reading of Roy induces me to explore how far Roy's fictions translate the subaltern historiography and Gramscian concept of subalternity. It provokes me to unearth her mission to trace the identity, agency, and potentialities of the subaltern. It is also interesting to uncover

whether Roy has been able to do justice in her venture of representing the subaltern.

Significance of this Study

The significance of studying Arundhati Roy's fiction and non-fiction through the lens of subaltern representation lies in its potential to deepen our understanding of the mechanisms through which marginalized voices are articulated and amplified in literature and activism. The study carries a pragmatic value to understanding the contemporary post-colonial society as Indian society has been reeling under the problems of caste conflicts, gender discrimination, religious bigotry, and demonization of state apparatuses. Arundhati Roy, through her works like *The God of Small Things* (1997) offers a critique of systemic inequalities drawing attention to the plights of those who are often silenced by dominant socio-political structures. Analyzing Roy's work from a subaltern perspective also allows for a nuanced exploration of how her narratives provide a platform for marginalized groups, particularly in the context of Indian society's caste system, gender discrimination, and economic disparities. Roy's literature serves as these deliberate efforts, presenting the struggles of the subaltern in a manner that demands attention and empathy from a global audience. As Chakravorty Spivak asserts, "Roy's narrative gestures toward a new way of representing the subaltern, one that does not seek to speak for but rather to allow the subaltern to speak" (Spivak 112). Furthermore, this study is significant for postcolonial literary studies as it extends the conversation about the role of literature in social justice movements. By examining Roy's works, this research highlights the transformative power of literature and non-fiction in challenging oppressive structures and advocating for the rights of the disenfranchised. It underscores the importance of narrative in creating socio-political awareness which is crucial in a world where inequality and injustice are pervasive.

Ultimately, this study emphasizes the enduring relevance of Arundhati Roy's contributions to literature for the representation and empowerment of the subaltern in contemporary society. Roy's artistic presentation of the subaltern community in the narrative of her fictions and non-fictions can be used by human rights, feminist and environmental activists to lobby for civil and terrestrial rights and to create awareness among the global readership about the deplorable condition of the subaltern is the aim of this study. The research has been undertaken with an attempt to synthesize or synchronize the subaltern in the mainstream stream society with the elite. It aims to trace the voice of the subaltern with the aim that the voices are being heard by the policy makers and in the academic debates. The research hopes to reach out to global readers. It intends to brew empathy towards those others who inhabit socio-culturally backward and stand economically at the lowest ladder of society particularly in the formerly colonized countries like India. The research will also help in understanding the nature and present state of postcolonial Indian society as well as post-colonial society across the globe. Moreover, it will be useful to understand contemporary Bangladeshi society as well. Above all, studying Arundhati Roy's fictions and non-fictions with an approach to post-colonial subaltern studies will contribute not only to understanding past events of

history but also the present and what may happen in the future as well. The purpose of this study is to seek to empower the marginalized community who have been robbed of opportunities and survived the onslaught of colonialism, neo-imperialism, globalization and capitalism. The ultimate mission of this study is to awaken readers against atrocities of the 'Big Things' and induce in them a nonviolent resistance to power. The study veers to deconstruct the dominant Indian nationalist discourse.

Objectives of the Study

General Objective

The general objective of this study is to explore and analyze the subaltern historiography for the representation of subaltern voices in Arundhati Roy's fiction *The God of Small Things* to understand how her works challenge and critique dominant socio-political structures.

Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of this study are;

a) To examine the thematic elements and narrative strategies employed by Arundhati Roy in her novels that highlight the experiences of marginalized groups

b) To trace the strength, potentiality, identity, and agency of the subaltern individual or community rather than exoticizing and stigmatizing them when they are thwarted being challenged by the caste, gender, and economic disparity

c) To assess the impact of Roy's literary endeavors in cognizance with the global readership, academia and the people in the policy-making body regarding subaltern issues

Research Questions

a) How do Arundhati Roy's narrative techniques in her novel provide a platform for subaltern voices, and what themes are most prevalent in these representations?

b) Why has postcolonial India, as an independent nation, failed to establish itself as a welfare state that ensures social justice and equity, particularly by mitigating economic disparity for the ordinary masses, especially subaltern communities?

c) How can the history, culture, lived experiences, potentialities, and activities of the subaltern be explored in writing the historiography of the subaltern, while countering the nationalist and elitist history of India?

Theoretical Framework

Subaltern historiography is a revolutionary project of writing the history from the below. It, starting its journey in the 80s of the last century, aimed to write history of the downtrodden people. Under the mentorship of Ranajit Guha (122) a group of

Anglo-Indian Marxist scholars initiated to trace the agency of the subaltern people counting their contribution to the national movement for the liberty of India. It emerged as a counter discourse to colonial, elitist and national historiography of India. It attempted to rectify the historical bias of the Eurocentric narrative. The subaltern study refers to the revisionist historiography of peasant movements in post-colonial India (Chakrabarty,1-26). The South Asian subaltern group was critical of the nature of the historiography prevalent during the colonial regime because of its elitist biases and "bourgeois-nationalist" and "colonial" mode of history writing. These forms of history distorted the historical portrayal of the subalterns or the "people" and neglected their role in the anti-colonial struggle (Guha, 283).

The term "subaltern" has undergone a sea change from an explicit description of peasants to concepts incorporating various forms of marginalization. This development reflects a growing recognition of the complexities of power structures and the diverse experiences of those positioned outside dominant narratives (Green,385-402). This has broadened the scope of subaltern studies to encompass issues of race, ethnicity, sexuality, and indigenous rights. During the colonial period all the Indian and African native people were treated as the subaltern save the colonial masters and their native allies. Guha (5) defines the subaltern as a demographic difference between the subaltern and the elites. Subaltern studies collective used the term subaltern as a general attribute for subordination in terms of class, caste, race and gender. According to Ranajit Guha the term "subaltern" stands as " a name for the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether in terms of class, caste, age gender and office or any other way" (Preface 35). By the term subaltern, Spivak refers to third world women and men, working class people or those disenfranchised and marginalized by the western culture. Guha developed the Gramscian thoughts with special reference to south Asian subaltern perspectives. He provided a comprehensive definition of subalterns as the overall Indian population excluding the elite. Guha's subalterns are suppressed people due to several demographic factors including class, caste, culture, religion etc. (Ludden, 1-2).

Subaltern studies group aimed to amend 'suppressed voices' by challenging 'authoritative voices'. Followers of the movement applied the approach to rediscover the lost historical narratives of the subaltern by unveiling the thick layers of hegemony entrenched at multiple levels (Prakash,27-38). Subaltern studies emphasize giving voice to the marginalized and has influenced fields like literature, anthropology, and sociology. It has also served as a powerful tool for postcolonial critiques, deconstructing narratives that perpetuate Eurocentric dominance. Following Gramsci's ideas, a group of Indian scholars in the 1980s launched a pioneering project known as Subaltern Studies. Disillusioned with traditional historiography that centered on elites and colonial narratives, they sought to "rewrite history" for the underclasses. Their objective was to trace the voices of peasants, women, and other marginalized groups ignored, silenced or deliberately rejected in mainstream historical accounts. This approach challenged the elitist bias inherent in traditional methods. Colonial histories focused on the actions of

administrators and political leaders, neglecting the experiences of the vast majority of the population. Similarly, nationalist narratives often celebrated elite figures who spearheaded independence struggles, overlooking the contributions of ordinary people (Chatterjee, 44-49). Subaltern studies scholars employed innovative methodologies to recover the experiences of the subaltern. They delved into previously neglected sources like oral histories, folklore, and local archives. By analyzing these materials, they aimed to reconstruct the worldviews and actions of marginalized groups, revealing their agency in shaping history. This emphasis on agency was crucial. Traditional narratives often portrayed subaltern groups as passive victims of oppression. Subaltern studies, in contrast, highlighted their potentialities and capacity for resistance, whether through every day acts of defiance or organized uprisings. This reframing of history challenged the notion that only elites could be historical actors. Subaltern studies have revolutionized the way people understand history and society (Amin, 4). By foregrounding the experiences of marginalized groups, it has forced a reevaluation of traditional narratives and unearthed the complexities of power structures. This approach continues to inspire scholars across disciplines, encouraging a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of the world around us. Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) paved the way for subaltern studies with his intuitive analysis of power dynamics. He identified two key mechanisms through which ruling classes maintain control: coercion and cultural hegemony. Coercion refers to the use of force or threats to earn the consent of the masses (55).

Spivak's (112) seminal essay on subalternity is crucial for any study on representing the marginalized voice. Her concepts of epistemic violence and representation directly inform the analysis of how Roy's works seek to give voice to the subaltern. Guha's (283) foundational work on subaltern studies provides theoretical impetuses into the dynamics of peasant resistance and marginality. Although not directly about Roy, it offers a theoretical backdrop for analyzing the subaltern resistances depicted in her writings. Gramsci recognized the potential and agency of subaltern groups. These underprivileged group in society lack access to power and resources. Being a victim of oppression and deprivation, these marginalized groups raise protest and resist through insurgency. Subaltern groups, according to Gramsci, lack their own organic intellectuals. Organic intellectuals are those who solely serve the interest of the subaltern group (Gramsci, 42). They emerge from the subaltern group. By this Gramsci propounded the concept of subaltern autonomous agency. Hence Roy translates the theoretical concept of the South Asian Subaltern Group as well as the theory of Antonio Gramsci through the artistic representation of the subaltern in her fictions and also by challenging the existing nationalist-elitist discourse prevailing in the contemporary post-colonial India. Guha's (83) foundational work on subaltern studies provides theoretical insights into the dynamics of peasant resistance and marginality. Although not directly about Roy, it offers a theoretical backdrop for analyzing the subaltern resistances in her writings.

Literature Review

Julie Mullaney (56-70), in her essay *Arundhati Roy, Local and Postcolonial Feminisms in the Transnational Economy,"* veers between the two poles of capitalist exploitation and patriarchal oppression without touching the issue of caste at all. It is a lapse on the part of any critical reader of *TGST*. Her essay thus fails to answer one of the crucial questions about the principle cause of subalternity in *TGST*. John Lutz (57-74) in his *essay "Commodity Fetishism, Patriarchal Repression, and Psychic Deprivation in Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things,"* has identified commodity fetish and patriarchy as the evil agencies. His essay privileges class and gender as similar categories of exploitation and ignores perhaps unconsciously the more India-specific exclusionary grid of caste, and remains unsatisfactory to the general reader who have gone through the text *TGST* directly. The textual subordination in the name of gender within a patriarchal society appeals to many critics. Ganguly (71-98) examines Roy's blending of secular and spiritual themes to critique socio-political realities in India. This perspective is valuable for studying how Roy's works address the spiritual dimensions of subaltern experiences alongside their material conditions. Loomba's (47) comprehensive overview of colonial and postcolonial theory provides essential context for analyzing Roy's critique of colonial legacies and their impact on contemporary subaltern groups in her novels and essays. Nair's (56-72) article explores the stylistic and thematic innovations in Roy's writing, focusing on how her unique narrative voice amplifies subaltern perspectives. This study aids in understanding the literary techniques Roy employs to foreground marginalized voices. Pandey (23-41) discusses the challenges of writing subaltern histories, which parallels the difficulties Roy faces and addresses in her works. Spivak's (271-313) seminal essay on subalternity is crucial for any study on representing marginalized voices. Her concepts of epistemic violence and representation directly inform the analysis of how Roy's works seek to give voice to the subaltern. Tickell (12) provides a detailed analysis of *The God of Small Things*, including its historical context, themes, and critical reception. This guide is instrumental in understanding the various dimensions of subaltern representation in Roy's novel. In their attempt to explore Roy's fictions Behood (1-57) has highlighted postcolonial subalternity, Al-Quaderi (29-50) has emphasized on discussion of gendered subaltern while Usha Ghimire (1-20) discusses Antonio Gramsci's Organic Intellectual in exploring the subaltern characters in Arundhati Roy whereas Ananya Roy (819-30) has focused on metropolis subaltern and spatial subaltern and Urvi Sharma (1-52) has discussed class and caste subaltern.

Research Gap

The existing research discussed above testifies the lack of grasping Roy's intention of glorifying the subaltern characters by highlighting their potentialities and agencies. They have discussed the pains, plights and stigmatization of the subaltern. However, they have overlooked the discussion of the strength, agencies and potentials of the subaltern which is profoundly significant to attribute voice to the subaltern and autonomous agency of

the subaltern. Their researches appear to be inadequate in addressing identity and the potentialities to assert their agency and resilience. In the existing literature the researchers focuses on the stigmatization and exoticization of the subaltern rather than glorifying them. The present study will fill in the gaps by articulating the history, culture, identity, agency and potentiality of the subaltern with the aim to deconstruct the existing nationalist discourse of India which was initiated by the South Asian Subaltern Collective.

Methodology of the Study

In the literature review, a comprehensive examination of existing scholarly works on Arundhati Roy's oeuvre is conducted, with a specific focus on the analysis of subaltern representation in her fictional narratives. This review serves as a foundational step in understanding the evolution of Roy's engagement with marginalized voices and the critical discourse surrounding her work. Employing close reading and textual analysis the study scrutinizes Roy's fictions *The God of Small Things*. Critical analysis method has been employed to decipher the meaning of the text and important passages. Secondary materials like books, journals, scholarly articles, internet materials and lectures on Roy's representation of the subaltern have been used to carry out the research.

Discussion and Findings

Roy's Booker Prize winner novel *The God of Small Things* is a saga of the subaltern. It is modern classic with an artistic presentation of patriarchal subjugation, male chauvinism, cross-cultural and cross-class encounters. The story revolves around Ayemenem, a symbolic capitalistic empire of a postcolonial society which stands for India in miniature. Ammu and Velutha, leading characters of *TGST* fell victim to patriarchy, gendered discrimination and caste prejudice. Ammu suffered deprivation of education as her father considered college education is useless for the girls. Her Entomologist father's reluctance narrowed down her scope to find a good husband. Breaking the taboo of cross cultural marriage, she got married of her own with a Bengali Hindu Babu who worked as a tea estate in Assam. Being a victim of male chauvinism and sexual exploitation, she return to Ayemenem, her ancestral home and faced humiliation. Everybody looked down upon Ammu and pronounced the word divorce with the connotation of Die-vorce! A man less woman has no place either in family or in society (Roy, 43). "Ammu had no Locusts Stand I (57)" Her twin baby, Rahel and Estha, were considered as waifs and a milestone of Ammu's sin for marrying a Hindu Babu. They fell victim of negligence both from the family members, relatives and neighbours throughout their life. She turned to be a social outcast within her family and felt utterly dehydrated. Ammu started to form her own identity and founded a pickle factory with her mother. She had major contribution proportionately in developing the factory. Her brother, Chacko, a man with Anglophile mentality and a self-proclaimed Marxist hardly accepted Ammu's partnership in the pickle factory. When an inspector came to visit the

factory, Chacko repeated his claim, "My factory, My Pine apples, My Pickle. Legally, this was the case. " According to Christian family law daughters cannot inherit ancestral property" (57). Patriarchy, gender discrimination and masculine control, as legacy of colonialism, still loom large in post-colonial contemporary Indian society. Ammu's father Pappachi never allowed her mother, Ammachi, to show off her talent in music and openly expressed his disgust for the fame she earned by founding the pickle factory. Unlike Mammachi Ammu refused to be a sexual pawn of her husband. She refuted to satisfy the sexual needs of the white tea planter Mr. Hollick and thereby save her husband's job. Mammachi's passivity in this regard does not retreat from patriarchal ideologies which is a sign of changelessness of women's attitude towards their husband's maltreatment accepting it as their fate. By divorcing her husband, Ammu proved that she did not accept her fate meekly like Baby Kochamma or her mother Ammachi. She has rather challenged. Unlike Baby Kokachamma she fought against patriarchy, male chauvinism and colonial legacy challenging the family tradition or age old caste laws of love. She appears to be an inaugurator of a feminist move to ensure equal rights and self-respect to all irrespective of caste, creed, colour, community and gender (Mashori and Zaib,183-96). However, though Ammu finally could not win the battle, she emerged as a formidable challenge to the normative, caste ridden and male chauvinist Indian society. She died at a viable dieable age unreported, unseen and unsung.

On the other hand, Velutha, another leading character of *TGST* fell victim to both class conflicts and caste prejudice. He was a cardholder Comrade in the communist party of Kerala. He emerged more popular a leader than K.N.M. Pillai. Therefore, the touchable upper-class people especially Syrian Christian community particularly Chacko and his family members were scared of losing their land and property due to Velutha's being a revolutionary with the zeal to establish a classless society. Pillai also was zealous of Vinutha's popularity in the party. He regarded Velutha as his rival. So, they conspired against him and waited for an opportune moment to crush him. Baby Koachamma waited to retaliate on Velutha and Ammu out of her frustration of her unfulfilled love with Father Mulligan. When their love affairs were disclosed, they brought false charges against Velutha of abducting Rahel, Estha and their British cousin Sophie Mol. They tagged innocent Velutha as a terrorist. Velutha died a tragic death out of the police brutality. When Ammu went to the police station and protested the killing of an innocent young man, the In-Charge of the Kottayam police station Thomas Mathew tagged her as a *veshya.* Mathew tapped Ammu's breast with his police baton as if he had sorted out mangoes from a basket. Roy has countered the dominant discourse and meta-narrative that police are friends of the ordinary mass. In reality, they are friends to the powerful. When Ammu left the police station she noticed a signboard inscribing the elaboration of the acronym of the term police which showed P for Politeness, O for Obedience, L for Loyalty, I-for Intelligence, C for Courtesy and E for Efficiency (Roy, 7). Kottayam police carry the colonial legacy in postcolonial India. Demonization of the state apparatuses in postcolonial India bears the testimony of partisan politics promoted by the politician by favouring the privileged and disfavouring

the underprivileged. Police, in the postcolonial society, have not been able to come out of their colonial mindset and power structure of society.

Again, the first ever democratically elected Chief Minister of Kerala, E.M.S. Namboodripad, who is a communist leader took a freaky stand by not minimizing the absolute disparity between the privileged and the underprivileged. He never initiated land reforms and peaceful transition of wealth. Most of the upper-class Syrian Christian of Kerala, who constitute only twenty percent of the Keralan population, were land lords and pickle factory owners. Namboodripad made a heady mix of democracy and communism. The rest were utterly poor people either day labourer in agriculture or factory workers. They had to work twelve hours a day with utterly poor wage of one or two rupees. Namboodripad came to power promising to alleviate the exploitation of the labourclass people. Practically nothing happened. In Kerala Marxism was simply replaced by Christianity and God with Marx, Satan with bourgeoisie, heaven with classless society, and the church with the party (Roy,66). Indian politicians tactfully play caste and minority cards to perpetuate their hegemonic capitalist domination over the multitude. India still remains an oppressive colony with a number of states governed by the colonial masters from its center, Delhi.

Velutha represents the underprivileged class belonging to a low caste Hindu and Caste Christian called Paravan. Paravans are known as untouchables. During Mammachi's time Parvans were not allowed to walk on public roads. They had to cover their upper bodies and were not allowed to carry an umbrella. They had to put their hands on their mouths to divert the polluted breath while talking with others. Previously they had to crawl backwards with a broom sweeping away their footprints so that the Brahmins or Syrian Christian do not defile themselves accidentally by stepping themselves into a Paravan's footstep (Roy, 74). When the British came to Malabar a number of people from untouchable communities including Paravans, Pulayas, and Pelayas converted to Christianity. They were converted to Christianity for some food and money. They are called rice Christians. But that did not put the discrimination to an end. Rather it started in a new form. They were given a new Church under a Pariah Bishop. They realized that they were from the frying pan to the fire. They lost the status of the underprivileged community and lost the ration facilities given to the lower caste Hindus by the government. The predicaments of the Paravans have been represented by Velutha. Though Velutha was hired by Ammachi as a family carpenter of Ipe family and also for the pickle factory he was never allowed to enter the touchable Ipe family through the main gate. He could enter through the back door. He was not allowed to touch anything of the touchable family. The touchable pickle factory workers protested against Velutha for his working as a carpenter-cum-engineer because Paravans are not meant to work as engineers, carpenters or factory workers. Chacko always deprived him of his due wage. He never paid him what he deserved. Velutha had to digest humiliation the society hurled on him in many ways. When Ammu and Veluth's courtship was disclosed, Mammachi spat on him and hurled inaudible abusive language at him:

> If I find you on my property tomorrow I'll have you castrated like the pariah dog that you are! I'll have you killed!... Mammachi spat on Velutha's face. Thick spit. It spatted across his skin. His mouth and eyes. He just stood there. Stunned (Roy, 284).

Ammu's relation with Velutha, shook the very foundation of a caste prejudiced society. Her upper class people were shocked at knowing the cross-cultural transgressive love affair of Ammu and Velutha. Baby Kochamma expressed her caste and class consciousness to Mammachi saying, "How could she stand the smell? Haven't you noticed? They have a particular smell, these Paravans" (Roy, 257). Ammu-Veluta's transgressive love affair hurt the ego of the upper class society and in retaliation they taught Velutha a lesson for the violation of love laws (Joseph, 4997).

In reality, Paravans are excellent carpenters, coconut pickers, fishermen and skilled day labourer and workers. Velutha was endowed with divine, blissful and graceful glees. Unlike the god of big things, he erected no artificial barriers, laid down no rigid norms rather fostered peaceful, spiritual, humanitarian and romantic bonds. Velutha symbolically stands for white though he is black skinned. He possesses the talent of a German accomplished Engineer. He was a little magician (Roy, 74). He excelled in carpentry. He could make intricate toys-tiny windmills, rattles, minute jewel boxes, out of dried palm reeds, he could carve perfect boats out of topic stems and figurines on cashew nuts (75). He had spent four years with the Christian Mission Society to attend workshops with local carpenters. He made all the beautiful furniture for the Anglophile Ipe family. He had finished high school. Had he not been a Paravan, he could have been an engineer (75). He used to fix baby Kochamma's garden cherub's silver. He was a caring brother, a friend to Estha and Rahel and a comrade to the poor villagers. He could mend radio clocks, water pumps, and looked the plumbing and electrical gadgets of the Ipe family. He was in charge of the maintenance of the boilers and electric waring and machineries of Ammu and Chacko's pickle factory. He fixed Chacko's Bharat Bottle sealing machine. He maintained new canning machine and the automatic pineapple slicer. Unlike his father, he served the Ipe family faithfully maintaining dignity. Ammu, the mouth speaker of Roy, discovered Velutha as the god of small things. The daily life and activities of Ayemenem are profoundly influenced by the presence the god of tiny and insignificant things. Though the patriarchal Anglicized god may be in charge, the god of small things keeps everything running smoothly. While every member of Ipe family discovered Velutha as the most talented boy even during his childhood days, Ammu watched him growing up with his manly muscle having the gut to challenge the caste-prejudiced society. He appeared as a father figure to her children. Ammu fell in love with and both dared to cross the age-old love laws. Thus, they challenged the normative society. They revolted against the regulations unjustly imposed on the underprivileged people by the powerful who is to love and how much.

Conclusion

By making Velutha one of the central figures of her Booker Prize winner novel *The God of Small Things* Roy attempts to rewrite the history of the subaltern keeping alliance with the mission of South Asian Subaltern Collective. Unlike other Indian writers, writing in English, she has kept herself aloof from exhotisizing or ghettoizing the representation of the subaltern. She has not diluted the subaltern representation with herself as well. She has presented them, as if , they were real human beings suffered being subjected to all sorts of socio-economic and political exploitation. Velutha emerges as a guardian angel for the unconsoled and the marginalized people living in Indian society. Roy has presented Velutha as a free will agent, a demi god, a god of small things and a martyr in pursuit of forming a classless society. Roy's attempt to recentering the subaltern is a paradigm shift in literature with an implication that the subaltern are also human beings with a past, present and a future, with a history, identity, agency and potentiality and can be the central figure of not only fictions but also of society. Roy has glorified both the gendered subaltern and the caste discriminated subaltern in postcolonial Indian society. Velutha and Ammu represent Gramsci's organic intellectuals. Their love lore is an artistic presentation of their protest against the caste prejudiced society. Thus, Roy has attributed voice and agency to the subaltern. Gramsci propounded the theory of forming an autonomous state by creating organic intellectuals from the labour class to counter the hegemonic bourgeoisie capitalist state. Velutha and Ammu represent organic intellectuals originating from the subaltern sect. Velutha symbolizes a man with an enlightened heart though he is a black skinned Paravan. Whereas entomologist Pappachi, Abbu, Anglophile Chacko, who exploits the women workers of his factory both sexually and financially; Baby Kochamma, Comrade K.N.M. Pillai, white tea planter Mr. Hollick, E.M.S. Namboodripad and police officer Thomas Mathew represent the degenerated heart of Kurtz in *The Heart of Darkness.* On the one hand, by giving the ambassadors of colonial legacy, political elites and social elites, a tag and, on the other hand, by glorifying the subaltern characters, Ammu and Velutha, Roy has attempted to counter the elitist and nationalist history of India.

References

Al-Quaderi, G. G. (2023). Gender and Subalternate in Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things. *Arts Faculty Journal. Dhaka University Press*, *12*(17), 29-50.

Chakrabarty, D. (1992). Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History. *Representations, 37*, 1-26.

Chatterjee, P. (2012). After subaltern studies. *Economic and Political Weekly*, *47*, 44-49.

D'Cruz, S. (2002). Constructing Histories: Gender, Sexuality, and Colonial Discourse in Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things. *Interventions, 4*(1), 118-134.

Ganguly, K. (2007). Literary Secularism: Arundhati Roy and the Postsecular Aesthetic. *Cultural Critique*, *65*, 71-98.

Ghimire, U. (2020). *Role of Organic Intellectual with Reference to Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things and The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. Tribhuvan University. Kathmandu.

Gramsci, A. (1973). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (Quintin Hoare, Trans.). Quintin Hoare, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, & Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (Eds.). International Publishers.

Green, M. E. (2011). Rethinking the Subaltern and the Question of Censorship in Gramsci's Prison Notebooks. *Postcolonial Studies, 14*(2), 385-402.

Guha, R. (1982). *Subaltern Studies. Writing on South Asian History and Society*. Oxford University Press.

Guha, R. (1999). *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*. Duke University Press.

Hossain, S. M., & Maswood Akhter. (2012). Cross Cultural Encounter in The God of Small Things. In *Musing the Post Colonies* (pp. 107-33). Chinno Publication.

Laisa Joseph, A. V. (2022). Research on The Genesis of Subaltern Literature And Its Significance In Arundhati Roy's Work. *International Journal of Food and Nutritional Sciences Journal (IJFANS), 11*(3), 4987-9.

Loomba, A. (1998). *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. Routledge.

Ludden, D. (Ed.). (2001). *Reading Subaltern Studies*. Permanent Black.

Lutz John, C. F. (2009). Patriarchal Repression, and Psychic Deprivation in Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things. *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal, 42*(3), 57-74.

Mashori, G. M., & Zaib, S. (2015). Subalterns Can Speak: Shahraz's Message of Hope for Human Equality in Zemindar's Wife. *ELF Annual Research Journal, 17*, 183-196.

MOHAMMAD ZADEH KHOSHMAHR, B. (n.d.). A Comparative Postcolonial Discourse in The God of Small Things by A. Roy and Things Fall Apart by C. Achebe And Its Incorporation in ELT Multicultural Literature Curriculum. *Izmir*, 1-157.

Mullaney, J. (2002). "Globalizing Dissent"? Arundhati Roy, local and postcolonial feminisms in the transnational economy. *World Literature Written in English, 40*(1), 56-70.

Nair, R. B. (2002). The Road Less Travelled: The Writing of Arundhati Roy. *New Literatures Review, 38*, 56-72.

Pandey, G. (1992). Voices from the Edge: The Struggle to Write Subaltern Histories. *Ethnohistory, 39*, 23-41.

Prakash, G. (1994). Subaltern Studies as Post Colonial Criticism. *American Historical Review, 99*(5), 27-38.

Quintin Hoare (Ed.). (1973). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (Quintin Hoare, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, & Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, Trans.). International Publishers.

Roy, A. (1997). *The God of Small Things*. India Ink.

Shahid Amin, & Dipesh Chakrabarty (Eds.). (1997). *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society, vol. 9*. Oxford University Press.

Sharma, U. (2020). Gender Religion and Class Tracing Intersectionality from Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things to The Ministry of Utmost Happiness. *New Horizon. Chandigarh, 47*, 1-52.

Spivak, G. C. (1988). *"Can the subaltern speak?" Marxism and Interpretaion of Culture*. C. Nelson & I. Grossberg (Eds.). Basing Stoke: Macmillan Education.

Spivak, G. C. (2002). Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography. In *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (pp. 107- 119). Harvard University Press.

Tickell, A. (2007). *Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things: A Reader's Guide*. Continuum.



NORTHERN UNIVERSITY

B A N G L A D E S H

Knowledge for Innovation and Change