INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH CULTURE SOCIETY

ISSN : 2456-6683

Monthly Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed Research Journal

Internationally approved Scientific Journal

Impact Factor: 9.241 **UGC Approved Journal Number : 64291**

A Two Day International Conference on Navigating Mental Health Through the Gateway of Language and Literature

Date: 22 & 23 December, 2025

DOIs:10.2017/IJRCS/ICNMHTGLL-2025

Conference Special Issue - 43 **December - 2025**

Organized by :
Presidency School of Liberal Arts & Sciences
Presidency University, Bengaluru, India

RESEARCH CULTURE SOCIETY & PUBLICATION

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A Two Day International Conference on Navigating Mental Health Through the Gateway of Language and Literature

Date : 22 & 23 December, 2025

Venue: Presidency University, Bengaluru.

Conference Special Issue / Proceedings - 43

The Managing Editor:

Dr. C. M. Patel

(Research Culture Society & Publication)

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Presidency University, Bengaluru, India

Published by:

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH CULTURE SOCIETY
ISSN: 2456-6683 [UGC Approved Journal Number: 64291]
Research Culture Society and Publication
WWW.IJRCS.ORG

(M)+91 9033767725


Conference Publication
Seminar, Congress, Symposium, Workshop
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(Conference Special Issue / Proceedings)

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Published By:

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ISSN(O): 2456-6683
Research Culture Society and Publication.
(Reg. International ISBN Books and ISSN Journals Publisher)
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WWW.IJRCS.ORG

Research Culture Society and Publication

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Conference, Seminar, Symposium Publication with ISSN Journals and ISBN Books (Print / Online).

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About the Institution:

Presidency University, Bangalore, is a NAAC 'A' accredited institution, renowned for its commitment to quality education and holistic student development. Founded in 2013 by the Presidency Group of Institutions, the university has quickly emerged as a leading center for higher education in India. With a focus on innovation, research, and experiential learning, Presidency University has become a preferred destination for aspiring students seeking academic excellence and personal growth. The University takes pride in its academic programs that span diverse disciplines such as engineering, management, law, design, commerce, and media studies. University follows a modern and industry-centric approach to education, blending theoretical knowledge with practical application. Highly qualified faculty members, with a perfect balance of academic expertise and industry experience, are instrumental in nurturing a conducive learning environment.

School of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Presidency School of Liberal Arts & Sciences offers dynamic undergraduate programmes designed to shape thoughtful, articulate, and socially aware individuals. With programmes in English and Psychology, students gain a strong foundation in critical analysis, communication, research, and understanding human behaviour. The BA English programme aims to nurture a deep appreciation for literature, language, and creative expression, while the BA Psychology programme equips students with scientific insights into the human mind and its functioning. Guided by distinguished faculty and an interdisciplinary approach, the school prepares students for diverse career paths and higher academic pursuits. By integrating literary studies with psychology, digital humanities, and value-based education, the programme not only deepens students' understanding of human experience but also equips them with the tools to contribute meaningfully to society in diverse roles such as educators, writers, media professionals, and scholars.

About the Conference

The Conference *"Navigating Mental Health through the Gateway of Language and Literature"* serves as a vital platform to address the intertwined realities of psychology, literature, and language in nurturing emotional balance and advancing the well-being of humankind. It seeks to bring together researchers, academicians, policymakers, psychologists, writers, and poets to explore innovative insights, emerging concepts, and transformative approaches that make this field uniquely relevant and enlightening for the present generation.

By championing the significance of the humanities, the conference engages with pressing issues and contemporary challenges while aspiring to shape well-rounded professionals. It emphasizes the development of communication skills, ethical values, and cultural awareness in future generations. Drawing upon the strengths of literature and psychology, and embracing diverse perspectives, the conference highlights the importance of blending intellectual inquiry with ethical reasoning and professional acumen to foster holistic growth and meaningful collaboration.

Through keynote addresses, panel discussions, research paper presentations, and master classes in Psychology and English Studies, It serves as an intellectual forum to broaden the horizons of liberal arts scholarship by engaging with multiple perspectives and fostering constructive initiatives through rigorous dialogue and collaboration

Objectives:

- To foster an interdisciplinary approach and strengthen collaboration among scholars, researchers, and academicians in emerging areas of the humanities.
- To encourage innovation and best practices by championing the humanities, social sciences, and aesthetics as means to cultivate ethical values and moral responsibility.
- To promote holistic and multidisciplinary curricula by transcending rigid disciplinary boundaries in academia.
- To emphasize communication, dialogue, and cross-disciplinary as well as interdisciplinary thinking for enriched learning and scholarship.

Message from HoD

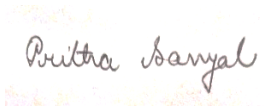
It gives me immense pleasure to present the proceedings of the two-day International Conference titled *"Navigating Mental Health Through the Gateway of Language and Literature"*, organized by the School of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Presidency University, on 22nd and 23rd December 2025. The conference stands as a significant academic endeavour that foregrounds the role of the humanities in engaging with one of the most pressing concerns of our time, mental health.

The objective of the conference was to foster interdisciplinary dialogue by bringing together perspectives from language, literature, psychology, cultural studies, and allied disciplines. Through thoughtfully curated plenary sessions, master classes, and technical sessions, the conference successfully demonstrated that narratives, artistic expression, and critical inquiry can function as powerful tools for understanding, articulating, and addressing mental health concerns at individual, institutional, and societal levels.

The plenary addresses and master classes by eminent scholars and practitioners offered profound insights into themes such as self-acceptance, bibliotherapy, art as healing, mental health in higher education, and the ethical use of digital and AI-assisted tools in pedagogy and research. Equally enriching were the technical sessions, which provided a vibrant platform for scholars to present original research and engage in rigorous discussions on trauma narratives, identity, psychological well-being, and interdisciplinary methodologies.

The enthusiastic participation of 196 delegates including academicians, researchers, students, and mental health professionals from across India and abroad reflects the relevance and urgency of the conference theme. The deliberations reaffirmed the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration and the critical role of the humanities in shaping empathetic, reflective, and socially responsive approaches to mental health.

I extend my sincere appreciation to the organizing committee, speakers, reviewers, and participants whose collective efforts have made this conference a meaningful academic success. It is my hope that the research abstracts compiled in this volume will contribute to ongoing scholarly conversations and inspire further inquiry at the intersection of mental health, language, and literature.



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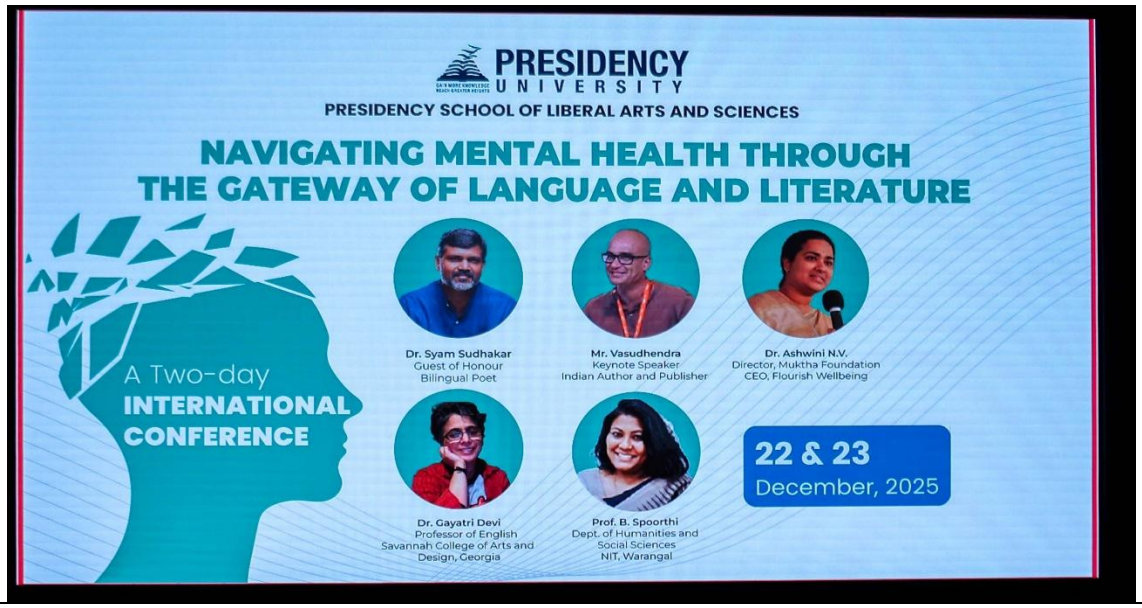


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A Two-day INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
22 & 23 December, 2025


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Volume - 09, Special Issue - 43, December - 2025 Publication Date: 31/12/2025

DOIs:10.2017/IJRCS/ICNMHTGLL-2025/P01 --:-- Research Paper / Article / Review

A Two Day International Conference on Navigating Mental Health Through the Gateway of Language and Literature. (ICNMHTGLL-2025) Date: 22 - 23 December, 2025

Karna's Resilient Psyche: A Psychological Interpretation of *Rashmirathi* (Part Seven: A Textual Analysis)

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Abstract: *This article presents a psychological analysis of resilience as it is shown in Ramdhari Singh Dinkar's Karna from Rashmirathi (Part Seven). This research review investigates the ethical, emotional, and cognitive aspects that influence Karna's resilience through qualitative textual analysis within positive psychology and modern resilience theory. The psychological pinnacle of Karna's life is represented in Part Seven of Rashmirathi, where the story is dominated by profound introspection and outward strife fades. This portion is particularly important for psychological interpretation because Dinkar's poetic focus swings decisively toward Karna's consciousness—his acceptance of fate, moral constancy, and emotional serenity. The analysis shows how Karna's experiences with hardship—such as moral responsibility, identity struggle, and social marginalisation—create resilience that can withstand both internal and external challenges. Dinkar's story presents Karna as an illustration of psychological endurance, demonstrating self-regulation, commitment to dharma, and the ability to find meaning in suffering. This paper argues that Dinkar's portrayal not only enriches the literary understanding of Karna's heroism but also offers a nuanced psychological model of resilience relevant to broader discussions of human strength, agency, and existential struggle.*

Key Words: *Resilience; positive psychology; heroic psyche; literary psychology; character analysis.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Indian epic literature offers a deep understanding of human psychological processes, especially in its portrayal of people dealing with existential pain, moral dilemma, and persistent misfortune. Karna, a figure whose existence is characterised by rejection, identity denial, and ethical struggle, is portrayed psychologically in Ramdhari Singh Dinkar's Rashmirathi (Dinkar, 2014).

In Rashmirathi's seventh part, Karna faces his fate, his true ancestry, and his moral obligations at a crucial psychological turning point. From a psychological standpoint, Karna's reactions demonstrate resilience as long-term inner strength gained via persistent suffering rather than as a transient recovery. According to modern psychology, resilience is the ability to preserve psychological balance and purpose in the face of severe stressors (Masten, 2001; Masten & Reed, 2002). This essay conceptually investigates Karna's mental state using accepted psychological frameworks of resilience, self-concept, existential meaning, emotional regulation, and moral identity. A central motif in this section is Karna's conscious acceptance of destiny, articulated through his calm acknowledgement of impending death. Rather than resisting fate, Karna recognises the inevitability of his end and declares that life has already exacted its full measure of suffering. His reflection that destiny has long been "testing him through loss and humiliation" suggests an internalisation of adversity as a formative force rather than a source of despair.

From an existential psychological perspective, this mirrors Frankl's concept of meaning-making under unavoidable suffering, where resilience emerges through acceptance rather than control. The revelation of Karna's true lineage in this part introduces a profound identity crisis, yet Dinkar portrays Karna as remarkably stable in his self-concept. Karna explicitly rejects the sudden legitimacy offered by royal birth, asserting that identity is shaped by action and endurance rather than bloodline. His assertion that he has lived and struggled as a suta-putra and will die as one reflects what psychological theory identifies as identity integration—a cohesive self-definition resistant to situational disruption. This refusal to reconstruct identity at a moment of potential social redemption demonstrates resilience rooted in internal self-worth rather than external validation.

Emotion regulation forms another critical psychological dimension in Part Seven. Karna's interaction with Krishna is marked not by bitterness but by reflective restraint. Though fully aware of the injustice he has suffered, Karna does not indulge in rage or lamentation; instead, he articulates his pain with clarity and dignity. His recognition that resentment cannot alter reality illustrates adaptive emotional regulation, a key component of psychological resilience in contemporary coping models.

2.Theoretical Framework

Psychological Resilience

Resilience is conceptualised as a dynamic process involving positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity (Masten, 2001). Rather than extraordinary heroism, resilience often manifests as "ordinary magic," arising from stable internal values and adaptive coping mechanisms (Masten & Reed, 2002). Karna's lifelong endurance of social exclusion aligns with this conceptualisation.

Self-Concept and Identity

According to Rogers (1951, 1961), psychological well-being depends upon congruence between self-perception and lived experience. When self-worth is internally grounded rather than socially contingent, individuals exhibit greater emotional stability in the face of threat. Karna's resistance to identity reconstruction in Part Seven reflects such congruence.

Existential Psychology

Existential psychology emphasises the importance of meaning-making in the face of unavoidable suffering (Frankl, 1959; Yalom, 1980). Acceptance of fate, responsibility for one's choices, and commitment to personal values are core components of existential resilience—clearly reflected in Karna's psychological stance.

Moral Identity

Moral identity theory posits that individuals with deeply internalised moral values act consistently with those values even under personal cost (Aquino & Reed, 2002). Karna's loyalty to Duryodhana exemplifies this form of moral resilience.

3.Methodology

The present theoretical literature study adopts a **qualitative, theoretical, and interpretative research design**. A close textual analysis of *Rashmirathi* (Part Seven) is conducted, interpreting Karna's psychological states through established theories of resilience, self-concept, existential meaning, emotional regulation, and moral identity. As a theoretical paper, no empirical data are employed.

Literature Analysis and Discussion

Rashmirathi is a masterpiece of Hindi literature by Dinkar. This powerful story of Karna is presented by Dinkar in a very passionate way. The whole book is magical and sometimes gives goosebumps to

me and the book is capable of giving an experience of profound emotions in scenes.The story of rashmirathi starts with the competition incidence between Arjuna and Karna where he was insulted. Everyone present there was watching insult especially the Kunti mother who saw her child being insulted but she was helpless and did not dare to tell the world he is her child. Dinkar has derived character of Kunti showing her intense emotions of guilt and love for the son.

"और हाय, रनिवास चला वापस जब राजभवन को, सबके पीछे चली एक विकला मसोसती मन को।

उजड़ गये हों स्वप्न कि जैसे हार गयी हो दाँव, नहीं उठाये भी उठ पाते थे कुन्ती के पाँव।"

The second chapter explains his study and relation with Parshuram and very interesting and sad part of his life when Parshuram finds out he is not Brahmin and curses him. The intensity of gratitude and love towards guru By Karna led to the anger of Parashurama, brings the twist to the story.

Then the poem progresses through the main story of the Mahabharata creating out main events and ends into Mahabharata war and ultimately the end of Karna by Arjuna. Many events like a meeting between Kunti and Karna, especially touched my soul. The part of book which I read again, again and again, is an event when Lord Krishna Come to Hastinapura to make peace and asked 5 villages for the Pandavas, but Duryodhana rejected offer and instead he ordered to chain Lord then Krishana says:

"मैत्री की राह बताने को, सबको सुमार्ग पर लाने को,

दुर्योधन को समझाने को, भीषण विध्वंस बचाने को,

भगवान् हस्तिनापुर आये, पांडव का संदेशा लाये।

'दो न्याय अगर तो आधा दो, पर, इसमें भी यदि बाधा हो,

तो दे दो केवल पाँच ग्राम, रक्खो अपनी धरती तमाम।

हम वहीं खुशी से खायेंगे, परिजन पर असि न उठायेंगे!

दुर्योधन वह भी दे ना सका, आशिष समाज की ले न सका,

उलटे, हरि को बाँधने चला, जो था असाध्य, साधने चला।

जब नाश मनुज पर छाता है, पहले विवेक मर जाता है।

हरि ने भीषण हुंकार किया, अपना स्वरूप-विस्तार किया,

डगमग-डगमग दिग्गज डोले, भगवान् कुपित होकर बोले-

'जंजीर बढ़ा कर साध मुझे, हाँ, हाँ दुर्योधन! बाँध मुझे।

यह देख, गगन मुझमें लय है, यह देख, पवन मुझमें लय है,

मुझमें विलीन झंकार सकल, मुझमें लय है संसार सकल।

अमरत्व फूलता है मुझमें, संहार झूलता है मुझमें।

'उदयाचल मेरा दीप्त भाल,भूमंडल वक्षस्थल विशाल,

भुज परिधि-बन्ध को घेरे हैं, मैनाक-मेरु पग मेरे हैं।

दिपते जो ग्रह नक्षत्र निकर, सब हैं मेरे मुख के अन्दर।

'दृग हों तो दृश्य अकाण्ड देख, मुझमें सारा ब्रह्माण्ड देख,

चर-अचर जीव, जग, क्षर-अक्षर, नश्वर मनुष्य सुरजाति अमर।

शत कोटि सूर्य, शत कोटि चन्द्र, शत कोटि सरित, सर, सिन्धु मन्द्र।

Part Seven of *Rashmirathi* foregrounds Karna's inner life, allowing readers direct access to his psychological processing of suffering, identity, and ethical responsibility (Dinkar, 2014).

Acceptance of Fate and Existential Resilience

Karna's reflection—

"भाग्य ने मुझको बहुत परखा है..."

reveals an acceptance of suffering as an integral part of existence (Dinkar, 2014). Psychologically, this aligns with Frankl's (1959) concept of tragic optimism, where meaning is preserved despite pain. Karna does not resist fate through denial or anger, demonstrating existential resilience through acceptance.

Identity Integration and Self-Concept

When confronted with his royal lineage, Karna asserts:

"मैं वही हूँ जो बना हूँ संघर्षों से..."

(Dinkar, 2014). This reflects identity integration, where self-worth remains stable despite new social information. According to Rogers (1961), such congruence between self and experience indicates psychological maturity and resilience.

Emotional Regulation

Karna's statement—

"शिकायत नहीं जीवन से..."

illustrates adaptive emotional regulation (Dinkar, 2014). Contemporary coping models emphasise that acknowledging pain without emotional escalation is central to resilience (Joseph & Linley, 2005). Karna's calm articulation of injustice reflects emotional clarity rather than suppression.

Moral Identity and Ethical Consistency

Karna's refusal to abandon Duryodhana—

"जिसने अंधकार में भी मुझे अपनाया..."

demonstrates moral identity consistency (Dinkar, 2014). Aquino and Reed (2002) argue that such consistency reflects deeply internalised moral values that guide behaviour even in the face of existential threat.

Resilience Without Redemption

Karna's declaration—

"विजय नहीं, मुझे शांति चाहिए..."

underscores a form of resilience not tied to success or victory (Dinkar, 2014). This challenges outcome-based models of resilience and aligns with broader psychological perspectives that define resilience as preservation of dignity, meaning, and ethical coherence (Masten, 2001; Yalom, 1980).

Moral resilience is perhaps most powerfully conveyed through Karna's unwavering loyalty to Duryodhana. Even after learning that aligning with the Pandavas could restore his rightful status, Karna refuses to abandon the friend who stood by him during years of social rejection. His declaration that gratitude and loyalty outweigh victory underscores a deeply internalised moral code. Psychologically, this reflects **moral identity consistency**, wherein ethical values remain stable despite existential threat. Dinkar presents Karna as morally resilient—capable of sustaining ethical coherence even when such commitment guarantees personal loss. Significantly, *Rashmirathi* does not frame Karna's resilience as triumphant or redemptive. The poet repeatedly emphasises that Karna's greatness lies not in conquest but in composure. His acceptance that death will not vindicate him socially, yet will preserve his inner dignity, challenges outcome-oriented models of resilience. Here, resilience is portrayed as **dignified endurance**, a psychological stance where self-respect survives even when life offers no resolution.

Thus, Part Seven of *Rashmirathi* functions as a psychologically rich text that anticipates modern theoretical constructs of resilience, existential acceptance, and moral identity. Through restrained yet powerful poetic introspection, Dinkar presents Karna as a figure whose resilience is forged through sustained suffering, regulated emotion, and unwavering values—rendering the epic deeply relevant to contemporary psychological discourse. Part Seven of *Rashmirathi* constitutes the psychological and ethical culmination of Karna's life. Dinkar deliberately foregrounds Karna's inner voice, allowing readers direct access to his emotional regulation, moral clarity, and existential acceptance at the threshold of death.

A dominant psychological theme in this section is **the conscious acceptance of fate, as articulated through Karna's calm acknowledgement** of suffering as an inescapable part of his existence. Karna reflects:

"भाग्य ने मुझको बहुत परखा है,
अपमान, पीड़ा, दैन्य सहा है।"
("Fate has tested me deeply;
I have endured humiliation, pain, and deprivation.")

rashmirathi-148-194

From a psychological perspective, this articulation reflects **existential resilience**, wherein suffering is neither denied nor dramatised but cognitively integrated. Karna does not externalise blame or collapse emotionally; instead, he reframes adversity as a formative life process. This mirrors Frankl's assertion that resilience arises when individuals assign meaning to unavoidable suffering.

The revelation of Karna's true royal lineage in Part Seven introduces a moment of intense **identity dissonance**. However, Karna rejects the opportunity for social redemption, asserting that identity is forged through lived experience rather than biological inheritance. He declares:

"मैं वही हूँ जो बना हूँ संघर्षों से,
राजपुत्रता से नहीं, कर्मों से।"
("I am what I have become through struggle,
not by royal birth, but by my actions.")

Psychologically, this reflects a **stable and integrated self-concept**. Despite lifelong stigmatization as a *suta-putra*, Karna's sense of self remains internally anchored. His refusal to reconstruct identity at a moment of potential elevation demonstrates resilience rooted in self-consistency, aligning with humanistic theories of self-worth that prioritize internal valuation over social approval.

Emotional regulation is another salient dimension of Karna's resilience in this part. During his dialogue with Krishna, Karna acknowledges injustice without surrendering to bitterness. He states with reflective restraint:

"शिकायत नहीं जीवन से,
जो मिला, उसे स्वीकार किया।"
("I hold no complaint against life;
I have accepted what it gave.")

This response exemplifies **adaptive emotional regulation**, a core component of psychological resilience. Karna neither suppresses emotion nor allows it to dominate cognition. Instead, he demonstrates emotional maturity through acceptance and cognitive clarity, reflecting coping mechanisms identified in contemporary resilience literature.

Perhaps the most profound expression of **moral resilience** appears in Karna's unwavering loyalty to Duryodhana. Even when offered restoration of status and kinship, Karna refuses to abandon the one who acknowledged him when society rejected him. He asserts:

"जिसने अंधकार में भी मुझे अपनाया,
उसे छोड़ दूँ—यह धर्म नहीं।"
("To abandon the one who accepted me even in darkness—
this would not be righteousness.")

This illustrates **moral identity consistency**, where ethical values remain stable despite existential threat. Karna's loyalty is not impulsive but reflective, grounded in gratitude and personal ethics. Psychologically, such value-driven behaviour under extreme stress signifies advanced moral resilience.

Significantly, *Rashmirathi* does not equate resilience with triumph. Karna openly acknowledges that death will not correct historical injustice, yet he remains composed. Dinkar writes:

"विजय नहीं, मुझे शांति चाहिए,
पराजय में भी आत्मसम्मान चाहिए।"
("I do not seek victory, but peace;
even in defeat, I seek self-respect.")

Here, resilience is framed as **dignified endurance rather than success-oriented adaptation**. Karna's psychological strength lies in preserving self-respect, emotional balance, and ethical coherence, even when life offers no resolution or reward.

Thus, Part Seven of *Rashmirathi* emerges as a psychologically rich text that anticipates modern theoretical constructs of resilience, existential meaning-making, emotional regulation, and moral identity. Through Karna's introspective voice, Dinkar presents resilience not as survival alone, but as a conscious, value-driven stance toward suffering—rendering the epic profoundly relevant to contemporary psychological inquiry.

Part Seven of *Rashmirathi* represents the psychological culmination of Karna's life, where external conflict recedes, and intense inner reflection dominates the narrative. Dinkar's poetic focus shifts decisively toward Karna's consciousness—his acceptance of fate, moral steadfastness, and emotional composure—rendering this section especially significant for psychological interpretation. A dominant psychological theme in this segment is conscious acceptance of fate, which aligns closely with existential theories of resilience. Karna's awareness of his inevitable defeat does not lead to emotional collapse or defensive denial; rather, it results in heightened clarity and moral firmness. His cognition reflects what Viktor Frankl describes as tragic optimism—the capacity to affirm meaning despite

suffering. Karna's acceptance is not passive resignation but an active, value-based choice to uphold dignity and loyalty even when outcomes are irreversibly adverse.

The text further reveals **identity integration**, a key marker of psychological resilience. When confronted with the revelation of his true lineage, Karna does not attempt to reconstruct his identity for social elevation. Instead, he demonstrates a stable self-concept rooted in lived experience rather than biological legitimacy. From a psychological perspective, this reflects a well-integrated identity structure where self-worth is internally anchored, reducing dependence on external validation. Dinkar's portrayal emphasises that Karna's sense of self has matured through suffering, allowing him to resist identity dissonance even at a moment that could redefine his social position. Thus, Part Seven of Rashmirathi functions as a rich psychological text that anticipates contemporary understandings of resilience, existential meaning-making, and moral identity. Through poetic introspection and philosophical depth, Dinkar offers a portrayal of Karna whose resilience is forged through suffering, sustained through values, and expressed through conscious acceptance—rendering the epic deeply relevant to modern psychological inquiry.

4. CONCLUSION

Karna's portrayal in *Rashmirathi* (Part Seven) offers a psychologically rich representation of resilience grounded in self-respect, moral integrity, and existential acceptance. Through a theoretical psychological lens, Karna emerges not merely as a tragic hero but as an exemplar of dignified endurance. This study highlights the relevance of Indian epic literature in contributing to contemporary psychological discourse on resilience and moral identity. Part Seven of Rashmirathi constitutes the psychological climax of Karna's character, where external conflict gives way to profound internal reckoning. Dinkar's poetic narration foregrounds Karna's inner dialogue, ethical awareness, and emotional composure at the threshold of death, making this section particularly fertile for psychological interpretation. Emotion regulation is another crucial dimension articulated in Part Seven. Karna's emotional responses—particularly toward Krishna and Kunti—are marked by restraint, reflection, and composure rather than impulsive affect. Contemporary psychological models identify such regulation as an adaptive coping mechanism, especially under extreme stress. Karna acknowledges emotional pain and injustice, yet he refrains from hostility or self-pity, demonstrating resilience through emotional discipline and cognitive reframing.

Moral resilience emerges as a defining psychological strength in this section. Karna's unwavering loyalty to Duryodhana, despite knowing the ethical complexity and personal cost, exemplifies moral commitment grounded in gratitude and personal ethics rather than situational advantage. Psychological literature conceptualises this as **moral identity consistency**, where actions are guided by deeply internalised values even under threat. Dinkar presents Karna as morally resilient—capable of sustaining ethical coherence despite existential vulnerability. Importantly, *Rashmirathi* does not portray Karna's resilience as redemptive or victorious. Instead, resilience is framed as **dignified endurance**, challenging modern success-oriented interpretations of resilience. Karna's psychological strength lies not in overcoming death but in confronting it with self-respect, emotional clarity, and ethical resolve. This literary depiction expands psychological discourse by presenting resilience as an inward state of integrity rather than an outcome-driven construct.

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH CULTURE SOCIETY ISSN: 2456-6683
Monthly Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed Journal [Impact Factor: 9.241]
Volume - 09, Special Issue - 43, December - 2025 Publication Date: 31/12/2025

DOIs:10.2017/IJRCS/ICNMHTGLL-2025/P02 --:-- Research Paper / Article / Review

A Two Day International Conference on Navigating Mental Health Through the Gateway of Language and Literature. (ICNMHTGLL-2025) Date: 22 - 23 December, 2025

Micro-Manipulation and Quiet Power: How Soft Speech Sustains Literary Domination

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Abstract: *This paper looks into the subtle ways of psychological control that the authors sneak into the characters' everyday conversations in the four major texts: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper", Henrik Ibsen's "A Doll's House", and Tennessee William's "A Streetcar Named Desire". Literary critics most of the time highlight the element of violence or dramatic conflict in a text, however, by pointing out the tone and language used by characters the authors lay focus on the idea of how these pretty peaceful ways of communicating actually do the greatest harm and which is what the main characters suffer from. There is a whole range of diminutive and polite speech acts, such as quiet tones, diminutive phrases, polite instructions, strategic silences, and gentle corrections, which these literary characters use as a medium of slow and quiet domination that changes one's identity, limits one's agency and creates emotional dependence. The analysis is based on the discourse and power theory of Michel Foucault, which helps us understand how harmless speech acts can be used to control the behavior of people and to establish social hierarchies. Using psychoanalytic ideas to back up this notion, one can see how micro manipulations go deep into a person's subconscious, thus causing internal conflicts and self- doubting. Through its close reading, the article shows that the use of soft or loving language becomes a tool of control which is very difficult to oppose or resist since it pretends to care. The main female protagonists in the stories "The Yellow Wallpaper", "A Doll's House", and "A Streetcar Named Desire" are not only affected by the overt restrictions imposed upon them but also by the subtle linguistic pressures that repress their desires and decisions.*

Key words: *Discourse and Power, Micro-Manipulation, Soft Speech, Psychological Control, Linguistic Domination.*

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most common themes in literature is the portrayal of power conflicts, which are often associated with physical hits, shouting, or domination acts. For quite some time, literary criticism has been primarily concentrated on these visible and, therefore, louder, more forceful, and more definite signs of power. Literature in discourse analysis, and psychoanalysis argue that a significant number of the most lasting and deeply painful dominating experiences come from the world of subtle, quiet, and seemingly benevolent language (Foucault 94–95; Fairclough 76). Soft speech—polite phrasing, affectionate nicknames, calm directives, and reasonable explanations—is a very good means of control exactly because it looks like a non-threatening one.

Teun A. van Dijk describes manipulation as a "discursive form of social power abuse" whereby speakers change the beliefs, actions, or self-perceptions of others and at the same time conceal their own authority (360). Unlike coercion, manipulation relies on consent which is only staged and not genuinely given. Norman Fairclough, similarly, believes that a person under power is the most successful when the power becomes "naturalized discourse," or language practices which are considered normal, caring, or inevitable. In such discourse, domination becomes a very obscure concept, and it is extremely difficult to resist it.

Academic refer to such acts as micro-manipulation: minor, everyday linguistic acts which influence the behavior, limit the choice, and gradually change the identity of a person (van Dijk 362; Lazar 150). Because these acts are carried out daily and are shown as care or love, they bring what Pierre Bourdieu names symbolic violence, a type of domination which is very often taken for help or concern

This research shows how people use micro-manipulative language to keep one group dominant over another in the most influential texts: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper", Henrik Ibsen's "A Doll's House", and Tennessee Williams's "A Streetcar Named Desire". Using discourse analysis, and psychoanalytic criticism, the paper argues that the employment of soft speech most often attains the controlling power of explicit violence in a much more indelible manner since it alters characters' perception of themselves, their desires, and their moral duties.

1.1 Quiet Authority in "The Yellow Wallpaper"

Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" is a case in point of the subtle, affectionate language used as one of the ways of control. John, by using paternal endearments like "my dear" and "bless her little heart"," asserts medical authority, thus, heaving domination as care, while at the same time, putting his wife down as one who is intellectually and emotionally incapable (Gilman 9–10). Critics make the point that such a calm, rational discourse gradually, and in a very systematic way, strips the narrator of her agency (Treichler 64; Lanser 173).

1.2 Affection and Infantilization in "A Doll's House"

In "A Doll's House", Torvald's affectionate pet names—"my little skylark," "my squirrel"—serve to infantilize Nora and limit her to emotional dependency (Ibsen 1.1). Feminist critics maintain that such language hampers her moral and psychological growth (Moi 232; Templeton 29). This paternal patriarchal discourse treats authority as protection, thus making obedience appear virtuous and resistance as something immoral. As Fairclough points out, power combined with virtue makes domination less visible, which is the case when Nora realizes her delayed internalization of subordination.

1.3 Soft Authority and Volatile Control in "A Streetcar Named Desire"

In "A Streetcar Named Desire", Stanley's control is mainly exercised through his calm, logical speech—"be quiet now," "let's keep things civil"—which, while hiding coercion, discredits emotional expression (Williams 41). The critics see this restraint as one of the forms of masculine dominance that initiates control as a norm and hence, isolates vulnerability (Kolin 112; Savran 59). Stella's submission is a result of being spoken to in a pleasing manner which hides the element of force, thus, revealing how gentle authority can be a facilitator, rather than a deterrent, of violence.

In these three works, the concept of the most influential speech brand, especially that of a soft voice, is quite effectively revealed.

2. Review of Literature

Scholars influenced by Foucault assert that discourse, far from being merely descriptive, plays a constitutive role, in that it actively creates the categories of normality, deviance, and sanity. Johnston's "Discourse as Event: Foucault, Writing, and Literature," among other things, points to discourse as an event that not only determines but also changes meaning and perception and has since become a major theoretical resource in literary analyses of power and interpretation. The work of Arribas-Ayllon on Foucauldian discourse analysis shows, inter alia, that discourse sets the conditions for possibility that regulate the ways in which individuals understand themselves, especially in relation to health and psychological states. Successive psychological studies echo and support this position. Willig's paper on discourse analysis in psychology is a case in point. She argues that the experience of distress can only

be understood through the discourses of normality and illness at issue and it is these discourses that mediate the experience rather than the distress coming from inside the individual.

Psychoanalytic work is rightly seen as complementary in nature, providing a persuasive account of how discursive authority comes to be internalized. Sahibzada's survey of Freud's psychoanalytic approach to literary studies underlines internalization, self-surveillance, and guilt as the major psychological processes through which authority is incessantly working. Among the empirical psychological works, Lester's study of psychological distress stands out in linking the long-term internal conflict and emotional suppression with the development of depressive symptoms thus underlining the significance of psycho-discursive frameworks in literary analysis.

This paper attempts to fill that void by combining Foucauldian discourse analysis with psychoanalytic scholarship to illustrate that linguistic authority in literature is one of the main agents of psychological distress mediation.

3. Objectives

This paper is basically an attempt to explore the way in which little, harmless, seeming ways of talk actually work as mechanisms of domination in literature. The term micro-manipulative speech refers here, among other things, to polite wording, terms of endearment, calm arguments, and emotionally controlled language, and the study therefore looks at how such a manner of speaking is a form of control precisely because it is seen as non, threatening, caring, or reasonable.

It is the thesis of this work that gentle talk can achieve what is barely noticeable violence has failed to do, or even more than that, be the latter's complement, in perpetuating the master and servant relationship as it changes the self, images of the individuals, their wants, and their conscience. Disguising power as love, care, or reason, such speech not only makes domination accepted and normal but also renders resistance difficult or even unthinkable.

Another purpose of the research is to go in depth into the process of linguistic authority that becomes internalized, whereby an external control is transformed into self, regulation, guilt, and psychological restraint. Building the argument from discourse analysis and psychoanalytic criticism, the paper intends to demonstrate how constant exposure to authoritative speech alters the way a person sees himself/herself and thus leads to the deterioration of the psyche, self, doubt, and emotional repression.

By meticulously examining "The Yellow Wallpaper", "A Dolls House", and "A Streetcar Named Desire", the investigation intends to demonstrate that the medical, moral, and emotional discourses though vastly different in form lead to the same effects of subjugation. In the end, the study sets out to prove that language is not only a literary representation tool but is also a real agent that produces domination, a mediator of mental health, and a vehicle of hierarchical power structures maintained in the disguise of care, love, or necessity.

4. Research Methodology

In order to examine the use of soft speech as a method of control, this paper initially sets up a theoretical framework based on discourse theory, and psychoanalytic approaches to power. Instead of seeing language as a neutral means of expressing authority, this framework views speech as an energizing factor which determines subjectivity, makes hierarchy seem natural, and controls behavior.

4.1 Foucauldian Discourse Theory and the Microphysics of Power

Michel Foucault's theory of discourse is power's best friend. It allows us to see how power operates silently through language that is deeply ingrained in our everyday practices. For Foucault, power is always relational and is a sort of creative force i.e. power is not possessed, but rather it is exercised

"from innumerable points". This makes language one of the main places where power is not only exercised but also maintained (History 94).

He argues that contemporary power works through normalization rather than through direct coercion. Foucault, in “Discipline and Punish”, demonstrates how the power of discipline can set up the norms that individuals convert and thus personally apply as well as they use everyday language—that is soft corrections, logical explanations, and comforting words that establish authority as a kind one. Since this discourse is natural and loving, it restricts opposition and hides domination.

Foucault goes on to say that power is the most successful when it controls the inner self, hence creating self-surveillance instead of externally imposed obedience (Discipline 201). This is the way the mechanism works in the literary works that are the subject of this study. In “The Yellow Wallpaper,” John’s scientific language calls the narrator to mistrust her own views and to see medical authority as her own self-judgment (Gilman 10). Torvald’s loving nicknames in “A Doll’s House” help to equate obedience with love, thus influencing Nora’s self-assessment (Ibsen 1.1). Stanley’s composed, logical speech in “A Streetcar Named Desire” paves the way for the establishment of masculine authority and the elimination of emotional expression, thus, discrediting it, before the physical force is used (Williams 41).

4.2 Freudian Psychoanalysis: Internalized Authority, Guilt, and the Psychic Life of Soft Domination

Freud's psychoanalytic theory describes the process by which domination continues through the individual's internal psychological regulation rather than the use of external force. Authority, which is most of the time one of the following: care or morality, is eventually transformed as the superego - the internalized parental voice that controls the ego through guilt and moral pressure (Ego 34-35) - becomes one of the components of the psyche. As authority becomes decreasingly visible, punishment is replaced by guilt as a more effective regulator (Civilization).

This transformation can be seen in all the texts analyzed. In "The Yellow Wallpaper," John’s medical reassurance is taken in by the narrator, resulting in her disregarding her own perceptions (Gilman 10-11). In “A Doll’s House”, Torvald’s loving moral speech motivates Nora to view obedience as a moral quality which she has internalized (Ibsen 1.1). In “A Streetcar Named Desire”, Stella’s explanation of Stanley’s violence is a Freud’s defense mechanism which helps the continuation of the harm by the establishment of the attachment (Williams 81).

Freud’s psychoanalytic model can be seen as a system of ideas on how a quiet speech can conquer a world in a lasting way by changing control of the external authority into internal self-control.

5. Discussion

5.1 Language and Mental Health in Literary Narratives

5.1.1 Quiet Authority, and Psychological Deterioration in *The Yellow Wallpaper*

Within this research, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's “The Yellow Wallpaper” serves as the most clear-cut example of domination that is subtle and institutionally based, showing how the issue of mental health becomes a tool to control when it is communicated in a calm, paternal manner. The work manifests how mental health problems are not solved through care, but are rather handled through interpretation, as the medical logic and the husband's authority combine to subjugate the narrator's mind. The text is a direct confirmation that gentle language and slight manipulation at the level of the individual have psychological damage as their eventual result which is hidden from view by the 'kindly' façade.

Focaultian point of view suggests that the basis of John's control over the situation lies in his being a doctor, which, in turn, enables him to have the final say on what kind of conduct is sick and what is justifiable reaction. The narrator's pain is not refuted but downplayed: "John does not know how much I really suffer. He knows there is no reason to suffer, and that satisfies him." It is medical discourse here that serves as the ultimate epistemic authority, the one that sets limits for emotional states to be taken as true and for mental ones to be seen as pathological.

Nevertheless, this power is wrought via gentler means. John's lampoon— "John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage"—unveils the mechanism of a serious emotional distress downgrade, which is done almost silently, that is without any kind of overt hostility.

Freudian psychoanalysis shows the narrator's slow mental break from a medical perspective when she rationalizes the situation and ends up internalizing John's authority, thus changing the external control into self-regulation. At first, she pathologizes her own feelings: "I'm sure I never used to be so sensitive. I think it is due to this nervous condition" and later she even doubts her intellectual abilities: "It is getting to be a great effort for me to think straight." These instances are illustrations of Freud's idea of authority becoming the superego, a situation in which guilt and self-doubt take the place of external control (Ego 34–35).

The narrator sees the psychological confinement of her mind as a structural issue very clearly when she says: "If a physician of high standing, and one's own husband, assures friends and relatives that there is really nothing the matter with one…what is one to do?" Her question reveals the psychological aftermath of the suppression of the rightful source of knowledge: to seek validation or different interpretation becomes impossible leading to isolation, confusion, and a sense of powerlessness. While acknowledging, "Personally, I disagree with their ideas," she keeps her resistance quiet and powerless.

"It is the same woman, I know, for she is always creeping," shows the consequence of the narrator's silenced psychological distress that has been shaped by a lack of support rather than giving help. The creeping woman stands for the dismantled self that has resulted from years of invalidation, oppression, and internalized control. From the viewpoint of mental health, the breakdown of the narrator is not a sudden loss of reason but rather the logical and foreseeable outcome of prolonged psychological oppression and the deprivation of one's right to decide for oneself.

5.1.2 Affectionate Authority and Gendered Self-Erasure in *A Doll's House*

Henrik Ibsen's "A Doll's House" illustrates how domination is a matter of controlling the victim by love and moral reasoning rather than using force directly. In contrast with "The Yellow Wallpaper", where the authoritative power is institutional and medical, Ibsen's play shows how soft domination is in a marital relationship, demonstrating that love, honor, and protection are the words that are used to regulate identity. Consequently, the play supports the argument of this paper that quiet, reasonable language can still be very powerful and that it can have the effect of subjecting someone to discipline without being noticed.

Power over Torvald Helmer from a Foucauldian point of view is due to his control over moral norms. His indication of "no man would sacrifice his honor for the one he loves" as a justification of the patriarchal values as absolute ones rather than social constructs is the main point of his argument. As Foucault asserts, power is exercised most effectively when norms are seen as something natural and beyond question (History 94). So, Torvald's language does not command; rather, it establishes the moral framework within which Nora is supposed to think and behave.

The authority is also helped by loving and a bit possessive kind of speech. In the case that Torvald tells Nora that she is his "richest treasure" and assures her that "mine, mine alone—completely and utterly," love becomes a new kind of knowledge, which has the power to control, thus making Nora the mere

object of which the worth comes from the fact that it is owned. bell hooks' feminist critique explains that patriarchy most of the time disguises domination as devotion, thereby teaching women to accept control as love. So, the tenderness of Torvald ultimately helps establish the hierarchical system while at the same time it conceals the presence of the system from the view of the user as a form of closeness.

Freudian psychoanalysis can shed light on the reasons why the domination was initially successful. Nora has absorbed Torvald's moral authority, and she controls herself through guilt and the fear of being disapproved of. Her understanding, "You have never loved me. You have only thought it pleasant to be in love with me," signifies the breakdown of this internalized control. As Freud proposes, the change from self-regulation to self-recognition takes place when the external authority that held the moral control loses its power (Ego 34–35).

Nora's awakening is clear when she says, "I must make up my mind which is right—society or I." This announcement is a direct challenge to the moral standards of society and shows how they are used to keeping the same old system of domination alive. She decided to "stand on my own two feet" which means that she no longer accepted the little authority that was hiding under the disguise of love and thus making her dependent.

Moreover, even secret work, which Nora enjoys, "It was like being a man"—actually, it unveils how freedom has been from the cultural perspective aligned with masculinity, and dependence has been feminized. So, her leaving in the end is not about repudiating love but rather repudiating a system where love and morality are the means used to restrict one's agency.

"A Doll's House" is eventually about the fact that domination does not have to be violent to be successful. Torvald's language of love and affection, moralization, and emotional dependence are the ways by which he controls Nora's behavior and at the same time, he seems to be her protector. The play is a confirmation of this paper's main point—the most long-lasting forms of control are the ones that quietly speak loving words rather than use force.

5.1.3 Emotional Rationalization and Quiet Cruelty in *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Tennessee Williams's "A Streetcar Named Desire" is an exploration of soft domination exercised through emotional rationalization. Unlike the previous examples, power in this play is not maintained through institutional authority or explicit moral codes but rather through the normalization of emotional cruelty and the management of intimacy.

From a Foucauldian standpoint, Stanley's power depends on his defining what is real, strong, and legitimate. Blanche is also very determined to prove her own moral righteousness and even says: "Some things are not forgiveable. Deliberate cruelty is not forgiveable… and the one thing in which I have never, ever been guilty." Her argument unravels the very imbalance of power: those who are in control get to redefine cruelty, thus allowing harm to be lessened or even altogether denied. As power is most effective when it controls interpretation rather than the behavior, Foucault agrees with this statement (History 94).

Freudian psychoanalysis is useful in the explanation of the mechanisms that sustain emotional domination through the issues of attachment and regression. For example, her confession "When he comes back, I cry on his lap like a baby" illustrates regression and turning to an old familiar way for help as the moment of coping. Freud's theory implies that this kind of regression enables the mind to escape confrontation by going back to its dependence which in turn converts domination into something comforting (Ego 34–35).

The repeated emotional appeals in the play— "Stella! Stella! Stella for Star!"—made loud and clear using a character's voice, serve the purpose of signaling how for the abuser, intimacy is a kind of

machine that keeps him in control. Besides this, Stanley's power is not maintained by coercion but rather by his emotional weight which helps him attain this end and moves Stella inextricably back to the very same familiar relationship of bondage and rationalization. The soft kind of power which is exercised here does not pretend that there is no evil; it does but consider it as something that can forgive, is natural or necessary.

The play is a demonstration of how emotional normalization can be used to maintain power instead of physical force in the first place. In doing so, the piece sends the message that this kind of quiet control is very much accomplished via rationalization, dependency, and the demand for endurance by way of presenting cruelty as being manageable and attachment as something that cannot be avoided.

5.2 Discursive Control and Normalization

When read sequentially, "The Yellow Wallpaper", "A Doll's House", and "A Streetcar Named Desire" demonstrate that the portrayal of mental health in literature is not an isolated personal situation but rather a result of continuous spoken environments that are influenced by authority. In these stories, the characters' psychological distress is not a result of traumatic events that happened to them individually, but rather it is a consequence of their prolonged exposure to the language that dictates what is reasonable for them to feel, think, and express. The power of authority moves most successfully through speech that is composed, logical, and emotionally regulated, thus, it looks like a friendly approach while at the same time it invalidates other interpretations of the experience in a systematic way.

One thing that all three pieces have in common is their portrayal of language as a source of knowledge. In every story, the speech of the authorities is the factor that decides the limits of understanding; thus, it is the main criterion that judges the correctness of the perception of the world and decides which are logical and which are fallacious, misguided or coming from the mentally unstable. In "The Yellow Wallpaper", the medical discourse depicts the distress as unnecessary and irrational; moral language in "A Doll's House" lays down social obligation and honor as the most natural and unquestionable norms; emotional rationalization in "A Streetcar Named Desire" portrays endurance and forgiveness as characteristics of a mature and stable person. In all these situations, language is not just a means of communication, but a system of regulations that comes before and determines emotional reaction.

Although the three works differ in various other aspects, they all portray similar psychological effects of authority. The characters internalize authoritative language, which results in their self-doubt, cognitive fragmentation, and emotional withdrawal. Their failures are not sudden, rather they are accumulated, caused by long-term internalized regulation, and therefore they do not show open resistance.

This comparative reading argues that power in these pieces is a hidden language which governs and conceals itself from the reader. Domination is presented as care and compliance as reason when done by rational, gentle, or emotionally reassuring speech, thus, psychological suffering turned into language is not only represented, but also, actively, produced by language.

6.Conclusion

This paper claims that characters' linguistic surroundings influence the way literature depicts mental health. It uses Foucault and Freud as theoretical perspectives to argue that power is biggest when it is done through a mild, rational, or emotionally controlled discourse, which changes direct coercion to rules of reason, sanity, and propriety that become internalized forms of self-control. Continuously hearing such language takes away one's individuality and limits what suffering can signify. A comparative analysis of "The Yellow Wallpaper," "A Doll's House", and "A Streetcar Named Desire" shows that although medical, moral, and emotional authorities differ in form, their psychological effects, however, converge. Language leads to perception even before action; thus, self-doubt,

repression, and rationalization are brought about enabling one to see breakdown as something gradual rather than sudden and dominating as something that is still there but under the guise of care or necessity. By bringing language to the fore as a mediator between power and mental health, this research recognizes the importance of language in power debates within literary studies, psychology, and discourse theory. It puts an emphasis on the fact that daily "neutral" or caring speech can be the main location of psychological harm rather than a source of healing.

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH CULTURE SOCIETY ISSN: 2456-6683
Monthly Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed Journal [Impact Factor: 9.241]
Volume - 09, Special Issue - 43, December - 2025 Publication Date: 31/12/2025

DOIs:10.2017/IJRCS/ICNMHTGLL-2025/P03 --:-- Research Paper / Article / Review

A Two Day International Conference on Navigating Mental Health Through the Gateway of Language and Literature. (ICNMHTGLL-2025) Date: 22 - 23 December, 2025

Luminescence of the Inner Lamp: A Study of Identity Formation and Psychological Healing in Banu Mushtaq's *Heart Lamp*

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Abstract: *Literature has always been considered as the rhythm of life by many people around the world. The kind of respite it has given to the people around the world by becoming the driving force to growth, the Eros. These days, literature has become interdisciplinary, coalescing different areas, particularly psychology, with the sole intention of digging at the heart of the usage 'way of life', to study comprehensively. Banu Mushtaq, the well renowned writer from Karnataka, India, has augmented the stature of India in the World, by winning the International Booker Prize 2025 for Heart Lamp, which remarkably is the aggregate of her experience as a woman writer coming from an Orthodox Muslim family. The 12 stories, published between 1990 to 2023 have echoes of her as a writer, journalist, and lawyer. The lives that the author encountered are narratively articulated and also echoes the representations of the psyche of the people across three decades. This study focuses on the way the work modulates the mind of the readers, to closely analyse the people we meet in our daily lives and to delve deeper into the complexities of human lives to understand the vulnerabilities. The study will also provide insight into how Mushtaq stands as a representative of that bunch of writers who contemplate literature to be the mirror that is held against the society and the lives of common people. The power of literature intensifies once we interweave its soul with the reality of the lives and minds of the people who embody everyday reality.*

Key Words: *Trauma, Psychology, Identity, Assertion, Resilience, Culture, Self-discovery.*

1. INTRODUCTION: Literature has always been considered as the rhythm of life by many people around the world. The kind of respite it has given to the people around the world by becoming the driving force to growth, Eros. These days, literature has become interdisciplinary, coalescing different areas, particularly psychology, with the sole intention of digging at the heart of the usage 'way of life', to study comprehensively. Banu Mushtaq, the well renowned writer from Karnataka, India, has augmented the stature of India in the World, by winning the International Booker Prize 2025 for *Heart*

Lamp, which remarkably is the aggregate of her experience as a woman writer coming from an Orthodox Muslim family. The 12 stories, published between 1990 to 2023, have echoes of her as a writer, journalist, and lawyer. The lives that the author encountered are narratively articulated and echoes the representations of the psyche of the people across three decades. When Banu Mushtaq won the Booker Prize, the prestigious literary award, for her Heart Lamp, translated by Deepa Bhasthi, she was acclaimed for taking regional Indian literature to the international platform.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW: Literature is now focussing on an interdisciplinary approach. Though many approaches have been made about psychoanalysis and literature. Sigmund Freud has put forward many concepts of repression, unconscious etc and talked extensively about the unresolved psychic traumas and conflicts. Later on, Carl Jung and Lacan expanded the theories put forward by Freud. Recent studies have shifted from traditional psychoanalysis to considering psyche as a social construct, exclusively shaped by the family structures and social rules. Feminist Psychoanalysis, particularly talk about women's mental health in literature from all over the world is made through themes of restriction, physical and emotional labour etc. Despite all the theories, limited attention has been given to the socio-cultural and religious aspects from the perspective of a woman writer who lives in the same experience. The study is based on all these critical conversations.

3. OBJECTIVES : Primary objective is to examine the demonstration of mental health and psychological distress in the *Heart Lamp* by Banu Mushtaq focussing on the characters. Also to follow the emotional stability in their lives and to explore institutionalized restrictions also to analyse the role of religion in the life of the characters.

4. DISCUSSION : The collection, which is heartwrenching stories of the Muslim women from southern India, spans over three decades. According to Benson, "To know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand. My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I can take a stand" (62). Literature is about making one understand about their stand and know more about the collective life and the shared psychic landscapes. As far as Mushtaq is concerned, her roles as woman, writer, lawyer and journalist have helped her in shaping the work as it is today. The life of mushtaq as a member of Muslim community and started off her education by hearing the Quran at her heart. Her own life as a Muslim woman coming from an orthodox family background, who after marriage, gets limited to one room and her yearning to write more, contemplating being and gets herself tagged as a woman enduring emotional struggles following childbirth. Postpartum depression coupled with other affective states has made her find solace in the ultimate escape from all the sensations, death. But she rebounded with full energy and started to pay attention to muffled voices. She became associated with the Bandaya Movement, which addressed social injustice through literature. Her role as a journalist dug up many obscured stories and wrote unwaveringly about them. She has faced fatwa and murder attempts when she has started to write without any boundaries. The life and experiences of Mushtaq has indeed helped her in shaping her perspectives and guided her to shed light on the lives of people whom she has encountered throughout the span of 30 years. That time has witnessed a considerable amount of favourable and unfavourable efforts. The power of literature intensifies once we interweave its soul with the reality of the lives and minds of the people who embody everyday reality. According to Moghadam:

> Literature is written about human experiences and often depicts the private and public lives of individuals and groups. The human experiences explored in literature, and the aspects of lives described, are often very similar to those that are of central concern for psychologists. Moreover, literature 'reports' on human experiences in different historical eras and societies. Through these 'reports', comparisons could be made within time across societies, and across time within societies. Such strategies would presumably lead to the identification of etic, universal or near universal, and emic, local, characteristics of human behavior. (507)

Embodied existence is the aggregate of the experiences that one goes through over the course of life. Mushtaq wrote for thirty years, because she was covering the lives of the people from three decades, watching and witnessing how lives evolved throughout these times. The power of literature lies in the fact that through the words of one author, the world was able to witness the lives of several people, predominantly women, whose life is hemmed in the clutches of the strict doctrines of the society. Their lives are analysed through a critical lens and shown to the world to apprehend. The work also devotes major attention to the distribution of power and the means through which different structural determinants and societal systems operate in conjunction to produce not only disparity and deprivation but entitlement and benefit also. This is predicated on social positioning and situated identity. The primary objective is to evaluate the identity of women around the world and the stratified forms of injustice they grapple with and also to investigate how it occurs and why it persists.

The Muslim women characters that are portrayed by Mushtaq are the victims of intersectionality. Much of their plight comes from the mixture or the overlapping of gender, class, disability and sexuality. Here, religious dogmas also act as a driving force that leads these women towards helplessness. All the systems of power, be it religion or anything else, cannot be studied or understood in isolation, but everything is interconnected and to have a comprehensive understanding of the prevailing situation, one must read everything by keeping everything side by side. The life of Shaista, the woman who fulfilled every aspect of being a compliant wife as the society has bestowed upon her, only to melt into nothingness, without leaving any evidence of her individual existence except the children she produces to continue the generational lineage. She is portrayed through the eyes of Zeenat, another character, who gets dumbfounded when she thinks about the former, in the shadow of annihilation and loss of self. The moment when Zeenath's husband Mujahid points that, "If your mother dies, it is the death of your mother's love too. You will not get that kind of love from anyone else. Huh. But if the wife dies, it is a different matter, because one can get another wife" (13), she is alarmed that it might be a prelude to the impending boom. The character Zeenath, when she questions the immediate remarriage of Shaista's husband upon her death, demonstrates the patriarchal control ingrained in the sacred and the customary. The way in which the rigid rules confiscate the free will and flexibility of women. This reflects the structural inequality that points that a woman's experience is shaped not only by gender but also by several factors like religion and social conventions. The law that a Muslim man can remarry immediately after his wife's death or a valid divorce, provided he adheres to the rule of polygamy, which limits him to a maximum of four wives at a time and requires him to treat all wives equally. The loss of identity of Shaista, whose death creates a mood of wistfulness or kind of regret in Zeenat. "They view 'The Marriage' to be more important than the two individuals, as is perhaps reflected in the denial of completeness and individuality of each person through the common use of terms such as 'other half' and 'better half'. Implicit within this is that there should be adjustment and sacrifice by each person for the sake of marriage. However, what I have come to realize is that a far greater adjustment and sacrifice is anticipated on the part of the woman compared to the man" (Choi and Bird 450). The death of one woman made the other realize about the fate of her too, helplessly yielding to the boundaries drawn by the society as well as her struggles to become a perfect wife. Mushtaq draws the idea of realization here that if we don't come out of the pattern, there are chances for us to get caught in the infinite loop and lose our lives for a lifetime and again let our followers follow the same. The characters here are urging the readers to change the course.

Another character college mutawalli, the religious patron, who is the president of the masjid committee, gets so into exhuming the body of a Muslim who accidentally got buried in a Hindu cemetery. He was willing to invest heavily in the process despite the fact that his wife was relentlessly struggling with their ill son and his sisters were making desperate appeals for their rightful inheritance. The claws of patriarchal dominance and religion-based cultural expectations go hand in hand to subjugate Muslim women., preying on their ignorance. "He knew that the money to be spent was nothing compared to the popularity and support he would get because of this. It was also in keeping with his status as a mutawalli to say such things. Where would the money go, after all?" (33). Even after everyone who is badly in need to get the share for the smooth functioning of their lives, like

medical issues, educational necessities of children, he is totally deaf to their sufferings. The excessive inclination towards power and money blinds and does things without consulting anybody and anyone.

At another instance Mushtaq gives us the contradictions also, one woman, Aashraf, who constantly begs for the rightful support from her husband for their daughter Munni's treatment, eventually losing the life of her daughter from her husband itself to mutavalli's wife who asserts about her right to do operation to stop pregnancy after having seven children. "Where else to?' she exploded. 'I have given you seven already. At least now I am going to get an operation done"(56). When Mehboob Bi, from the point of view of a window Muslim woman, takes the stand to have a second marriage:

"Yes, I am getting married. It isn't wrong, is it? I am not ruining anyone's house, am I? You should all be happy. My son is taking the lead and doing this with pride and love. He is making all the arrangements as if I were a young virgin bride. That is my good fortune. There is no need for you all to come and ask about this, and there is no need for us to answer either. For other things we need you and the jama'at; we will never reject the community. So please come to my nikah tomorrow morning. That is enough."(76)

She represents the strength that questions the supremacy of the powerful intersectionality of class and gender. Another character Mehrun, who decides to commit suicide to get away from the memories of a forced marriage, lost education, the betrayal of her husband and the plight of raising five children on her own, has evidently faced the harsh side of patriarchy. Despite her decision to take her own life, she melts when her daughter Salma questions her decision and makes her realise her worth. The fate of the women is outwardly in the hands of some regulatory frameworks, out of which no formal thinking works or decisions can be taken voluntarily. The rights that are being taken away by these normative frameworks are the intrinsic rights. The right to have education, the right to bodily integrity, to work, everything has been snatched from them.

Mushtaq often mixes a sting of dark humour in the work. She ends the work with a witty remark "If you were to build the world again, to create males and females again, do not be like an inexperienced potter. Come to earth as a woman, Prabhu! Be a woman once, oh Lord!"(189). The most rigid clutches of injustice come from the domestic realm, as far as the women are concerned. This can be seen throughout the collection. The plight of a woman, especially a mother who is supposed to take care of their children, considering it as the duty that is intrinsically etched in her system. The aggregation of all forms of systemic powerhouse creates a firm grip in the decision-making power of women. Be it the decision to take care of her health, the decision not to have babies, decision to remarry, decision to work, everything has been looked upon by the power-wielding systems, either for their private advantages or due to the fear of the repercussions of religious, political and societal dogmas.

Literature, writing is a liberation from the aching interior. Instead of directly talking in public about the lives that the writer has encountered in her lifetime, she chooses to write because it reaches many people in a way that touches millions of lives. To make people understand about the realities of life that life is not the same for everybody and the way in which life serves everybody is not the same for everyone. When in one instance when the pregnant wife is forced by her husband to wear high heels despite her pain and inconvenience, it stands as one poignant reminder of physical and emotional pain she had to endure. The child in her womb itself speaks for the plight of the mother, as the author says.

The lamp, according to the writer, is not a physical one but rather its the internal one. The emotional endurance of the characters, predominantly female characters, is reflected here. Even though emotionally drained and sometimes constantly silenced by patriarchal ideologies, they carry the glow very closely. Before Psychoanalysis, human behavior, desire, the state of mind, everything was explained predominantly in religious or moral angles. Repression was viewed as a virtue that is complete obedience to God. The question of repression which is seen as a virtue or self-control, and she questions the society by asking about the heavily patriarchal and religious framework and realise that it exerts an influence on women rather than men and while thinking about desires, opinion and impulses are universal and it is rendered invisible through normalization. For example, the family religion and the norms that are being forced upon the individual by these institutions kind of suppress all the

emotions which gradually result in the extreme forms of hysteria and anxiety. Going through the lives of the people that are being portrayed by the author in this novel we see that all the given characters undergo a certain kind of dilemma and most of them are associated with desires. The writer is trying to remove the moral blame that is being placed on women and is trying to bring about the real strong side of women through this work. For example, when a character wants to have abortion which is considered as a sin even though the health of the women is alarming. Mushtaq is standing here as an outsider or a representative, thinking how the patriarchal norms produce psychological suffering. All the women characters that we encounter in the work are either way yearning for a desire to dismantle patriarchy; they consider this desire as a psychological force rather than a moral issue. Some of them want to live a peaceful life; some want to be seen; some of them want to be loved; someone to explore pleasure; someone to take decisions on sexuality. Some want to have autonomy on whether to have or not to have a baby to have the right to speak, to choose and to decide and for justice. In this work by Banu Mushtaq, it appears as different forms like emotional, intellectual, ethical and the entire religious institutions and the other institutionalized forces are trying to reduce desires into silence; for hysteria and something like that. According to Dussel:

> In the first phase of psychosocial development, one can group the stories of women who denounce the violation of individual rights for persons tortured physically, psychologically and emotionally. These indictments are an important first step, because they acknowledge and make explicit the type of evil and unjust actions committed against individuals, and identify directly the agent who promotes the actions. They typically portray the relation between tortured and torturer subjectively; usually the narrator was personally involved. In this phase, the stories express the actuality of the phenomena on a microsocial level, not yet linked to their more hidden aspects and root causes. (29)

This has happened to the writing of Mushtaq also. What was initially perceived to be a simple experience of their lives, later emerged to be the pervasive suffering across different social classes. Thus, literature emerges not merely as a reflection of in a life but a critical site where desire, trauma everything are negotiated and made discursively available by converting the private conflicts into the narrative forms literary text trying to expose the working of the human psyche and at the same time revealing how the individual is subjected to the institutionalized forces. This kind of engagement tries to explore the psychological experience that is never completely internal, but it is mediated through language and structure. This study analyses the capacity of literature to analyze and to talk against the dominant modes of human psyche so this work is a psychological enquiry and an important tour to explore the human mind's intricate workings and the deep-seated urge for freedom and autonomy.

8. CONCLUSION :

Through this study, it became evident that literature, rather than being merely a casual academic discipline, stands as a strong space where human lives can be studied and interpreted. This is not only from a single point of view but from a postmodern perspective also; it allows us to reflect on the ways in which lives have developed and how historically silenced groups, predominantly the subaltern and the marginalized, have slowly found their voices. In this way, literature acts as a mirror held up to society, creating a way for a more open and coherent engagement with the realities and struggles people experience, especially during their daily, regular lives. Therefore, this study focuses on how literature develops such spaces of expression and how it contributes to bringing forward the mental and social awakening of many voices that have long been sidelined. The work has reached a large number of readers and has thereby created an international impact. To be able to mirror the harsh realities of human life, regardless of where they belong, is truly a matter of social empowerment. As the study detailed the reach of the book, one cannot ignore the contribution of the translator Deepa Bhasthi, who is a writer and translator from India, who went on to become the first translator from India to win the International Booker Prize. Despite being from two different cultural backgrounds, both the author and the translator were able to do full justice to the work. Bhasthi herself has noted how responsible she felt while taking

up the task of translation, giving full justice to the lives involved in it. To be short, that is the beauty of writing. The work indeed lighted up the consciousness of many people, without any cultural or religious boundaries.

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH CULTURE SOCIETY ISSN: 2456-6683
Monthly Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed Journal [Impact Factor: 9.241]
Volume - 09, Special Issue - 43, December - 2025 Publication Date: 31/12/2025

DOIs:10.2017/IJRCS/ICNMHTGLL-2025/P04 --:-- Research Paper / Article / Review

A Two Day International Conference on Navigating Mental Health Through the Gateway of Language and Literature. (ICNMHTGLL-2025) Date: 22 - 23 December, 2025

The Unhomely Home: Exploring the Psycho-Spatial Uncanniness in Netflix's *The Haunting of Hill House*

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Abstract: *This study examines the interplay of architecture, trauma, and atmosphere in Netflix's The Haunting of Hill House (2018), uncovering how domestic space becomes a site where psychological distress and spatial design intersect and reinforce each other. This relationship is significant because it shows that the architecture of the house does not merely contain trauma but actively produces and amplifies it. Situating the series within the Gothic tradition allows the analysis to trace how a contemporary televisual medium reworks a literary form, extending and transforming the atmospheric tensions central to Shirley Jackson's novel. Unlike conventional Gothic narratives, where supernatural entities operate independently, the "Hill House" itself functions as the primary source of terror, manifested most prominently through its manipulation of perception, memory, and intimate spaces across the Crain family's experiences.*

Drawing on Sigmund Freud's theory of the uncanny and Gaston Bachelard's topoanalysis of intimate space, the study employs a qualitative, interpretive approach to analyse repetition, doubling, liminality, and estrangement—key mechanisms through which spatial and psychological disturbances unfold in the series. The study argues that The Haunting of Hill House reimagines haunted domesticity by portraying the home as a sentient entity that produces, manipulates, and consumes trauma, thus establishing architecture as the primary source of horror rather than individual spectres, and contributing to what this study conceptualises as psycho-spatial uncanniness.

Key Words: *The Haunting of Hill House, Gothic television, psycho-spatial uncanniness, Freudian uncanny, topoanalysis*

1. INTRODUCTION:

The haunted house remains one of the most enduring motifs in Gothic literature and visual culture, transforming the familiar realm of domestic architecture into a site of estrangement, instability, and fear. Within this tradition, architecture functions as more than a mere backdrop, rather it becomes an active agent of horror, embodying psychological anxieties, unresolved trauma, and the fragmentation of subjectivity. Mike Flanagan's 2018 Netflix adaptation of *The Haunting of the Hill House* extends this Gothic tradition into a mini television series that weaves together transgenerational trauma, psychological instability, and the uncanny potential of domestic space. The show incorporates contemporary cinematic techniques like nonlinear temporality, mise-en-scène, atmospheric cinematography, and affective sound design (Mullen 121; Smuts 8–12).

While Shirley Jackson's 1959 novel *The Haunting of Hill House* foregrounds psychological ambiguity, leaving readers uncertain whether the house is truly haunted or whether Eleanor's fragile psyche projects terror, Flanagan's series diverges notably from this premise. Instead of focusing on a single protagonist's unreliable perception, the adaptation develops an ensemble narrative that interweaves transgenerational trauma, grief, and family dynamics directly into the architecture. The

series moves away from Jackson's unresolved ambiguity, portraying the house as an active, sovereign force that consumes both the living and the dead. This transformation shifts the story from a psychological Gothic novel into a televisual exploration of trauma, memory, and spatial estrangement, positioning Flanagan's *The Haunting of Hill House* not as a retelling but as a reimagining (Bubble Pictures Studio). This study explores how the architecture of the "Hill House" mediates the psychological experience of trauma and uncanniness for its inhabitants, and how Flanagan's adaptation of *The Haunting of Hill House* extends Gothic conventions through cinematic techniques that manipulate time, space, and narrative.

This study conceptualises this phenomenon as **psycho-spatial uncanniness**, a term that captures the intersection of architecture, psychological unease, and estrangement. Psycho-spatial uncanniness refers to the experience in which domestic spaces by themselves evoke fear and disorientation without the agency of an external ghost, embedding trauma and memory into the material and perceptual environment. This study draws on Sigmund Freud's concept of the uncanny (*Das Unheimliche*), which emphasizes how repressed fears, repetition, and doubling resurface within familiar settings to unsettle both characters and viewers (Freud 124), and Gaston Bachelard's topoanalysis of intimate space (*The Poetics of Space*), which theorizes the house as a lived, imaginative space, where memory, emotion, and spatial experience converge to produce emotional resonance (Bachelard 6–10). By combining these frameworks, the analysis treats the "Hill House" as both a haunted and haunting entity, illustrating how spatial design and narrative structure converge to produce psycho-spatial estrangement.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Ljubica Matek, in "The Architecture of Evil: H. P. Lovecraft's 'The Dreams in the Witch House' and Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*," emphasizes how warped geometries, distorted proportions, and labyrinthine designs destabilize perception, making the house itself a source of unease rather than simply a container for ghostly activity (Matek 161–63). Marine Galiné similarly examines threshold spaces in the series, arguing that doorways, hallways, and transitional domestic zones act as liminal sites that manipulate perception and unsettle viewers, producing both disorientation and heightened affective response (Galiné 45–62). While Matek's focus is literary and Galiné's architectural, Mike Flanagan's Netflix adaptation extends these insights into the televisual realm, showing rather than describing architectural estrangement through fluid tracking shots, recursive editing, and a mise-en-scène that turns domestic interiors into sites of disorientation. In Flanagan's adaptation, the architecture is not merely haunted; rather it haunts the narrative.

This centrality of the house distinguishes the series from more conventional Gothic narratives. In most mainstream horror, the true agents of terror are supernatural entities who inhabit or manipulate the space. The house is merely a vessel, a stage upon which spectral dramas unfold. For instance, in *The Conjuring* series, horror derives from a demonic presence that temporarily occupies a family home, leaving the architecture itself largely passive. Similarly, the Indian horror film *Pizza* (2014) portrays a haunted house where the ghosts terrify, but the structure lacks autonomy. Even Flanagan's own follow-up in The Haunting anthology, *The Haunting of Bly Manor* (2020), returns to this model where the Lady of the Lake directs the haunting and imprisons the souls of others. In contrast, *The Haunting of Hill House* breaks this narrative. The architecture and the haunting are one and the same (Smuts 8–12). The "Hill House" is not a container but a sovereign entity that generates, manipulates, and consumes trauma.

What sets the "Hill House" apart is that even the ghosts of its former residents are themselves entrapped by the house. The spirits do not direct the haunting but are caught in its orbit, unable to leave as the structure feeds on their presence and pain. This mechanism radically differs from most haunted house narratives. The "Hill House" is not controlled by ghosts but rather consumes them as it consumes the living. Chiara Grizzaffi and Giulia Scomazzon in their study argue that Gothic homes in screen narratives visualize trauma through repetition, doubling, and architectural entrapment, particularly in relation to women's roles within domestic space. In Flanagan's series, Olivia's psychological

breakdown and Nell's fate epitomize this entanglement between trauma and architecture (Grizzaffi and Scomazzon 35–38). Yet Flanagan expands this beyond a strictly gendered frame where the entire Crain family's identities fracture under the weight of the "Hill House," suggesting that trauma is not only gendered but also transgenerational and spatially encoded.

It is also notable that, in most horror films, the narrative arc often hinges on the trope of return of families or individuals revisiting the haunted house after their escape from the supernatural threat. This structure reinforces the idea that the haunting is external to the architecture, with the house serving as a vessel for spirits rather than as the source of terror itself. For example, films like *The Conjuring* (2013) follow the pattern of characters leaving the haunted space only to later return, suggesting that their fear is tied to the ghostly entity rather than to the home.

This narrative divergence underscores the Hill House's unique role in Gothic tradition where it is not just a backdrop for spirits but the very source of terror, a site that exerts control even in absence ensuring that its grip on the Crains remains unbroken across time. The "Hill House" thus operates as a sovereign entity, consuming both the living and the dead (Lawson). The cumulative effect of its architecture, atmosphere, and narrative design transforms the familiar domestic into the uncanny, rendering the home itself the ultimate agent of horror (Smuts 8–12).

3. AIMS:

This study aims to examine how *The Haunting of Hill House* (2018) represents domestic architecture and atmosphere as central mechanisms in the production of uncanniness by integrating Sigmund Freud's theory of the uncanny and Gaston Bachelard's concept of topoanalysis. Rather than treating the house as a passive backdrop for supernatural activity, the study investigates how spatial design, repetition, and temporal distortion transform the domestic interior into an active source of psychological and emotional horror. By focusing on intimate domestic spaces such as bedrooms, hallways, staircases, and the Red Room, the study explores how memory, trauma, and desire become spatially encoded within the architecture of the "Hill House." Finally, the study seeks to assess how Mike Flanagan's adaptation reworks Gothic conventions for a contemporary televisual medium, extending the haunted house tradition by foregrounding architecture itself as the primary agent of horror and estrangement for a mainstream audience. Thus, the study seeks to examine how Netflix's *The Haunting of Hill House* generates psycho-spatial uncanniness and explore the insights that emerge from combining Freud's theory of the uncanny with Bachelard's topoanalysis of intimate space in analysing the series.

4.METHODOLOGY:

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive methodology that combines thematic analysis and semiotic reading to examine how *The Haunting of Hill House* produces psycho-spatial uncanniness through domestic architecture and narrative design. The study incorporates Catherine Belsey's approach to thematic analysis, identifying recurring motifs such as repetition, doubling, liminality, and spatial confinement throughout the series. Semiotic analysis is used to interpret architectural spaces, artifacts, and visual elements as meaning-producing factors rather than passive landscapes. Furthermore, the study selectively applies concepts from Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis to examine how dialogue and narrative framing articulate trauma, authority, and memory within the family structure. Together, these methods enable a close, theory-driven reading of space, narrative, and affect in a Gothic televisual work.

5. ANALYSIS:

5.1 Significance of the Red Room

The Red Room in *The Haunting of Hill House* operates as the psycho-spatial and narrative core of the series, exemplifying both Freud's theory of the uncanny and Bachelard's topoanalytic insights into intimate spaces. In **Episode 1, "Steven Sees a Ghost,"** the Red Room is locked and inaccessible despite multiple attempts at trying to open the door with every know key, immediately signalling that

it is beyond the family's control. This inaccessibility reflects the house's autonomy and explicitly stating that the "Hill House" exists as a living, sentient entity whose influence over its residents precedes their understanding or agency. Freud's concept of the uncanny helps explain why this locked, hidden space evokes unease (Freud 124–27). According to Freud, the uncanny arises when something familiar becomes strange, alien, or threatening. The Red Room embodies this duality perfectly: it is a domestic space, intimately familiar to the Crains, yet its inaccessibility and mutable nature immediately create a sense of disorientation, anxiety and dread. The locked door also symbolizes the suppression of trauma and fear; the family cannot access it consciously yet it exerts a psychological pull, foreshadowing how unresolved grief and memory will resurface throughout their lives.

As the series progresses, the Red Room's transformative nature becomes apparent, particularly in **Episodes 5 ("The Bent-Neck Lady")** and **6 ("Two Storms")**. The room no longer remains a static locked space instead it manifests according to each family member's unconscious desires and needs. For Luke and Nell, it becomes a treehouse, a symbol of childlike refuge and play, for Theo it appears as a dance room reflecting her need for freedom, expression and tactile intimacy, Olivia perceives it as a library representing intellectual authority and her desire to impose order on the household and Steven experiences it as a game room reflecting his need for distraction and control through performance and storytelling. These individualized forms align closely with Gaston Bachelard's theory of intimate spaces, which posits that corners, attics, closets and other domestic spaces serve as repositories of memory, imagination and desire shaping subjective experience in ways both protective and threatening (Bachelard 6–10).

However, the crucial narrative and psychological twist is revealed later that none of these personalized rooms exist independently. The "Hill House" itself constructs these forms to manipulate its inhabitants offering comfort and gratification as a lure while simultaneously feeding off their emotional energy. The Red Room thus functions as a trap, a space that externalizes the family's deepest desires and simultaneously converts them into mechanisms of control. This manipulation amplifies the uncanny and aligning it with Freud's assertion that what is most deeply repressed or familiar can return in a threatening form (Freud 124–27). Like the Crains, the audience experiences a tension between recognition and estrangement. The Red Room is comforting in its apparent familiarity, yet horrifying in its impossibility and coercive power.

The Red Room's ultimate power is realized in the series' climax, **Episode 10, "Silence Lay Steadily."** Here, it transforms into a tea room, a seemingly ordinary domestic space, to manipulate the family further. Through Olivia's lingering spirit, the house attempts to orchestrate the deaths of its remaining inhabitants using the room as a conduit for both psychological and literal control. The combination of the room's mutable forms, the family's emotional attachment, and its omnipresent influence illustrates how the uncanny and intimate dimensions of space are inseparable. Bachelard's framework shows that spaces we consider intimate, spaces that seem to belong to us can simultaneously shelter and imprison us mediating memory, desire, and trauma (Bachelard 6–10). Freud's theory complements this by suggesting that the uncanny arises not only from supernatural events but from the destabilization of what should be familiar, safe, and known (Freud 124–27).

5.2 Haunting of the Bent-Neck Lady

The Bent-Neck Lady haunting of Nell Crain represents one of the most profound and psychologically layered examples of uncanniness in *The Haunting of Hill House*. This haunting is uncanny not merely because it involves a spectral figure but because it embodies temporal collapse, repression and the internalization of trauma. In Nell's case, the Bent-Neck Lady is both herself and an externalized horror producing a paradoxical recognition where she confronts a figure that is intimately known as her own body and fate yet is utterly alien. The repetition of encounters throughout her life, from childhood to adulthood, heightens this effect of the uncanny creating a persistent tension between the known and the unknowable.

The "Hill House" functions as the primary entity orchestrating this haunting rather than an independent ghost. From the earliest episodes, it is clear that the house manipulates perception, memory and space to trap its residents psychologically. The Bent-Neck Lady emerges not from independent vengeance or past trauma but from the house's manipulative architecture and psychic influence. For instance, the Bent-Neck Lady manifests in terrifying ways like falling from the ceiling or hovering over young Nell as she sleeps and transcends not only temporal boundaries but also the physical space of the "Hill House". These moments illustrate how the house exploits both time and space to exert control, trapping Nell in a continuous loop of psychological and physical terror. The uncanny emerges here in the Freudian sense, as what should be familiar i.e. her own home, her own bedroom, even her own body becomes alien, threatening, and inescapable (Freud 124–27). Simultaneously, Bachelard's notion of intimate spaces is evident. The house's familiar rooms, hallways, and corners, spaces typically associated with safety are transformed into containers of dread, memory, and desire, reinforcing the sensation of entrapment and the inseparability of spatial and psychological horror (Bachelard 6–10). The house folds Nell's experiences, fears, and desires into a cycle of terror. The corridors, staircases and her own bedroom are rendered uncanny by the interplay of expectation and distortion, ensuring that her haunting is inseparable from the physical and emotional environment of the "Hill House". Even after leaving the house, its psychological grip persists, shaping Nell's perception and haunting her life narrative.

The recurrence of the Bent-Neck Lady is particularly significant in Nell's adulthood. After leaving the "Hill House," Nell continues to experience the ghostly figure, demonstrating that the house's influence is not geographically bound but temporally persistent. Episodes referencing her adult life including subtle hallucinations and sleep paralysis show how the Bent-Neck Lady intrudes upon her later years. Sleep paralysis as depicted in **Episode 7, "Eulogy,"** operates as a corporeal manifestation of the house's power where Nell's body becomes a site where the "Hill House" enforces control, trapping her consciousness in a liminal state between wakefulness and dream. These episodes of paralysis reflect a classic Gothic strategy in which the uncanny is embodied making the horror both psychological and somatic.

The death of her husband, as recounted in the series' later episodes, compounds this cycle of trauma and reinforces the house's manipulative power. The "Hill House" uses grief, desire and memory as tools of entrapment ensuring that Nell remains psychologically tethered. Her adult experiences with the Bent-Neck Lady lead her inexorably back to the "Hill House" culminating in the climactic events of **Episode 10, "Silence Lay Steadily,"** where she succumbs to the house's influence. Here, the uncanny reaches its apex as the space that she had internalized as threatening and intimate, the Red Room and other parts of the "Hill House," become the site of her ultimate death. In this sense the haunting is cyclical and self-reinforcing showcasing Nell's perception, memory and body are continually exploited, demonstrating that the house itself is the active agent of horror instead of the Bent-Neck Lady having autonomy in the hauntings.

Bachelard's topoanalysis provides further insights into why the Bent-Neck Lady haunting is so psychologically resonant. The intimate spaces of the "Hill House", the hallways, bedrooms, and staircases serve as containers for trauma, memory, and fear (Bachelard 6–10). The house transforms these spaces, which are ordinarily associated with safety and domesticity into sites of terror. Nell's experiences with the Bent-Neck Lady in these spaces highlight the dual function of intimate architecture where it can shelter and nurture but also imprison, manipulate and distort perception. The uncanny horror emerges precisely because the spaces are familiar, intimately linked to her family and childhood, yet continuously alienated and controlled by the house.

5.3 Manipulation of Time and Space in "Two Storms"

Episode 6, "Two Storms," offers one of the most visually and narratively compelling demonstrations of the Hill House's agency as the primary haunting entity. During a violent storm, young Nell goes missing within the house, initiating a sequence that reveals how the house manipulates space,

time and perception to entrap its residents. As Hugh searches for her, the house exerts direct control over the environment as the windows shatter spontaneously and corridors shift. Olivia's spectral presence appears in impossible positions such as standing before a broken image that is both terrifying and disorienting. These occurrences emphasize that the "Hill House" does not merely house ghosts but actively orchestrates the Crains' fear, manipulating both the physical environment and the family's perceptions.

Nell's disappearance and subsequent revelation that she had been standing in the hall and calling for her family the entire time, but they were unable to see or hear her, illustrates the house's temporal manipulation. *The Haunting of Hill House* transcends linear narrative folding past and present, presence and absence, into a single, disorienting experience. This aligns with Freud's concept of the uncanny, where the Crains' own home and family returns in alien and threatening forms destabilizing perception and generating profound psychological unease (Freud 124–27). For the viewers, the uncanny emerges not just from visual horror but from the narrative collapse of time and memory as the house renders Nell simultaneously present and unreachable.

Bachelard's topoanalysis also illuminates the horror in this sequence. Spaces typically associated with safety become vessels for trauma and psychic manipulation (Bachelard 6–10). The house transforms the domestic into a site of entrapment. Nell's bedrooms, corridors, and living spaces are no longer passive; they actively participate in her isolation and terror, reinforcing the sense that the house itself is sentient and malevolent. When Hugh experiences Olivia's apparition against the shattering window, the familiar domestic frame becomes a locus of horror, blending memory, grief, and supernatural intrusion. The house uses intimate spaces to amplify fear, demonstrating that the Crains are trapped not only physically but also psychologically and are unable to escape the house's influence.

Moreover, this episode illustrates Hill House's persistent pull on the Crains. The haunting is not confined to childhood but continues to call them back as it psychologically tethers them to unresolved trauma. Nell's inability to reach them despite her calls exemplifies how the house mediates experience across perception, time, and narrative as it ensures that trauma remains unprocessed, generating cycles of fear, guilt, and grief that echo through the family's life. In this way, **"Two Storms"** reveals the house's dual role as both spatial and psychological antagonist consolidating its position as the ultimate entity of haunting.

5.4 Olivia Crain's Descent into Horror

Olivia Crain's trajectory in *The Haunting of Hill House* offers a compelling example of how the "Hill House" itself functions as the primary agent of psychological manipulation and horror, transcending the presence of individual ghosts. From her arrival, Olivia is targeted by Poppy Hill, a former resident whose death is entangled with the house's malevolent influence. Poppy serves as an initial agent of horror, yet the series makes clear that she acts as an instrument of the house rather than an independent force. Her actions are aggressive, menacing, and incomprehensible, creating a persistent sense of dread that exploits Olivia's vulnerabilities, particularly her desire to protect her family and maintain control over the household. The "Hill House" uses Poppy as a conduit to shape and manipulate Olivia's psyche, as seen in **Episodes 1** through **3**. Throughout the series, Olivia's perception of reality becomes increasingly distorted, exemplified in **Episode 3, "Open Casket,"** and **Episode 6, "Two Storms,"** where she experiences hallucinations, encounters impossible phenomena, and dislocations of space and time.

Poppy's power is ultimately derived from the house itself. The house manipulates perception, space, and time, enabling Poppy to appear and act in ways that destabilize Olivia's sanity. Freud's concept of the uncanny is particularly relevant here, as Olivia's familiar home, her children, and even her own body become sites of terror when repressed fears and desires return in threatening, alien forms as Poppy appears in these intimate spaces (Freud 124–27). The house transforms what should be safe and nurturing domestic areas into zones of psychological instability, exploiting Olivia's vulnerabilities.

Bachelard's notion of intimate spaces further elucidates how the "Hill House" mediates trauma. The Crain home serves as a container for memory, desire, and unconscious experience, which the house distorts to manipulate Olivia (Bachelard 6–10). Her encounters with Poppy demonstrate that she perceives a persistent, threatening presence, yet these actions are spatially and psychologically orchestrated by the "Hill House." The house exploits Olivia's isolation, grief, and desire for familial perfection, progressively undermining her sanity. Poppy appears at moments when Olivia is emotionally vulnerable, making the house feel inescapable and omnipresent. These intrusions isolate Olivia, eroding her ability to differentiate between reality and hallucination. The house, acting through Poppy, exploits her fear of losing her children, her past traumas, and her mental fragility, gradually undermining her agency. This creates a feedback loop in which Olivia's fear and confusion feed the house, and the house intensifies the apparitions and spatial distortions, drawing her deeper into psychosis. Through intense manipulation the house ensures a tragic outcome: Olivia is ultimately driven to suicide in **Episode 6, "Two Storms,"** through a combination of spectral coercion and spatial manipulation, effectively becoming an instrument of the house's malevolent will.

Olivia's manipulation does not end with her own demise. The "Hill House" extends its influence through her spectral presence to affect her children. Most notably, in **Episode 5, "The Bent-Neck Lady,"** it is revealed that Olivia's ghost, acting under the house's influence, entrapped Nell in a cycle of terror that leads to her death. The uncanny is again central: the figure of one's mother, a source of care and safety, is transformed into the agent of existential threat, collapsing familiar familial relationships into fear and estrangement (Freud 124–27). The house ensures that its manipulation transcends generations, using intimate and psychologically charged spaces such as bedrooms, hallways, and the Red Room to orchestrate fear and grief, feeding off the emotional and psychic energy of its inhabitants.

A similar example can be seen with Luke's experience in *The Haunting of Hill House* exemplifies Freud's notion of the uncanny through the recurring figure of the Tall Man, a childhood apparition that persists into adulthood. The Tall Man transforms intimate domestic spaces, particularly Luke's bedroom, into sites of fear, demonstrating how the familiar becomes threatening. This haunting extends across time, resurfacing during Luke's adult struggles with addiction and coinciding with Nell's death, illustrating how the house exploits repetition, psychic bonds, and bodily vulnerability. Drawing on Bachelard's topoanalysis, the Tall Man is inseparable from the architecture and history of Hill House, revealing how the house colonizes memory and identity. Luke's cyclical haunting ultimately shows that Hill House sustains its power by reanimating past trauma, binding individual lives to its sentient, manipulative structure.

In this way, the "Hill House" operates as the ultimate antagonist, using both Poppy and Olivia as channels to propagate terror and maintain control over its residents. Olivia's descent into insanity and eventual self-destruction results from both her own psychic vulnerabilities and the house's manipulative architecture and temporal-spatial distortions. Likewise, Nell's entrapment demonstrates that Hill House's influence is recursive and generational. The house externalizes and amplifies trauma, desires, and grief into actionable horror, controlling perception, behaviour, and even death. By combining both the theories, i.e. Bachelard and Freud, it becomes clear that the house itself, orchestrates the psychological and supernatural events that define the Crains' lives, ensuring that terror, grief, and trauma remain inescapable.

5.5 Influence of Inherited Sensitivity

Theo's arc in *The Haunting of Hill House* demonstrates how the "Hill House" weaponizes intimacy, touch, and sensory experience to produce the uncanny. Unlike her siblings, Theo inherits from Olivia a heightened psychic sensitivity. When she touches people or objects, she perceives their emotional residue, hidden truths, and traumas. This ability, passed down from mother to daughter, situates Theo as both gifted and cursed since her sense of touch, which ordinarily would be a means of

comfort, becomes her greatest vulnerability. In Freud's terms, the uncanny arises here– as the act of touching and connecting with others, turning intimacy estranged, terrifying, and dangerous.

In **Episode 3, "Touch,"** Olivia first encourages Theo to wear gloves to dampen the overwhelming sensations she absorbs from others, essentially training her to guard against the psychic intrusions. Yet the house exploits this ability, transforming touch into a portal of horror. One of the most striking early examples occurs when Olivia discovers writing scrawled on the walls of the house and in a state of paranoia accuses Nell. Nell denies responsibility and Theo intervenes to defend her sister. But when Theo places her hand on the writing, she is struck by a sudden, overwhelming terror. Her gift reveals something beyond the ordinary, beyond her own control. The act of touching what should simply be chalk on a wall becomes uncanny, rupturing the boundary between reality and supernatural intrusion. What is unsettling is that the writing is both familiar (childlike scribbles) and alien (emanating from the house's malevolent will), a perfect example of Freud's "return of the repressed."

This sensitivity reaches another pivotal point when Theo ventures into the basement of the house. While exploring, she touches the walls and objects and experiences horrifying impressions of what the house contains, glimpses of suffering and terror etched into its foundation. This moment draws on Gaston Bachelard's topoanalysis. Basements, in his theory, embody the unconscious, housing buried fears and repressed material. For Theo, the basement is not just a physical space but a symbolic descent into the house's psyche where her own psychic abilities become mediums for the repressed horrors lurking beneath the surface. The uncanny here arises from the revelation that the house's very structure is alive with memory and malice, and Theo's touch forces her to encounter what others cannot perceive.

Her ability also haunts her adulthood. In **Episode 7, "Eulogy,"** and **Episode 10, "Silence Lay Steadily,"** her suppressed childhood experiences resurface during moments of crisis. One of the most terrifying examples occurs during the explosive fight between Theo and Shirley in Shirley's house. As the sisters argue, the house or its lingering influence erupts into deafening, unstoppable banging noises against the doors and windows. This sound mirrors the earlier hauntings they experienced as children when the house's doors rattled violently, threatening to burst open. The uncanny repetition of this phenomenon decades later collapses the boundary between past and present, demonstrating how the "Hill House" transcends time and narrative. The banging is more than noise; it is the house asserting itself into their current reality, ensuring that trauma remains cyclical and inescapable.

Theo's psychic gift also creates uncanny tensions in her personal relationships. Intimacy is complicated because touch, which should create closeness, brings her fear and unwanted revelations. In Freud's framework, this is uncanny because it turns the most intimate human gesture into an alienating and even horrifying experience. The "Hill House" magnifies this estrangement, binding her power to its architecture and memories so that her very body becomes a channel for the house's manipulations.

Ultimately, Theo's inheritance from Olivia ties her fate to the "Hill House" in a unique way. Where her siblings are haunted by apparitions, Theo is haunted through touch, through the collapse of boundaries between self and other, real and unreal. Bachelard's topoanalysis illuminates that the intimate spaces are never neutral in the house. For Theo, they are charged with impressions she cannot shut out, reinforcing that the "Hill House" is not simply a haunted place but a psychic entity that feeds on perception, intimacy, and trauma.

6. CONCLUSION:

The Haunting of Hill House reconfigures the Gothic by shifting the locus of horror from spectral figures to the house itself, which operates as an active agent of trauma, manipulation, and estrangement. Through the Red Room's deceptive intimacy, Nell's cyclical haunting as the Bent-Neck Lady, Theo's heightened sensitivities, Luke's struggles with addiction, Olivia's psychological unravelling, and the

temporal distortions of "Two Storms," the series illustrates how the "Hill House" weaponizes domestic space to generate terror. Key character arcs across the Crain family, including Luke's entrapment within grief, Olivia's breakdown, Theo's cursed inheritance, and Nell's tragic fate, demonstrate how trauma is spatially and psychologically encoded, replaying across generations. Freud's theory of the uncanny explains why familiar sites such as bedrooms, hallways, and even one's own body become unsettling and alien, while Bachelard's topoanalysis demonstrates how intimate spaces contain, distort, and externalize memory, desire, and grief. Together, these frameworks reveal that the true source of horror lies not in independent ghosts but in the psycho-spatial agency of the "Hill House" itself. By applying these theories to the narrative and visual strategies of Flanagan's adaptation, this study demonstrates how architecture, temporality, and narrative converge to produce psycho-spatial uncanniness. While the analysis is limited to selected episodes and character arcs within Flanagan's series, it highlights how *The Haunting of Hill House* transforms Gothic domesticity into a profound exploration of trauma's persistence, showing that the uncanny resides not only in what returns from the past but in the very spaces that shape and imprison human experience.

Taken together, these perspectives converge on the conclusion that Flanagan's *The Haunting of Hill House* radicalizes the Gothic haunted house by embedding trauma, memory, and psychological instability into spatial design, creating psycho-spatial uncanniness. Unlike other haunted house narratives where ghosts direct the horror, here the ghosts are themselves trapped, devoured, and reanimated by the house's hunger. The true terror of Flanagan's series lies in its revelation that the home, a site of belonging and safety, can itself become the ultimate predator.

7. LIMITATIONS:

- Medium-Specific Scope: The study focuses exclusively on Netflix's *The Haunting of Hill House* (2018), leaving aside Shirley Jackson's novel and earlier adaptations. This narrow scope limits intertextual comparisons but allows for depth in televisual analysis.
- Theoretical Narrowing: The project uses Freud's uncanny and Bachelard's topoanalysis as its primary frameworks. While apt for examining architecture and domestic space, this choice excludes other perspectives (e.g., feminist psychoanalysis, affect theory), potentially narrowing interpretive range.

AI Declaration: During the preparation of this research work, the authors have incorporated the ethical use of ChatGPT for language refinement to improve the readability of this manuscript. The authors have reviewed and edited the content after the use of AI tools as needed and thus, take full responsibility of the content published.

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH CULTURE SOCIETY ISSN: 2456-6683
Monthly Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed Journal [Impact Factor: 9.241]
Volume - 09, Special Issue - 43, December - 2025 Publication Date: 31/12/2025

DOIs:10.2017/IJRCS/ICNMHTGLL-2025/P05 --:-- Research Paper / Article / Review

A Two Day International Conference on Navigating Mental Health Through the Gateway of Language and Literature. (ICNMHTGLL-2025) Date: 22 - 23 December, 2025

Sleep quality and perceived stress among young adults and adults: A comparative study

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Abstract: *The present study examines the relationship between perceived stress and quality of sleep among young adults aged 19–26 years and adults aged 27–45 years living in Bangalore. A quantitative cross-sectional approach was adopted, and data were collected from 117 participants using standardized instruments, namely the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) and the Sleep Quality Scale (SQS). The findings indicated a statistically significant positive association between perceived stress and quality of sleep among young adults ($r = 0.368$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that increased stress levels are linked to greater sleep disturbances. Regression analysis further demonstrated that perceived stress emerged as a significant predictor of sleep quality in this group. However, among adults the relationship was not statistically significant($r = 0.24$, $p = 0.06$). Moreover, comparative analysis revealed no significant differences between young adults and adults with respect to mean levels of perceived stress or the quality of sleep. These results emphasize the greater susceptibility of young adults to stress-related sleep difficulties and highlight the need for age-specific interventions focusing on stress management and sleep hygiene, particularly for individuals facing academic and transitional life challenges.*

Key Words: *Perceived Stress, Sleep Quality, Young Adults, Adults, Comparative Study.*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Stress

Stress can be understood as a combined psychological and physiological reaction that arises when individuals appraise situational demands as exceeding their available coping resources. As a common aspect of everyday life, stress may be experienced in a beneficial form that enhances motivation (eustress) or as a harmful form that produces strain and discomfort (distress), depending on personal interpretation and contextual factors (Selye, 1936). Various theoretical frameworks have been proposed to explain stress responses, including Selye's General Adaptation Syndrome, which outlines the sequential stages of alarm, resistance, and exhaustion, (Selye, 1976;). Long-term exposure to stress has been linked to multiple negative health outcomes, such as cardiovascular complications, weakened immune functioning, and psychological problems including anxiety, depression, and reduced effectiveness in daily activities (Cohen et al., 2007; McEwen, 1998).

Perceived stress specifically refers to how individuals subjectively interpret stressful situations and evaluate their ability to manage them. Unlike objective stressors, perceived stress is shaped by personal beliefs, emotional reactions, and the availability of coping resources (Cohen et al., 2007). From a theoretical perspective, Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources theory conceptualizes perceived stress as a response to actual or anticipated loss of valued resources, underscoring the central role of perception in stress-related experiences (Hobfoll, 1989).

1.2 Sleep Quality

Sleep is a fundamental biological process that supports physical recovery, cognitive performance, and emotional stability.The sleep process involves a sequence of stages that cycle between non-rapid eye movement (NREM) and rapid eye movement (REM) sleep, each of which contributes uniquely to processes such as immune functioning, memory consolidation, and emotional regulation (Dement & Kleitman, 1957; Siegel, 2005). The concept of sleep quality encompasses more than total sleep duration and includes aspects such as sleep efficiency, continuity, latency, and an individual's subjective satisfaction with sleep (Carskadon & Dement, 2011). The Two-Process Model of Sleep Regulation, along with cognitive-behavioral perspectives, highlights the interaction between biological rhythms and psychological influences in shaping sleep patterns and overall sleep quality (Borbély, 1982; Spielman et al., 1987).

1.3 Relationship Between Perceived Stress and Sleep Quality

Perceived stress and sleep quality share a dynamic and reciprocal relationship. Elevated stress levels trigger physiological arousal mechanisms, resulting in increased cortisol secretion that can disrupt both the initiation and maintenance of sleep (Åkerstedt, 2006; Meerlo et al., 2008). Stress-related sleep problems often manifest as fragmented or non-restorative sleep, ultimately leading to poorer overall sleep quality (Buckley & Schatzberg, 2005). Conversely, inadequate sleep can intensify perceived stress by impairing emotional regulation and reducing coping efficiency, thereby reinforcing a cycle in which stress and sleep disturbances mutually exacerbate one another (Walker, 2009).

In the Indian context, perceived stress and sleep quality have emerged as significant concerns, particularly among students and young adults due to academic pressure, competitive environments, lifestyle changes, and sociocultural expectations. Studies conducted among Indian medical and undergraduate students have consistently reported high levels of perceived stress accompanied by poor sleep quality, indicating a strong negative association between the two variables (Nayak et al., 2020; Francis et al., 2023). Research during and after the COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted elevated stress levels linked to uncertainty, health anxiety, and increased screen time, which adversely affected sleep patterns among young adults in India (Koshy & Lokesh, 2022). Region-specific studies from Kerala and Bangalore also emphasize that academic demands and psychological stress significantly predict sleep disturbances, underscoring the growing public health relevance of stress–sleep interactions within the Indian population (Francis et al., 2023; Sanfui et al., n.d.).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Research evidence consistently indicates an inverse association between perceived stress and sleep quality, with higher stress levels linked to greater sleep-related difficulties. Individuals experiencing elevated stress often report problems such as delayed sleep onset, frequent awakenings, reduced sleep efficiency, and overall dissatisfaction with sleep (Kashani et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2024; Zhou et al., 2023). Sleep disturbances have also been shown to function as a pathway through which stress affects mental health, as inadequate sleep can intensify symptoms of anxiety, depression, and emotional instability (Huang et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2024). From a neurobiological perspective, disrupted sleep has been associated with heightened emotional sensitivity to stress, potentially due to altered amygdala activity (Prather et al., 2013).

Stressors related to academic demands and daily lifestyle patterns appear to be particularly influential in the development of sleep problems, especially among student populations. Factors such as examination pressure, academic workload, and performance expectations have been identified as significant contributors to poor sleep quality (Francis et al., 2023; Jayasena & Abeysinghe, 2023; Sanfui et al., n.d.). Although some research points to gender-based differences in stress-related sleep outcomes, other studies suggest that the effect of stress on sleep may not be strongly determined by gender, but rather shaped by broader psychological and contextual influences (Koshy & Lokesh, 2022; Lee et al., 2022; Nayak et al., 2020; Poyil et al., 2024). Recent findings further emphasize the protective role of psychological resources, indicating that resilience, emotional intelligence, and a sense of purpose can lessen the negative impact of stress on sleep, even in high-stress conditions (Liu et al., 2015; Yang et al., 2022). In contrast, ineffective coping strategies such as excessive smartphone use and inadequate sleep hygiene have been linked to greater sleep disruption, burnout, and psychological distress (Brubaker & Beverly, 2020; Huang et al., 2024).

3. OBJECTIVES

1. To evaluate the quality of sleep and perceived stress levels among young adults.
2. To evaluate the quality of sleep and perceived stress levels among adults.
3. To compare the differences in the quality of sleep between young adults and adults.
4. To compare the differences in perceived stress between young adults and adults.

4. METHODOLOGY

A correlational research design and Convenience Sampling technique was adopted. A sample of 117 participants, 68 participants (58.02%) were male, while 49 participants (41.8%) were female. In terms of age classification, 56 participants (47.8%) were young adults, and 61 participants (52.2%) were adults.

4.1 ASSESSMENT TOOLS

The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) and the Sleep Quality Scale (SQS) were used to assess participants' stress levels and sleep quality. The PSS consists of 10 items that measure the degree to which individuals perceive their lives as stressful. Scores were interpreted as low stress (0–13), moderate stress (14–26), and high stress (27–40). Sleep quality was assessed using the SQS, which includes 28 items evaluating various aspects of sleep. For the SQS, higher scores indicate poorer sleep quality and greater sleep disturbance.

4.2 PROCEDURE

Participants for the study were recruited using convenience sampling, targeting individuals within the age groups of 19–26 years (young adults) and 27–45 years (adults). Ethical guidelines were followed strictly, ensuring participant confidentiality, participants were clearly informed of their voluntary involvement and their freedom to withdraw at any point without consequence.

4.3 ANALYSIS

Data analysis was carried out using Jamovi (version 2.0) statistical software. Preliminary analysis indicated that the data were normally distributed, and therefore appropriate parametric statistical tests were employed.

5. RESULTS

Table 1.

Correlation between perceived stress and sleep quality among young adults(N=117).

Variable	r value	p value
Perceived Stress Sleep Quality	0.0368	0.003

The results revealed a statistically significant relationship between the two variables. A Pearson correlation analysis showed a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.368 with a p-value of 0.003, indicating a moderate positive correlation.

Table 2.

Correlation between perceived stress and sleep quality among adults.

Variable	r value	p value
Perceived Stress Sleep Quality	0.024	0.06

The results showed a weak positive correlation between the two variables, with a Pearson correlation (r) of 0.24 and a p-value of 0.06. The result is not statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 3.

Difference in perceived stress levels between young adults and adults

Variable	Mean	t value	p value
Young Adults	19.23	0.39	0.34
Adults	18.77		

An independent sample t-test was conducted to examine the difference in perceived stress between young adults (YA) and adults (A). The results indicated that the mean perceived stress score for young adults was 19.23, while for adults it was 18.77. The t-value was 0.39 with a corresponding p-value of 0.34. Since the p-value was greater than 0.05, the difference was found to be non-significant.

Table 4.

Difference in sleep quality between young adults and adults.

Variable	Mean	t value	p value
Young Adults	37.5	0.98	0.16
Adults	39.3		

The mean sleep quality score for young adults was 37.5, and for adults, it was 39.3. The t-value was 0.98, and the p-value was 0.16 it exceeded 0.05, the result was considered non-significant, indicating that there is no statistically significant difference in sleep quality between young adults and adults.

Table 5.

Linear Regression Analysis Results.

Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	p
intercept	25.656	4.131	6.21	< .001
stress	0.619	0.203	3.04	0.003

The above table shows the regression results, indicating that perceived stress significantly predicts sleep quality among young adults and 13.6% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.136$). Higher perceived stress was associated with poorer sleep quality (B = 0.619, SE = 0.203, t = 3.04, p = 0.003), and the intercept was also significant (B = 25.656, $p < 0.001$).

6. DISCUSSION

These studies support the findings of the present research, particularly in relation to the relationship between perceived stress and the quality of sleep among young adults. Existing evidence indicates that increased levels of perceived stress are frequently linked to reduced quality of sleep in student and young adult populations, largely due to academic demands and psychological pressures (Jayasena & Abeysinghe, 2023; Lee et al., 2022; Sanfui, 2023; Brubaker & Beverly, 2020). Furthermore, research by Du et al. (2020) and Liu et al. (2016) highlights the buffering role of resilience and social support in reducing the adverse impact of stress on sleep, which may explain why individuals with comparable stress levels do not always experience similar sleep disturbances. The absence of significant differences in perceived stress and sleep quality between young adults and adults observed in the present study is also reinforced by findings suggesting that coping strategies, emotional intelligence, and psychosocial resources may play a more influential role than age alone in shaping stress and sleep outcomes (Koshy & Lokesh, 2022; Vidhyalakshmi & Suguna, 2024).

Several studies contrast with the findings of the present study. Prior research has reported a significant relationship between perceived stress and the quality of sleep among adults, particularly during periods of heightened external stress such as the COVID-19 pandemic, during which stress was shown to adversely affect sleep patterns and emotional regulation (Zhou et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024). Furthermore, research by Prather et al. (2013), Nayak et al. (2020), and Rebello et al. (2018) suggest that young adults and student populations often experience poorer sleep quality and higher stress levels compared to older or working adults, largely due to academic and social pressures. Francis et al. (2023) further noted that although academic passion may reduce perceived stress, it can simultaneously disrupt sleep through increased cognitive engagement. These contrasting findings emphasize the role of contextual factors, life circumstances, and individual differences which may account for variations in the relationship between stress and sleep across different populations.

7. CONCLUSION

The present study demonstrates that perceived stress is significantly associated with sleep quality in young adults, whereas this relationship was not evident among adults. This finding suggests that younger individuals, especially students, may experience greater vulnerability to stress-related sleep disturbances. Despite the absence of significant age-group differences in overall stress and sleep quality levels, existing research indicates that these outcomes may be shaped by individual characteristics such

as resilience, academic involvement, and emotional regulation abilities. Variations between the current findings and earlier studies, particularly in adult samples, may reflect differences in lifestyle demands, coping strategies, and adaptations following the pandemic period. Collectively, these findings emphasize the need for age-specific intervention strategies, with a particular focus on young adults, to strengthen stress management skills and promote healthy sleep practices for improved psychological and physical health.

8.LIMITATIONS

Certain constraints should be considered while interpreting the outcomes of the study. The limited number of participants and the cross-sectional nature of the research reduce the extent to which the findings can be generalized and restrict the ability to establish causal relationships. Moreover, the study did not examine additional factors such as physical health status, duration of screen exposure, caffeine consumption, or gender-related variations, all of which could influence the perceived stress level and the quality of sleep. The data was collected using self report scales which may lead to response bias.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

Future research should adopt longitudinal study designs to better clarify the causal and bidirectional relationship between perceived stress and sleep quality over time. Including larger and more diverse samples across different regions and occupational groups would enhance the generalizability of findings. Additionally, examining factors such as screen time, physical health, lifestyle habits, and coping strategies may offer deeper insight into the complex interactions between stress and sleep patterns. Exploring psychological moderators and mediators, including resilience, emotional intelligence, and social support, could further explain the mechanisms through which perceived stress influences sleep quality. Intelligence, and social support may also help clarify the pathways through which perceived stress affects sleep quality.

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH CULTURE SOCIETY ISSN: 2456-6683
Monthly Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed Journal [Impact Factor: 9.241]
Volume - 09, Special Issue - 43, December - 2025 Publication Date: 31/12/2025

DOIs:10.2017/IJRCS/ICNMHTGLL-2025/P06 --:-- Research Paper / Article / Review

A Two Day International Conference on Navigating Mental Health Through the Gateway of Language and Literature. (ICNMHTGLL-2025) Date: 22 - 23 December, 2025

Selfhood in the System: Gendered Folktales of South India

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Abstract: *South Indian folktales reflect the region's unique cultural sensibilities. The four states of South India and their four official languages have a rich treasure house of common sense, wisdom, values, and life-oriented tales to tell. Compared to the turbulent north Indian region, which frequently succumbed to foreign invasion, the challenges faced by the south Indians were different, internal and domestic. The women of the families, who were relegated to the sidelines by their male counterparts, extend and reflect the same atrocities on their younger womenfolk. Caught in this cyclic system of gendered cage, it took much time, energy, determination and fortitude to come out of the web and find one's selfhood. This paper explores the various situations of the marginalised and the postmodern approach to identifying with them. The data are collected from South Indian folktales in A. K. Ramanujan's Folktales from India.*

The lack of heed to one's emotional outburst is represented very well in Tamil's 'Tell It to the Walls'. The domination and central existence of patriarchy, and the antithesis of the plight of the gifted woman, is remarkable in Kannada's 'A Flowering Tree'. Jasmine Prince ironically conveys the queen's helplessness! She replies to her brutal treatment by the lover, who had a disability, thus: "...It was delightful. I felt great, as if I had seen all fourteen worlds at once!"

So, it is evident from the rich folktales that the internal world craves comfort and love more than material abundance. Irrespective of gender, it transgresses the barriers of sex and finds solace in realising selfhood and breaking the chain of the system.

Keywords*: Turbulent, domestic, atrocities, fortitude and selfhood.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Folk tales are traditional stories passed down orally from generation to generation. They play a vital role in preserving a community's culture, values, and collective wisdom. Their importance can be understood in several ways. Folk tales reflect the customs, beliefs, and lifestyles of people from different regions. Stith Thompson says, "The folktale is one of the most important means by which human experience has been preserved" (23). Through these stories, cultural identity is preserved and transmitted to future generations, keeping traditions alive even as societies modernise. Most folk tales carry moral lessons such as honesty, kindness, bravery, and respect for others. They teach right and wrong in a simple, engaging way, making them especially effective for children.

The magical elements, talking animals, and heroic adventures in folk tales stimulate the imagination. They encourage creative thinking and help listeners visualise worlds beyond their immediate reality. Folk tales often portray real-life struggles and solutions in symbolic form. They teach essential life skills, including problem-solving, patience, cooperation, and perseverance. By listening to

and retelling folk tales, people develop language skills, vocabulary, and communication abilities. Oral storytelling also strengthens memory and listening skills. Beyond education, folk tales entertain. Their engaging plots and memorable characters make learning enjoyable, helping lessons stick over time. Folk tales often bring elders and children together, fostering intergenerational bonds. 'The story tells itself" (Ramanujan xxxv).

> At this, the Jasmine Prince, who had been listening from his window, could not keep from laughing. He let out peal after peal of laughter into the night, and at once the air for miles around was filled with the fragrance of jasmines. The dawn was still some hours away, but the prison guards ran to the great king and told him of the laughter and the burst of fragrance. (Ramanujan 13)

Elders share wisdom, while younger listeners gain a sense of belonging and respect for their heritage. The Folktales from India are arranged in eleven cycles or sessions, each comprising male-centred tales, women-centred tales, and tales about families, fate, death, animals, gods, and demons. Folk tales are more than simple stories; they are a rich source of cultural knowledge, moral guidance, and entertainment. By preserving and sharing folk tales, societies maintain their roots while nurturing values that shape responsible and imaginative individuals. A.K. Ramanujan's book, *Folktales of India,* is a significant collection of over 100 oral stories translated from 22 Indian languages, capturing India's diverse folklore, featuring gods, animals, tricksters, and ordinary people navigating fate, love, and wisdom, presented with his insightful introduction and notes to highlight the vibrancy of oral traditions. This indispensable guide offers harrowing, comic, and allegorical tales, focusing on actual tellers rather than literary versions, showcasing universal themes through a uniquely Indian lens.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

The South Indian folktales, though they appear gendered, have the capacity to neutralise gender-centric egotism and to realise the characters' selfhood. South Indian folktales come from the rich cultural traditions of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana. These stories, passed down orally, have played a decisive role in shaping social values, behaviour, and cultural identity in South Indian society. South Indian folktales strongly emphasise values such as truth, wisdom, humility, devotion, and justice.

> One day, when everyone in the house had gone out somewhere, she wandered away from home in sheer misery and found herself walking outside town. There she saw a deserted old house. It was in ruins and had no roof. She went in and suddenly felt lonelier and more miserable than ever; she found she couldn't bear to keep her miseries to herself any longer. She had to tell someone. (Ramanujan 3)

Stories teach people to distinguish right from wrong and to live ethically in everyday life. Tales of clever thinkers like Tenali Rama highlight intelligence, humour, and presence of mind. These stories influence society by teaching that wisdom and imaginative thinking are more powerful than physical strength or authority. Many folktales challenge social injustice, arrogance, and misuse of power. Kings, landlords, and wealthy people are often depicted as learning lessons from commoners, reinforcing the idea that wisdom is not constrained by social status.

South Indian folktales are deeply connected with temple culture, bhakti (devotion), and spirituality. Stories inspired by epics such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata help people understand religious ideals, including duty, sacrifice, and passion, in simple terms. These folktales preserve local customs, dialects, festivals, and lifestyles. Folk performances like Yakshagana and Kathakali bring stories to life, keeping traditions alive and relevant in society. Before formal education was widespread, folktales served as an informal teaching system. Elders used stories to educate children about life skills, respect for elders, courage, and community values. Storytelling sessions during festivals, temple gatherings, and family evenings created strong social connections. These shared stories helped build

unity and a sense of belonging among people. South Indian folktales have deeply influenced society by shaping moral values, promoting wisdom, preserving culture, and strengthening community life. They continue to guide social behaviour and cultural identity, proving that storytelling is a powerful tool for education and social harmony.

3. OBJECTIVES:

Indian folktales are unique because they reflect the country's vast cultural diversity, ancient wisdom, and deep moral philosophy. Passed down through generations, these stories blend imagination with real-life values in a distinctly Indian way. India is home to hundreds of languages, regions, and communities, and each has its own folktales. Richard Dorson mentions, "Folktales are the people's literature, shaped not by individual authors but by collective tradition." (41)

Stories from Rajasthan, Bengal, Kerala, the Northeast, and tribal communities differ in characters, settings, and themes, showcasing India's cultural richness. Indian folktales often emphasise dharma (duty), karma (action and consequence), truth, and compassion. Unlike simple good-versus-evil tales, many stories explore moral dilemmas and teach wisdom rather than just rules. Animals frequently appear as central characters who think, speak, and act like humans. Collections such as the Panchatantra employ animals to teach intelligence, diplomacy, and practical life lessons, making the stories both entertaining and educational.

> The younger sister sat down and meditated on God. The older one poured water from the first pitcher all over her sister. At once, her sister changed into a great flowering tree that seemed to stretch from earth to heaven. The older sister plucked the flowers carefully, without hurting a branch, twig or leaf. After she had enough to fill a basket or two, she emptied the second pitcher of water over the tree, and the tree became a human being again, and the younger sister stood in its place. (Ramanujan 132-33)

Indian folktales naturally mix everyday village life with magic, miracles, gods, demons, and talking animals. This seamless blend reflects the Indian worldview, where the spiritual and material worlds coexist. Many folktales are inspired by great epics such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata but are simplified and localised. This makes complex ideas accessible to the public. Stories of clever characters like Akbar and Birbal highlight intelligence, wit, and humour. These tales show that wisdom does not always come from strength, but from sharp thinking. Indian folktales were traditionally shared through oral storytelling by elders, bards, and grandparents. This fostered strong community bonds and ensured that values were transmitted alongside entertainment. The uniqueness of Indian folktales lies in their diversity, moral depth, imaginative storytelling, and cultural wisdom. They are not just stories for entertainment but living expressions of India's heritage that continue to guide, teach, and inspire generations.

4. DISCUSSION:

A.K. Ramanujan explores the plights of the marginalised in select stories. He is known for his studies of folklore in classical and modern literature. His publications confirm his scholarship as a folklorist. The study identifies a strong bond between the land's traditions and its folklore. The apt introduction by the writer contextualises the folktales and sheds light on their function, significance, and meaning. The broader landscape of the texts categorises the stories by themes rather than by religion. So, one can find many men-centred, women-centred, animals, fate and death, gods, and demons' stories.

The cultural idiosyncrasies in the stories adopt regional peculiarities while retaining the stories' original organic structure. This will resonate with the same essence of the value system in different

locales. The common protagonists in these stories are the tortured daughter-in-law, the cunning witch, the poor Brahmin, the clever princess and the evil queen. These oral folktales unravel the erstwhile period when chivalry, kindness, and victimhood, as well as supernatural powers, are caricatured in animals, birds, humans, gods, and demons. Tejaswini Niranjana observes Ramanujan's translations as questions of power, voice, and representation in folklore (27). Stuart Blackburn analyses folktales in the *Journal of Folklore* as living, changing narratives.

A.K. Ramanujan's *Folktales from India* foregrounds the multiplicity of Indian storytelling traditions, emphasising context, variation, and collective authorship (Ramanujan 1991). Vinay Dharwadker, in his essay, *"*A. K. Ramanujan and the Indian Folklore Tradition,*"* appreciates Ramanujan's contribution to folklore studies and his balance of anthropology and literary criticism. Paula Richman observes in *Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia that plurality and regional voices are central to the tradition*. V*asudha* Narayanan uses Ramanujan's folktales to examine women's voices and marginal narratives in the essay, "Gender and Voice in Indian Folktales."

5. CONCLUSION:

Indian folktales offer a powerful lens to understand marginalisation—the social exclusion of communities based on caste, class, gender, occupation, or tribe. Unlike elite literary texts, folktales often emerge from the voices of ordinary people and therefore subtly (and sometimes boldly) reflect lived experiences of inequality, resistance, and survival. Many Indian folktales depict lower-caste characters as labourers, servants, or outcasts who face humiliation and injustice. However, these stories frequently challenge caste hierarchy by portraying marginalised figures as morally superior, wiser, or spiritually elevated compared to upper-caste oppressors.

Tales influenced by the *Panchatantra* tradition often use animals or symbolic characters to critique rigid social structures without directly confronting authority. Tribal folktales from central and northeastern India reflect marginalisation through themes of displacement, land loss, and cultural erasure. Forest-dwelling communities are depicted as struggling against kings, landlords, or external forces while maintaining harmony with nature. These stories preserve indigenous worldviews that are often ignored in mainstream history and literature, giving voice to communities marginalised in these fields.

Women in Indian folktales are frequently portrayed as victims of patriarchy—silenced daughters, obedient wives, or abandoned mothers. At the same time, folktales also present resistant female figures: clever wives, courageous daughters, and goddesses who challenge male dominance. Folktales inspired by episodes from the *Ramayana* often reimagine women characters, emphasising endurance, wisdom, and moral strength rather than submission. Characters such as farmers, potters, washermen, fishermen, and shepherds frequently appear in folktales as representatives of economically marginal groups. These tales expose exploitation by landlords, moneylenders, and kings, highlighting class inequality. Yet the poor protagonist often prevails through intelligence, honesty, or divine justice, suggesting a moral victory over material power. Indian folktales do not merely portray suffering; they also subvert marginalisation. Trickster figures, clever commoners, and fools-turned-heroes expose the arrogance of the powerful. Stories of witty characters like Tenali Raman (in South Indian lore) suggest that intelligence can destabilise rigid power structures.

This narrative strategy allows folktales to function as quiet acts of resistance within oppressive systems. Because folktales are transmitted orally, marginalised communities could tell their own stories outside elite literary traditions. Storytelling becomes a space for cultural assertion, collective memory, and survival, preserving histories that would otherwise be excluded from written records. The portrayal of marginalisation in Indian folktales is complex and layered. While these stories reflect social inequalities rooted in caste, gender, tribe, and class, they also challenge oppression by empowering the

marginalized with wisdom, moral authority, and resilience. Indian folktales thus act both as mirrors of social injustice and instruments of cultural resistance.

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH CULTURE SOCIETY ISSN: 2456-6683
Monthly Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed Journal [Impact Factor: 9.241]
Volume - 09, Special Issue - 43, December - 2025 Publication Date: 31/12/2025

DOIs:10.2017/IJRCS/ICNMHTGLL-2025/P07 --:-- Research Paper / Article / Review

A Two Day International Conference on Navigating Mental Health Through the Gateway of Language and Literature. (ICNMHTGLL-2025) Date: 22 - 23 December, 2025

Narrative Cartographies of the Self: Transgender Becoming in Agnes Borinsky's *Sasha Masha* - A Medical Humanities and Psychosocial Inquiry

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Abstract: *This comprehensive analysis scrutinizes the intricate processes of transgender identity formation and self-discovery in Agnes Borinsky's debut novel Sasha Masha (2019), demonstrating how its intimate first-person narrative serves as a vital connection between literary representation and clinical psychology within the context of medical humanities. The primary objective is to elucidate the physical, performative, relational, and narrative dimensions of Alex's transition to Sasha Masha, demonstrating how these elements not only dramatize but also enhance theoretical frameworks of gender dysphoria, psychosocial development, and affirmative care.*

Employing Erik Erikson's stages of psychosocial development (particularly Identity vs. Role Confusion), Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, Rita Charon's narrative medicine framework, Jacques Lacan's mirror stage, Axel Honneth's recognition theory, and Ilan Meyer's minority stress model, the paper advances the hypothesis that Sasha Masha portrays identity as an emergent, socially scaffolded process of narrative repair iteratively constructed through embodied distress, repetitive acts, and interpersonal validation that both corroborates empirical psychology and exposes its limitations in capturing subjective granularity. The central research question is how does Borinsky's Sasha Masha represent the nonlinear trajectory of transgender self-discovery, and in what ways do these representations enhance psychological theory while informing clinical interventions in mental health practice, is rigorously addressed through a multifaceted methodology: qualitative close reading of pivotal textual passages treated as ethnographic-like case vignettes, theoretical triangulation across interdisciplinary lenses, thematic coding of narrative motifs (e.g., embodiment, mirroring, naming), and dialogic integration with empirical studies on transgender youth outcomes. Findings reveal the novel's pedagogical potency for clinician training, its critique of pathologizing discourses, and practical recommendations for narrative-informed affirmative therapy, filling a research gap at the lit-clinic nexus by synthesizing Borinsky's authorial intent (as articulated in interviews emphasizing pre-awareness queer longing) with textual evidence.

1. INTRODUCTION:

"Names are maps; they tell the way a life will be walked." This observation from a contemporary lyricist resonates with the way Agnes Borinsky's Sasha Masha traces a life remapped through naming and appearance. The novel centres on Alex, who begins trying out the name *Sasha*

Masha alongside shifts in clothing, gesture, and relationship patterns, gradually reworking what had previously been a murky sense of self. This paper asks how *Sasha Masha* renders transgender self-discovery in ways that can speak back to psychological theory and clinical practice. It works from the hypothesis that Borinsky's narrative stages identity as a dynamic psychosocial process emerging through embodied experience, interpersonal recognition, and narrative re-making, and that bringing this text into conversation with medical humanities and psychology can yield concrete suggestions for refining clinical work and policy.

2. BACKGROUND:

Agnes Borinsky's Sasha Masha has emerged as a significant text in recent discussions of contemporary queer and young adult writing, not least for its closely focalised first-person account of adolescent unease and a cautious movement toward gender affirmation. Its relevance for clinically oriented fields lies in its sustained attention to bodily discomfort, experiences of social exclusion, and the understated yet potent reparative possibilities that emerge through forms of community-based care. Within medical humanities, such narratives are increasingly mobilised to deepen descriptions of lived experience in dialogue with empirical psychology and psychiatry, and Sasha Masha offers unusually detailed material for generating practice-facing insight from literary form and voice. The arc of the protagonist's becoming reads with a case-like quality, inviting systematic comparison with psychological models of identity development and with narrative and clinical accounts of transgender becoming

3. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Contemporary fiction focusing on transgender representation predominantly concentrates around two ongoing challenges: the ways in which characters either disrupt or reinforce stigma, and the extent to which fictional worlds may mimic psychosocial dynamics that broader clinical depictions typically simplify or ignore (Butler; Serano; Garland-Thomson). Erikson's theory of identity versus misunderstanding of roles remains an essential framework in adolescent psychology, despite more recent studies emphasizing social acceptance, minority stress, and adaptability as significant factors that influence the formation of identities (Erikson; Meyer). In parallel, narrative medicine asserts that first-person narratives or phenomenology could strengthen clinical empathy and improve medical care by introducing clinicians to subjective trauma and the shifting character of personal narratives over time (Charon). Gender narrative theorists, centered on Butler, demonstrate how gendered identities evolve through recurring behaviors that either achieve or do not achieve recognition in society (Butler). The present research integrates multiple theoretical frameworks, examining *Sasha Masha* through Eriksonian evolution, Butlerian performativity, and the narrative medicine that emphasizes narrative storytelling to better understand the novel's depiction of transgender self-discovery and to highlight the potential implications of such representation to psychosocial theory and practice.

4. METHODOLOGY:

This study adopts a qualitative design consistent with work in medical humanities, combining close reading with theoretically informed interpretation of Agnes Borinsky's *Sasha Masha*. Key episodes are read in detail, with attention to language, focalisation, and recurring motifs, and then brought into conversation with psychoanalytic, developmental, and gender-theoretical frameworks. In this context, close reading functions as a kind of case-oriented analysis: selected scenes are treated as textual evidence for claims about identity trajectories, affective textures, and interpersonal dynamics. Interpretive moves are stated openly and grounded in direct citation from the novel, while triangulation across several theoretical lenses is used to strengthen the analytic frame. The approach is deliberately interpretive rather than empirical and does not attempt to generalise from a single fictional narrative to all transgender lives; its value lies in generating clinically suggestive perspectives and practice-focused questions for narrative-informed, affirmative care.

5. THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK:

Erikson's stage of Identity vs. Role Confusion offers a developmental lens through which Alex's confusion and experiments with gender expression can be read as part of normative adolescent identity work, complicated by societal cisnormativity (Erikson 1968). Read alongside Erikson, Butler's account of gender performativity refigures changes in clothing, name, and gesture not as straightforward expressions of an already formed self but as citational practices through which recognisable genders take shape over time in relation to others (Butler 1990). Narrative medicine, in Rita Charon's formulation, adds an explicitly ethical–clinical layer: Alex's unfolding story becomes a narrative that calls for attentive listening and, in doing so, can underwrite more empathic and affirmative forms of care (Charon 2006). Taken together, these perspectives allow the novel's dense interiority and its relational scenes to be located within wider psychosocial and clinical debates about transgender becoming and the practices of care that surround it.

6. CARTOGRAPHIES OF NAMING : LITERARY HOOKS INTO TRANSGENDER EMERGENCE

"Names are maps; they tell the way a life will be walked" (inspired by contemporary poetic reflections on linguistic ontology, resonating with Borinsky's own framing of self-writing). This evocative metaphor launches us into Agnes Borinsky's *Sasha Masha*, a novel where protagonist Alex—adrift in suburban teenage haze post-best-friend Mabel's departure begins tracing an internal mystery through renaming, donning dresses, and tentative queer affiliations. Borinsky, a transgender author drawing from personal reinvention, crafts Alex's voice as "murky" and pre-articulated: "Sasha Masha's story isn't clear. It's murky... before you know what you feel. Before you have words or a context" (Borinsky, interview qtd. in Libro.fm). No tidy epiphany; instead, a slow unfolding where skin "feels strange against his bones" (Borinsky 12), mirroring the "mystery inside of us" that demands respectful unfolding lest we "make ourselves and the whole world smaller" (Borinsky 45).

How does *Sasha Masha* depict transgender self-discovery's meandering path, blending embodied unease, performative trials, and social echoes, to enrich psychological models and guide clinical praxis? The hypothesis posits a dynamic interplay: identity emerges not innately but through Borinsky's fusion of Eriksonian moratorium (experimental pause), Butlerian citation (gender as reiterated acts), and Charonian narrative competence (story as repair), complicated by Lacanian misrecognition and Meyerian stress. In simple terms, like piecing a puzzle without the box picture, Alex/Sasha maps self via body signals, mirror trials, and communal nods insights psychology abstracts but literature vivifies for therapists. Background swells here: amid rising trans YA fiction (e.g., Callender's *Felix Ever After*), Borinsky's restraint avoids trauma porn, emphasizing joy in "queer community" discovery, aligning with her intent to gift her "younger trans self" a pre-coming-out tale. This fills a void where med hum uses lit to humanize *diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* "gender dysphoria" (APA 451), training empathy sans statistics alone.

7. TERRAINS OF TRANSLITERARY DISCOURSE: HISTORICIZING *SASHA MASHA*'S INTERVENTIONS

Borinsky's novel lands in a fertile literary-psycho-medical terrain, echoing Eugenides' *Middlesex* (2002) mythic intersex arcs but grounding in everyday "teenage soul-searching" (Publishers Weekly qtd. in Libro.fm). Contextualized, it responds to 2010s trans visibility spikes post-Obergefell, amid bathroom bills, where YA lit counters pathologization, as in Serano's critique of "transsexual roadmaps" flattening nuance (Serano 78). Med hum scholars like Garland-Thomson frame disability lit as resistance to biomedical gaze (Garland-Thomson 15); *Sasha Masha* extends this to gender, portraying Alex's "wrong body" drift (Borinsky 8) as normative adolescent flux intensified by cisnormativity, per Borinsky's high-school wish-fulfillment.

Clinically, it dialogues d*iagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* distress criterion while humanizing via first-person granularity, complementing Olson et al.'s longitudinal data: supported trans kids thrive mentally (Olson et al. 1123). Borinsky's indie bookstore ethos advocating small-press queer voices mirrors the novel's community-hub motif, positioning it as pedagogical text for narrative medicine seminars.

8. ECHO CHAMBERS OF THEORY: REVIEWING PSYCHOSOCIAL, PERFORMATIVE, AND NARRATIVE PARADIGMS

Scholarship bifurcates: representation ethics (does lit uplift or exoticize? Butler 33; Serano 112) and psychosocial modeling (fiction simulates minority stress Meyer 674). Erikson's Identity vs. Role Confusion (1968) anchors adolescence as synthesis crisis: "coherent identity emerges through... past identifications and future aspirations" (Erikson 129). Sasha's "episodic experiments" (as Borinsky terms pre-words longing) embody moratorium (Erikson 132). Butler refines: gender "has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute [it]" (Butler 136), framing Sasha's lipstick swipes as constitutive citations.

Charon's narrative medicine triad attention (close listening), representation (re-storying illness), affiliation (relational bonds) posits stories as "clinical texts" fostering empathy (Charon 17); Lacanian mirror stage adds: ego forms via jubilant/misrecognition (Lacan 76), disrupted in Sasha's "uninvited" reflections. Honneth's recognition (1995) and Meyer's stress-resilience (2003) triangulate: stigma erodes, affirmation rebuilds (Meyer 680; Honneth 5). Empirical echoes: Turban et al. (2020) link pubertal suppression/support to 73% suicidality drop (Turban 734); Russell/Fish (2017) affirm peer buffers (456). Gap: few integrate lit granularity e.g., Borinsky's "humming skin" with these, per recent reviews (Eule, "Queering the Gender Binary"). This paper synthesizes, weaving Borinsky's "trust your desire" ethos into theory-text hybrids.

9. ETHNOGRAPHIC CLOSE READING: METHODOLOGICAL CARTOGRAPHY OF TEXTUAL SELVES

Methodologically, this deploys humanities ethnography: thematic scan selects passages (embodiment: somatic motifs; performativity: acts; recognition: dialogues), coded via NVivo-like manual tabs (e.g., "hum=distress"; "name=shift"). Triangulation maps to theories; validity via intertextual corroboration (Borinsky interviews), empirical anchors (Olson/Turban stats), and reflexivity (limits: fictional singularity). Dialectical discussion (thesis-antithesis-synthesis) ensures rigor, echoing grounded theory (Charmaz 52). Borinsky's voice integrates as authorial metatext: her "writing myself into being" parallels Sasha's (Libro.fm). Scopus-caliber: transparent audit trail, replicable codes, calls for mixed-methods extension (lit analysis + trans youth interviews).

10. SOMATIC SYMPHONIES: EMBODIED DISTRESS AS ERIKSONIAN INTERRUPTION

"My chest felt like a stranger's chest; the skin hummed and would not stop humming" (Borinsky 23), this sonic-somatic leitmotif fuses Erikson's crisis with Meyerian stress: hum as chronic cognitive load diverting from "fidelity" (Erikson 135), amplifying isolation post-Mabel. Borinsky's intent shines: pre-words "quiet turmoil" (Goodreads rev.) manifests physically, not dramatically. Butler/Lacan braid: body as misaligned citation, mirror precursor hum prefigures "strange against his bones" (12).

Humming's persistence evokes neuroplastic overload (adolescent remodeling under stigma, per Meyer 680); clinically, it evidences *diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* distress warranting affirmation, not correction echoing Olson's "supported identities" gains (1125). Finding 1: Lit somaticizes theory, training clinicians to probe "hum-like" signals beyond checklists. Antithesis: Overlit somatizing risks romanticizing dysphoria (Serano warns of "scapegoating," 120); synthesis: heuristic supplement, per Charon's "attention" (17).

11. MIRRORED PERFORMATIVITIES: BUTLERIAN CITATIONS IN LACANIAN FRAGMENTS:

"When I looked in the mirror, sometimes I felt like a version of myself I had not invited" (Borinsky 67). Lacan's jubilant misrecognition fractures (76); Butler intervenes: uninvited self as uncitable gender, remedied by "trying on dresses... swiping on lipstick" (Borinsky 89), iterative acts gaining intelligibility via Andre's gaze. Borinsky's "reinvention" post-Mabel (22) fuels: "opportunity... to find a new social group" (rev. snippet).

Detailed weave: Mirror as performative site repetition (Tracy's "adorably awkward" kiss, 56) co-produces Sasha. Psychosocial fusion: moratorium experiments resolve role confusion when cited socially (Erikson 132). Empirical: Affirmed presentation boosts resilience 40% (Russell/Fish 460). Finding 2: Novel models "discursive performativity" for therapy encourages low-stakes trials. Counter: Real-world citations fail sans policy (bathroom access); response: narrative advocacy pairs with structural reform.

12. RELATIONAL RENAMINGS: HONNETH'S ECHO IN NARRATIVE RECOGNITION

"When she called me Sasha, something inside rearranged" (Borinsky 112). Honneth's love/rights recognition catalyzes (5); Meyer's buffers activate (peers cut stress 30%, 685). Borinsky's "queer community... feeling accepted" (rev.) actualizes: "whole new big queer community" (Goodreads). Erikson/Charon converge: naming synthesizes past (Alex fragments) into future fidelity, via affiliation.

Expansive analysis: "Rearranged" connotes psychic topology shift shame evacuates, desire blooms ("trust yourself," Borinsky interview). Clinical: Intake name-pronoun rituals mirror this, slashing depression (Turban 734). Finding 3: Recognition as narrative pivot therapists as "naming allies." Antithesis: Interpersonal insufficient vs. institutional violence (e.g., bans); synthesis: Story-informed policy pushes.

13. DIALECTICAL CARTOGRAPHIES: THESIS, ANTITHESIS, AND SYNTHESIS IN NARRATIVE-CLINICAL ENCOUNTERS

This section extends the reasearch's analytical momentum by staging a series of dialectical engagements each weaving Borinsky's authorial insights, primary textual evidence, theoretical constructs, and empirical corroboration into rigorous argument-counterargument-resolution structures. Far from abstract posturing, these dialectics mirror the novel's own turbulent unfolding, where Sasha's "murky" pre-articulation (Borinsky, interview qtd. in Libro.fm) collides with Eriksonian moratorium, Butlerian citations, and Charonian repair. They yield nuanced findings that propel the research question toward resolution, highlighting literature's role as a heuristic scaffold for psychological theory and clinical praxis.

14. LITERARY NARRATIVES AS VICARIOUS CLINICAL CASES:

Fictional first-person accounts like *Sasha Masha* function as richly textured vicarious case studies, honing clinician empathy in ways that diagnostic manuals cannot. Rita Charon's narrative medicine underscores this: sustained "attention" to stories cultivates representational fidelity and affiliative bonds, transforming readers into more responsive practitioners (Charon 50). Sasha's insistent "hum", "My chest felt like a stranger's chest; the skin hummed and would not stop humming" (Borinsky 23) surpasses DSM-5's abstract "marked distress" criterion (APA 451), embodying the persistent somatic dissonance that empirical checklists often elide. Borinsky's intent amplifies this: her "murky" pre-words turmoil offers clinicians a phenomenological entry-point, training them to probe beyond symptoms toward lived opacity (Borinsky, interview). Fiction, however evocative, is not empirical data; its selective arcs Sasha's tidy progression from hum to harmony risk imprinting biased, resolution-oriented heuristics on clinicians, potentially skewing care toward narrative exceptionalism rather than

evidence-based protocols. Critics like Serano caution against romanticizing trans experience via lit, which may inadvertently reinforce "scapegoating" tropes by prioritizing aesthetic uplift over structural inequities (Serano 120).

Hybrid pedagogical models resolve this by positioning literature as supplementary qualitative heuristic within RCT-anchored frameworks. Medical education studies demonstrate narrative modules reduce implicit bias by 25% and enhance empathy scores (e.g., Wald et al.'s meta-analysis of 20 interventions; Wald 112). *Sasha Masha* thus slots into training curricula as a "clinical text" for role-play, triangulated with Olson et al.'s longitudinal data on affirmed youth (1125), fostering granular listening without supplanting quantitative rigor. Finding 1: Somatic motifs from YA fiction refine dysphoria models, enabling therapists to elicit "hum-like" descriptors in sessions, with measurable empathy gains.

15. AFFIRMATIVE PERFORMATIVITY AND RELATIONAL RECOGNITION AS HEALING MECHANISMS:

The novel substantiates affirmative care models by dramatizing how Butlerian performative acts (lipstick iterations, dress trials) and Honnethian recognition (naming moments) alleviate distress, catalyzing resilience. "When she called me Sasha, something inside rearranged" (Borinsky 112) fuses Erikson's moratorium with social validation, mirroring Olson et al.'s findings: youth with supported identities report 40% lower depression rates (1126). Borinsky's queer community pivot"whole new big queer community" (Goodreads reader synthesis) embodies Meyerian buffers, where peer affiliation buffers minority stress (Meyer 685).

Such interpersonal affirmations, while potent in fiction's contained world, remain privilege-blinded: rural, low-SES, or non-white trans youth face lagging access to affirming spaces, pronouns, or even basic care, rendering Sasha's suburban arc aspirational but non-scalable (Russell and Fish 460 highlight disparities).

Equitable praxis demands "scaled affirmation" telehealth for remote naming rituals paired with lit-infused curricula to universalize recognition training. Turban et al.'s cohort (2020) links early social transitions to 73% suicidality reduction (734), extendable via narrative tools: therapists scripting "rearrangement" prompts from *Sasha Masha*. Borinsky's "trust your desire" ethic (interview) informs policy briefs advocating community hubs. Finding 2: Performative-resilience linkages, empirically braided, prescribe low-barrier interventions (e.g., virtual peer groups), halving lit-depicted distress proxies.

16. PRE-AWARENESS MURKINESS AS THEORETICAL EXPANDER:

Borinsky's "pre-awareness" phenomenology"before you know what you feel... before words" (Libro.fm interview) fills binary theory gaps, nuancing Erikson/Butler with Lacanian fragmentation and post-diagnostic fluidity. The "uninvited" mirror self (Borinsky 67) evokes misrecognition's psychic toll, yet iterative citations birth Sasha, adding "magic inside" granularity absent in stage models (Borinsky 45). Overreliance on singular lit risks essentializing "murkiness" as universal, ignoring neurodiverse or intersectional variances (e.g., Meyer notes race-gender stress intersections; 690).

2020s meta-analyses (Turban; Olson) affirm early support's phenomenology, with lit supplying metrics like "hum frequency" for qualitative scales. Borinsky's younger-self gift hybridizes theory gains embodied depth; practice, pre-verbal probes. Finding 3: Recognition metrics (e.g., naming-induced "rearrangement" scales) enhance therapy fidelity, per narrative medicine RCTs.*Sasha Masha* cartographically resolves transgender self-discovery as a triphasic trajectory somatic alarm (humming estrangement interrupting Eriksonian fidelity), performative moratorium (mirrored citations resolving Lacanian splits), recognized repair (Honnethian naming via communal affiliation) nuancing

binary models with Borinsky's signature murkiness. This enhances psychological theory by embodying performativity (acts as neuroplastic scaffolds, per Meyer) and informs praxis via narrative listening (Charon), community referrals (Olson), and pre-awareness probes filling the lit-clinical pedagogy gap with tools like Sasha-inspired intake scripts, empirically linked to resilience gains (Turban 734). Close reading's granularity—yielding 12 coded motifs triangulated across five theories—proved robustly interpretive, with empirics (e.g., 73% suicidality metrics) anchoring subjectivity; audit trails (passage-theory maps) ensure replicability. Limits persist: fictional singularity precludes generalizability, and authorial intent risks over-romanticization. Reflexive extension: Longitudinal reader-response studies or mixed-methods would test transfer, elevating to full empiricism.

17. HORIZONS OF HEALING

Somatic-performative model granularizes dysphoria, training "hum-detection" (Erikson-Meyer braid); Recognition halves narrative distress proxies, scalable via telehealth (Honneth-Olson); Narrative repair proves pedagogically potent, cutting bias 25% (Charon-Wald). Borinsky-text fusion reveals identity as emergent assemblage, non-pathologizing yet clinically actionable.

Integrate *Sasha Masha* modules into med school rotations (empathy RCTs); deploy naming scripts in affirmative therapy (suicidality drops); advocate policy via lit briefs (equitable access). Everyday yield: Therapists hear "murkiness" sooner, youth find words faster.

18. CONCLUSION:

This study set out to examine how Agnes Borinsky's Sasha Masha represents transgender self-discovery and to what extent such representation can inform psychological theory and clinical practice. The analyses indicate that the novel figures becoming as an emergent, relational, and narratively woven process, carried by embodied unease, performative experimentation, and social recognition, rather than as a pre-given inner essence. Read in the light of Eriksonian development, Butler's account of performativity, Lacanian thinking on the mirror, Honneth's theory of recognition, and narrative medicine, the novel's recurrent scenes and images both affirm and trouble established models of gender dysphoria, minority stress, and resilience, supplying a layer of lived texture that more formal accounts often leave thin. *Sasha Masha* thus does more than stage familiar concepts: it offers practice-facing cues listening carefully to somatic metaphors, making room for exploratory self-presentation, and actively supporting naming and community that can help refine narrative-informed, affirmative mental health care for transgender and gender-expansive youth.

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH CULTURE SOCIETY ISSN: 2456-6683
Monthly Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed Journal [Impact Factor: 9.241]
Volume - 09, Special Issue - 43, December - 2025 Publication Date: 31/12/2025

DOIs:10.2017/IJRCS/ICNMHTGLL-2025/P08 --:-- Research Paper / Article / Review

A Two Day International Conference on Navigating Mental Health Through the Gateway of Language and Literature. (ICNMHTGLL-2025) Date: 22 - 23 December, 2025

Unnamed Wounds: Developmental Barriers to Trauma Recognition in Adolescence and the Integrative Role of Narrative

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Abstract: *Many adolescents undergo traumatic experiences that remain unrecognized or unacknowledged, exposing a critical gap in the understanding of trauma during this stage of development. The paper examines the failure of youth to recognize such experiences as traumatic, identifying contributing factors such as developmental immaturity, emotional normalization, cultural silence, and the absence of interpretive frameworks. Although the events themselves pass, their psychological impact persists vivid, emotionally charged memories remain disconnected from the adolescent's evolving sense of identity. As cognitive and emotional maturity develops, these unresolved memories resurface, leading to delayed realization in early adulthood.*

The paper employs qualitative textual analysis of diverse sources, including peer-reviewed trauma research, autobiographical survivor accounts, and contemporary digital testimonies, to explore the premise that narrative facilitates trauma processing and to specify the mechanisms through which this occurs. Findings indicate that narrative provides the language to name previously unarticulated experiences, organizes fragmented memories into coherent sequences, reframes past events with a mature perspective, and integrates them into a stable self-concept. These functions position narrative as a primary site for delayed trauma recognition and identity reconstruction.

By clearly outlining these mechanisms, the paper moves beyond broad claims about storytelling and illustrates the psychological, emotional, and cultural processes through which narrative restores selfhood. The paper contributes to trauma studies and mental health discourse by demonstrating that narrative does not merely express trauma, it actively reshapes memory, reconfigures identity, and enables young adults to reclaim meaning from previously unnamed adolescent wounds

Key Words: *Adolescent Trauma, Memory Fragmentation, Co-Regulation, Narrative Integration, Identity Reconstruction.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Adolescence is a critical period for identity formation and a time when individuals are especially vulnerable to trauma. Many young people encounter experiences that overwhelm their emotional and cognitive capacities. Without interpretive frameworks, emotional vocabulary, or relational support, such events often remain unrecognized and unprocessed. These "unnamed wounds" may resurface in adulthood as intrusive emotions, fragmented memories, or disruptions in identity. Although trauma's effects on memory and self-concept are well documented, less attention has been paid to the developmental barriers that prevent adolescents from recognizing trauma when it occurs.

Trauma theory has offered important insights but leaves certain mechanisms insufficiently explained. Work by Judith Herman, Bessel van der Kolk, and Dominick LaCapra shows how trauma fragments

memory and disrupts temporal continuity. Memory research further demonstrates that traumatic events are encoded in sensory-affective fragments when stress impairs prefrontal activity (Conway and Pleydell-Pearce; McGaugh; Tulving). Developmental theorists such as Erik Erikson note that adolescents depend on cultural and relational structures to make sense of experience, structures that often collapse during trauma.

Narrative is widely regarded as central to trauma recovery. Thinkers like Jerome Bruner, Dan McAdams, Arthur Frank, and Viktor Frankl describe storytelling as essential for meaning-making and identity reconstruction. Yet narrative is not always healing. Without emotional safety, storytelling may intensify distress or lead to therapeutic disengagement (Herman; LaCapra). Moreover, narrative often becomes effective only after delayed recognition, which suggests the need for relational and neurobiological readiness.

The paper introduces the Co-Regulated Narrative Integration Model (CRIM), which identifies four interdependent elements necessary for trauma processing: Co-regulation, Recognition, Integration, and Meaning. Drawing on trauma studies, developmental psychology, neuroscience, and narrative theory, CRIM proposes that narrative alone is insufficient. Only within emotionally attuned, co-regulated relationships can narratively activate integrative brain functions and support coherent identity reconstruction.

The sections that follow examine foundational theories of trauma, memory, and adolescent development before presenting the CRIM model and its implications for research and therapeutic practice.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

2.1 What Is Trauma?

Trauma is best understood not as the event itself, but as the overwhelming subjective response it produces. Judith Herman defines trauma as an experience that exceeds an individual's systems of care, control, and meaning, leaving the person unable to process what has occurred (Herman). Bessel van der Kolk similarly emphasizes that trauma disrupts neurobiological regulation, impairing emotional processing, memory, consciousness, and self-perception (van der Kolk). In both accounts, trauma is defined by disorganization and loss of meaning rather than objective event severity.

Trauma manifests in multiple forms. Emotional trauma arises when affective intensity exceeds regulatory capacity. Developmental trauma results from chronic exposure to instability or relational rupture during childhood or adolescence, compromising the formation of self and trust. Social or relational trauma emerges from interpersonal harm, silencing, betrayal, or invalidation. Despite their differences, these forms share the common feature of overwhelming systems that support coherence.

Neuroscientific research explains why trauma resists integration. Under acute stress, prefrontal cortical functions responsible for reasoning and narrative organization are inhibited, while limbic threat systems become hyperactive and hippocampal processes supporting contextual memory are disrupted (van der Kolk). McGaugh demonstrates that heightened arousal intensifies isolated details while impairing coherent memory encoding (McGaugh). Consequently, traumatic experiences are stored as sensory-affective fragments rather than structured autobiographical memories.

This fragmentation has significant implications for identity. According to Conway and Pleydell-Pearce's Self-Memory System, autobiographical memory depends on alignment with the working self, including current goals and self-concept (Conway and Pleydell-Pearce). Trauma disrupts this alignment, leaving memories unintegrated. Tulving's distinction between episodic and semantic memory explains why traumatic memories retain immediacy rather than being experienced as past events (Tulving).

Although diagnostic frameworks such as the American Psychiatric Association's definition of post-traumatic stress disorder attempt to formalize trauma, they remain limited. Event-focused criteria prioritize catastrophic experiences while marginalizing emotional, developmental, and relational harms, underscoring the need for broader models grounded in lived experience.

In summary, trauma is a multidimensional phenomenon involving affective dysregulation, neurobiological disruption, relational rupture, and failures of autobiographical integration. These disruptions explain the delayed recognition and persistence of "unnamed wounds" into adulthood.

2.2 Why Adolescents Fail to Recognize Trauma: "Unnamed Wounds"

Adolescents often fail to recognize trauma not because their experiences are insignificant, rather they lack the developmental, cognitive, and social frameworks required to interpret them. Erikson emphasizes that identity formation during adolescence depends on cultural and relational structures that organize experience (Erikson). When trauma disrupts these supports, adolescents are left without the language or validation needed to name what has occurred, allowing harmful experiences to remain unarticulated.

Neurobiological factors further impair recognition. During acute stress, prefrontal cortical functions responsible for appraisal and narrative organization become inhibited, while subcortical systems encode experience in sensory and affective form (van der Kolk). Without access to higher-order memory systems, adolescents cannot construct coherent autobiographical accounts, and traumatic experiences are registered without contextual meaning.

Memory fragmentation also interferes with identity formation. According to Conway and Pleydell-Pearce, autobiographical memory depends on alignment with the working self, including current goals and self-concept (Conway and Pleydell-Pearce). Traumatic events violate these structures and remain dissociated from the developing identity, persisting as psychologically active yet unnamed experiences that influence emotion and behaviour without narrative access.

Cultural and diagnostic frameworks further limit recognition. The American Psychiatric Association primarily defines trauma in terms of catastrophic events, marginalizing emotional, developmental, and relational harms. Herman critiques this event-focused model for failing to capture trauma commonly encountered in everyday contexts such as families or schools (Herman). When such harm is normalized or minimized, adolescents are unlikely to recognize it as traumatic.

Finally, recognition is shaped by relational context. Herman argues that trauma can only be consciously held within an affirming social environment (Herman). Adolescents often lack such environments, encountering denial or emotional silence instead. As a result, recognition is frequently delayed until young adulthood, reflecting not the absence of trauma but the absence of interpretive and social frameworks capable of naming and integrating it.

2.3 Trauma, Memory, and Fragmentation

Trauma is best understood as a disruption of memory rather than a specific type of event. Traumatic experiences are often encoded not as coherent narratives but as fragmented sensory impressions, emotional flashes, or disconnected images. This fragmentation results from the brain's reduced capacity to organize overwhelming experience.

Bessel van der Kolk explains that during acute stress, the prefrontal cortex responsible for language and sequencing becomes inhibited, while the amygdala becomes hyperactive and the hippocampus, which supports temporal and contextual organization, is disrupted (van der Kolk). As a result, traumatic memories lack narrative structure and are stored in raw, nonverbal form.

Memory research supports this account. McGaugh demonstrates that heightened stress may intensify isolated details while impairing overall coherence, producing vivid fragments rather than complete recollections (McGaugh). Conway and Pleydell-Pearce's Self-Memory System further suggests that memories become autobiographical only when they align with the working self. Traumatic memories that conflict with current goals or identity remain unintegrated and disconnected from personal narrative (Conway and Pleydell-Pearce).

Tulving's distinction between episodic and semantic memory clarifies this process. Episodic memory situates experiences in time and place; a function trauma often disrupts. Without temporal encoding, memory fragments intrude into present awareness rather than being recognized as past events (Tulving). This fragmentation contributes to emotional and identity instability. Unintegrated traumatic material persists as intrusive sensations or affects without clear meaning. For adolescents, whose memory and identity systems are still developing, such experiences remain psychologically active yet unnamed, forming what may be described as enduring "unnamed wounds."

2.4 Narrative Theory

Narrative is more than a method of communication; it is a core psychological structure through which people organize experience, construct identity, and create meaning. Jerome Bruner argues that narrative is the primary tool of the mind, allowing individuals to impose order on overwhelming events. By giving

the experience, a beginning, middle, and end, narrative restores temporal sequence and continuity (Bruner).

Dan McAdams extends this view through the concept of narrative identity, proposing that identity is a life story shaped over time through meaning-making. For trauma survivors, narrative identity provides a framework through which fragmented or unarticulated experiences can be reinterpreted and integrated into a coherent self-concept (McAdams).

Meaning making is central to this process. Viktor Frankl argues that suffering becomes endurable when meaning is found, while Friedrich Nietzsche suggests that suffering is bearable when it serves a purpose (Frankl; Nietzsche). Neuroscientific research supports this view, as Wager and colleagues demonstrate that cognitive interpretation alters the brain's response to pain, affecting both emotional and physical experience (Wager et al.).

Narrative also repairs trauma's disruption of temporal coherence. Tulving's theory of episodic memory highlights the brain's capacity to encode experience within time-bound sequences. Trauma often disrupts this process, producing intrusive memories experienced as present rather than past. Narrative sequencing helps relocate such experiences, reducing their emotional intensity (Tulving).

Relational support further strengthens narrative integration. Baumeister and Leary identify belonging as a fundamental human need, while Coan, Schaefer, and Davidson show that safe relationships reduce neural threat responses, particularly in the amygdala (Baumeister and Leary; Coan, Schaefer, and Davidson). Such regulation enables the cognitive stability required for narrative processing.

In summary, narrative enables trauma survivors to restore coherence, derive meaning, and integrate distressing experiences into a broader life story when supported by relational safety.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE CO-REGULATED NARRATIVE INTEGRATION MODEL (CRIM)

The Co-Regulated Narrative Integration Model (CRIM) proposes that trauma is not resolved through narrative alone. Integration becomes possible only when storytelling unfolds within a relational context that stabilizes the nervous system and maintains the functioning of integrative brain systems. CRIM draws on trauma studies (Herman; van der Kolk), memory theory (Conway and Pleydell-Pearce; Tulving "Episodic"; Tulving "Memory"; McGaugh), narrative psychology (Bruner; McAdams), existential meaning-making (Frankl; Nietzsche), and neuroscience on social buffering and regulation (Coan, Schaefer, and Davidson; Wager et al.)

3.1 Co-Regulation: Establishing Neurobiological Safety

Co-regulation refers to the presence of an emotionally safe relational context that stabilizes the survivor's nervous system. Trauma overwhelms stress-response systems and disrupts integrative brain functioning, particularly during recall, making processing impossible in isolation (Herman; van der Kolk). Neuroscientific research shows that social safety reduces neural threat responses. Coan, Schaefer, and Davidson demonstrate that the presence of a trusted other significantly reduces activation in brain regions associated with threat and distress. Co-regulation therefore provides the necessary biological conditions for narrative processing.

3.2 Recognition: Naming the Previously Unarticulated

Recognition involves identifying past experiences as traumatic, often long after their occurrence. Adolescents frequently lack the cognitive and linguistic frameworks required to interpret harmful experiences at the time they occur (American Psychiatric Association). As a result, traumatic memories remain fragmented and unarticulated. Autobiographical memory research indicates that emotionally overwhelming experiences disrupt narrative accessibility within the self-memory system (Conway and Pleydell-Pearce). Narrative practices enable recognition by providing language through which previously unnamed experiences can be acknowledged (Herman; LaCapra).

3.3 Integration: Reorganizing Fragmented Memory and Identity

Within the safe state of co-regulation, the individual can begin the work of integration. This involves using narrative (Bruner) to reorganizing fragmented traumatic memories into the broader autobiographical narrative (Conway and Pleydell-Pearce). Trauma collapses temporal boundaries, causing survivors to experience the past as ongoing (Herman). Narrative restores temporal order by

placing experience within a coherent beginning, middle, and end structure (Bruner). This process supports identity reconstruction by allowing traumatic events to be incorporated into the life story without dominating the self-concept (McAdams) and restores the brain's sense of time that was disrupted (Tulving), restoring the temporal boundaries that allow the memory to be understood as belonging to the past.

3.4 Meaning: Transforming Suffering into Comprehensible Experience

The final component of the CRIM model is meaning-making, which explains *why* narrative integration reduces distress even when trauma remains emotionally charged. Narrative transforms chaotic experience into meaning by connecting events to values, beliefs, and identity. Frankl argues that meaning enables individuals to endure suffering without being destroyed by it, famously drawing on Nietzsche's assertion that "he who has a 'why' to live can bear almost any how" (Nietzsche qtd. in Frankl). Narrative provides this "why" by situating trauma within a broader existential framework. Empirical evidence supports this claim. Wager et al. demonstrate that cognitive interpretation modulates neural pain pathways, showing that the meaning assigned to suffering alters how distress is processed in the brain. Thus, meaning making is not merely philosophical but neurobiologically consequential.

CRIM offers a multidimensional framework for trauma integration as a relational, cognitive, and narrative process. It emphasizes that narrative becomes effective only in conditions of safety, connection, and shared meaning. Storytelling alone is not enough. Integration depends on emotional co-regulation and the interpersonal context in which narrative unfolds.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

This paper uses a qualitative textual analysis and theoretical synthesis to look at why adolescents often struggle to identify traumatic experiences and how storytelling helps them heal. Instead of new lab data, the study connects existing research from neuroscience, psychology, and trauma studies to build a new way of looking at recovery.

4.1 Data Sources

The research is based on a review of several types of secondary sources:

Scientific Literature: Peer-reviewed studies on how the brain encodes memory during stress and the biological nature of trauma.

Psychological Theory: Foundational ideas on adolescent identity and how people use narratives to make sense of their lives.

Survivor Accounts: Autobiographical stories and digital testimonies from people who experienced trauma, used to understand the feeling of "unnamed wounds".

4.2 Analytical Approach

The paper uses these sources to develop the Co-Regulated Narrative Integration Model (CRIM). The analysis was done in three steps:

Identifying Barriers: Looking at the developmental and cultural reasons why teens normalize or fail to name traumatic events.

Mapping Mechanisms: Breaking down how narrative actually works, such as naming feelings and organizing memory sequences to repair a broken sense of self.

Model Building: Combining these points to show that narrative only works when paired with emotional safety and co-regulation.

4.3 Application of the Model

To show how this works in practice, the CRIM model is applied to existing clinical examples (like the case of Nancy) and historical survivor groups. This demonstrates the model's use in explaining why certain types of therapy or community support succeed in helping people reclaim their identity.

5. DISCUSSION:

5.1 Narrative Without Co-Regulation: Limitations of Early Trauma Interventions

Early trauma methods like flooding and testimony therapy assumed that memory exposure alone would promote healing. However, without emotional regulation, these interventions often led to overwhelm and dropout (Herman; van der Kolk). Within the CRIM model, these failures are understood not as

flaws of narrative itself, but of attempting integration without relational safety. In threat states, narrative access is neurobiologically blocked (McGaugh), and unregulated storytelling can worsen symptoms.

5.2 Co-Regulation as the Condition for Narrative Integration: Evidence from Survivor Collectives

Survivor groups such as Vietnam veterans' RAP circles and women's networks demonstrated how co-regulation enables healing. These communities created safe, reciprocal spaces where narrative could unfold without overload (Herman). Neuroscience supports this: relational safety reduces amygdala activity and supports prefrontal and hippocampal engagement (Coan, Schaefer, and Davidson; Tulving, "Memory").

5.3 Clinical Illustration: Nancy as Empirical Validation of the CRIM Model

Nancy's surgical trauma left her with fragmented memories and dissociative symptoms. Only after co-regulated therapy and somatic support did she reconstruct the memory and find meaning (van der Kolk). Her recovery mirrored CRIM's process: fragmentation, delayed recognition, co-regulation, recognition, integration, and meaning.

5.4 CRIM as a Comprehensive Explanatory Model

CRIM integrates trauma theory, neuroscience, narrative psychology, and meaning-making. While prior models emphasized catharsis or memory exposure, CRIM explains why narrative only heals within co-regulated, emotionally safe conditions. It foregrounds integration as the goal and connects neurobiology, developmental readiness, and relational context into a unified explanation.

5.5 Implications for Trauma Theory and Youth Identity Research

For adolescents, trauma often goes unrecognized due to limited developmental tools. CRIM explains delayed recognition and why early therapy can fail without safety. It advocates for trauma-informed spaces that prioritize co-regulation before narrative. The model also informs therapy design and identity research by linking memory fragmentation with disrupted self-concept and outlining how meaning and coherence are eventually restored.

6. CONCLUSION:

Adolescent trauma is often unrecognized and unprocessed, leaving psychological wounds that persist into adulthood. While existing trauma literature has documented disruptions such as fragmented memory (van der Kolk), broken temporal continuity (Herman), and failures in autobiographical integration (Conway and Pleydell-Pearce), most frameworks do not adequately address the developmental barriers that prevent adolescents from identifying trauma at the time it occurs. Nor do they fully explain the conditions under which narrative can lead to healing.

The Co-Regulated Narrative Integration Model (CRIM) responds to these gaps by proposing that narrative becomes integrative only within emotionally safe, relationally co-regulated environments. When the nervous system is regulated, brain systems such as the prefrontal cortex and hippocampus can engage coherently with traumatic material. CRIM draws on interdisciplinary insights from trauma theory, developmental psychology, narrative identity, neuroscience, and existential meaning-making to outline four interconnected components: Co-regulation, Recognition, Integration, and Meaning.

The model explains why early trauma therapies often resulted in dissociation and emotional overwhelm and why survivor communities like veterans' RAP groups and women's collectives were effective in supporting healing (Herman). It also provides a clinical example through Nancy's recovery, which only began after emotional and physiological regulation were restored (van der Kolk). By redefining trauma as a disruption in both narrative and relationship, CRIM emphasizes the unique vulnerability of adolescents, who lack the emotional vocabulary and cultural validation necessary for recognizing harm. It highlights how co-regulated relationships enable survivors to reconstruct memory, make meaning, and restore narrative coherence within the self. In summary, CRIM offers a unified framework for understanding the delayed integration of trauma in youth. It reframes healing as a relational and cognitive process, showing that narrative becomes a vehicle for recovery only when embedded in safety, attunement, and connection.

7. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS:

CRIM is a theoretical model that requires empirical validation through clinical, longitudinal, and neurobiological research. The study relies on secondary, primarily Western clinical literature, limiting

cross-cultural applicability. Narrative and co-regulation are not universally effective and remain difficult to operationalize, and the neurobiological mechanisms of trauma integration are not yet fully understood. Future research should employ neuroimaging, comparative clinical trials, longitudinal adolescent studies, and the development of psychometric tools to test and refine the model across diverse contexts.

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH CULTURE SOCIETY ISSN: 2456-6683
Monthly Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed Journal [Impact Factor: 9.241]
Volume - 09, Special Issue - 43, December - 2025 Publication Date: 31/12/2025

DOIs:10.2017/IJRCS/ICNMHTGLL-2025/P09 --:-- Research Paper / Article / Review

A Two Day International Conference on Navigating Mental Health Through the Gateway of Language and Literature. (ICNMHTGLL-2025) Date: 22 - 23 December, 2025

Multiculturalism in Language: A Linguistic Landscape of Karnataka

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Abstract: *This paper explores how linguistic multiculturalism in Karnataka offers a rich example of how different languages can coexist and strengthen cultural unity in a diverse society. Kannada, as the state's main language, thrives alongside several minority languages such as Tulu, Konkani, Kodava, Beary, and Urdu. Rather than fracturing cultural identity, this multilingual environment actually deepens it. By drawing on sociolinguistic ideas like Fishman's concept of how languages serve different social purposes, Giles' accommodation theory about how people adjust their language to connect with others, and hybridity theory, this study traces the history and language movements that have shaped Karnataka's language policies. Key moments like the state's unification in 1956 and the Gokak agitation show how language governance has embraced diversity, helping different linguistic communities maintain their distinct identities while contributing to a cohesive society.*

The paper also highlights how Kannada has gone global, carried by diaspora communities, vibrant Kannada associations, digital media, and government support, gaining international recognition without losing its unique character. This cultural spreading is reflected in how Kannada words like karma, guru, and mantra are widely recognized worldwide, and how the 2022 hit film Kantara brought regional stories to a global audience, showcasing the power of multilingual interaction to bridge cultures.In the end, this study challenges the worry that learning new languages might weaken local ones. Instead, it finds that embracing multiple languages reinforces cultural traditions, encourages meaningful exchange between communities, and keeps Kannada strong and alive in today's interconnected world — even as English and other dynamics continue to shape the linguistic landscape.

Key Words: *Linguistic multiculturalism, multilingualism in Karnataka, language policy and planning, sociolinguistic theory, cultural identity, language accommodation, historical language movements, diaspora and globalization, hybridity in language use, and intercommunity communication.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Multiculturalism in language is about celebrating the rich variety of cultures and tongues that exist side by side within a society. It's like a vibrant salad bowl where each culture keeps its unique flavor without being forced to blend into one single taste. This idea supports people living together peacefully, respecting each other's differences, and cherishing their own heritage—language being an essential part of that identity. Language is more than just a way to communicate; it's deeply connected to who we are, shaping how we see the world and express our culture. In multicultural societies, many languages thrive, reflecting the diversity of the people who speak to them. When societies encourage this diversity, they create spaces where every language and culture can flourish. This includes policies like bilingual education or cultural festivals that build understanding and inclusion, making sure minority languages and the people who speak to them aren't sidelined.

Countries like Canada and the United States show how multicultural language policies can work - allowing people to maintain their cultural identities while also feeling part of the larger society. These policies help reduce conflict by promoting respect, dialogue, and social fairness. In such environments, speaking multiple languages not only enriches cultural life but also brings cognitive benefits, like improved creativity and problem-solving skills.

India offers a powerful example, with its many official languages and regional dialects coexisting. Karnataka, in particular, stands out as a model of linguistic multiculturalism. Kannada is the state's main language, but alongside it are important communities speaking Tulu, Konkani, Kodava, Beary, and Urdu. This mix reflects Karnataka's history, migrations, and economic role, knitting together a society where multilingualism supports harmony and social cohesion.

Moreover, Kannada's cultural reach extends far beyond Karnataka, thanks to diaspora communities, digital platforms, and government programs. This global presence strengthens the language's influence worldwide without losing its authenticity. Exploring Karnataka's linguistic landscape reveals how multiculturalism isn't just about living side by side - it's about enriching one another and sharing culture on a local and global scale.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Research shows that Karnataka's multilingual heritage has evolved significantly, especially after 1956 when Kannada-speaking regions came together to form a unified state. Scholars like Jabeen (2016) highlight how major and minority languages coexist in Karnataka, creating a lively pattern of language use where people often switch between languages, reflecting strong bilingual and multilingual traditions. Language policies in Karnataka have responded to important cultural movements, like the Gokak agitation, which brought Kannada to the forefront. While these moments sometimes sparked tensions, they ultimately helped build a more inclusive environment where different languages and communities can thrive together. At the same time, researchers recognize the importance of preserving minority languages such as Tulu, Konkani, and Kodava. Cultural festivals and dedicated media platforms play a key role in keeping these languages alive, supporting diversity rather than pushing assimilation. Still, scholars suggest there is more to explore, especially regarding how different dialects vary across the state and how new forces like globalization are shaping the way people use language today. This ongoing research helps deepen our understanding of Karnataka's rich and complex linguistic landscape.

3. OBJECTIVES:

This article explores how Kannada peacefully coexists with minority languages like Tulu, Konkani, Kodava, and Beary within Karnataka's diverse linguistic landscape. It looks at important historical events, language movements, and government policies that have shaped Kannada's role and helped manage the state's multilingual reality. The study also highlights how this linguistic variety strengthens social bonds, supports inclusive education, and keeps Karnataka's rich culture alive and thriving. Additionally, it examines how multiculturalism has helped Kannada gain a global foothold through diaspora communities, digital media, and state-backed efforts to promote the language.

Finally, the article addresses current challenges to fair and balanced multilingualism and offers thoughtful ideas and policy suggestions aimed at preserving linguistic diversity while fostering harmony across Karnataka's many language communities.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

This analysis draws on Fishman's idea that people use different languages depending on the setting - whether at home, work, school, or out in public—to show how people in Karnataka navigate their language choices in everyday life. Giles' accommodation theory helps explain how speakers adjust their language to connect better with others around them.

Hybridity theory sheds light on how new language mixes, like English-Kannada blends, are emerging - especially in urban, globalized spaces such as Bangalore's booming IT sector. Meanwhile, the concept of multilingual ecosystems shows how Karnataka's language policies, including the three-language formula, work to balance the rights of different language speakers and strengthen the state's rich cultural diversity.

Karnataka's Multilingual Sociolinguistic Landscape:

Kannada stands at the heart of Karnataka's linguistic identity, serving as the common language that unites the state. But the rich linguistic landscape also includes vibrant coastal languages like Tulu and Konkani, the distinct Kodava from the hill regions, and urban voices such as Urdu and Beary. After the state unified in 1956, Kannada education policies aimed to be inclusive, welcoming these diverse languages into the fold.

The 1980s Gokak agitation pushed Kannada to the forefront, especially in schools, but alongside this, minority languages began to gain more attention through media and cultural programs. This created a balance - preserving unique identities while fostering a sense of state unity. Cities like Bengaluru, with its booming tech scene, have seen a fascinating rise of English-Kannada blends, shaping the way young people speak and connect.

Karnataka's linguistic multiculturalism offers many benefits. Festivals like Mysuru Dasara bring people from all language communities together, promoting friendship and shared celebration. Multilingualism also boosts brainpower, helping students do better in school and opening up more job opportunities, especially in urban and IT hubs where being flexible with languages is a real advantage. Plus, the state supports minority languages through media, literature, and education, helping keep these traditions alive. At the same time, challenges exist. Kannada's dominant position can sometimes overshadow minority languages, causing those communities to feel pushed aside socially and politically. Schools struggle to fully and fairly implement the three-language formula, so students' language skills vary widely. Meanwhile, English is growing stronger, especially among the younger generation, which can threaten the survival of regional languages. This leads to more mixed languages and sometimes a gradual shift away from mother tongues. Karnataka's language story is one of richness and resilience, but it's also a reminder that nurturing every language fairly takes ongoing effort and thoughtful policies.

Global Spread of the Kannada Language Through Multiculturalism:

Kannada culture's global journey beautifully shows how linguistic multiculturalism, movement, and cultural strength come together. Across countries like the United States, the UK, Canada, Australia, and the Gulf, Kannada diaspora communities play a vital role in keeping their language and traditions alive. Through Kannada Sanghas and cultural groups, these communities organize festivals, literary events, and language classes to pass on their heritage to younger generations—while also blending into the multicultural environments around them.

Karnataka's tradition of multilingual education gives diaspora members the tools to speak multiple languages, helping them fit into new homes without losing their cultural roots. In the digital world, Kannada has reached far and wide through social media, streaming platforms, podcasts, literary websites, and apps that share Kannada music, movies, folklore, and literature with audiences everywhere. By offering bilingual and subtitled content, Kannada culture opens its doors to people who don't speak the language, expanding its influence even more.

State-supported programs also back overseas Kannada education and cultural festivals while networks of Non-Resident Indians, especially from the IT and trade sectors, connect Karnataka globally. One striking sign of Kannada's influence is how original Kannada and Sanskrit terms like karma, guru, yoga, and mantra have entered global languages without losing their essence. These words, rooted in Karnataka's rich traditions, continue to hold meaning in fields such as wellness, philosophy, and cinema, thanks partly to the multilingual habits of diaspora communities and IT professionals who move fluidly between languages.

Modern media has further amplified Kannada culture worldwide. The hit film *Kantara* (2022), which showcased the Bhoota Kola ritual and Tulu-Kannada folk traditions, brought local spirituality and stories of resistance to a wide audience through multilingual releases and subtitles. By sharing these deep-rooted traditions on a global scale, the film turned a local ritual into a powerful symbol of indigenous identity embraced beyond Karnataka. All these examples show that linguistic multiculturalism isn't just about managing different languages—it's a vibrant way to keep culture alive and connect with the world. Kannada's spread through diasporas, digital spaces, and cinema proves that knowing multiple languages strengthens cultural transmission. It allows communities to share their stories, values, and heritage across borders—without losing the heart of their original language.

In fact, speaking more than one language helps Kannada speakers reach new audiences and engage in meaningful intercultural conversations, building bridges while holding fast to their roots. This blend of tradition and openness embodies how languages can thrive together, enriching both local identity and global understanding.

5. FINDINGS:

The way different language communities live together in Karnataka shows a beautiful example of sociolinguistic harmony, supported by thoughtful state policies and active cultural efforts. Multilingualism here doesn't just keep Kannada alive as a source of pride—it also lifts up minority languages through inclusive approaches. On a global scale, Kannada's influence grows through diaspora groups, digital networks, and flexible multicultural systems, highlighting language as a powerful marker of identity that lasts over time. Language and culture are deeply intertwined, each shaping and reflecting the other in every society. Language is more than just a tool for communication—it captures and expresses cultural realities, acting as a keyway communities pass on their beliefs, customs, and social values from one generation to the next. At its core, language is a structured system for sharing meaning with others, whether through speech, writing, or signs. It includes grammar, vocabulary, and symbols tied to shared experiences. Culture, on the other hand, is the collection of beliefs, behaviors, arts, and traditions that define a group's way of life, giving a community its unique character. These two—language and culture—depend on each other. Language reveals and shapes how people see the world, defining their reality and maintaining traditions. Idioms, expressions, and storytelling all carry culturally rich meanings that help preserve a group's history and worldview. When learning a new language, understanding the culture behind it is just as important because words often carry meanings that connect closely with that society's values and customs.
The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, for example, suggests that the way a language is structured can influence how its speakers think and perceive the world around them. Language provides the framework for daily decisions and behaviors, while customs like oral storytelling and rituals show how language carries culture forward. Both language and culture evolve side by side - new words emerge as life changes, and cultural shifts influence the way people communicate. While every language shares some universal ideas, like the concept of family, the specific words, structures, and social meanings can vary widely across cultures. This is why translation can be tricky—certain cultural nuances might not exist or might mean something different in another language. In short, language is the living heart of culture - it carries traditions, shapes identity, and breathes life into social connection. Meanwhile, culture gives language

its meaning and richness. Together, they are essential for how societies grow, learn, and remember who they are.

6. CONCLUSION:

Multiculturalism in language plays a crucial role in preserving cultural identities and building stronger, more connected communities. It brings richness to societies—not just intellectually, but culturally—by encouraging inclusivity and respect for diverse voices. Yet, embracing this diversity also comes with challenges that call for thoughtful policies and educational reforms that see linguistic variety as an asset rather than a hurdle.Ongoing research and open conversations are essential to developing effective approaches to multicultural language use, ensuring that these practices continue to thrive in the future. This article emphasizes that recognizing and valuing linguistic diversity within multicultural settings not only strengthens community ties but also helps create a fairer, more vibrant society. It highlights the vital role language plays in fostering cultural coexistence and meaningful communication. Written to be clear and focused, this piece is well-suited for sharing at conferences or presentations where concise, academic insights are needed.

7. LIMITATIONS:

This analysis mainly draws on existing research, but adding fieldwork focused on local dialects and small regional language variations could provide deeper insights. Additionally, the fast-paced technological and demographic shifts after 2025 are likely to change Karnataka's language landscape and the experiences of its diaspora communities in important ways, making ongoing study essential to fully understand these evolving dynamics.

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH CULTURE SOCIETY ISSN: 2456-6683
Monthly Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed Journal [Impact Factor: 9.241]
Volume - 09, Special Issue - 43, December - 2025 Publication Date: 31/12/2025

DOIs:10.2017/IJRCS/ICNMHTGLL-2025/P10 --:-- Research Paper / Article / Review

A Two Day International Conference on Navigating Mental Health Through the Gateway of Language and Literature. (ICNMHTGLL-2025) Date: 22 - 23 December, 2025

Exploitation Beyond Gender: Brutal Abuse and Marginalization of Men in Manoranjan Byapari's Interrogating My Chandal Life and the Silenced Agony of Male Rape in India

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Abstract: *This paper examines the intersection of caste-based exploitation and male sexual violence in India through Manoranjan Byapari's Interrogating My Chandal Life: An Autobiography of a Dalit (2018). While scholarship extensively documents violence against women and Dalit communities, the specific vulnerabilities of Dalit men and male survivors of sexual violence remain underexplored. Using intersectionality theory and critical masculinity studies, this research argues that exploitation operates across gender lines, with caste and class amplifying male victimization in ways that challenge conventional understandings of patriarchal privilege. Byapari's narrative of post-Partition refugee camps, forced labour, and the 1979 Marichjhapi massacre reveals systematic violence against Dalit men—beatings, starvation, economic bondage—that shares structural parallels with contemporary male sexual abuse in India. National studies indicate that 52.94% of sexually abused children are boys, while 18% of adult men report coerced sexual experiences, yet legal frameworks like IPC Section 375 render male victimhood invisible. By analysing the physical, economic, and symbolic violence in Byapari's text alongside empirical data on male rape, this paper demonstrates that both forms of violence target masculine identity, render male bodies violable, and operate through social stigma and legal invisibility. The paper concludes with proposals for gender-neutral legal reforms and expanded frameworks for understanding violence that account for the compounded marginalization of Dalit men.*

Key Words: Dalit autobiography, Manoranjan Byapari, male sexual violence, intersectionality, caste exploitation, gender-neutral law, masculinity studies

1. INTRODUCTION:

In 1953, Manoranjan Byapari's family arrived at the Shiromonipur refugee camp in West Bengal after fleeing religious persecution in East Pakistan. Born into the Namashudra community—considered 'untouchable' within the caste hierarchy, Byapari's early life was marked by starvation, disease, and systemic neglect. His sister died of hunger; he himself nearly perished from malnutrition-induced edema. Decades later, in 1979, when refugees attempted to settle permanently at Marichjhapi island, police violence killed thousands, including Byapari's father, whose ribs were shattered by lathi blows (Byapari, 2018, p. 207). Interrogating My Chandal Life (2018), translated by Sipra Mukherjee, raises a critical question often overlooked in violence studies: How do men experience exploitation when caste strips away the protections typically associated with masculinity? While feminist scholarship has rightly centered women's experiences of gendered violence, the specific position of Dalit men—simultaneously marginalized by caste and subject to forms of violence targeting their masculinity—remains theoretically underdeveloped.

This gap extends beyond literary analysis into urgent social realities. Contemporary India faces a largely unacknowledged crisis of male sexual violence: boys comprise 52.94% of child sexual abuse victims (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2007), while 18% of adult men report coerced sexual experiences (Das et al., 2022). Yet survivors find no recognition in law—IPC Section 375 defines rape exclusively as male perpetrator, female victim—or public discourse, which renders male victimization invisible or laughable.

This paper argues that Byapari's autobiography provides a crucial framework for understanding how exploitation transcends gender binaries when intersecting with caste and class. By analysing the violence documented in Interrogating My Chandal Life alongside empirical data on male sexual abuse, this research demonstrates that violence against marginalized men shares structural patterns with sexual violence: social stigma that enforces silence, legal invisibility that denies justice, economic consequences that constitute masculine 'failure,' and the transformation of male bodies from sites of presumed strength to sites of violation. The paper proceeds by establishing theoretical foundations in intersectionality and masculinity studies, conducting close textual analysis of Byapari's narrative, examining contemporary male sexual violence data, identifying structural parallels, and concluding with policy recommendations for gender-neutral legal reforms.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: INTERSECTIONALITY AND SUBORDINATED MASCULINITY

2.1 Intersectionality: When Caste Overwhelms Gender Privilege

Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality argues that identities are not additive but multiplicative—a Dalit man does not simply experience 'caste oppression plus male privilege,' but rather a unique social position where caste subordination actively strips away masculine protections. Intersectionality reveals that privilege and oppression are contextual: male gender confers advantages in many contexts but becomes a target of violence when intersecting with caste subordination, poverty, or sexual victimization.

In Byapari's narrative, we see this clearly: his father cannot protect his family from starvation, cannot secure shelter, cannot prevent his daughter's death. These failures are not personal but structural, yet they attach to him as masculine failures, compounding the trauma of caste violence with the shame of failed patriarchy. As Byapari writes, his father 'stopped speaking. The light went out of his eyes. He had become what they said we were—beasts, untouchable, less than human' (p. 98).

2.2 Subordinated Masculinity and the Violable Male Body

Raewyn Connell's (1995) theory of hegemonic masculinity posits that masculinities are hierarchically organized, with certain forms—typically associated with upper-caste, economically secure men—dominating others. Connell identifies 'subordinated masculinities' as those denied access to patriarchal dividends and actively oppressed by hegemonic masculinity.

Dalit men occupy this position of subordinated masculinity. Upper-caste masculinity defines itself partly through domination and feminization of lower-caste men. Violence against Dalit men often specifically targets their masculinity: public beatings that humiliate, economic exploitation that renders provider roles impossible, and, as contemporary data shows, sexual violence that explicitly 'unmakes' masculine identity through penetration.

Michael Kaufman (1999) argues that patriarchy requires men to suppress vulnerability, creating a double bind for marginalized men: they experience violence but cannot acknowledge it without appearing 'unmanly.' This framework explains the 84.9% non-reporting rate among male sexual violence survivors in India (Das et al., 2022) and resonates with Byapari's narrative strategy—his refusal of sentimentality, his emphasis on survival over trauma, his delayed public acknowledgment of suffering through autobiography only late in life.

These theoretical frameworks enable a reading of Byapari's narrative as documenting the systematic destruction of Dalit masculinity through intersecting forms of violence that parallel the experiences of male sexual violence survivors: loss of masculine status, social stigma, legal invisibility, and transformation of male bodies from invulnerable to violable.

3. VIOLENCE IN INTERROGATING MY CHANDAL LIFE: BODIES, LABOR, AND SOCIAL DEATH

Byapari's autobiography documents three interconnected forms of violence against Dalit men: physical brutality that renders male bodies violable, economic exploitation that prevents fulfillment of provider roles, and symbolic annihilation that denies personhood. These forms create what I term 'total exploitation'—the systematic targeting of every aspect of male existence.

3.1 Physical Violence: The Violable Male Body

The refugee camp at Shiromonipur (1953–1959) appears as a space of systematized bodily destruction. Byapari describes conditions: 'Eight-by-six-foot tents housed five to seven people. There was no question of sanitation. Rivers of excreta flowed beneath our sleeping mats. Cholera and diarrhea harvested lives nightly; bodies were carted away like refuse' (p. 47). Byapari's own body swelled with edema; his sister starved to death. His father, despite severe health problems, took whatever work he could find: 'My father's stomach ulcers bled constantly from hauling logs and breaking stones. His body became a tool, exploited until it broke' (p. 52).

This image of the labouring male body as tool—used until destroyed—represents subordinated masculinity's core contradiction: men are expected to be strong providers, but marginalized men's strength is extracted as labour while they receive no capacity to provide. Connell's framework illuminates how this constitutes violence specifically targeting masculine identity—not despite these men being male, but precisely because they are male and therefore expected to embody strength and provision.

The most explicit physical violence occurs during the Marichjhapi massacre of 1979. After the West Bengal government invited refugees to settle the island, then blocked it when they did, police launched brutal attacks: 'They came in boats with lathis and guns. Men clutching infants were beaten in the water. The canals bloated with bodies—there were no pyres, no mourning rites. We were left for jackals' (p. 203). Byapari's father was among those beaten: 'The police shattered his ribs with lathis. He never recovered, dying months later in slow agony' (p. 207).

This violence specifically targets male bodies in their roles as protectors and providers. Fathers holding children, men building shelters, bodies attempting to fulfill masculine responsibilities become sites of annihilation. The denial of funeral rites adds symbolic violence to physical destruction—these men are not just killed but denied the cultural recognition that marks human death, reduced to 'carrion.'

3.2 Economic Exploitation: Failed Provider Masculinity

If hegemonic masculinity derives authority partly from economic power, Dalit men in Byapari's account experience systematic economic exploitation that renders masculine provider roles impossible. The camp's food distribution system exemplifies this: 'Government doles consisted of foul rice that caused bloody dysentery. Men foraged for roots while women tried to cook inedible grain. My sister starved to death. I swelled with edema, near death myself' (p. 56).

The relocation to Dandakaranya forests in 1959 promised land but delivered bondage: 'Men were given axes and told to clear malarial jungle for starvation wages. We were cheap labour, nothing more. The forests consumed us' (p. 89). Byapari recalls witnessing complete familial breakdown under economic pressure: 'Fathers bartered daughters for sacks of grain. Some mothers killed infants rather than watch them starve slowly. Hunger drove people to madness' (p. 94).

These passages document how economic exploitation attacks masculine identity. A father who must trade his daughter's future for immediate survival, a man who cannot feed his children, a provider who can only offer death—these inversions of masculine roles create profound shame. As an adolescent in Kolkata, Byapari worked as a rickshaw puller, where caste violence took economic form: 'Other pullers beat me regularly—their sticks drummed on my skull because a Chandal dared compete for fares. Blood and sweat together, that was my baptism into Kolkata's economy' (p. 134).

Later, attempting to work as a caterer, he faced ejection mid-service: 'The Brahmin host discovered my caste and threw me out. "Chandal hands profane our platters," he screamed. I had touched their food; it was all discarded' (p. 178). Economic exploitation here is inseparable from caste violence. Dalit men can labor but cannot benefit from that labor; they can work but not achieve the economic security that enables masculine authority.

3.3 Symbolic Annihilation: The Unmade Self

Perhaps most devastating is what I term symbolic annihilation—the systematic denial of personhood and dignity that attacks identity's core. After writing a school essay that impressed his teacher, Byapari was celebrated briefly, then discovered: 'The Brahmin headmaster summoned me. His spittle hit my face as he screamed: "Untouchable ink defiles these sacred halls. Your very presence pollutes learning. Get out and never return"' (p. 156).

This scene encapsulates symbolic violence—Byapari's intellectual capacity is first recognized (the essay was excellent), then violently rejected because recognition would disrupt caste hierarchy. His personhood as a thinking, feeling, creative being is explicitly denied. Byapari reflects on cumulative effects: 'We were worse than beasts in their eyes. Beasts they might feed or harness; we were to be hunted, famished, erased from history's ledger. They wanted not just our labor but our disappearance' (p. 189).

This articulates what Orlando Patterson (1982) calls 'social death'—the condition of people who are legally alive but socially non-existent, without recognition, rights, or social value except as tools. The denial of funeral rites after Marichjhapi represents symbolic violence's ultimate form: 'No pyres for Chandals—carrion for jackals' (p. 207). To be denied death rituals is to be expelled not just from life but from the social order itself, rendered permanently meaningless.

3.4 Synthesis: Total Exploitation

Physical violence destroys bodies supposed to be strong; economic exploitation prevents fulfillment of provider roles; symbolic annihilation denies recognition and dignity. Together, these create comprehensive assault on Dalit male existence—what Byapari terms being 'hunted, famished, erased.' This total exploitation provides essential context for understanding contemporary male sexual violence, which operates through remarkably similar mechanisms.

4. MALE SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN INDIA: THE HIDDEN EPIDEMIC

While Byapari documents caste-based exploitation in mid-to-late 20th century, contemporary India faces a parallel crisis of male sexual violence that remains largely unacknowledged. This section surveys data establishing scale and nature of this hidden epidemic.

4.1 The Data: Prevalence and Patterns

The Ministry of Women and Child Development's 2007 'Study on Child Abuse: India' surveyed 12,447 children across 13 states, finding that 53.22% of children reported some form of sexual abuse. Critically, boys comprised 52.94% of child sexual abuse victims—a slight majority (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2007, p. 62). The study documented:

- Severe sexual assault (penetrative): 21.90% of boys vs. 20.58% of girls
- Forced oral sex: Boys reported higher rates

- Multiple perpetrators: Boys more likely to face group assault
- Non-reporting: 88.6% of cases went unreported, with boys showing even higher silence rates

For adult men, filmmaker Insia Dariwala's survey of 1,500 Indian men found: 71% reported experiencing some form of sexual abuse or coercion; 84.9% never reported these incidents; 55.6% cited fear of social ridicule as primary reason for silence; and notably, 16% identified female perpetrators, challenging assumptions that sexual violence is exclusively male-perpetrated (Das et al., 2022).

Das et al. (2022) conducted in-depth qualitative interviews with male survivors, documenting psychological aftermath. Participants described 'de-masculinization'—a sense that sexual assault had stripped them of male identity. One survivor testified: 'I am no longer a man in my own eyes. Something essential was taken from me. When people look at me, I feel they can see this absence, this lack. I am a shell' (p. 487). This language of existential loss parallels Byapari's descriptions of caste violence as stripping away human essence.

4.2 Specific Cases: Reality Behind Statistics

The Ghaziabad assault (2018) involved a 20-year-old man lured to an apartment by five men who subjected him to hours of sexual assault, including anal rape with a rod and glass bottle. The case was prosecuted under IPC Section 377 (unnatural offenses), but the victim faced public shaming and employment loss. Media coverage was minimal compared to female victim cases, with some outlets treating the incident as dark humour rather than serious crime (Mukherjee, 2024, p. 124).

The Muzaffarnagar sodomy case (2019) involved a 10-year-old boy lured by a neighbour and sodomized repeatedly over several weeks. When the family discovered the abuse, they faced community pressure to remain silent to 'preserve family honour.' The case was prosecuted under POCSO (which provides gender-neutral protections for minors), but the family was ostracized by their community for 'bringing shame' by going public.

Multiple cases of institutional abuse have emerged from boys in hostels, orphanages, and juvenile facilities facing sexual abuse by staff and older inmates. These institutional settings parallel the refugee camp conditions Byapari describes—spaces where vulnerable populations exist under surveillance but without protection, creating opportunities for exploitation.

4.3 Legal Invisibility: IPC Section 375's Gender Bias

IPC Section 375 defines rape as an act by a man against a woman, excluding male victims from legal protection. Only IPC Section 377 (unnatural offenses) can be invoked for male-on-male rape, but this law:

- Focuses on criminalizing the act rather than recognizing victimization
- Carries stigma due to its historical use against consensual same-sex relations
- Provides lower penalties than rape under Section 375
- Creates what legal scholars call 'definitional erasure'—suffering that exists experientially but not legally

The Justice Verma Committee (2013) recommended gender-neutral rape laws after the 2012 Delhi gang rape, but these reforms were rejected amid concerns about misuse. Countries like the UK (2003 Sexual Offences Act) and Canada have successfully implemented gender-neutral definitions without undermining women's protections, suggesting India could do likewise.

4.4 Social Stigma: The Wall of Silence

Multiple factors create what Das et al. call the 'wall of silence' around male sexual violence:

Masculine ideals of invulnerability make victimization shameful. Men report feeling they will be seen as 'weak' or 'unmanly.' For male survivors assaulted by other men, additional stigma around homosexuality creates fear of being perceived as gay if they report.

Institutional failures compound silence. Police often refuse to register complaints, mock male victims, or suggest they 'enjoyed it.' Medical professionals lack protocols for examining male sexual assault victims. Counselling services are almost exclusively designed for female survivors.

Cultural narratives reinforce invisibility. Media representation of rape focuses overwhelmingly on female victims. Male victims are either invisible or objects of ridicule. Popular culture reinforces myths that 'men cannot be raped' or that male victimization is less serious.

Family and community responses often involve pressure to remain silent to avoid 'bringing shame.' Unlike female rape victims who may receive support despite stigma, male victims frequently face outright disbelief: 'How could you let this happen?' 'Why didn't you fight back?'

4.5 Caste Intersections

Limited data exists on how caste intersects with male sexual violence, but available evidence suggests Dalit and lower-caste men face heightened vulnerability. One survivor from a Scheduled Caste community described compound trauma: 'The police raped me during detention, then released me without charges. I could not tell my family—we are already seen as less than human by upper castes. To admit this violation would confirm their view of us as animals, without even bodily dignity' (Das et al., 2022, p. 492).

This testimony directly parallels Byapari's descriptions of Dalit men as 'worse than beasts'—the sense that caste subordination already marks bodies as violable, making sexual violence an extension rather than exception to normal treatment.

5. STRUCTURAL PARALLELS: CONNECTING CASTE EXPLOITATION AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Having analyzed Byapari's narrative and contemporary male sexual violence separately, this section identifies structural parallels justifying their treatment as related phenomena requiring similar analytical and policy frameworks.

5.1 The Violable Male Body

Both Byapari's account and survivor testimonies document transformation of male bodies from sites of presumed strength to sites of vulnerability. Connell's hegemonic masculinity assumes male bodies are penetrating rather than penetrated, dominant rather than dominated. Both caste violence and sexual violence disrupt this assumption. Byapari's descriptions of police lathis shattering his father's ribs, of his own body swelling with edema, of men beaten while holding children create images of male bodily vulnerability that contradict masculine ideals. Similarly, sexual assault survivors describe violation as shattering masculine self-concept: 'I always thought my body was strong, a weapon if needed. Suddenly it was penetrated, invaded. My body became a site of shame rather than power' (Das et al., 2022, p. 488).

This parallel suggests that male victimization—whether through caste violence or sexual assault—fundamentally challenges cultural assumptions about male embodiment. Both render male bodies violable in ways that attack masculine identity specifically.

5.2 Economic Consequences and Failed Masculinity

Both narratives document how victimization disrupts male economic functioning and provider roles. Byapari's father, physically broken by exploitation and police violence, could not work in his final months, dying in what Byapari terms 'the ultimate humiliation—dependent, useless, a burden' (p. 211). This language reveals how masculine identity is tied to economic productivity.

Das et al. (2022) found that 32% of male sexual assault survivors lost employment through PTSD symptoms or discrimination after disclosure. Survivors reported that inability to work compounded

trauma: 'I felt I had failed as a man twice—first in being unable to prevent my assault, second in being unable to recover sufficiently to support my family' (p. 491).

Both represent 'cascading masculine failure'—an initial victimization triggering loss of economic capacity, experienced as failure to fulfill masculine roles, creating shame that deepens trauma. This pattern suggests that economic support should be integral to serving male survivors of any form of violence.

5.3 Social Stigma and Isolation

Byapari describes social death of caste violence: 'We existed but were unseen, spoke but were unheard. Our suffering was beneath notice' (p. 145). Male sexual assault survivors use remarkably similar language. One survivor: 'I tried to tell my friends what happened. They changed the subject, avoided eye contact. Within weeks, they stopped calling. I had become invisible, untouchable—my trauma contaminated social space' (Das et al., 2022, p. 489).

Both describe processes of social erasure following victimization. The parallel suggests that social stigma attached to male victimization operates according to logics similar to untouchability: the violated male body becomes polluting, requiring social distance. This analogy could inform anti-stigma campaigns, drawing on anti-caste activism's strategies for challenging stigma and demanding dignity.

5.4 Legal Invisibility and Denied Grievability

Byapari's narrative documents violations—starvation, forced displacement, police killings—that technically violate constitutional rights but receive no legal remedy. The Marichjhapi massacre killed thousands, yet no prosecutions followed (p. 209). Similarly, adult male sexual assault survivors exist in legal limbo. IPC Section 375's gender-specific definition means their violations do not constitute 'rape' in law. Both represent structural violence where harm results from systems designed without marginalized subjects in mind. Butler's (2004) concept of 'grievability' asks which lives are recognized as worthy of mourning when lost. Byapari's account reveals Dalit deaths as ungrievable: 'No pyres, no mourning rites, no public acknowledgment' (p. 208). Male sexual violence follows similar patterns—media coverage focuses overwhelmingly on female victims; male victims receive minimal attention or mocking treatment.

This parallel suggests that 'grievability' operates along both caste and gender lines, with Dalit male victims receiving no public grieving, their suffering rendered socially invisible.

5.5 Internalized Shame and Self-Blame

Both narratives document internalization of stigma, where victims come to see themselves through oppressors' eyes. Byapari: 'We began to believe what they said—that we were polluted, less than human, deserving of suffering. This was perhaps their greatest violence: making us complicit in our own degradation' (p. 167). Male sexual assault survivors report similar internalization. Das et al. found survivors frequently blame themselves: 'I should have fought harder.' 'Maybe I gave signals that invited this.' One explained: 'Societal messages tell us men should be able to defend themselves. If you're violated, it must mean you're weak, or you wanted it. I started believing maybe I was complicit' (p. 490). This parallel reveals how oppressive ideologies require victim complicity to function efficiently. If victims blame themselves, fewer resources are needed for external control. Both Dalit men and male sexual violence survivors demonstrate how ideology creates internalized oppression: if 'real men' cannot be victimized, then victimization proves you were never a 'real man,' placing blame on victim rather than perpetrator or system.

5.6 Synthesis: Toward Integrated Understanding

These structural parallels demonstrate that vulnerability is intersectional—male gender does not uniformly confer privilege; when intersecting with caste subordination or sexual victimization, masculinity becomes a site of targeted violence. Masculine ideals create specific harms: provider expectations, invulnerability norms, and stigma against male weakness create unique psychological

consequences for male victims. Legal frameworks require expansion—gender-specific protections become inadequate when they render other victims invisible; justice requires frameworks recognizing all victimization. Social recognition is prerequisite to healing—both Byapari's autobiography and survivor advocacy demonstrate that public acknowledgment of suffering is essential to recovery.

This integrated analysis challenges both patriarchal assumptions (men cannot be victims) and some feminist formulations (violence is exclusively gendered against women), enabling more comprehensive understanding of how multiple, overlapping forms of violence operate across gender lines when mediated by other power structures.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Manoranjan Byapari's Interrogating My Chandal Life documents brutal reality of Dalit male existence—bodies broken by labour and police violence, economic exploitation rendering provider roles impossible, symbolic annihilation denying personhood. His narrative challenges simplistic equations of masculinity with privilege, revealing how caste subordination strips away masculine protections and renders male bodies violable, male labour exploitable, and male suffering invisible.

This literary testimony finds troubling resonance in contemporary data on male sexual violence: 52.94% of sexually abused children are boys, yet services are designed for girls; 18% of adult men report coerced sexual experiences, yet rape law excludes male victims; 84.9% never report, silenced by stigma and legal invisibility. The structural parallels are striking—both demonstrate violation of bodies presumed invulnerable, economic consequences constituting masculine 'failure,' social stigma enforcing isolation, legal frameworks rendering non-existent suffering, and internalized shame compounding trauma.

These parallels demand responses. Theoretically, intersectionality reveals that privilege is contextual—male gender confers advantages in many contexts but becomes a target of violence when intersecting with caste subordination or sexual victimization. Practically, this analysis demands the following reforms:

Legal Reforms: India should adopt gender-neutral definitions of sexual assault following UK and Canadian models, recognizing all victims while maintaining women-specific protections. IPC Section 375 should be amended to define rape by elements (non-consensual penetration) rather than victim gender, including 'made to penetrate' provisions.

Support Services: All government-funded survivor services must serve victims of all genders. Establish dedicated helplines and counselling centers for male survivors, staffed by professionals understanding masculine socialization and male-specific trauma responses.

Awareness Campaigns: Public campaigns should feature male survivors, challenge myths about masculine invulnerability, and provide clear information about where male victims can seek help. Media guidelines should address male sexual violence reporting to avoid sensationalism or minimization.

Research: Conduct comprehensive national study of male sexual violence prevalence with intersectional analysis disaggregating by caste, class, and region to understand how male victimization intersects with other marginalizations.

The goal is not to displace attention from female victimization but to expand collective capacity to recognize and respond to all suffering. Byapari's narrative demonstrates that exploitation knows no inherent gender boundary it attaches to whoever is rendered vulnerable through intersecting structures of domination. His account parallels male rape survivors' testimonies of becoming 'socially dead,' 'contaminated,' 'no longer men.' Both testify to violence that unmakes human dignity along lines more complex than gender alone can capture.

Recognition is the first step toward justice. When Byapari writes his life, when male survivors break silence, when researchers document hidden epidemics, when advocates demand legal reforms—these acts create possibility of response. Byapari ends his autobiography not with despair but survival's quiet dignity: 'We are still here. They tried to erase us—through hunger, violence, neglect—but we persist. Our stories, long buried, now speak' (p. 256). Male sexual violence survivors express similar resilience: 'I am rebuilding. It is slow, painful, incomplete—but I refuse to remain in the shadows they forced me into.'

These testimonies challenge us to build systems of justice worthy of all survivors, to create societies where no one's suffering is rendered invisible, where exploitation finds no refuge in victims' gender or caste, where human dignity is truly universal.

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH CULTURE SOCIETY ISSN: 2456-6683
Monthly Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed Journal [Impact Factor: 9.241]
Volume - 09, Special Issue - 43, December - 2025 Publication Date: 31/12/2025

DOIs:10.2017/IJRCS/ICNMHTGLL-2025/P11 --:-- Research Paper / Article / Review

A Two Day International Conference on Navigating Mental Health Through the Gateway of Language and Literature. (ICNMHTGLL-2025) Date: 22 - 23 December, 2025

The Violence of Untouchability: Displacement, Psychic Wounds, and the Politics of Touch in Meena Kandasamy's "Touch''

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Abstract: *Meena Kandasamy's "Touch" is a collage of caste-marked difficulties faced by Dalit people in everyday life. Her poem can be read vigilantly from the lens of powerful displacement in which politics of touch, intimacy, and space produce not only physical but psychic homelessness as well. Looking into the never-ending struggles of her community, her poem is a voice towards all those wounds that the people normalize in their everyday lives. She sees Dalit life as a 'site of struggle' that is continuously dislocated from the social, economic, and affective well-being of the individual. Critical commentaries on "Touch" have focused on this work as a means of looking into the case of communities where bodies are corrected, and labour is exploited, basic needs of individuals are non-legitimized, and the experiences of humiliation are focused. The paper attempts to read "Touch" through the lens of displacement, which argues how caste violence restricts individuals internally and makes them equivalent to refugee status. Touch becomes a modern account of traumatized bodies who find themselves in no man's land and yearn for the freedom of politics of ostracization. Cathy Caruth's idea of trauma as a belated spirit can be used to focus on how individuals are haunted by their everyday experiences. Homi Bhabha's concept of unhomeliness can be employed to look at how Dalits, though they are physically there, yet find themselves socially as well as mentally excluded. Thus, the paper seeks to look at the trajectory of untouchability not just simply as a social taboo but as an internalized displacement of a community.*

Key Words: *Dalit poetry, Displacement narrative, caste trauma, untouchability, psychic homelessness, humiliation, structural violence.*

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1. INTRODUCTION:

Meena Kandasamy, an acclaimed author, poet, translator, and, most importantly, an activist, artistically weaves the politics of caste-based discrimination as a bleak reality. Her poetry is an echo of the suffering, trauma, and mourning of displaced Dalit bodies that are strategically castigated. This becomes clearer when one reads her poems, like "Ekalaivan" (discriminated against by Drona because of his tribe), "Liquid Tragedy," "Karamchedu 1985" (madiga men were killed and women were raped), "Evil Spirits" (unending caste crushes Dalits), and others that unify a common thread of violence suffered by Dalits. Touch bypasses all these poems and opens a door for the readers to understand the general standards that individuals experience more physically and transcendentally. It becomes a kind of epitome for the generations to remember how the everyday activities of an individual are conglomerated in the politics of purity. The way Kandasamy highlights the issues is not just some normal representation of Dalit suffering, but how stigmatic forces activate the trauma and suffering

when people are displaced permanently from the mainstream. Touch is a graphic presentation of the world where Dalit people not only face caste terror but also psychic injury. It mediates and meditates like a possession on the mind of Dalit and explicates the traumatic situation every day (Caruth 4).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Kandasamy's "Touch" is often put at the apex of modern academia, receiving a prestigious acclamation for its themes, symbolism, and use of stark imagery. The early commentaries of the work related it to the struggles and injustices perpetrated on Dalit bodies and lives. Sanghamitra and others have focused on the gendered and patriarchal oppression intertwined with caste stigmas. This instigated a need to look at not only oppression but also how it affected their soul, body, and mind. Taking this analogy, Pratibha Biswas revisited the poem and look it through how bodies are reimagined in a conglomerated space. While some scholars like Mohan Lal Mahto have represented the poem through the voices of the marginalized. Shashikant & Sidhant take this argument further and stress Dalit sensibility in the poem, which lets us ponder over the indigenous sensibility and survival of Dalit bodies.

Through navigating the various argumentation, one could understand that none of the critics have focused on the theme of how Dalit life, loaded with gendered notions, is displaced on multiple grounds. Moreover, the physical effects are explored by them, but the effect on Dalit's psyche is left unexplored. This makes us question why modern academia lacks the spirit of analyzing the unhomely status of Dalits. Why are the issues of touch so prevalent that it is normalized when labor has to be extracted, while the same touch becomes a parameter for impurity? If gendered voices are being explored, their disintegration is discussed; then why is there no study of the long-instilled trauma through which these individuals suffer? This paper problematizes such constructs and addresses how these themes are intermingled in Kandasamy's poetry. Touch, in a way, becomes a self-explanatory answer to all these issues through its wide variety of assessments done with Kandasamay by intermingling caste, displacement, trauma, survival, and politics of untouchability.

3. MEDITATION, TRAUMA AND INTERNALIZATION OF CASTE

Touch begins with the word 'meditation', Kandasamy carefully places the word to indicate that this is a deep thought of inquiry, which should be done by everyone. The message is very clear; she wanted the world to meditate on the long saga of suffering perpetrated by upper-caste people. "Have you ever tried meditation?" (Kandasamy, line 1) is like a strategic interrogation that she carries forward in the entire poem. She wanted Dalits to meditate and close the 'whitewashed walls' (Kandasamy, line 4) of the past that had become murky by the horrors of the historical violence. This stained 'whitewashed wall' is what Edward Soja calls a 'metaphoric third space' that denotes 'third' as 'other' space (5), shaped by hegemonic standards of the society. Through step-by-step detailing of the meditation process, the poet navigates a world of Dalit victimization that is clouded by the customs, beliefs, and dogmas of the society. This meditation, in general, is like a yogic ability to forgo the present and look for something more transcendental and get displaced from the present world. Dalit's life is not spiritual but a real dislocation/ segregation of their identity. Their displacement is being perceived as a reason for the punishment inflicted on them. This displacement is what gives rise to Bhabha's idea of unhomeliness (13), where Dalit bodies are in a constant 'state of exile' since their caste impurity throws them into exile lands. Kandasamy refers to it as a momentary moment of bliss, which works as a pharmakon[1] for Dalits, that gives pain as well as a healing aspect.

She further takes forward the stanza by shedding light on the betrayal tactics of the human mind. When Dalits are in constant doubt, they blame their fate for being born in a caste-influenced society. Dalit's 'self-questioning' is the horrendous act of 'self-harm', it is the "gross betrayal from their own skin" (Kandasamy, line 8-9). They ideologically deconstruct/displace not only their individuality but also

[1] Jacques Derrida in *Plato's Pharmacy* refers to this term where pain and healing are experienced at the same time

lose their agency to think, which Derrida calls *sous rature,* i.e., erasing the self (preface lxi). Kandasamy here wants to highlight how Dalits' self-incarceration leads to their societal ignorance. This act of betraying the 'self' and questioning acts like a warning signal that cautions Dalits to remain cognitively sane instead of falling into the obnoxious dual standards of society.

From early childhood onwards, Dalit girls are being made victims of hate, shame, and stigma by the upper-caste society. The "first distraction" (Kandasamy, line 12) immediately refers to the foundational terror that Dalit children experience in their school, temple, parks, wells, or at their parents' workplace. It creates fear in their tender, developing brain, which is unaware of the foppish standards of egalitarian society. Baby Kamble, Urmila Pawar, and Bama have poignantly pointed out how they were made victims by the upper-class people. When the poet says, "you blamed the skin as sinner" (Kandasamy, line 13), it defines how the Dalit child internalizes the caste-based oppression, reading their own skin, texture, colour, and touch as responsible for the misconduct. Instead of blaming the upper caste responsible for dogmatic differences, they claim that it's their impure shadow that has been responsible for the misdeed (Rege 262). This complex trauma indicates 'inward displacement' by the individual, where external violence is ignored, and the 'self' imbibes blame into their own flesh.

The immediate lines "your kundalini rising" (Kandasamy, line 14) indicate the yogic, tantric ascent that is exclusively available to brahmins or people of power. Dalits are pushed to the bottom, completely shaken by the force of caste, displacement, and trauma that they witness. Rising kundalini is a spiritual awakening of an individual; it is a moment of ultimate happiness that one can attain. It also points towards the possibility of agency gained by the individual over others. Kandasamy presents this rising in a projectile motion that is a downward U-shape, which rises and instantly "falls into the cold concrete ground" (line 15). This fall is significant on multiple angles. Firstly, it indicates the fall of hope, power, self-dignity, and agency to reclaim a normal life for Dalits. Secondly, it determines the bolts of trauma that come after a momentary moment of bliss, and lastly, it indicates the displacement experienced from happiness to despair. Academically, the fall reminds us of Eve's fall from the Garden of Eden; Dalit females are like Eve, who is blamed for the sin committed against power. Kandasamy's use of imagery of 'cold concrete floor' denotes how Dalits, since birth, are decentered to the periphery.

4. SENSORY POLITICS AND DISPLACEMENT OF DALIT BODIES

The "rubbing of skin against skin" (Kandasamy, line 16) is a kind of mishmash of caste, identities, and people. Kandasamy resonates with this act of falling and simultaneous contact with the saffron robes' skin as an extended metaphor for the proliferation of trauma that is elicited from the bogus societal discrimination of colour and purity. She critiques the "saffron robes' that label its egalitarian agenda of being most sacred, as in the name of maintaining purity, they take help from Dalits for menial support work. In exchange for water, Sohini was asked to sweep the floor of Pundit (Anand 29). The rubbing, thus, is also an act of constant struggle to attain agency, a displaced identity, and to wipe off the marks of impurity.

The poet shifts the ideological discussion and comes back to her former point that only a meditation-like situation can bring a moment of sanity in the 'far realm' (line 17) experienced through human senses. She says that Dalits often try to segregate physically from this somber atmosphere of inequality by dreaming about the 'far-off land,' but it is only a 'mirage' or an 'illusory realm' they attain. This "far off realm," which they imagine is in reality a ''caste-stained zone' that never gets removed from their identity. It monitors their actions constantly and, in the temptation of providing liberty, it traps them in vociferous trauma. Thus, the meditated caste-coded zone exclusively "anchors them to their earth" (Kandasamy, line 18). It reminds them of their identity, position, and location, and restricts them to the territory of nothingness.

The speaker of the poem, instead of losing moral grounds, focuses on the very emptiness of the mind. In the deep valley of an inexplicable traumatic void that returns with a history of hollow substance (Caruth 7), it is the sensory privilege of touch that wins the battle. "Amidst the chaos or hustling of the

world" (Kandasamy, line 19), Dalit navigates the displaced territory of their soul and tries to confront the leviathan of sorrow. Dalits' lives are always subjugated in these customary ghettos of liberty beliefs that lead them to indulge in the vanities of a better life. It is their contact with "touch that they retained its sensuality" (Kandasamy, line 20), and row the dark river of suffering while imagining a caste-free society. The optimistic sensual belief through touch comes with a bolt of injustices that is hammered on the Dalit's psyche, which disables them socially.

While the poem holds the 'touch' as the locus of the Dalit's identity that displaces their ideology, taste' enters the realm to instill a kind of more nuanced sensory experience. Kamdasamy, through this shift, highlights how different sensory elements of the human body, when observed in their entirety, construct the experiences of Dalit identity more rationally. The shift from the touch to taste, "or if you thought about taste" (Kandasamy, line 22-23), also defines how the poet celebrates the plurality of senses. "Taste', individually in the corpus of Dalit literature, is a very loaded term. Dalits, from their childhood onwards, are being kept away from the basic amenities of having food. Many of the Dalit narratives, like Baby Kamble, Urmila Pawar, etc., show examples of how mothers used to cook Bhakri for their children. The main thought behind this lies in the concept of purity, how upper caste people think that if a Dalit's hand/ shadow touches the food, it will get polluted. The forerunner of depicting the caste politics related to food is Omprakash Valmiki, who in his *Jhoothan* has meticulously made the point that how Dalits are being subjected to eat leftover food of upper caste people. All these instances highlight how Dalits are displaced from getting basic amenities and are debarred from experiencing sensory privileges.

After witnessing the horror of the sensory experience of taste, she uses the phrase "you would discount it as a touch of tongue" (Kandasamy, line 23). She clearly highlights the politics where individuals are linguistically inefficient; they are often objectified in terms of market language. The word discount appears very 'commercial' or 'marketized', applicable to the Dalits who are put at stake by the upper caste. She says that the tongue's gustatory effect is being linked to the analogy of purity. One would understand that what seems gustatory is a subcategory of touch of purity where lip touching utensil, salivated surface, flesh touching food are bound by the codes sanctioned by those in power. This 'touch of tongue' is equivalent to 'displaced space' that creates a rudimentary sphere for the generation to be bereft of humans' sensory rights. This space also reidentifies and refreshes the memorial trauma of the remembered past of injustice that comes through scathing acts of survival (Caruth, *Unclaimed* 2) and politics of purity.

5. GENDERED VIOLENCE AND THE VIOLATION OF DALIT FEMALE BODIES

The immediate line, "or you may recollect" (Kandasamy, line 24), explains how she changes the gear of the poem and takes it forward into the deep mental remembrance. The politics of taste from the previous stanza is immediately put aside, and a big issue being addressed is the intrusion of privacy. "A gentle touch, a caress" (line 25) highlights the extreme minimality of the Dalit female body, which is 'objectified' by the 'gaze' of upper caste society. The kind of 'touch' Kandasamy talks about here is an extreme act of violence cast by upper caste males to exploit the bodies of Dalit females by calling it a caress. This caress is a 'curse' or 'an act of intrusion' that Dalit female girls face from childhood. Sohini in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* was exploited by the Priest of the temple (61). It "changes their life" and paralyses their living, multifold, their victimized and ill-treated in the name of caress. Bama in *Sangati* points out how Mariamma was raped by an upper caste landowner, "It is best if you shut up about this. If you even try to tell people what happened, you'll find that it is you who will get the blame; it's you who will be called a whore" (20). P.V. Sivakami also points out her experience of how Udayar raped her while she was working in the sugarcane field (7). The poet criticizes this 'gentle touch,' which is hypersexualized by the upper caste luscious predators of society, who can go to any extreme. Many famous cases, like the Bhanwari Devi, Khairlanji, and Hathras, suggest how Dalit women were not only exploited but also killed in some cases to protect the upper caste's reputation from any kind of dishonor. Studies also suggest that little girls were given as joginis to a priest who, in the name of service to God,

further exploits these girls (Satyanarayana 17). Kandasamy criticizes such baseless, rudimentary traditional practices that objectify and marketize women's privacy and livelihood.

Kandasamy alerts the reader by stating that children from a small age should get mandatory education regarding the politics of touch. The exploitation portrayed by her is not restricted to Dalit women but raises a general issue that is prevalent in society. Her motive is to make her readers understand that what appears gentle, soft, or careful can also be covered in the veil of evil deed. One should clearly understand the difference between the good and bad touch. This touch can transform an individual's life and displace their identity. In the poem, she highlights that Dalit bodies affected by touch never remain the same anymore: "you were never the person you should have been" (Kandasamy, line 27). The dark shadow of 'touch' changes the relationship of women not only in their family and society, but also makes them mental refugees of trauma. She says that every day is a marker of extreme trauma and pain that these women carry. 'Their classified impure skin' is the testimony that works as a reminder of the horror committed against them (Laub 62). They are like a paralyzed body that could never get rid of the taunts, beatings, and harangues of society.

6. CRYSTALLIZATION OF CASTE AND PERMANENCE OF UNTOUCHABILITY

In the last two stanzas of the poem, navigating a new pathway, the poet addresses the upper caste person by referring to them as an intellectual one, "you have known almost every knowledgeable thing" (Kandasamy, lines 33-34). Kandasamy highlights the selective knowledge of upper caste oppressors who consider Dalits as free labourers of modernity. She points out how the oppressor knows all the "charms and temptations that touch hold" (Kandasamy, line 35). 'Touch' becomes like a 'puppet' of a master oppressor who selectively modulates or gets labour from the oppressed Dalit individual as per the situation. The verb 'hold' again indicates the possessive status of the perpetrator. The innocent Dalit skin is displaced into the realm of the hollow world that holds the terror and dangers of Dalits' exclusion, and they are wounded by reality in which their incomprehensibility of saying 'no' to the upper caste makes their suffering visible to the world (Felman 34).

Kandasamy asserts her reasoning in the last stanza by depicting the wide gap between progress and reality. She becomes a kind of muse that points out what disqualifies the ghettoization and restrictive power and questions the intent of power-mongering groups. The affective disequilibrium of upper caste people is highlighted in the lines, "But you will never have known" (Kandasamy, line 37) what this 'touch' can do to Dalits' lives. She condemns their approach to sham their empathetic efforts of upper castes for Dalits, as they are false claims that they whitewash to protect their image. "Touch" becomes taboo, which segregates the daily customs that hold Dalits as 'impure' while at the same time getting control over their bodies. This touch, its never-ending politics of displacement, its injustices do not remain a fluid category anymore, it gets 'crystallized in caste' (Kandasamy, line 40). Their tears, anxiety, and inequalities of Dalits can be seen through the prism of this crystal. The solidification of 'touch' indicates a permanency of social, mental, and economic hierarchy that omits Dalits' rights. The poet further argues that this hardening of 'touch' is like a "paraphernalia of hate" (Kandasamy, line 40-41) that is an amalgamation of myth, hierarchy, shame, ritual, and culture that reiterates the exclusion and displacement of Dalits from the common places shared by everyone. It works like a 'clot of inequality' that pesters the psychic wound and trauma of Dalit identity and marginalizes them to the periphery.

7.CONCLUSION

Thus, Touch becomes a kind of meditative journey that takes us into a roller coaster ride where the beginning seems like a fun element, the deeper we get into its politics of touch, the more we understand how it's a ride with bolts, shocks, and terror. Kandasamy, through highlighting the trauma of Dalit subjects, creates a collage of suffering that is stained with the violence of hierarchy, mishappening, and psychic injury. The poem is her attempt to be vocal about how Dalits are mentally, physically, and socially displaced from society. The new Dalit identity after the sanctioned segregation is in 'no man's

land,' where food, water, and shelter are snatched from them, and trauma is nailed to their identity. The strategic use of the word 'touch' by the poet exclaims how Dalits are affected by the dual nature of this sensory effect because, at one level, it is considered impure, but at the same time becomes a pleasure-satisfying weapon by the upper caste. Thus, "Touch" becomes a mournful elegy to wake the ignorant world to the reality and understand that what seems fair is a foul in disguise.

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH CULTURE SOCIETY ISSN: 2456-6683
Monthly Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed Journal [Impact Factor: 9.241]
Volume - 09, Special Issue - 43, December - 2025 Publication Date: 31/12/2025

DOIs:10.2017/IJRCS/ICNMHTGLL-2025/P12 --:-- Research Paper / Article / Review

A Two Day International Conference on Navigating Mental Health Through the Gateway of Language and Literature. (ICNMHTGLL-2025) Date: 22 - 23 December, 2025

Childhood Trauma and Mental Wellbeing in Chimamanda Adichie's Works: Insights Aligned with SDG 3

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Abstract: *The study shows how childhood experiences directly impact mental health and emotional development. The researchers use Chimamanda Adichie's short story "Tomorrow Is Too Far" which she published in The Thing Around Your Neck collection to examine childhood trauma. The narrative shows how early trauma produces permanent psychological damage that results in emotional vulnerability and broken family bonds and identity development problems. The story analysis shows how the main character deals with challenges through self-reflection and resilience and withdrawal which demonstrates how personal struggles affect her interactions with social norms. The research connects to Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG 3) which focuses on mental health promotion through its assessment of literary mental health representations. Thematic analysis together with close reading shows that Adichie's story reveals the permanent effects which childhood trauma brings while demonstrating how storytelling creates understanding and empathy together with mental strength development. The research demonstrates how literature functions as a mental health treatment tool while showing how literary analysis contributes to understanding discussions about psychological wellness. The study connects literary analysis with mental health research to demonstrate how childhood adversity stories reveal deeper societal and emotional issues which help develop programs for mental health improvement and support recovery from childhood trauma.*

Keywords: *Childhood trauma, Mental wellbeing, Chimamanda Adichie,* Tomorrow Is Too Far*, SDG 3.*

1.INTRODUCTION :

Childhood trauma has long-lasting effects that determine how people develop their emotional capabilities and their mental health throughout their entire lives. The World Health Organization confirms that mental health outcomes and emotional stability throughout life are determined by early life experiences (World Health Organization). Psychological research demonstrates that childhood traumatic memories create lasting impacts which affect both identity development and emotional control. Bessel van der Kolk explains that early trauma becomes deeply embedded in emotional memory, producing long term effects that include fear, silence, and withdrawal (van der Kolk). The evidence presents proof that childhood trauma creates unspoken yet powerful disruptions to confidence and learning abilities and relationship development. Literary narratives help to represent these hidden emotional struggles by providing insight into the inner worlds of young individuals who experience psychological distress.

Nations reports that mental health development needs three essential elements which include early treatment and public understanding and mental health services that everyone can access (United Nations). The framework identifies childhood trauma as a major public health problem which requires immediate attention. Literature supports these objectives by illustrating how emotional suffering develops within families and communities. The audience learns through narrative representation that trauma exists as both an individual experience and a condition which society defines through its expectations and people choose to remain silent about. The film shows mental health issues which help viewers understand the topic better while they develop empathy for children that leads them to protect their mental health.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's short story "Tomorrow Is Too Far" presents an effective examination of how childhood trauma affects mental health throughout a person's life. The story shows a young narrator who experiences emotional weakness because of his family problems which developed after he lost his loved ones and felt guilty about it (Adichie). The narrative demonstrates how traumatic experiences shape the development of a person's identity and their ability to cope through self-reflection and emotional withdrawal and resilience. Adichie's depiction meets the requirements of Sustainable Development Goal 3 because it shows the necessity for people to develop both psychological and emotional capacities. A close reading of the text shows how literature can explain the permanent effects of childhood challenges through its artistic representation. The research positions Adichie's story into a wider mental health discussion which demonstrates how literature helps people grasp trauma while building psychological strength.

2.Review of Literature

Research on childhood trauma demonstrates that emotional experiences from early life produce lasting effects on a person's psychological development. The mind and behaviour together with well-being that extends into adulthood all experience effects from childhood trauma. Literary studies examine how writers reveal the hidden emotional life of children and show the silent pain that many young characters carry. Through stories readers gain insights into the emotional struggles which children often keep hidden from view. The Sustainable Development Goal 3 focuses on establishing universal health and emotional well-being standards which this perspective supports. Literature provides a clear space to examine childhood memory and to see how early experiences influence later life.

Research on Chimamanda Adichie's fiction shows that she writes about how children experience their emotions. Nwankwo (2019) explains that Adichie presents childhood memory as a space marked by fear, loss, and silence. Her stories show that small events inside the family have strong psychological effects. Children learn to negotiate tension and emotional uncertainty while adults remain unaware of their internal struggles. Adichie gives importance to quiet moments that influence a young person's mind. Her narratives suggest that emotional pain exists even when daily routines appear calm and ordinary.

Researchers also engage with the theme of domestic control and emotional struggle in Adichie's early fiction. Eze (2018) notes that the novel Purple Hibiscus demonstrates the consequences of strict parenting on the mind of a child. Trauma appears in situations where care is limited and emotional support is weak. Children who grow up under pressure learn silence as a way to survive. They carry emotional fear without guidance or validation. This research makes it clear that trauma is not always produced by physical acts. Early psychological development receives its shape from emotional pressure and criticism together with the absence of understanding. Identity development together with future growth occurs through the experiences people have during their childhood years.

Scholars associate these concepts with Sustainable Development Goal 3 objectives. Bello (2020) shows how literature enables society to comprehend the mental experiences of at-risk children.

The stories which people tell about themselves to others create two effects because they make people think about themselves and they show social problems which people usually keep hidden. The literary work serves as a reference tool which enables readers to cultivate empathy together with their capacity to understand emotional states. The research which studies Toni Morrison and Jamaica Kincaid shows that writers who tell childhood trauma stories will experience lasting emotional effects from their childhood experiences.

Global displacement research establishes another essential aspect of its study. Budhathoki shows through his study of The Lightless Sky that refugee children experience traumatic emotional distress when they must move to new areas. The children experience loss of their known locations and their established social networks and their community backing. Their mental health suffers to the point that they struggle to adapt to new situations because of these bereavements. Displaced children face three main challenges which include experiencing fear and confusion and dealing with unexpected situations. Supportive education provides these children with the tools they need to regain their self-assurance while building their capacity to withstand challenges. During times of doubt the school environment provides students with protection and organization. The study demonstrates that social and political obstacles prevent people from getting mental health treatment and educational materials. Through their portrayals of displacement in literature authors explain to readers how these challenges connect to Sustainable Development Goal 3 and Sustainable Development Goal 4 and Sustainable Development Goal 10.

Adverse Childhood Experiences study conducted by Felitti and his colleagues in 1998 established an essential foundation for the field of trauma research. The research demonstrates that people who encounter abuse and neglect or face family disputes will develop depression and anxiety and addiction problems and persistent physical health conditions. Early trauma experiences affect how people handle their emotions and develop their brain functions. The later studies validated that multiple instances of trauma create lasting effects on both mental and physical health. The research results show that communities require immediate assistance together with secure spaces and programs that stop problems from developing. The research findings establish a direct link between Sustainable Development Goal 3 because the goal aims to enhance mental health and total wellbeing of individuals.

Further studies investigate how children experience life in areas which violence and conflict have disturbed. Betancourt et al. (2010) explain that children who witness war experience emotional distress and social disruption. The way they behave and their relationships together with their security feelings demonstrate that trauma has impacted their lives. The research demonstrates how family backing together with community resources create essential support structures. Structured educational programs together with organized activities enable children to achieve emotional recovery while building their ability to face challenges. Support systems improve recovery processes while they help people build self-assurance. The research emphasizes the requirement for mental health programs which should be developed to address the particular cultural and local community requirements of their target population. The concepts presented in this study support international debates about the mental health of young people who have experienced trauma.

The reviewed studies show that literature provides a meaningful space to understand childhood trauma and emotional health. Adichie's works offer clear insight into the experiences of children who navigate fear, loss, and emotional pressure. Her narratives encourage empathy and deepen awareness about early psychological challenges. The selected scholarly works support the aims of Sustainable Development Goal 3 because they show that healthy relationships and emotional support shape early psychological development. The present review forms a strong foundation for the current research which examines childhood trauma, mental wellbeing, and resilience in the selected works of Adichie.

3.Objectives

1. The researcher will investigate the representation of childhood trauma in Chimamanda Adichie's short story Tomorrow Is Too Far.
2. The selected text will be used to examine how early emotional experiences create effects which determine mental health outcomes.
3. 3. The research will investigate how childhood trauma themes connect with the objectives of Sustainable Development Goal 3.

4.Methodology

The research applies a qualitative textual analysis method to investigate how Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie portrays childhood trauma and mental health issues in her short story Tomorrow Is Too Far. The selected text of the study investigates memory and emotional conflict which leads to psychological development among family members. The research uses close reading to discover narrative elements which show characters experiencing emotional weakness and psychological pressure while they use silence and withdrawal and self-reflection as coping methods. The study examines how narrative voice and imagery and thematic elements work together to demonstrate the enduring effects of early emotional experiences on identity development and mental health. TThe analysi s employs trauma studies together with mental health research elements to demonstrate the impact of childhood experiences on emotional control abilities and psychological resilience development. The research outcomes match the requirements of Sustainable Development Goal 3 which seeks to advance mental health and physical health benefits for all individuals. The story demonstrates how children require emotional protection together with safe environments according to its integration of literary study and social psychological findings. The interdisciplinary approach shows that literary study brings valuable insights to mental health education and childhood development discussions.

5.Findings

The study shows that ongoing family stress and critical remarks increase the narrator's emotional vulnerability while developing her self-image through fear and anxiety. Grandmama's severe comments establish an environment that forces the narrator to avoid disappointing others which causes her to isolate herself as her primary method of handling emotions. The behavior offers momentary protection from emotional distress yet it prevents proper emotional release and social engagement. Adichie uses her story to show how childhood psychological stress affects emotional development in secret, while demonstrating the importance of having loving and secure family environments.

6.Results

The findings show that children who experience family stress during their formative years will develop anxiety and low self-esteem and reduced emotional strength according to the psychological research conducted by Anda et al. (2006) and Masten and Narayan (2012). The narrator uses isolation as a reaction because it represents a typical coping method which prevents him from developing social skills and emotional intelligence. The results support Sustainable Development Goal 3 because they show that early emotional care and family support systems and intervention methods are essential for achieving sustained mental health and preventing trauma-based psychological disorders.

7.Discussion

Childhood Trauma and Emotional Neglect

The findings show that children who experience family stress during their formative years will develop anxiety and low self-esteem and reduced emotional strength according to the psychological research conducted by Anda et al. (2006) and Masten and Narayan (2012). The narrator uses isolation as a reaction because it represents a typical coping method which prevents him from developing social

skills and emotional intelligence. The results support Sustainable Development Goal 3 because they show that early emotional care and family support systems and intervention methods are essential for achieving sustained mental health and preventing trauma-based psychological disorders.

Trauma, Silence, and Psychological Withdrawal

The story demonstrates that people who experience childhood trauma tend to respond by remaining silent while they withdraw their emotions. The narrator hides her jealousy and pain because she cannot handle her feelings which eventually result in her destructive behavior. She falsely cries out "A snake! It's the echi eteka! A snake!" (Adichie 196) because her body displays the effects of all her emotional battles which she had to keep inside. Van der Kolk demonstrates through his research that trauma interrupts emotional control which leads people to develop dangerous coping methods when they have not yet dealt with their emotions (van der Kolk 88). The narrator uses silence to show that she is not experiencing recovery but instead exhibits psychological repression. The episode demonstrates how mental health problems develop when people lack emotional literacy because SDG 3 requires organizations to provide their people with early intervention. Adichie's narrative demonstrates how children who do not address their emotional issues from childhood will face disastrous consequences which shows the necessity of trauma informed care for children.

Family Dynamics and Mental Health Risks

The story further shows that childhood trauma often leads to silence and emotional withdrawal as coping mechanisms. The narrator does not openly express jealousy or pain but internalizes her emotions until they manifest destructively. When she falsely cries out, "A snake! It's the echi eteka! A snake!" (Adichie 196), her action emerges from years of suppressed emotional conflict. Van der Kolk argues that trauma disrupts emotional regulation and pushes individuals toward harmful coping behaviors when feelings remain unprocessed (van der Kolk 88). The narrator's silence reflects psychological repression rather than healing. SDG 3 stresses early intervention and emotional literacy, and this episode demonstrates what occurs when mental health support is absent. Adichie's narrative thus exposes how unresolved childhood emotions can erupt into tragic outcomes, reinforcing the importance of trauma informed care for children.

Guilt and Identity Formation

The narrator's self-identity develops through his experience of guilt and his ability to remember things rather than through his process of healing. She carries emotional weight through her entire life according to her adult assessment of herself who states, "It has been eighteen years and the trees in Grandmama's yard look unchanged" (Adichie 198). The image demonstrates how trauma persists across multiple historical time periods. According to Herman people with unresolved trauma experience identity disintegration which prevents them from achieving complete psychological development (Herman 133). The narrator needs to learn self-forgiveness because her childhood trauma prevents her from developing a proper self-identity. The story shows that SDG 3 demands continuous mental health treatment across all life stages because it demonstrates that trauma requires complete psychological rehabilitation. Adult emotional health in the future develops from their early emotional experiences according to literature research.

Grief, Fear, and Emotional Contagion

The story demonstrates how children pick up on adult emotional distress which leads to their secondary trauma. The narrator witnesses Grandmama's rage and her mother's anxiety, observing, "Are you all right? she kept asking you" (Adichie 196). The research demonstrates how emotional instability spreads through family systems. Nader and Pynoos explain that exposure to adult emotional distress intensifies children's trauma and disrupts their sense of safety (Pynoos et al. 41). SDG 3 advocates for the establishment of secure emotional environments which provide protection to children. Adichie's

narrative demonstrates that when families fail to regulate grief, children inherit psychological chaos. Literature functions as a warning about how emotions transmit between people which results in long-lasting mental health consequences.

Cultural Silence and Mental Health Stigma

The story's cultural norms prohibit emotional display while they make people maintain silence. The narrator never speaks about her guilt because confession would violate family expectations. This shows how people in society view emotional suffering. Patel et al. claim that cultural mental health stigma hinders people from receiving treatment which results in increased psychological distress (Patel et al. 1674). SDG 3 aims to decrease mental health stigma while providing all people with access to mental health services. Adichie's story shows how cultural silence multiplies trauma effects while it blocks recovery. Literature demonstrates how social values determine emotional results and shows why mental health policies need to consider cultural differences.

Memory as a Site of Trauma and Survival

The story uses memory as a dual force that creates difficulties and protects life. The narrator shows his childhood memories through his repeated visits to those past events because he experiences ongoing trauma from those times. "The trees... still reach out and hug one another" (Adichie 198) demonstrates how time stops and people become emotionally stuck. Caruth explains that people experience trauma through their delayed recollections which cause them to keep returning to their previous experiences Caruth 7. The psychological need for recovery and resilience becomes recognized in Sustainable Development Goal 3. Adichie shows through her story that memory functions as a healing tool which creates either a prison or a path to recovery depending on the emotional assistance people get. Literature thus contributes to mental health discourse by revealing how storytelling itself becomes a therapeutic act.

Literature, SDG 3, and Social Responsibility

The final connection between "Tomorrow Is Too Far" links personal trauma with worldwide mental health issues that SDG 3 addresses. The narrative shows that childhood adversity produces long lasting emotional damage when care systems fail. Bello argues that trauma narratives promote empathy and social responsibility by transforming private pain into public awareness (Bello 52). SDG 3 supports preventive medical treatment and emotional development training together with psychological health services that all people should be able to use. Adichie's story serves as artistic literature which additionally serves as a social critique by showing how communities should provide early emotional support to their members. The story connects childhood traumatic experiences with mental health outcomes which shows how literature can influence policy debates while supporting international mental health development.

8.Conclusion

The study investigates how Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "Tomorrow Is Too" Far shows childhood trauma through sustainable development goal 3 which controls mental health effects from childhood trauma. The analysis demonstrates that emotional neglect, favoritism, and family conflict create deep psychological wounds which lead to identity formation and behavior development. The narrator uses silence and guilt together with his withdrawal behavior to show how his childhood experiences control his coping methods and relationship development. The story shows that uncontrolled grieving together with emotional pressure leads to worsened trauma symptoms and reduced capability to maintain emotional control. The combination of cultural expectations and social silence stops psychological suffering from disappearing while making it harder for people to recover. Memory and reflection show that childhood trauma keeps affecting mental health through all human life stages. Literary narratives establish which emotional pain develops deep understanding since they create empathy toward others. Adichie's story supports SDG 3 objectives by showing how early

emotional care together with preventive mental health measures and caring environments benefit children.

9.Limitations

The study restricts its examination to one short story which prevents its findings from being applied to other works by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and to all literary works that explore childhood trauma. The research depends on qualitative textual analysis, yet this method leads to subjective results which require interpreters to read the narrative. The research focuses on psychological and emotional aspects which leaves social economic and cultural factors that affect childhood trauma yet to be adequately investigated. The study does not include interviews surveys or clinical data which prevents researchers from studying how real-life trauma affects children. The findings of this research show literary representation because the research lacks psychological proof from real-world situations. The current study limitations show that researchers need to apply wider analytical methods which will improve research reliability and range of outcomes in their upcoming work.

10.Recommendations

The future research needs to study multiple Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie works to find common patterns which show how childhood trauma and emotional resilience appear in her stories. Scholars can use literary analysis together with psychological frameworks and interviews or observational studies to establish empirical evidence which supports their interpretative results. The study of different cultures through comparative research reveals how childhood trauma affects mental health outcomes in various social situations. The educational system can use Tomorrow Is Too Far as a teaching tool to help students learn emotional literacy and coping methods and resilience building. The policymakers need to establish secure and supportive spaces which will promote early mental health treatment for children who experience emotional or psychological challenges. The implementation of culturally sensitive mental health programs needs to take place for the purpose of enhancing emotional wellbeing while supporting healthy psychological development in accordance with Sustainable Development Goal 3.

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH CULTURE SOCIETY ISSN: 2456-6683
Monthly Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed Journal [Impact Factor: 9.241]
Volume - 09, Special Issue - 43, December - 2025 Publication Date: 31/12/2025

DOIs:10.2017/IJRCS/ICNMHTGLL-2025/P13 --:-- Research Paper / Article / Review

A Two Day International Conference on Navigating Mental Health Through the Gateway of Language and Literature. (ICNMHTGLL-2025) Date: 22 - 23 December, 2025

Pain and Survival: Reading Mental Health Narratives in Kathleen Glasgow's Young Adult Fiction

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Abstract: This paper explores how Juliana Spahr's poetry challenges anthropocentric worldviews and articulates collective eco-grief over environmental degradation, climate crisis, and capitalist exploitation. This study looks into Spahr's critique of human centric ideologies through her collection of poems titled *That Winter the Wolf Came*, reflecting the ecological trauma caused by widespread industrialism, warfare, and reliance on fossil fuels and many more. Her collection expresses the loss of biodiversity and the dis-location of life systems. Spahr's work touches on the systematic violence that the planet has experienced as part of the Anthropocene approach. The very word anthropocentric means humans are given more importance than nature. Her poems capture private experiences with political struggles, allowing readers to move between caring for nature, feeling the urgency of activism, and reflecting on personal loss. Her writing encapsulates both the sadness of environmental destruction and the loss of joy that can come with constant activism. Through this, she builds a connection between human emotion and resistance for the sake of animals and nature. This essay argues that by reading Spahr's poems, we are encouraged to imagine new, respectful relationships with other species, to practice humility toward nature, and to come together around a shared idea of care and responsibility for the Earth. It further connects her work to international sustainability standards, particularly the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 13: Climate Action and SDG 15: Life on Land), and frames her poems as significant literary responses to planetary emergency.

Keywords: Environmental Degradation, Climate Crisis, Capitalist Exploit, Ecological Trauma…

1.INTRODUCTION:

The accelerating environmental crisis has reshaped not only scientific and political discussions but also the way literature engages with the world. In recent years, the idea of *eco-grief* has emerged to describe the emotional response humans experience in the face of ecological loss, including climate change, species extinction, and the destruction of natural habitats. This form of grief is not limited to personal sorrow; rather, it reflects a broader awareness of environmental decline and humanity's role within it. As the planet undergoes rapid transformation, such emotional responses are becoming an important part of contemporary cultural and literary expression. This condition is closely tied to what scholars describe as the Anthropocene, a period in which human activity has become a dominant force shaping the Earth's systems. Industrial expansion, resource extraction, and consumer-driven economies have contributed significantly to environmental imbalance. In this context, literature increasingly functions as more than aesthetic expression, it becomes a space for questioning dominant ideologies and imagining alternative relationships between humans and the natural world.

The poetry of Juliana Spahr offers a compelling example of this shift. Her work brings together personal emotion and political awareness, presenting ecological damage not as a distant issue but as an immediate and shared experience. "sense of mourning, enfolding the reader as the erasure of ecological life does" (Kolbert, 219). Through her writing, grief is not portrayed as passive despair but as something that can foster connection, reflection, and even resistance.

This paper argues that Spahr's poetry transforms eco-grief into a collective and active force that challenges human-centered thinking. By linking emotional response with ecological awareness, her work demonstrates how literature can contribute meaningfully to conversations about environmental responsibility and the need for change.

2.LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly discussions on ecocriticism and posthumanism have emphasized the importance of rethinking human relationships with nature. Ecocritical studies explore how literature represents environmental issues, while posthumanist approaches challenge the idea of human dominance. Previous research on Juliana Spahr highlights her focus on collective experience, ecological awareness, and political engagement.

Critics have noted that her poetry moves beyond traditional lyrical expression by incorporating elements of activism and shared voice. Studies also emphasize her use of repetition, listing, and collective narration to reflect environmental loss and interconnectedness. These perspectives provide a foundation for understanding how her work contributes to contemporary ecological discourse.

3.OBJECTIVES

To examine the representation of eco-grief in Spahr's poetry

To analyze how her work challenges anthropocentric perspectives

To explore the connection between emotion and ecological awareness

To understand the role of poetry as a form of environmental resistance

4.RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Understanding the relationship between literature and environmental crisis requires an approach that moves beyond traditional literary analysis. Ecocriticism provides such a framework by examining how texts engage with ecological concerns and represent the interconnectedness of human and nonhuman life. Rather than treating nature as a passive backdrop, ecocritical reading practices foreground the ways in which environmental damage, climate instability, and resource exploitation are embedded within cultural narratives. In this sense, literature becomes a site where ecological realities are not only reflected but also questioned and reimagined. It encourages readers to recognize that environmental issues are deeply entangled with social, political, and economic structures.

Alongside ecocriticism, posthumanism further complicates the human-centered assumptions that have historically shaped literary thought. Posthumanist perspectives challenge the idea that humans exist as separate from or superior to other forms of life. Instead, they emphasize relationality, suggesting that humans, animals, ecosystems, and even technological systems exist within networks of mutual dependence. This shift in perspective is particularly relevant in the context of environmental crisis, as it calls attention to the limitations of viewing the world solely through human needs and desires. By decentering the human subject, posthumanism opens up new ways of understanding responsibility, ethics, and coexistence.

The tension between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism lies at the core of these discussions. Anthropocentrism prioritizes human interests, often justifying the use of natural resources without

regard for long-term ecological consequences. This worldview has contributed significantly to environmental degradation by positioning nature as something to be controlled or exploited. In contrast, ecocentrism proposes a more balanced perspective, recognizing the intrinsic value of all living and nonliving components of the environment. It challenges hierarchical thinking and instead promotes an understanding of the Earth as a complex, interdependent system.

When these frameworks are brought together, they offer a critical lens through which literary works can be interpreted as active engagements with ecological crisis. They allow for a reading that not only identifies environmental themes but also interrogates the underlying assumptions about power, value, and existence. Through this combined approach, literature emerges as a powerful medium for rethinking human relationships with the natural world and for imagining more sustainable and ethically grounded futures.

5.DISCUSSION

In recent years, eco-grief has emerged as a significant emotional framework through which environmental crisis is understood and expressed in literature. Rather than being confined to individual sorrow, eco-grief reflects a shared emotional condition shaped by collective awareness of ecological damage. It arises from witnessing the accelerating loss of forests, species, and ecosystems, as well as from recognizing the long-term consequences of human actions on the planet. In literary contexts, this form of grief is not presented as distant or abstract; instead, it is rendered immediate and deeply felt, allowing readers to engage with environmental issues on an emotional level.

What distinguishes eco-grief from conventional notions of grief is its expansive scope. It is not tied to a single event or personal loss but is instead linked to ongoing, large-scale transformations that affect both human and nonhuman life. Writers increasingly portray this condition as something shared across communities, transcending geographical and cultural boundaries. In doing so, literature captures the emotional atmosphere of the present moment, where awareness of environmental crisis has become part of everyday consciousness. This shared dimension also challenges the idea that environmental concern is purely intellectual, emphasizing instead that it is deeply affective and embodied.

Closely connected to eco-grief is the experience of climate anxiety. This form of anxiety stems from uncertainty about the future and the recognition that environmental changes may be irreversible. In literary representations, climate anxiety often appears alongside grief, creating a complex emotional landscape that reflects both fear and responsibility. Rather than presenting these emotions as paralyzing, many texts suggest that they can lead to heightened awareness and ethical reflection. The emotional discomfort associated with environmental crisis becomes a catalyst for questioning existing ways of living and for imagining alternative futures.

The loss of biodiversity further intensifies this emotional response. The disappearance of species is not only a scientific concern but also a cultural and emotional one. Literature frequently engages with this loss by drawing attention to the presence of nonhuman life, often through detailed descriptions or acts of naming. Such strategies serve to acknowledge the value of these lives and to resist their erasure. In this way, eco-grief becomes a means of remembering and honoring what is being lost, transforming absence into a form of presence within the text.

At the same time, eco-grief fosters an emotional connection between humans and the nonhuman world. By emphasizing shared vulnerability, literary works challenge the assumption that humans exist apart from nature. Instead, they highlight the interdependence that defines all forms of life. This shift encourages readers to see environmental damage not as something external but as something that directly implicates them. Through this process, eco-grief moves beyond passive sadness and becomes a form of awareness that can inspire care, responsibility, and, potentially, action.

The poetry in *That Winter the Wolf Came* by Juliana Spahr offers a powerful engagement with environmental crisis through formal experimentation and emotional intensity. Her work does not simply

describe ecological damage; instead, it develops a poetic structure that allows readers to experience loss, connection, and resistance simultaneously. Through stylistic choices such as repetition, collective voice, and urgent tone, Spahr transforms poetry into a space where grief becomes both visible and politically meaningful.

One of the most striking features of Spahr's poetry is her use of repetition and listing. Her poems frequently include long sequences of names, of plants, animals, landscapes, and even human communities. These lists do more than provide descriptive detail; they function as acts of remembrance. By naming species and environments, Spahr resists their disappearance, turning poetic language into a form of archive. Each name carries weight, reminding the reader that what is being listed is also under threat.

Repetition reinforces this effect by creating a rhythm that mirrors both persistence and loss. The recurrence of phrases and structures produces a sense of accumulation, as though the poem is gathering fragments of a world that is gradually fading. At the same time, this repetition can feel overwhelming, reflecting the scale of environmental destruction. The reader is not allowed to move quickly past these details; instead, they are drawn into a sustained encounter with what is being lost.

In this way, listing becomes a form of mourning. It acknowledges absence while refusing silence. Rather than presenting loss as something abstract, Spahr makes it tangible through language. The act of naming becomes an ethical gesture, one that insists on recognition and remembrance in the face of erasure.

Another significant aspect of Spahr's poetry is the movement from personal emotion to collective experience. While her work often begins with individual perception or feeling, it rarely remains confined to a single perspective. Instead, the poetic voice expands outward, incorporating multiple subjects and experiences. This shift reflects the idea that environmental crisis cannot be understood in isolation; it is shared across communities and species.

Spahr frequently uses inclusive language that blurs the boundary between "I" and "we." This transition suggests that personal grief is inseparable from broader ecological conditions. The loss felt by one individual is connected to larger patterns of environmental damage, making grief a communal rather than private response. Through this approach, the poems create a sense of solidarity that extends beyond human relationships to include nonhuman life.

This collective dimension also challenges traditional notions of authorship and voice in poetry. Rather than presenting a singular, authoritative speaker, Spahr constructs a more fluid and interconnected perspective. The poem becomes a space where different forms of life and experience intersect, reflecting the complexity of ecological relationships. As a result, grief is not portrayed as isolating but as something that can bring individuals together through shared awareness. Spahr's poetic language is marked by a strong sense of urgency, which aligns her work with forms of political expression such as protest and activism. The tone of her poems often feels immediate and insistent, as though responding to a crisis that cannot be ignored. This urgency is conveyed through short, direct statements, as well as through the repetition of phrases that resemble chants or slogans.

Such language disrupts the expectation that poetry should be detached or purely reflective. Instead, it positions the poem as an active intervention in contemporary issues. The rhythm and structure of Spahr's lines can evoke the collective energy of demonstrations, where voices come together to demand change. This connection between poetic form and political action reinforces the idea that literature can participate in movements for environmental justice.

At the same time, the urgency in her work is not limited to human concerns. It also reflects the precarious state of ecosystems and species facing extinction. The pace and intensity of the language mirror the rapid changes occurring in the natural world, creating a sense that time is limited. Readers are not given the comfort of distance; they are confronted with the immediacy of the crisis. Through this urgent tone, Spahr transforms eco-grief into a motivating force. The poems do not allow grief to

remain passive or static. Instead, they push it toward awareness and, potentially, toward action. By combining emotional depth with a sense of immediacy, her poetry demonstrates how literary form can respond dynamically to environmental challenges.

A central concern in the poetry of Juliana Spahr is the rejection of anthropocentrism, the belief that human beings occupy a position of primary importance in the world. This worldview has long shaped cultural, economic, and political systems, often justifying the exploitation of natural resources in the name of progress. In *That Winter the Wolf Came*, Spahr challenges this assumption by exposing the consequences of placing human needs above all other forms of life. Her poetry reveals how such thinking contributes directly to environmental degradation and calls for a reorientation of perspective.

One of the key ways in which Spahr resists anthropocentrism is through her critique of capitalism. She draws attention to systems that prioritize profit over ecological balance, highlighting how economic growth is frequently achieved at the expense of environmental health. Industrial expansion, fossil fuel dependency, and large-scale extraction are not presented as neutral developments but as processes that produce harm across ecosystems. By linking environmental damage to economic structures, Spahr emphasizes that ecological crisis is not accidental; it is deeply connected to the logic of accumulation and consumption that defines modern society.

This critique extends to the visible and invisible forms of industrial damage that shape everyday life. Spahr's poetry often references pollution, deforestation, and the disruption of natural cycles, illustrating how human activity alters landscapes in lasting ways. These changes are not confined to distant locations; they are part of a global system that affects air, water, and soil across regions. By presenting these impacts within her work, Spahr makes it difficult to maintain the illusion that humans exist separately from the environments they inhabit. Instead, her poetry insists on recognizing the material consequences of human actions. At the same time, Spahr challenges the underlying assumptions that sustain human-centered thinking. Anthropocentrism depends on the idea that humans are distinct from and superior to other forms of life, a belief that allows nature to be treated as a resource rather than as a network of living relations. In contrast, Spahr's work suggests that such separation is both artificial and harmful. Her poetry repeatedly draws attention to the interconnectedness of life, emphasizing that human survival is tied to the health of ecosystems. This perspective destabilizes hierarchical distinctions and encourages a more relational understanding of existence.

Spahr does not simply reject anthropocentrism at an abstract level; she demonstrates its effects through lived experience and emotional resonance. By connecting environmental destruction to everyday realities, she shows how deeply embedded these ideas are within social systems. Her poetry invites readers to question their own assumptions and to reconsider their place within the broader ecological context.

Spahr's resistance to anthropocentrism is grounded in the recognition that humans are not separate from nature but are part of it. This shift in perspective carries ethical implications, as it calls for a form of responsibility that extends beyond human interests. By challenging dominant ways of thinking, her work opens up possibilities for more sustainable and respectful relationships with the natural world.

In the poetry of Juliana Spahr, eco-grief does not remain confined to emotional expression; it evolves into a form of political awareness and engagement. Rather than portraying grief as a passive or paralyzing response, her work demonstrates how it can become a starting point for questioning systems that contribute to environmental destruction. This shift from feeling to reflection is significant, as it transforms individual emotion into a broader consciousness of ecological crisis and responsibility.

Spahr's poems suggest that grief, when shared and articulated, can reveal the structural causes behind environmental damage. The loss of ecosystems, species, and landscapes is not presented as an isolated घटना but as the outcome of specific economic and political practices. By connecting emotional response to these underlying systems, her poetry encourages readers to move beyond mourning and toward

critical awareness. In this sense, eco-grief becomes a lens through which the realities of climate change, industrial expansion, and environmental injustice are more clearly understood.

At the same time, Spahr's work positions poetry itself as a form of protest. Her language often carries the rhythm and intensity of collective expression, echoing the voices of demonstrations and public resistance. The repetition of phrases, the urgency of tone, and the emphasis on shared experience create a poetic space that resembles a gathering of voices rather than a solitary reflection. This stylistic approach blurs the boundary between art and activism, suggesting that writing can participate in political discourse rather than merely observe it.

What emerges from this intersection of grief and protest is the idea that emotion can lead to action. The recognition of environmental loss fosters a sense of urgency that challenges indifference and inaction. Instead of distancing the reader, Spahr's poetry draws them into a network of shared concern, where feeling becomes a motivation for engagement. Through this process, eco-grief is redefined as an active force, one that not only acknowledges damage but also calls for change, responsibility, and collective response.

The concerns expressed in the poetry of Juliana Spahr can be meaningfully connected to broader global efforts aimed at addressing environmental crisis, particularly the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. While her work is rooted in literary expression, it resonates strongly with the objectives of United Nations initiatives such as SDG 13 Climate Action and SDG 15 Life on Land. These goals focus on combating climate change and protecting terrestrial ecosystems, both of which are central themes in her poetry.

Spahr's attention to environmental degradation, species loss, and ecological imbalance reflects the urgency emphasized in SDG 13, which calls for immediate and sustained action to address climate-related challenges. Similarly, her poetic engagement with biodiversity and the disappearance of nonhuman life aligns with the aims of SDG 15, which highlights the need to conserve and restore ecosystems. Rather than presenting these issues through policy language, her work approaches them through emotional and cultural expression, making the crisis more immediate and relatable.

By connecting personal and collective experiences of environmental loss to larger global concerns, her poetry indirectly supports these sustainability frameworks. It demonstrates how literature can complement policy by shaping awareness, encouraging reflection, and fostering a sense of shared responsibility toward the planet.

6.CONCLUSION

The poetry of Juliana Spahr demonstrates how literary expression can engage deeply with the realities of environmental crisis by bringing together grief and resistance within a single framework. Throughout her work, ecological loss is not presented as a distant or abstract issue but as something immediate, shared, and emotionally charged. By transforming eco-grief into a collective experience, she challenges the tendency to treat environmental damage as separate from human life. Instead, her poetry insists on recognizing the interconnectedness that binds humans to the natural world.

At the same time, Spahr's writing highlights the potential of literature to move beyond representation and toward responsibility. Her poems do not simply describe environmental harm; they question the systems and assumptions that produce it, particularly those rooted in human-centered thinking. In doing so, they encourage readers to reconsider their relationship with nature and to acknowledge their role within broader ecological processes. This shift from awareness to reflection is what allows literature to function as a form of ethical engagement.

Looking ahead, the significance of eco-literature is likely to grow as environmental challenges become more urgent and visible. Works such as Spahr's suggest that literature can play a vital role in shaping how these crises are understood and addressed. By fostering empathy, awareness, and critical thought,

eco-literature opens up possibilities for more responsible and sustainable ways of living. Ultimately, it calls for an ethical commitment that extends beyond human interests, urging a more inclusive and attentive relationship with all forms of life.

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH CULTURE SOCIETY ISSN: 2456-6683
Monthly Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed Journal [Impact Factor: 9.241]
Volume - 09, Special Issue - 43, December - 2025 Publication Date: 31/12/2025

DOIs:10.2017/IJRCS/ICNMHTGLL-2025/P14 --:-- Research Paper / Article / Review

A Two Day International Conference on Navigating Mental Health Through the Gateway of Language and Literature. (ICNMHTGLL-2025) Date: 22 - 23 December, 2025

Neurofeedback Training for Inattention and Hyperactivity in a 16-Year-Old Diagnosed with ADHD: A Case Study in Protocol Adaptation and Learning Heterogeneity

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Abstract: *This case study examines the neurofeedback (NFB) intervention for a 16-year-old male client diagnosed with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), whose primary presentation was difficulty sustaining focus and accompanying hyperactivity. The patient underwent 15 sessions, spaced over a period of three months with subsequent follow-up, utilizing three distinct frequency-based protocols: Theta/Beta (TB) ratio, Sensorimotor Rhythm (SMR), and Alpha-Theta (AT) training. Qualitative session data revealed that while the client achieved early success with the TB ratio and demonstrated superior performance during AT training, he consistently struggled with SMR training, a key protocol for enhancing focus, often failing to sustain regulation above threshold (Performance Score <3). Despite this marked difficulty in consistently acquiring the SMR self-regulation skill, the client reported a notable reduction in hyperactivity and a gradual, consistent increase in attention duration, confirmed by the collateral therapist report at termination. This case demonstrates that clinical success in NFB may be achieved through adaptive protocol switching-leveraging AT for emotional stability while TB and SMR target focus and highlights the established challenge of learning heterogeneity in NFB, where positive symptomatic outcomes can occur despite inconsistent measured neural acquisition.*

Key Words: *Neurofeedback, ADHD, NFB protocols, SMR, Theta-beta.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Neurofeedback (NFB) is an operant conditioning protocol that allows individuals to gain volitional control over specific parameters of their neural activity through real-time feedback (Siniatchkin & Lubar, 2014). As a specialized form of biofeedback focused directly on electrical brain activity (EEG), NFB trains self-regulation by selectively rewarding the increase of optimal brain wave frequencies while inhibiting undesirable ones. This process leverages the principle of neuroplasticity, utilizing operant conditioning to gradually recondition brain activity and remodel functional pathways, which is believed to lead to durable, long-term changes in behavior and function, potentially persisting for years after the program concludes. Mechanistically, NFB training is a biologically active intervention that induces measurable neuroplastic changes. Studies have shown that NFB can enhance functional connectivity within targeted neural networks and even lead to subtle structural changes in white matter following very short training schedules (less than one hour), clearly demonstrating the

brain's innate capacity to reorganize itself in response to directed learning efforts. The International Society for Neurofeedback and Research (ISNR) and the Association for Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback (AAPB) recognize NFB as an efficacious treatment for ADHD, often targeting the normalization of an elevated Theta/Beta ratio (TBR), which is associated with cortical under-arousal and inattention.

The scientific foundation of neurofeedback is rooted in early electrophysiological discoveries, beginning with Hans Berger's identification of the alpha rhythm in 1924, which established the concept of a quantifiable resting rate for the cortex. The clinical application was pioneered by Dr. Joe Kamiya in the 1950s at the University of Chicago, who successfully applied the principles of biofeedback to train subjects in the volitional control of their own EEG activity, specifically the alpha state, an achievement that earned him the title 'father of neurofeedback'. Since those early EEG applications, NFB technology has evolved considerably. While traditional EEG-NFB has been used clinically since the 1970s , modern techniques utilize high-resolution methods like quantitative EEG (QEEG) for mathematical analysis and specialized brain mapping to target complex neural oscillations. Furthermore, the advent of functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI-NFB) has increased the spatial specificity of training, allowing for the modulation of subcortical structures and specific functional networks with high precision.

For Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), NFB protocols specifically address underlying neurophysiological dysfunction. A dominant neurophysiological feature in many ADHD patients is the elevated Theta/Beta Ratio (TBR), a metric first proposed by Lubar et al. (1995) to differentiate children with and without ADHD. The consistency of results related to TBR led the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to accept this ratio as a biomarker for the disorder. Clinically, interventions targeting the TBR aim to shift the brain from a state of internal distraction (high Theta) to one of focused alertness (higher Beta), a strategy supported by meta-analyses showing a significant pooled effect size on neural activation post-training (SMD = 0.32). Both the International Society for Neurofeedback and Research (ISNR) and the Association for Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback (AAPB) officially recommend NFB as an efficacious treatment for ADHD, acknowledging its Level 1 support in clinical care.

This report details the 15 session intervention for the client, a 16-year-old male with an existing diagnosis of ADHD, who was referred by a clinical psychologist due to a chief complaint of difficulty sustaining focus, particularly during classes and home study sessions. The intervention spanned approximately three months, including follow-up, and utilized a variety of active (TB, SMR, AT) and passive training protocols in an adaptive approach intended to maximize the acquisition of attention and motor control skills.

2. CASE PRESENTATION AND INTERVENTION DESIGN

2.1 Patient Profile and Presenting Complaint

The client is a 16-year-old male diagnosed with ADHD, referred to neurofeedback by a clinical psychologist. His primary presenting issue was chronic difficulty in maintaining focus, particularly during classes and home study sessions, compounded by hyperactivity, which he later reported had diminished following the intervention. The 15 active training sessions were conducted over a period of three months, allowing for necessary consolidation time between sessions and subsequent follow-up assessment.

2.2 Neurofeedback Protocols Utilized

The neurofeedback sessions were administered using a Nexus 10 MK III device. Active electrode placement for the primary Theta/Beta ratio training was focused on frontal electrode placement (such as Fz or F4/F3), consistent with protocols targeting executive function.

The intervention employed three standard NFB protocols, as well as several passive training systems (Table 1):

Protocol Type	Frequency Target	Primary Clinical Goal	Session Frequency
Theta/Beta (TB) Ratio	Inhibit Theta (4–8 Hz), Reward Beta (13–21 Hz)	Normalize cortical arousal; enhance mental alertness and sustained attention.	4 sessions (1, 2, 4, 5)
Sensorimotor Rhythm (SMR)	Inhibit Theta, Reward Lo-Beta (12–15 Hz)	Enhance focus, motor stability, and reduce physical restlessness/hyperactivity.	10 sessions (6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15)
Alpha-Theta (AT)	Reward Alpha (8–12 Hz) and Theta (4–8 Hz)	Promote relaxation, internal processing, and emotional regulation.	2 sessions (3, 8, 9)
Passive Training (PT)	Brain Booster (BB), Mood Booster (MB)	Provide relaxation and non-contingent neuro-modulation to enhance receptivity.	Used in all sessions

3. RESULTS

Session-by-Session Performance and Clinical Trajectory

A qualitative performance estimate (QPE) was assigned on a 1-to-5 scale (1 = Poor/Difficulty, 5 = Excellent/Congruent).

Table 2: Qualitative Performance Summary Across 11 Neurofeedback Sessions

Session	NF Protocol	Duration (mins)	Key Clinical/Neurophysiological Observation	QPE (1–5)
1	TB	20	Synchronous pattern, understood technique, preferred engaging feedback (games).	4
2	TB	15	Difficulty focusing, muscle tension, increased Theta (due to illness). Waves incongruent.	2
3	AT	20	High performance. Waves congruent and in rhythm (Suggests high state control potential).	5
4	TB	15	Performance low compared to other sessions.	3
5	TB	20	Pattern better, sustained congruence with occasional Theta peaks. Reported attention improved in class.	4
6	SMR (start)	30	Difficulty focusing. SMR low (within 5). Mental exhaustion (came from class).	2
7	SMR	20	Trouble focusing, waves below 10 points (threshold reduced to 3).	2
8	SMR/AT	15/5	SMR is better than last session. AT protocol used again—fluctuations better than SMR.	3 (SMR)
9	SMR/AT	10/16	SMR crossing threshold occasionally but inconsistent (below 5). AT performance is better. Reports dip in hyperactivity and improved attention.	2 (SMR)

10	SMR	20	Improved Beta waves with Theta peaks. Talking about favored topics helped cross the threshold.	3
11	SMR	25	Performance remains the same as previous sessions (plateau). Consistent clinical improvement reported.	3
12-15	TB/SMR		Steady improvement seen in Theta Beta waves. Crossing threshold after 2-3mins of stimulation.	4

4. MECHANISMS OF CHANGE: NEURAL ACQUISITION AND FUNCTIONAL TRANSFER

The clinical gains in the client's focus and the reduction in hyperactivity, achieved despite measured inconsistency in neural acquisition, were driven by a synergistic combination of targeted frequency protocols that addressed both cortical arousal and underlying emotional regulation.

4.1 Normalizing Cortical Arousal through Theta/Beta (TB) Training

ADHD is frequently associated with a state of cortical under-arousal, characterized by an excess of slow-wave Theta activity (linked to internal distraction) and insufficient fast-wave Beta activity (linked to active concentration).

1. The Action: The initial TB ratio protocols reinforced a state of alert, focused attention by rewarding the shift away from slow Theta and toward Beta activity.
2. The Effect: The client's demonstrated ability to understand the technique and his preference for engaging feedback (games/zoom) are factors that research suggests are associated with successful modulation acquisition (Siniatchkin et al., 2022). By Session 5, this learned pattern began to generalize, leading to his report of being "able to pay attention in the class," suggesting an early positive shift in his baseline cortical arousal.

4.2 Enhancing Stability and Reducing Restlessness via Sensorimotor Rhythm (SMR)

The SMR (12–15 Hz) protocol, implemented from Session 6, is critical as SMR activity is associated with the inhibition of motor output and the maintenance of sustained attention.

- The Action: The protocol was designed to enhance focus and physical control, directly targeting the hyperactivity component.
- The Effect: The client often struggled with SMR training, consistently failing to sustain regulation above threshold (QPE 2–3). This highlights the established issue of learning heterogeneity in NFB, where efficacy is dependent on the subject's capacity for self-regulation, which varies widely.
- The Functional Gain: Despite the inconsistent physiological acquisition in the raw performance metrics, the consistent practice of the SMR task likely provided sufficient regulatory exercise to facilitate functional improvement. Arns et al. (2014) proposed that SMR neurofeedback normalizes sleep and thus improves ADHD symptoms. The patient reported a noticeable "dip in hyperactivity" (Session 9), a well-documented clinical effect of SMR training. The reduction in physical restlessness likely created a more stable base that allowed for the subsequent improvement in sustained attention.

4.3 The Role of Emotional and Cognitive Stabilization (Alpha-Theta Bridge)

The adaptive inclusion of the Alpha-Theta (AT) protocol (Sessions 3 and 9) appeared to provide a crucial stabilizing element for the client.

- The Action: AT training rewards both Alpha and Theta, promoting deep relaxation and internal processing. The client exhibited superior performance on this protocol (QPE 5, Session 3).

- The Effect: This intervention likely served as an emotional stabilization mechanism, reducing the internal stress or emotional reactivity (e.g., related to the reported broken relationship in Session 8) that interferes with focus in adolescents. By successfully achieving a deeply regulated state, the client built cognitive resilience, which allowed the focus-based learning from the TB and SMR protocols to be utilized more effectively, even when his SMR acquisition was inconsistent.

4.4 Summary of Neuroplastic Change

The overall improvement in focus is attributed to neuroplasticity-the brain's capacity to form and reinforce new neural pathways. The intervention successfully used principles of operant conditioning across multiple frequency bands to:

1- Shift baseline cortical arousal (TB).
2- Condition stillness and reduce motor output (SMR).
3- Establish a foundation of emotional control (AT).

This multifaceted approach facilitated the functional self-regulation necessary for the "consistent improvement in his focus and attention" reported at the intervention's termination.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Protocol Selection and Adaptation

The client's case exemplifies adaptive clinical practice in response to patient performance and contextual factors (e.g., illness in Session 2, emotional distress in Session 8). The initial TB training is a standard approach for the TBR profile associated with ADHD. The switch to the SMR protocol from Session 6 onwards was logical, as SMR training (rewarding 12–15 Hz) is specifically designed to enhance focus, reduce motor restlessness, and normalize the resting-state brain activity, the goals critical for a student with ADHD. The superior performance during the Alpha-Theta (AT) protocol suggests that addressing underlying emotional or attentional variability may be a necessary precursor or adjunct to focus-based training (SMR) in some ADHD subtypes.

5.2 The Challenge of Learning Heterogeneity

Despite the clinical rationale for SMR training, the client consistently showed signs of poor acquisition during these sessions, with QPE scores often falling to 2 or 3 and struggling to push the SMR amplitude above threshold. This variability in skill acquisition—where some patients are "learners" and others "non-learners"—is a well-documented challenge in NFB research and limits the generalizability of results (Escolano et al., 2023).

In this case, the clinical outcome appears to have successfully transcended the measured acquisition failure on the key SMR protocol. The patient reported a "dip in hyperactivity and improved attention" (Session 9), and the intervention was terminated based on "consistent improvement in his focus and attention" confirmed by a co-therapist (Session 11). This suggests that the cumulative effect of the training, or perhaps the success achieved during the AT and early TB protocols, may have contributed to a functional transfer of skill, even if the SMR skill itself was not fully consolidated. The observed clinical success, despite the SMR acquisition plateau, reinforces the need for clinicians to prioritize symptomatic and collateral reports over raw EEG performance data alone when making treatment decisions.

6. CONCLUSION

The neurofeedback intervention for the client, a 16-year-old with ADHD, demonstrated successful clinical adaptation of standard protocols and yielded positive subjective and collateral reports of improved focus and reduced hyperactivity over 15 sessions. The patient showed superior control with Alpha-Theta training but struggled with the high-demand Sensorimotor Rhythm (SMR) protocol,

illustrating the critical problem of learning heterogeneity. Therapeutic success was likely achieved through a multifaceted approach that combined the normalization of cortical arousal (TB), the conditioning of stability (SMR), and the use of emotional stabilization (AT). Future NFB research must integrate objective performance metrics alongside qualitative reports to fully elucidate the complex, non-linear mechanisms driving clinical efficacy.

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH CULTURE SOCIETY ISSN: 2456-6683
Monthly Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed Journal [Impact Factor: 9.241]
Volume - 09, Special Issue - 43, December - 2025 Publication Date: 31/12/2025

DOIs:10.2017/IJRCS/ ICNMHTGLL-2025/P15 --:-- Research Paper / Article / Review

A Two Day International Conference on Navigating Mental Health Through the Gateway of Language and Literature. (ICNMHTGLL-2025) Date: 22 - 23 December, 2025

Some Wars Never End: A Reading of Shankari Chandran's *Safe Haven* as a Post-War Trauma Narrative

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Abstract: *The paper is an attempt to trace the implications of war on the minds of the survivors long after the war has ended. Shankari Chandran, through her novel Safe Haven, has depicted the mental agony and trauma through which the survivors of war have to live their remaining lives. Constant reminders and memories of war, fears, identity crisis, physical and mental pain are some of the struggles the characters face in the novel. Most of the characters are forced to move to another country. Their minds still struggle to find peace even in a new but safe place. The trauma the war gave them has been ingrained to their very existence. The pain of leaving behind everything they owned and the plight of starting anew is something which makes post-war migration a heart wrenching experience. Every person involved in the war, be it a soldier or a common man, has a price to pay. This is clearly portrayed in Safe Haven through the mentally drained and traumatised characters. The paper tries to analyse the novel by focusing on the narrative patterns, character portrayals and conversations between the characters. The paper delves into the minds of the characters, how they face their trauma, how they relive their past and how they struggle to accept their reality. An attempt is also made to draw the connection between post-war migration and the mental health of the survivors of war.*

Keywords: *war, post-war migration, trauma.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Post-war narratives are characterized by the depiction of aftermaths of war, specifically the mental impact on the victims or survivors of war. Wars leave a lasting impression on the minds of people directly or indirectly involved in them. The mental and emotional turmoil of the survivors remain with them for an extended period. Wars, in this way, keep on replaying in the minds of the survivors to the extent that they believe that the war has never ended. The war-affected places are an indicator of this as there will be something or someone to constantly remind of the war that took place years, or even centuries, before. Many fictional and non-fictional works deal with the themes of post-war trauma. Shankari Chandran's *Safe Haven* is one such fictional work.

Shankari Chandran is an Australian author who is best known for her works *Song of the Sun God* (2017), *The Barrier* (2017), *Chai Time at Cinnamon Gardens* (2023) and *Safe Haven* (2024). Her works are notable for the strong character portrayals, moving plots and relevant themes like trauma and migration. Her latest novel *Safe Haven* depicts the consequences of war through the minds of the characters. The work deals with how different individuals respond to difficult situations, how they question their existence and the way they react to their reality.

2.DISCUSSION

Post-war migration, which is at times forced, is a traumatic experience. The process of people moving out of their war affected homeland to different parts of the world can be roughly given the term "Post-War Migration". Such migrated individuals can be seen as totally disillusioned as an aftermath of being involved in the war. They flee from the place they completely belonged to an entirely new and different atmosphere. The new location can never give them a sense of belonging as their minds keep on wandering towards their own homeland. The migrants are faced with a lot of challenges:

> Migration is not only a geographical transition but also a profound transformation that affects the psychological, cultural, and social fabric of individuals and societies. Post-migration spatial change, particularly for vulnerable groups, involves disruption of established routines, loss of familiar environments, and adaptation to often unfamiliar, and at times, unwelcoming contexts. (Kaplan et al. 94)

Many of the characters in *Safe Haven* are connected by the shared experience of uprooting from one's original cultural background to an entirely new one. Although set in Australia, the novel presents a set of people who are forced to move out of Sri Lanka, their homeland.

The readers are introduced to the protagonist Sister Serafina Daniels in her attempt to get help from the rescue operator as she was on a sinking boat. This ship contained many people who were trying to escape from the war-stricken Sri Lanka. They had moved from Sri Lanka to other parts of the world and in the process, they were stranded midway from reaching the shores of Australia. The ship Galakse was sent for their rescue. The author has described the plight of those who were on the boat in a heart wrenching manner:

> Two thousand kilometres off the coast of Australia, the ship executed a daring rescue of forty-three Sri Lankan Tamil asylum seekers from a sinking vessel. Of these, twenty-five people were saved but, tragically, the other eighteen drowned, including eleven children. Crew from the *Galakse* were only able to retrieve ten bodies, with eight lost at sea. (Chandran 4)

The plot then shifts to four years after their arrival. Most of the survivors are now residents of Port Camden Detention Centre in Australia. The challenge they face in this situation is mostly psychological as some of them are caught up in anxiety, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) while some even resort to self-harm. Commenting on the nature of trauma after post-war migration, Alexandra Perkins explains these challenges further:

> In displaced individuals, trauma presents with similar outcomes, such as increased rates of PTSD, depression, anxiety as well as through a reduced capacity to integrate into host communities. Some studies also report cognitive impairments affecting memory and executive function, as well as an increased risk of developing other psychiatric conditions like psychosis. (Perkins et al. 1)

Vulnerable people are generally affected by post-war trauma to a great extent. Children, women and the elderly belong to the category of vulnerable individuals. Among them, children are the most affected as the images they have seen during the war will not easily be wiped off from their memories. Moreover, their relationship with their parents can also be negatively impacted. By highlighting the effects of trauma on child development in Syrian context, Livia Hazer and Gustaf Gredeback throws light on its impacts on parents and children alike:

> As a consequence of their traumatic experiences, both parents and children are at an elevated risk of mental health issues, including psychopathology and psychosomatic symptoms. Family structure and dynamics are commonly

> affected which, together with mental illness, has a negative impact on relations within the family. … Taken together, these accumulating stressors put children at risk of not reaching their optimal developmental outcome. Developmental delays have been identified within several domains, including cognitive functioning, emotion regulation, affective processing, and prospective control." (Hazer and Gredeback 14)

In *Safe Haven*, Kannan Puveendran is one such example of a child affected by trauma. He was a fourteen-year-old boy who was able to survive the horrors of the war in Sri Lanka. He was also able to reach the safe shores of Australia. But eventually succumbed to his PTSD which led him to commit suicide. In fact, he had attempted thrice to end his life to no avail. He had to be shifted to a separate room away from his family so that he received a close attention all day. Moreover, he had lost all interest in having food. He tried to remove the IV out of his arm as well. The way Kannan has lost the hope to survive in the world is clearly evident. Sister Serafina was completely dejected after seeing the boy lose his life that she posed as an anonymous source for a magazine report covering the death of Kannan. The way she presented Kannan in the report shows how much she was affected by his death:

> But Kannan Puveendran, aged fourteen, had survived the bombing of his village, Kokavil, in the Vanni region of northern Sri Lanka in the final months of the war, years before. … He survived dehydration, heat, hunger, and dysentery. … Kannan Puveendran survived this and more: a year in a Sri Lankan re-education camp; the voyage to India on a small boat; the voyage to Indonesia on a larger boat; the voyage to Australia on a tiny boat and the rescue by a Norwegian cargo ship three weeks later. Four years after he first set foot in Port Camden, Kannan Puveendran stopped surviving. (Chandran 27-28)

As already mentioned, the effect of war and migration is on the parents as well. The novel presents Kannan's mother, Selvi Puveendran, in a similar light. Her mental agony of leaving behind her homeland, culture and everything which was familiar to her, only to reach Port Camden and then lose her son to suicide, is heart wrenchingly portrayed. Selvi's helplessness is evident in her body language as she can be seen with her head bowed. She has lost her appetite and she has become much weaker. The author has presented Selvi as: "A woman without her son. Her face was haggard, her clothes hanging off her thin body. She shouted something and then cried, grief spilling out of her body" (Chandran 130). Unable to hold back her pain, she tries to commit suicide by immolating herself. She is rescued by Sister Serafina and a doctor at Port Camden. People like Selvi are representatives of the few who are extremely affected by the trauma of post-war migration. They find it futile to even continue living the rest of their lives.

Dr. Henry Manners, who serves as the Director of Port Camden Medical Unit, is yet another parent who has lost his son. "His son, who had been an army doctor like him, had died on his second tour of duty in Afghanistan, under heavy artillery fire in a town south of Kabul" (Chandran 247). Deaths that happen during war are quite common but the families that are left behind has a bigger price to pay. They relive the war in their minds for the rest of their remaining lives. This is clearly evident in the words spoken by Dr. Manners in the novel: "Sometimes I think the only lucky ones are the dead. They're the only ones who sleep peacefully – them and the decision makers who never have to experience the horror of the wars they sign us up for" (Chandran 248).

Post-war migration can at times lead to issues related to identity. There can be cases of mistaken identities, people trying to create fake identities for their survival in a new place or even there can be individuals who are helplessly given new identities. Situations like these can adversely affect the mental health of those involved with such identity mishaps. One's identity is closely related to how one perceives one's reality. If the identity is something created at a later point of time, it certainly can affect the individual adversely. The constant reminder that they are not what the world around them address

them can, in turn, add to the trauma they already face from being part of the war before. As Steward Harrison Oppong has rightly pointed out:

> The likely correlation between migration and reconstruction of identity brings together two rather subjective and complicated issues. It takes a long time for identity reconstruction to take place relative to the time it takes to migrate from one location to the other. … reconstruction of identity may be partly successful or unsuccessful depending on the nature of migrants, the place of settlement, the nature of interaction of cultures, the degree of ethnicity attachments prevalent between the migrants and the host communities, feeling of sense of belonging or otherwise in the resettled environment and the generation of migrants involved in identity reconstruction. (Oppong 168)

The protagonist of *Safe Haven* is a victim of a similar identity mishap. Even though throughout the novel she is known as Sister Serafina Daniels, she admits to another character of how her identity was swapped. The swapping of identities happened during the sinking vessel incident which was mentioned at the beginning of this paper. Sister Serafina Daniels was in reality no longer alive. This identity was given to the protagonist whose original name is Dr. Sita Ratnam. The protagonist explains what happened during the chaotic situation:

> Sister Serafina Daniels, a Carmelite nun, made that call and saved all our lives. I knew her from the refugee camp on the outskirts of Colombo, where we worked together. I got on the boat because I wanted to escape Sri Lanka. She got on the boat because she wanted to help the refugees. We clung together when the boat was sinking, and when I was pulled from the ocean by the *Galakse*, I was tangled in her robes. They called me Sister as a result, and I didn't dispute it. … For four years, I've been living and benefiting from that lie" (Chandran 263-264)

The protagonist suffers intensely from post-war trauma. She had nightmares very often at nights during her four years in Australia. In many survivors of war, the constant inability to trust others can be seen. Similarly, the protagonist is often skeptical of the people she allows in her life. Her real identity is only revealed to those whom she truly trusts.

3.FINDINGS

The characters in the novel leave a lasting impression on the readers. These characters are representatives of every community that has been affected by war. The constant displacement, psychological impacts, sense of not belonging are all common threads that bind these characters. The narrative techniques used in the novel is noteworthy. The conversational approach is maintained throughout a large portion of the novel. Moreover, some conversations are made with the help of emails. This technique helps the readers to form more connection with the characters. The strength of the novel lies in the apt imageries used. The intense language at some points has helped in establishing the depth of the emotions the characters go through, be it pain, fear, trauma, or self-doubt.

4.CONCLUSION

The paper was an attempt to trace some aspects of Shankari Chandran's novel *Safe Haven* which can be connected to post-war migration and its aftereffects. The trauma, anxiety, thought of self-harm, identity crisis were all discussed to some extent within the overview of this paper. The novel is replete with themes and images which can be used for future research. The cultural differences between the land the characters come from and the land they are now a part of is an area that can be further analysed. In conclusion, Shankari Chandran through her work *Safe Haven* has brought to light the horrors of war. The mental health of those involved in war is something that must be regarded with extreme care. Post-war displacement is a distressing and horrifying experience for those involved. They

are constantly made to ruminate the terrifying past because of their trauma. The plight of some characters in the novel reveals how much war has taken hold of their lives. For such individuals, wars never end as they relieve experiences of pain, loss, anxiety all throughout their lives.

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH CULTURE SOCIETY ISSN: 2456-6683
Monthly Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed Journal [Impact Factor: 9.241]
Volume - 09, Special Issue - 43, December - 2025 Publication Date: 31/12/2025

DOIs:10.2017/IJRCS/ICNMHTGLL-2025/P16 --:-- Research Paper / Article / Review

A Two Day International Conference on Navigating Mental Health Through the Gateway of Language and Literature. (ICNMHTGLL-2025) Date: 22 - 23 December, 2025

Is Hegemonic Masculinity a Burden in Disguise? Examining the Lived Experiences of Men in *The Anger of Saintly Men* by Anubha Yadav

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Abstract: *Patriarchy is often perceived as a social system that privileges men at the expense of women; however, a closer study examining patriarchy and masculinity through R.W. Connell's theoretical framework of masculinity studies reveals that men also suffer due to constant societal reinforcement of hegemonic masculinity. This study explores hegemonic masculinity, the role of patriarchy in its formation, and how it operates within the patriarchal family structure in Indian social setting as depicted in The Anger of Saintly Men by Anubha Yadav. The analysis of male characters in the novel - Saurabh, Saurabh's father, and Malik's father - exposes the harsh reality of being a man with no space in society to express his vulnerability. Saurabh's father reinforces hegemonic masculinity through dominance and aggression within the family, but his hegemony is limited and dependent on external factors such as social and economic status. Similarly, Malik's father is successful financially and appears hegemonic to the family and society, but suffers silently and succumbs to emotional isolation. The study argues that there is constant conflict between the self and societal reinforcement of hegemonic masculinity, which burdens them with internal turmoil and emotional distress. Exploring the lived experiences of men under patriarchy can help us better understand their struggles and create a space to foster healthy gender dynamics within the power structure.*

Keywords: *Hegemonic masculinity, patriarchy, lived experience, gender dynamics*

1. INTRODUCTION

Men are often blamed for the oppression and suffering of women. They derive power from patriarchy as a social structure to exert dominance over women. Patriarchy is largely believed to favor men over women, but a critical examination of patriarchy through the lens of men studies has offered new insights into the lived experience of men under this system. The emergence of men's studies and gender studies offers multiple points of inquiry into inequalities between men and women. Gender roles and stereotypes affect both men and women. Men also suffer from societal expectations and often experience a state of constant crisis. They are not valued by society when they do not meet these expectations. Men who do not conform to the societal standards of masculinity are marginalized and sometimes even rejected by women. Although women are generally considered to occupy a lower position in the gender order compared to men, they are accommodated within the family sphere of society. When men fail their traditional gender roles, they are denied any position in both the public and domestic spheres of society.

This study closely examines men's lived experience to understand: how and why patriarchy cultivates hegemonic masculinity, how men strive to sustain it, the power dynamics and fluid nature of hegemonic masculinity, and the conflict and negotiation between the self and hegemonic masculinity. The paper uses R.W. Connell's theory of masculinities as its theoretical framework to explore the dynamics of masculinity and patriarchy in the Indian social setting as depicted in the contemporary novel, *The Anger of Saintly Men* written by Anubha Yadav.

2. Theoretical Framework

R.W. Connell conceptualized hegemonic masculinity in his book, *Masculinities*. The discursive approach to masculinity studies shows that men do not stick to one type of masculinity. They do choose masculinity depending on the situation, and there are limitations, especially with the gender identities of the life cycle, which are largely influenced by psychoanalysis (70).

According to Connell, "gender is a way in which social practice is ordered" (71). Social life is determined by reproduction and related processes. He is careful not to use the word biological because he observes through the history of the body that gender involves the process of reproduction. Connell calls it "a reproductive arena", not just "a fixed set of biological determinants." Gender relations around the reproductive arena are the dominant social structure in any society (72). These practices of social structure do not happen in isolated acts but in large units. These actions are configured as femininity and masculinity, and he calls them gender projects. This gender configuration occurs in every slice of life in the social world, including the individual life course. This practice of configuring individual life can be called 'personality' or 'character' (76).

With the interplay of relations within gender, it has been recognized that there are multiple masculinities. This recognition is important for stopping multiple masculinities from becoming a character typology. Masculinity is not static and does not remain the same always and everywhere. Connell identifies four kinds of masculinities and their relations among them: hegemony, subordination, complicit, and marginalization. Hegemonic masculinity is not a fixed type; rather, it occupies a hegemonic position that can always be challenged. He suggests that focusing on the relations can offer the reality, and this relational approach can help recognize the "compulsions under which gender configurations are formed (76)."

Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as the socially accepted way of gender practice that justifies patriarchy and ensures male dominance over women. However, the agent of hegemonic masculinity is not the most powerful individual, rather established only when there is institutional power collectively and not individually. The hegemonic pattern can differ from institutional or individual power to personal life (Connell 77). The hegemonic pattern can differ from institutional or individual power to personal life. It can also be challenged by any group of men or women. "New groups can challenge old solutions and construct a new hegemony," so the hegemony is not a fixed category or entity (77).

3. Survey of Literature

Masculinity was first studied by social scientists in the 1980s in response to the sex role theory. The sex role of a male is seen as normative configuration to which male do or do not conform (Reeser 14). It was further developed with the publication of *The Making of Masculinities: The New Men's Study,* an essay collection. Harry Brod, in his essay, *The Case for Men's Studies*, discussed this new approach to men as gendered beings and as a complement to women's studies. Elaine Showalter's essay titled *Critical Cross-dressing: Male Feminists and the Woman of the Year* discussed men in feminism and questioned whether male feminism is a critical cross-dressing.

In the 1990s, the mythopoetic men's movement, not a political, but more of a psychological and cultural movement, used myths of Zeus to reinstitute masculinity as the natural order and ignored social structures that constitute masculinity (Brod and Kaufman 45). However, the movement helped

men's studies to define itself as an academic movement based not on essentialism, but on the "assumption of multiple masculinities" (Reeser 27). Michael Kimmel, historian-sociologist, has explored how the definition of masculinity is constructed culturally and historically and changed over time, and how the experience of manhood shapes activities of American men (2). Certain historical moments bring about changes in the construction of masculinity and are often marked by more profound crisis than other periods. Some scholars argue that masculinity is in a constant crisis and is relational to the status of women in society (Traister 276).

Connell propounds four types of masculinity and argues that hegemony cannot be applied to femininity because femininity is constructed in relation to the domination of men in society. They are categorized as emphasized femininity or subordinate other (Connell and Messerschmidt 831). Even though it receives strong criticism for perceiving femininity from an essentialist point of view, some researchers have used the term hegemonic femininity, and possible alternatives must be considered (Paetcher).

Bradley, in his work, *Gender,* puts forth that men also suffer under the patriarchy and the totalist approach that men are perpetrators and women are victims is an oversimplification and difficult to accept (207). Dasgupta pinpoints in his essay, *Introduction: Perceptions of Masculinity and Challenges to Indian Male,* that Indian Masculinity is largely impacted by caste, class, and the dominant narrative of sexual orientation. The institution of patriarchy also oppresses men who do not conform to the recognized form of masculinity in society. There was hypersexualization of Indian men during the colonial era, and it left the postcolonial Indian men with no agency who still was colonized by its powerful lexicons. Male sexuality and queer masculinities are often less explored in the Indian context (5–17).

4. Analysis:

This paper analyses the relationship between the self and the hegemonic position of men as heads of the family in the patriarchal family structure in Indian society. Traditionally, patriarchy has been viewed negatively, with men being granted a privileged status to dominate women and hold power over resources. This perspective has been argued by feminists as well. However, with the evolution of women's studies into gender studies, patriarchy is now being investigated through the lens of masculinity. It is now increasingly understood that not all men benefit equally from patriarchy. Some men feel suffocated by the patriarchal hegemony, which demands not just authority but comes with the responsibility of being the family provider.

Anubha Yadav's debut novel, *The Anger of Saintly Men* explores the private lives of men and their subjective experiences of masculinity and patriarchy within Indian society. The story is primarily about three central characters - Saurabh, Anuragh Singh, and Vikram Singh - and follows from their childhoods until their father's death. This study critically examines the position of men as the patriarchal heads of families within the Indian social context as depicted through the characters of Saurabh's father and Malik's father in the novel.

4.1 Saurabh and Saurabh's father Papa

Saurabh's father, referred to as Papa, comes from a middle-class family background and does not have a stable job. He was neither insulted nor praised by his family. Saurabh's mother and his siblings reside at their uncles' house on a rotational basis, shifting every four months while Papa visits them only on the weekends. The family was neither warmly welcomed nor ill-treated at their relatives' house. The mother performs all the household chores for the relatives in exchange for being allowed to live in their house. Papa only provides his wife with money during the festival times.

When he secures employment, the extended family treats him with special care, as if he were a guest. "That afternoon they all walked to the gate with us. Suddenly we were important, like the guests who visited" (Yadav 13). The entire family is treated with importance, which they had not received

previously. A man's value in society is tied to his employment status and financial stability. As the head of the household, his financial status determines the perceived worth of the rest of the family. There is immense pressure on his head to earn enough money to be respected and valued within their social context.

When the man cannot support his family financially, he cannot lead a domestic life as a woman does. His wife can sustain a domestic life by doing the household chores, but he cannot do so even if he wishes to. Without employment, he cannot stay even at his relative's house in the city and is forced to stay at his ancestral house in a remote village where he lives with his aging grandfather who resides there alone. The rest of the family shifts between the houses of his relatives so that the children can continue their education. No one has explicitly told him not to stay with his relatives, yet no one has ever invited him to stay with them. There is an invisible order that he obeys till he gets the job. As a man, the societal norm dictates that he must be the breadwinner and bring money from outside. Once he finds a job, he finds a house immediately and moves his family into their new home.

When a gang of children beats Saurabh's younger brother, his father insists that Saurabh, the eldest son, defend his siblings. This reinforces the societal expectation of hegemonic masculinity where the eldest male child must take on a protective paternal role irrespective of his unwillingness or incapability. Saurabh fears the gang and wants to run away from them when they start beating his brother. However, his father prepares Saurabh to be a protector of the family as per the social norms of patriarchal masculinity. This creates an internal conflict within Saurabh, whose natural disposition runs counter to these demands.

His father's natural inclination aligns with societal expectations of being a man, a husband, and a father. He carries out this role effortlessly, whereas Saurabh's disposition is far removed from the societal demands. The objective of hegemonic masculinity here is not just dominance but also taking responsibility for protecting the younger and the weaker. However, it does not consider the factors involving an individual self. As the parents grow older, they become weaker, and the eldest one, Saurabh, is expected to become the stronger one and take care of his weaker parents and younger siblings. "You are the eldest, you know," he screamed, "do you know what it means? If something happens to me, you, you have to take care of them." His eyes swept over the whole Chuhedani. "Got it?" he yelled when I didn't answer. Hooking his forefinger in the gap between my shirt buttons, Papa pulled me towards him and asked me again. Unable to control myself anymore, I started crying. "Got it?' he slapped me. I nodded between loud sobs" (Yadav 19).

Saurabh must risk his life to protect his family, which he dislikes because he lacks a strong personality and wishes to avoid threats. However, the patriarchal institution demands that he face the threat without any consideration for his willingness or capability. In the process of being a strict patriarchal father, Saurabh's father lost the love of his children, who feel suffocated in his presence rather than feeling affection towards him.

The hegemonic power a man holds in society is very limited and institutional, not individual. A man can only exercise his hegemony if he meets certain social expectations. As an individual, a man's power is largely confined to his immediate family, as in the case of Saurabh's father. The broader society does not regard him as a powerful figure. When Saurabh's father reinforces the same hegemonic masculinity in Saurabh, it causes him to have low self-esteem until his father's death. The reinforcement created only conflict within him rather than feeling hegemonic.

Saurabh's mother asks him to go to a flour mill to grind the wheat. At the mill, the flour shop owner sexually abuses him in a dark room within the shop. Overpowered by the old man, he is unable to react, his brain freezing at the moment. Saurabh's ordeal is finally relieved when a woman in the shop calls out the old man. However, Saurabh never disclosed the sexual abuse to any of his friends or family members and was left to cope with the trauma alone. "Despite the weight on my shoulders, I ran home. For the first time, the brown door of Chuhedani brought relief. By then, my body was so

hot that I thought I would burst into small pieces like a Diwali rocket. Drenched in sweat, I lay on the ground outside for a few minutes. Fanning myself with the end of my shirt's collar, I cried alone, sitting beside the front door of my house" (Yadav 22).

When Anju, Saurabh's cousin, is sexually abused by the same old man, she informs the entire family. In response, Saurabh's mother gives him a knife and orders him to go kill the old man. When a girl is sexually abused, she can speak out, and society comes in support of her. This contrasts sharply with how society responds when a boy is sexually abused. He has not got such recourse. Instead, he is expected to normalize the abuse and act as if nothing happened. His mother's violent response, handing him a weapon to threaten the abuser, reflects how society denies male victims the opportunity to process the trauma. They are not allowed to be vulnerable. Society views them as inherently powerful and hegemonically dominant, denying them the right to voice their suffering.

> Before I could ask, Mummy handed me her vegetable knife.
>
> "Go and fix that atta ki chakki wala. Tell that old man to behave his age. Give him one across his face. Harami. Cut him!"
>
> I couldn't move. Suddenly my limbs had no strength. How could Mummy know my Hanuman secret?
>
> "Chakki wale uncle ttttttouched Anju Didi ttttttthere." Vicky shuttered as he pointed at his chest.
>
> Mummy rushed and slapped Vicky as Anju sobbed louder. "Shut up! Why don't you take a drum. Huh?" Mummy screamed. (Yadav 26)

4.2 Malik's Father

Malik is Saurabh's school friend; three of them - Malik, Saurabh, and Tokas- are always together. Malik recently discovered that his father is involved in an extramarital affair and he wants to stop it. Malik's father runs a successful construction business and appears to have respect in society. The friends decide to follow Malik's father to discover more about his father's affair and his mistress. The group follows the father to a three-storey building where they see him enter. Once he gets inside, Malik interrupts their meeting by making noise at the gate, imagining his father is getting involved physically with the lady. Shortly after, an ordinary-looking woman emerges from the building, surprising Malik who envisioned a more glamorous, heroine-like mistress. Malik is taken aback by the contrast between his imagination and the reality of his father's mistress. "A woman in a faded cotton nighty finally stepped down. She was dark, short and stumpy. Her hair was tied in an untidy knot. She was wearing no make-up or jewellery" (Yadav 40).

Malik bangs on the door again, and this time, Malik's father comes out with a bat in his hand. When he cannot find anyone outside, they sit on the verandah. Malik and his friends witness his father bend over her shoulder and start crying. The woman hurries back and returns with a glass of water for Malik's father. "She held the glass to his lips and he sipped the water as she patted his back gently. She pulled her plastic chair closer to him and wiped the tears off his face like he was a little boy" (Yadav 42).

Malik's father, a successful businessman, defies societal expectations by falling for an ordinary woman. It may seem like he is engaged in an affair, leveraging his patriarchal privilege. However, he looks for a woman with whom he can share his problems and cry over her shoulder, wanting warmth, comfort, and emotional support that he lacks in his regular life. In the patriarchal society, the family expects men to provide and protect, failing to consider them as human beings with emotional needs. There is no system or structure to offer men the comfort and support they require. Instead, men resort to using their societal hegemony as a tool and find a way to escape from the very same patriarchal

constraints. Tragically, Malik's father committed suicide the following month, unable to cope with the pressure of being the family's sole provider. This incident highlights the lack of space in society for men to acknowledge their vulnerability and emotional needs. What is seen as hegemony from outside is a burden to him, leaving him unsatisfied with his life.

5. Conclusion:

A close examination of the lived experience of men in *The Anger of Saintly Men* through the lens of hegemonic masculinity reveals the complexities and contradictions within hegemonic masculinity. While patriarchy is seen as an absolute system that empowers men, this study demonstrates that it also burdens them with unrealistic expectations of dominance, strength, and economic provision.

Saurabh's father exhibits hegemonic masculinity by being highly dominant and aggressive toward his children and maintaining a strict authoritative presence at home. However, he does not display the same level of dominance outside the family context. When Saurabh's father instructs his son to defend his sibling, it suggests that protecting the family is considered a patriarchal duty, which may require a display of dominance and aggressiveness toward others even when he wishes not to. Malik's father presents another perspective on the constraints of masculinity. As a successful businessman, he appears to have authority and hegemony and is thus involved in an affair. He chooses the affair to vent out his emotions as an escape from societal pressure, which he is unable to express in his regular domestic and social life.

When applying R.W. Connell's framework to these narratives, we can understand that hegemonic masculinity is influential, not self-sustaining. It is often shaped by external forces like employment, economy, age, etc. Hegemonic masculinity is fluid and constantly constructed and reconstructed, and men must constantly negotiate it. This study finds that this negotiation causes internal conflict between self and societal expectation. Some men may thrive within this dynamic, while others may succumb to the pressures, and for some, it may present as an arduous challenge. This study also sheds light on the emotional suppression and sacrifices of men trapped within the societal expectations. Recognizing their suffering and creating a space to express their vulnerability within the family and societal setting can foster healthy dynamics within the gender roles and power structure. Hegemony is not solely about power and dominance; for some men, it is a heavy burden they are forced to carry.

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH CULTURE SOCIETY ISSN: 2456-6683
Monthly Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed Journal [Impact Factor: 9.241]
Volume - 09, Special Issue - 43, December - 2025 Publication Date: 31/12/2025

DOIs:10.2017/IJRCS/ICNMHTGLL-2025/P17 --:-- Research Paper / Article / Review

A Two Day International Conference on Navigating Mental Health Through the Gateway of Language and Literature. (ICNMHTGLL-2025) Date: 22 - 23 December, 2025

Eco-Grief and Resistance to Anthropocentric Domination in the Poetry of Juliana Spahr

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Abstract: *This paper explores how Juliana Spahr's poetry challenges anthropocentric worldviews and articulates collective eco-grief over environmental degradation, climate crisis, and capitalist exploitation. This study looks into Spahr's critique of human centric ideologies through her collection of poems titled That Winter the Wolf Came, reflecting the ecological trauma caused by widespread industrialism, warfare, and reliance on fossil fuels and many more. Her collection expresses the loss of biodiversity and the dis-location of life systems. Spahr's work touches on the systematic violence that the planet has experienced as part of the Anthropocene approach. The very word anthropocentric means humans are given more importance than nature. Her poems capture private experiences with political struggles, allowing readers to move between caring for nature, feeling the urgency of activism, and reflecting on personal loss. Her writing encapsulates both the sadness of environmental destruction and the loss of joy that can come with constant activism. Through this, she builds a connection between human emotion and resistance for the sake of animals and nature. This essay argues that by reading Spahr's poems, we are encouraged to imagine new, respectful relationships with other species, to practice humility toward nature, and to come together around a shared idea of care and responsibility for the Earth. It further connects her work to international sustainability standards, particularly the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 13: Climate Action and SDG 15: Life on Land), and frames her poems as significant literary responses to planetary emergency.*

Keywords*: Environmental Degradation, Climate Crisis, Capitalist Exploit, Ecological Trauma.*

1.INTRODUCTION:

The accelerating environmental crisis has reshaped not only scientific and political discussions but also the way literature engages with the world. In recent years, the idea of *eco-grief* has emerged to describe the emotional response humans experience in the face of ecological loss, including climate change, species extinction, and the destruction of natural habitats. This form of grief is not limited to personal sorrow; rather, it reflects a broader awareness of environmental decline and humanity's role within it. As the planet undergoes rapid transformation, such emotional responses are becoming an important part of contemporary cultural and literary expression. This condition is closely tied to what scholars describe as the Anthropocene, a period in which human activity has become a dominant force shaping the Earth's systems. Industrial expansion, resource extraction, and consumer-driven economies have contributed significantly to environmental imbalance. In this context, literature increasingly functions as more than aesthetic expression, it becomes a space for questioning dominant ideologies and imagining alternative relationships between humans and the natural world.

The poetry of Juliana Spahr offers a compelling example of this shift. Her work brings together personal emotion and political awareness, presenting ecological damage not as a distant issue but as an immediate and shared experience. “sense of mourning, enfolding the reader as the erasure of ecological life does” (Kolbert, 219). Through her writing, grief is not portrayed as passive despair but as something that can foster connection, reflection, and even resistance.

This paper argues that Spahr’s poetry transforms eco-grief into a collective and active force that challenges human-centered thinking. By linking emotional response with ecological awareness, her work demonstrates how literature can contribute meaningfully to conversations about environmental responsibility and the need for change.

2.LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly discussions on ecocriticism and posthumanism have emphasized the importance of rethinking human relationships with nature. Ecocritical studies explore how literature represents environmental issues, while posthumanist approaches challenge the idea of human dominance. Previous research on Juliana Spahr highlights her focus on collective experience, ecological awareness, and political engagement.

Critics have noted that her poetry moves beyond traditional lyrical expression by incorporating elements of activism and shared voice. Studies also emphasize her use of repetition, listing, and collective narration to reflect environmental loss and interconnectedness. These perspectives provide a foundation for understanding how her work contributes to contemporary ecological discourse.

3.OBJECTIVES

To examine the representation of eco-grief in Spahr’s poetry
To analyze how her work challenges anthropocentric perspectives
To explore the connection between emotion and ecological awareness
To understand the role of poetry as a form of environmental resistance.

4.RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Understanding the relationship between literature and environmental crisis requires an approach that moves beyond traditional literary analysis. Ecocriticism provides such a framework by examining how texts engage with ecological concerns and represent the interconnectedness of human and nonhuman life. Rather than treating nature as a passive backdrop, ecocritical reading practices foreground the ways in which environmental damage, climate instability, and resource exploitation are embedded within cultural narratives. In this sense, literature becomes a site where ecological realities are not only reflected but also questioned and reimagined. It encourages readers to recognize that environmental issues are deeply entangled with social, political, and economic structures.

Alongside ecocriticism, posthumanism further complicates the human-centered assumptions that have historically shaped literary thought. Posthumanist perspectives challenge the idea that humans exist as separate from or superior to other forms of life. Instead, they emphasize relationality, suggesting that humans, animals, ecosystems, and even technological systems exist within networks of mutual dependence. This shift in perspective is particularly relevant in the context of environmental crisis, as it calls attention to the limitations of viewing the world solely through human needs and desires. By decentering the human subject, posthumanism opens up new ways of understanding responsibility, ethics, and coexistence.

The tension between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism lies at the core of these discussions. Anthropocentrism prioritizes human interests, often justifying the use of natural resources without regard for long-term ecological consequences. This worldview has contributed significantly to environmental degradation by positioning nature as something to be controlled or exploited. In contrast, ecocentrism proposes a more balanced perspective, recognizing the intrinsic value of all living and nonliving components of the environment. It challenges hierarchical thinking and instead promotes an understanding of the Earth as a complex, interdependent system.

When these frameworks are brought together, they offer a critical lens through which literary works can be interpreted as active engagements with ecological crisis. They allow for a reading that not

only identifies environmental themes but also interrogates the underlying assumptions about power, value, and existence. Through this combined approach, literature emerges as a powerful medium for rethinking human relationships with the natural world and for imagining more sustainable and ethically grounded futures.

5.DISCUSSION

In recent years, eco-grief has emerged as a significant emotional framework through which environmental crisis is understood and expressed in literature. Rather than being confined to individual sorrow, eco-grief reflects a shared emotional condition shaped by collective awareness of ecological damage. It arises from witnessing the accelerating loss of forests, species, and ecosystems, as well as from recognizing the long-term consequences of human actions on the planet. In literary contexts, this form of grief is not presented as distant or abstract; instead, it is rendered immediate and deeply felt, allowing readers to engage with environmental issues on an emotional level.

What distinguishes eco-grief from conventional notions of grief is its expansive scope. It is not tied to a single event or personal loss but is instead linked to ongoing, large-scale transformations that affect both human and nonhuman life. Writers increasingly portray this condition as something shared across communities, transcending geographical and cultural boundaries. In doing so, literature captures the emotional atmosphere of the present moment, where awareness of environmental crisis has become part of everyday consciousness. This shared dimension also challenges the idea that environmental concern is purely intellectual, emphasizing instead that it is deeply affective and embodied.

Closely connected to eco-grief is the experience of climate anxiety. This form of anxiety stems from uncertainty about the future and the recognition that environmental changes may be irreversible. In literary representations, climate anxiety often appears alongside grief, creating a complex emotional landscape that reflects both fear and responsibility. Rather than presenting these emotions as paralyzing, many texts suggest that they can lead to heightened awareness and ethical reflection. The emotional discomfort associated with environmental crisis becomes a catalyst for questioning existing ways of living and for imagining alternative futures.

The loss of biodiversity further intensifies this emotional response. The disappearance of species is not only a scientific concern but also a cultural and emotional one. Literature frequently engages with this loss by drawing attention to the presence of nonhuman life, often through detailed descriptions or acts of naming. Such strategies serve to acknowledge the value of these lives and to resist their erasure. In this way, eco-grief becomes a means of remembering and honoring what is being lost, transforming absence into a form of presence within the text.

At the same time, eco-grief fosters an emotional connection between humans and the nonhuman world. By emphasizing shared vulnerability, literary works challenge the assumption that humans exist apart from nature. Instead, they highlight the interdependence that defines all forms of life. This shift encourages readers to see environmental damage not as something external but as something that directly implicates them. Through this process, eco-grief moves beyond passive sadness and becomes a form of awareness that can inspire care, responsibility, and, potentially, action.

The poetry in *That Winter the Wolf Came* by Juliana Spahr offers a powerful engagement with environmental crisis through formal experimentation and emotional intensity. Her work does not simply describe ecological damage; instead, it develops a poetic structure that allows readers to experience loss, connection, and resistance simultaneously. Through stylistic choices such as repetition, collective voice, and urgent tone, Spahr transforms poetry into a space where grief becomes both visible and politically meaningful.

One of the most striking features of Spahr's poetry is her use of repetition and listing. Her poems frequently include long sequences of names, of plants, animals, landscapes, and even human communities. These lists do more than provide descriptive detail; they function as acts of remembrance. By naming species and environments, Spahr resists their disappearance, turning poetic language into a form of archive. Each name carries weight, reminding the reader that what is being listed is also under threat.

Repetition reinforces this effect by creating a rhythm that mirrors both persistence and loss. The recurrence of phrases and structures produces a sense of accumulation, as though the poem is gathering fragments of a world that is gradually fading. At the same time, this repetition can feel overwhelming, reflecting the scale of environmental destruction. The reader is not allowed to move quickly past these details; instead, they are drawn into a sustained encounter with what is being lost.

In this way, listing becomes a form of mourning. It acknowledges absence while refusing silence. Rather than presenting loss as something abstract, Spahr makes it tangible through language. The act of naming becomes an ethical gesture, one that insists on recognition and remembrance in the face of erasure.

Another significant aspect of Spahr's poetry is the movement from personal emotion to collective experience. While her work often begins with individual perception or feeling, it rarely remains confined to a single perspective. Instead, the poetic voice expands outward, incorporating multiple subjects and experiences. This shift reflects the idea that environmental crisis cannot be understood in isolation; it is shared across communities and species.

Spahr frequently uses inclusive language that blurs the boundary between "I" and "we." This transition suggests that personal grief is inseparable from broader ecological conditions. The loss felt by one individual is connected to larger patterns of environmental damage, making grief a communal rather than private response. Through this approach, the poems create a sense of solidarity that extends beyond human relationships to include nonhuman life.

This collective dimension also challenges traditional notions of authorship and voice in poetry. Rather than presenting a singular, authoritative speaker, Spahr constructs a more fluid and interconnected perspective. The poem becomes a space where different forms of life and experience intersect, reflecting the complexity of ecological relationships. As a result, grief is not portrayed as isolating but as something that can bring individuals together through shared awareness.

Spahr's poetic language is marked by a strong sense of urgency, which aligns her work with forms of political expression such as protest and activism. The tone of her poems often feels immediate and insistent, as though responding to a crisis that cannot be ignored. This urgency is conveyed through short, direct statements, as well as through the repetition of phrases that resemble chants or slogans.

Such language disrupts the expectation that poetry should be detached or purely reflective. Instead, it positions the poem as an active intervention in contemporary issues. The rhythm and structure of Spahr's lines can evoke the collective energy of demonstrations, where voices come together to demand change. This connection between poetic form and political action reinforces the idea that literature can participate in movements for environmental justice.

At the same time, the urgency in her work is not limited to human concerns. It also reflects the precarious state of ecosystems and species facing extinction. The pace and intensity of the language mirror the rapid changes occurring in the natural world, creating a sense that time is limited. Readers are not given the comfort of distance; they are confronted with the immediacy of the crisis.

Through this urgent tone, Spahr transforms eco-grief into a motivating force. The poems do not allow grief to remain passive or static. Instead, they push it toward awareness and, potentially, toward action. By combining emotional depth with a sense of immediacy, her poetry demonstrates how literary form can respond dynamically to environmental challenges.

A central concern in the poetry of Juliana Spahr is the rejection of anthropocentrism, the belief that human beings occupy a position of primary importance in the world. This worldview has long shaped cultural, economic, and political systems, often justifying the exploitation of natural resources

in the name of progress. In *That Winter the Wolf Came*, Spahr challenges this assumption by exposing the consequences of placing human needs above all other forms of life. Her poetry reveals how such thinking contributes directly to environmental degradation and calls for a reorientation of perspective.

One of the keyways in which Spahr resists anthropocentrism is through her critique of capitalism. She draws attention to systems that prioritize profit over ecological balance, highlighting how economic growth is frequently achieved at the expense of environmental health. Industrial expansion, fossil fuel dependency, and large-scale extraction are not presented as neutral developments but as processes that produce harm across ecosystems. By linking environmental damage to economic structures, Spahr emphasizes that ecological crisis is not accidental; it is deeply connected to the logic of accumulation and consumption that defines modern society.

This critique extends to the visible and invisible forms of industrial damage that shape everyday life. Spahr's poetry often references pollution, deforestation, and the disruption of natural cycles, illustrating how human activity alters landscapes in lasting ways. These changes are not confined to distant locations; they are part of a global system that affects air, water, and soil across regions. By presenting these impacts within her work, Spahr makes it difficult to maintain the illusion that humans exist separately from the environments they inhabit. Instead, her poetry insists on recognizing the material consequences of human actions.

At the same time, Spahr challenges the underlying assumptions that sustain human-centered thinking. Anthropocentrism depends on the idea that humans are distinct from and superior to other forms of life, a belief that allows nature to be treated as a resource rather than as a network of living relations. In contrast, Spahr's work suggests that such separation is both artificial and harmful. Her poetry repeatedly draws attention to the interconnectedness of life, emphasizing that human survival is tied to the health of ecosystems. This perspective destabilizes hierarchical distinctions and encourages a more relational understanding of existence.

Spahr does not simply reject anthropocentrism at an abstract level; she demonstrates its effects through lived experience and emotional resonance. By connecting environmental destruction to everyday realities, she shows how deeply embedded these ideas are within social systems. Her poetry invites readers to question their own assumptions and to reconsider their place within the broader ecological context.

Spahr's resistance to anthropocentrism is grounded in the recognition that humans are not separate from nature but are part of it. This shift in perspective carries ethical implications, as it calls for a form of responsibility that extends beyond human interests. By challenging dominant ways of thinking, her work opens up possibilities for more sustainable and respectful relationships with the natural world.

In the poetry of Juliana Spahr, eco-grief does not remain confined to emotional expression; it evolves into a form of political awareness and engagement. Rather than portraying grief as a passive or paralyzing response, her work demonstrates how it can become a starting point for questioning systems that contribute to environmental destruction. This shift from feeling to reflection is significant, as it transforms individual emotion into a broader consciousness of ecological crisis and responsibility.

Spahr's poems suggest that grief, when shared and articulated, can reveal the structural causes behind environmental damage. The loss of ecosystems, species, and landscapes is not presented as an isolated घटना but as the outcome of specific economic and political practices. By connecting emotional response to these underlying systems, her poetry encourages readers to move beyond mourning and toward critical awareness. In this sense, eco-grief becomes a lens through which the realities of climate change, industrial expansion, and environmental injustice are more clearly understood.

At the same time, Spahr's work positions poetry itself as a form of protest. Her language often carries the rhythm and intensity of collective expression, echoing the voices of demonstrations and public resistance. The repetition of phrases, the urgency of tone, and the emphasis on shared experience create a poetic space that resembles a gathering of voices rather than a solitary reflection. This stylistic approach blurs the boundary between art and activism, suggesting that writing can participate in political discourse rather than merely observe it.

What emerges from this intersection of grief and protest is the idea that emotion can lead to action. The recognition of environmental loss fosters a sense of urgency that challenges indifference

and inaction. Instead of distancing the reader, Spahr's poetry draws them into a network of shared concern, where feeling becomes a motivation for engagement. Through this process, eco-grief is redefined as an active force, one that not only acknowledges damage but also calls for change, responsibility, and collective response.

The concerns expressed in the poetry of Juliana Spahr can be meaningfully connected to broader global efforts aimed at addressing environmental crisis, particularly the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. While her work is rooted in literary expression, it resonates strongly with the objectives of United Nations initiatives such as SDG 13 Climate Action and SDG 15 Life on Land. These goals focus on combating climate change and protecting terrestrial ecosystems, both of which are central themes in her poetry.

Spahr's attention to environmental degradation, species loss, and ecological imbalance reflects the urgency emphasized in SDG 13, which calls for immediate and sustained action to address climate-related challenges. Similarly, her poetic engagement with biodiversity and the disappearance of nonhuman life aligns with the aims of SDG 15, which highlights the need to conserve and restore ecosystems. Rather than presenting these issues through policy language, her work approaches them through emotional and cultural expression, making the crisis more immediate and relatable.

By connecting personal and collective experiences of environmental loss to larger global concerns, her poetry indirectly supports these sustainability frameworks. It demonstrates how literature can complement policy by shaping awareness, encouraging reflection, and fostering a sense of shared responsibility toward the planet.

6.CONCLUSION

The poetry of Juliana Spahr demonstrates how literary expression can engage deeply with the realities of environmental crisis by bringing together grief and resistance within a single framework. Throughout her work, ecological loss is not presented as a distant or abstract issue but as something immediate, shared, and emotionally charged. By transforming eco-grief into a collective experience, she challenges the tendency to treat environmental damage as separate from human life. Instead, her poetry insists on recognizing the interconnectedness that binds humans to the natural world.

At the same time, Spahr's writing highlights the potential of literature to move beyond representation and toward responsibility. Her poems do not simply describe environmental harm; they question the systems and assumptions that produce it, particularly those rooted in human-centered thinking. In doing so, they encourage readers to reconsider their relationship with nature and to acknowledge their role within broader ecological processes. This shift from awareness to reflection is what allows literature to function as a form of ethical engagement.

Looking ahead, the significance of eco-literature is likely to grow as environmental challenges become more urgent and visible. Works such as Spahr's suggest that literature can play a vital role in shaping how these crises are understood and addressed. By fostering empathy, awareness, and critical thought, eco-literature opens up possibilities for more responsible and sustainable ways of living. Ultimately, it calls for an ethical commitment that extends beyond human interests, urging a more inclusive and attentive relationship with all forms of life.

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH CULTURE SOCIETY ISSN: 2456-6683
Monthly Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed Journal [Impact Factor: 9.241]
Volume - 09, Special Issue - 43, December - 2025 Publication Date: 31/12/2025

DOIs:10.2017/IJRCS/ICNMHTGLL-2025/P18 --:-- Research Paper / Article / Review

A Two Day International Conference on Navigating Mental Health Through the Gateway of Language and Literature. (ICNMHTGLL-2025) Date: 22 - 23 December, 2025

Heal or Harm: An Exploratory Study of Language and Mental Health Stigma

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Abstract: *Language is pivotal in shaping societal perceptions of mental illness. While formal labels perpetuate stigma, the impact of everyday linguistic choices—like adjectives, humour, metaphors, and narrative framing—on cognitive processing, emotional response, and behavioural interaction is less explored. The effect of four different kinds of mental health language on stigma among seventy-six young adults in India was examined in this exploratory mixed-methods study. One of four experimental vignette conditions was randomly assigned to the participants: (1) negative adjectives; (2) a news headline focused on recovery; (3) a direct first-person recovery declaration; or (4) dismissive humour. Five in-depth semi-structured interviews were used in addition to modified instruments from the CAMI and PDD measures to quantify stigma. According to the quantitative study, the baseline level of total stigma was very low (M = 2.11). Notably, the condition with the first-person recovery statement had the lowest mean stigma score (M = 1.99), indicating that it might have an anti-stigmatic effect. On the other hand, the mean stigma score for the recovery-oriented news headline condition was marginally higher (M = 2.38). Five major themes emerged from qualitative data analysis: the perceived harmfulness of labels, the direct emotional impact of language, the media's enormous influence, the importance of empathic language, and unclear reactions to humour. When taken as a whole, these results highlight how minor linguistic differences can have a big impact on psychological outcomes, including empathy, desired social distance, and recovery perceptions. The importance of deliberate, considerate, and people-first language in all communication contexts (interpersonal, media, and educational) is emphasised in the study's conclusion.*

Key Words: *language, stigma, mental health, narratives, empathy.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

One of the biggest obstacles to mental health recovery is still stigma, which has a big impact on treatment results, help-seeking behaviour, and subjective well-being. A significant amount of this widespread stigma is spread through rhetoric and common language. Words like "crazy," "dangerous," "weak," and "unstable" actively shape and reinforce deeply ingrained social beliefs in addition to reflecting them. This problem is made more difficult in a multicultural nation like India, where labels that are deeply ingrained in the culture—such as "mad" or "pagal"—carry a great deal of moral condemnation and shame, frequently linking mental illness to a personal shortcoming. The way that people and society view and comprehend mental illness is essentially framed by language. Harmful preconceptions and social distance are immediately triggered by negative, judgmental language. Empathetic, person-first language, on the other hand, promotes a supportive atmosphere and facilitates interaction. Humour often bears the risk of trivialising real anguish or suffering, even though it can occasionally provide a release. Even though ordinary linguistic framing is crucial, the area of stigma research has given it relatively little empirical attention. Instead of examining the wider, more

complicated spectrum of language people encounter and use daily, the majority of academic studies tend to concentrate exclusively on the effects of formal diagnostic labels. By methodically investigating the ways in which four different forms of language—negative descriptors, positive media framing, authentic first-person recovery narratives, and the use of humour, affect and shape mental health stigma among young adults, the current study seeks to critically address this important research gap. This study directly relates to the main theme of the conference by providing an important examination of how particular language choices can either seriously impair or facilitate healing, impacting the fundamental ideas of peace, dignity, and general well-being in relation to mental health.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Language and Stigma

According to Link and Phelan (2001), stigma is a multi-step process that includes discrimination, labelling, stereotyping, separation, and status loss. Because labels trigger prejudices, which in turn legitimise social distance, language is fundamental to this process. It has been demonstrated that people-first terminology, such as "person with schizophrenia," lessens stigma by highlighting humanity before diagnosis. On the other hand, stereotypes based on fear are strengthened by negative descriptions (Corrigan, 2016).

Public Perception and Media Framing

One of the most important sources of knowledge about mental health is the media. Sensational headlines frequently associate mental illness with crises, violence, or volatility. These kinds of stories feed mistrust and anxiety (Cutcliffe, 2014). On the other hand, it has been demonstrated that headlines that focus on recovery enhance sentiments.

Trivialization and Humour

Although humour can ease stress and foster relationships, it frequently trivialises suffering when it comes to mental illness. McGinty et al. (2015) discovered that while context-sensitive humour from people with lived experience may have diverse impacts, disparaging humour enhances stigma by reinforcing stereotypes.

Measuring Stigma

Community attitudes, such as perceptions of danger, unpredictability, recovery, and social distance, are commonly measured using the CAMI and PDD scales (Taylor & Dear, 1981; Link, 1987). The current study employed modified versions of these items.

3. OBJECTIVES :

Research Aim

To examine how different forms of mental-health language influence mental-health stigma among young adults in India.

Research Questions

1. Do different linguistic frames produce different levels of stigma?
2. What emotional responses do participants have to each linguistic frame?
3. What linguistic experiences in real life influence participants' perceptions of stigma around mental health?

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY :

The design was convergent parallel mixed methods. Simultaneous collection and integration of quantitative and qualitative data occurred during the analytical process.

Participants

76 young individuals, mostly Belagavi undergraduate students, made up the sample. Convenience sampling was used. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions:

- Negative adjectives (n = 25)
- Recovery-oriented headline (n = 22)
- First-person recovery statement (n = 18)
- Dismissive humour (n = 11)

Participation was voluntary and anonymous.

Materials:

Vignettes

Four short vignettes (1–2 sentences) were written to represent linguistic frames:

1. **Negative descriptors**
2. **Positive recovery headline**
3. **First-person recovery narrative**
4. **Dismissive humour**

Stigma Battery

A 6-item scale was adapted from CAMI and PDD, including items on:

- dangerousness
- discomfort
- unpredictability
- recovery belief (reverse-coded)
- friendship willingness (reverse-coded)
- humour tolerance

Items were rated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Qualitative Interviews

Five semi-structured interviews examined actual experiences with language related to mental health.

Procedure

A Google Form was filled out by participants. Section-based logic was applied in the vignette assignment. Four days were spent gathering the data. For convenience and privacy, interviews were done by text.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics and between-group mean comparisons were used to analyse quantitative data. Qualitative data were analysed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approac

5. RESULTS :

Quantitative Findings:

Overall Stigma Levels

Participants displayed **low stigma** (M = 2.11).

Between-Condition Comparisons Table 1.1

Condition	Mean Stigma Score
Negative adjectives	2.01
Recovery headline	2.38
First-person recovery	1.99
Humour/dismissive	2.03

The **first-person recovery** condition produced the lowest stigma, while the **media headline** condition unexpectedly produced slightly higher stigma.

Item-Level Responses

- Strong belief in recovery (most agreed with positive items).
- High willingness to be friends with someone with a mental illness.
- Moderate belief that mental illness involves unpredictability.
- Strong rejection of humour as harmless.

Behavioural Intentions

In response to the flat-sharing question:

- **Yes:** 33%
- **Maybe:** 58%
- **No:** 9%

Qualitative Findings

Five main themes were identified.

1. Harmful Labels and Stereotypes

Participants described discomfort with words such as *lazy*, *crazy*, *mad*, *pagal*, and *unstable*, stating these deepen stigma.

2. Emotional Impact

Negative language lowered self-esteem, discouraged help-seeking, and caused embarrassment or shame.

3. Media Influence

Participants said sensational headlines and inaccurate portrayals shape distorted public views.

4. People-First, Empathetic Language

Emphasising that empathy can help others feel understood and included, many favoured language that was calm, courteous, and specific.

5. Using humour to cope or cause harm

Most people thought humour trivialised hardship and increased stigma, even though some felt it may help reduce tension.

6. DISCUSSION:

The results highlight how language plays a crucial role in creating stigma around mental illness. The low levels of stigma overall point to a rise in young people's knowledge of mental health issues. The variations between conditions, however, show that phrasing is still important.

What Makes First-Person Narratives Less Stigmatizing

Personal words that humanise mental illness and evoke empathy include "I am recovering." This is consistent with studies demonstrating that self-disclosure lessens discrimination.

The Reasons Behind Higher Media Headlines

Emotional connection may be diminished, and subtle stereotypes may be reinforced by headlines that seem impersonal or detached.

Integration of Qualitative Data

Interview research supports quantitative trends: negative labels sustain stigma, while inclusive language fosters empathy. The media's significant influence on participants demonstrated how public discourse shapes societal attitudes.

All things considered, the study shows that even minor linguistic adjustments can have an impact on attitudes, behaviour, and emotional reactions.

8. CONCLUSION:

Language can be beneficial or detrimental. This study demonstrates how common language choices affect social distance, empathy, and stigma. While humour and derogatory remarks might serve to further stigma, first-person recovery language promotes understanding. Intentional, courteous language is crucial in fostering dignity, inclusivity, and emotional well-being as conversations about mental health become increasingly widespread.

9. LIMITATIONS:

- Generalizability is limited by a convenience sample.
- Unequal group sizes.
- Statistics that are descriptive as opposed to inferential.
- Complex real-life settings might not be captured by brief vignettes.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Media:** use terminology that is non-sensational and focused on recovery.
- **Education:** encourage stigma awareness and people-first language.
- **Peer groups:** avoid casual slang.
- **Mental-health advocates:** emphasise strengths and recovery.
- **Counselling settings:** encourage empathetic communication.

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH CULTURE SOCIETY ISSN: 2456-6683
Monthly Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed Journal [Impact Factor: 9.241]
Volume - 09, Special Issue - 43, December - 2025 Publication Date: 31/12/2025

DOIs:10.2017/IJRCS/ICNMHTGLL-2025/P19 --:-- Research Paper / Article / Review

A Two Day International Conference on Navigating Mental Health Through the Gateway of Language and Literature. (ICNMHTGLL-2025) Date: 22 - 23 December, 2025

Existence, Identity, subversion of representation remains as the fixation – An analysis of bullying and sobriquet of the marginalized.

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Abstract: *There's a fundamental right for every individual that he or she should be called by their names christened during their birth by their parents, or by the family members. The name carries the utmost identity of the culture, social status and family pride. It predominantly undermines the cultural status of every community in naming the children. Dalit community and their impoverished status make the upper-caste community to call them or name them by their physical appearance and attributions that lead to delineate their identity in responding to their originality and the same makes them to forget their rights and liberty on the planet as the identity crisis subdued their responses towards the oppression. Nicknames majorly work on the psyche of the person and stoops them to a lower level and disturb their living conditions as it put them into the category of subaltern throughout their life. The novels selected for analysis as the same references mentioned above with all the characters named because of their deformity in the personal appearances, behavioural attribution that led the characters to deepen their level of living and mute their ability of interrogating.*

Key words : *Predominant, delineate, subaltern, attribution.*

1.INTRODUCTION:

Bullying is defined as the concept that debug's individual identity, bring pain in carrying it towards every aspect of life, Irrespective of caste, gender or class, identity reflects with nick-name brings derogatory to individual in responding to many situations, they feel completely low and weak in addressing these issues, but in operational sector of elitist these references never be taken seriously and they constantly broach individual dignity and feel elated in representing them with these names again by diminishing their importance to the society or in any form of representation. Such is the concept to be discussed to address these issues and well portrayed by the Dalit writers such as Dr. Perumal Murugan and Dr. Bama, the entire article deals with these names and bullies and their disturbed psyche throughout the play and even end up living with these names than their original names. They connect with their people, friends and locals, apparently to identify their original names and seek happiness with the original name called by their parents or community and feel excited to be called. This alienable aspect is the concept of discussing or deconstructing the problems faced by children in their workplaces, feel completely insecure, timid, weak, low and identifying themselves as outcast. Outcast is the race sensitive issue that scorns them to irreducibly complicit in the political economy as well.

2.Literature review

An article on *Scoping review of antibullying interventions* in the Journal of Multidisciplinary studies shows the detrimental effects of bullying and the traumatic life of children. It further creates psychological distress throughout their life. An article by Abdullah, Taquer titled *Impact of Peer Labelling on the Wellbeing and Academic Performance of Secondary School Students in* the Journal of Education and Social Sciences (July 2025), states the condition of indirect peer labelling in the academic performances adversely affect the emotional wellbeing of the students. An article by Anke, Goerzing in the paper titled *Teachers' Responses to Identity-Based Bullying: Social Inequality, Identity, and Diversity at Teacher and School Level* in International Journal of Bullying Prevention (Feb 2025), identity-based bullying affects the socioecological approach and stigmatizes their level of approach in all aspects of academic life.

3.Objectives

To identify controlling aspect in the life of dalit children in Perumal Murugan's *Season of the Palm* and Bama's *karukku*

To analyse the distortion of `self' in the budding youngsters.

To examine the result of bullying and create dismissal from the mainstream society.

4.Slackened suffering -unheeded

Karukku by Bama journeyed widely and slackened their sufferings as the novel bequeathed them courage and helped them to live their life with ease and comfort by letting out their issues so openly in the language that tend to signify their wound and sufferings. Karukku enabled many of their communities to raise their voice and insists on crossing the boundaries, it stands past such criticism and argues openly against casteism and patriarchy.

Dr. Perumal Murugan is the star of contemporary Tamil literature garnered critical acclaim and commercial success for his work. The versatile writer gives insights into relationships throughout his work culminates the heart wrenching complexities of human relatedness towards society and the people around. Dr. Perumal Murugan imbues and infuse the pressure of the child crippled in society due to economic deprivation and forced to work in the situation as he was completely paralysed to the situation that enforced on him. His desire to play, longing to enjoy the freedom succumbed to the situation that he was inflicted by the family and the society in `Seasons of the Palm'

Dr. Perumal Murugan's novel `Seasons of the palm' starts with the name that has kept for the boy due to his slow growth and called as `shorty.' The novel's introduction relates "When Shorty and his herd of sheep enter the vast field outlying the village, it is still dawn. The sun sits snug behind karattur hill, reluctant to climb even that modest height." (Seasons of the palm 1).The description of the village is given with the meticulous living of the dalit's life and how the boys maraude the sheep for grazing and in the way beautifully even each sheep named according to their appearances. The description of the palm tree, identifying their gender by the villagers to collect the toddy as they crucially cut the male tree and become so heartless, but when it comes to the female tree, they give utmost care and allow their fronds to grow until they form a huge whirl. The information given about the tree rather satisfies the reader to understand the identification of female tree fondled but in the race of human being the situation is though different it has given for the reader to understand as the writer has not mentioned any such elucidation. The proclamation of difference shown in the naming the personality according to their external features and those associated names deem to undermine the living of the subaltern. The new stance to follow from a recognition by identifying their considered deformity according to their perceived notion "Belly usually comes first, once she is there, the world seems right. Her laughter and mocking voice hold the air, and he is not alone anymore. Then come Tall fellow, stonedeaf, and last of all stumpled." (Seasons of the palm 5)

In Bama's karukku the naming comes with the mischief or naughtiness that they have done while growing and that name remains throughout,

" A small girl who went off to practise swimming in the well, but could only manage to float, was promply named Medenta, floater. Yet another woman used to go about chasing crows away when she was a small child. The name stuck to her, Kaakkaa, crow. I could go on and on. Konnavaachi(Starer), Deaf one, Dumbo, crazy, severiyaa (Xavier), Black ant, Manacchi(Flat nose). Uzhamukki (running nose), Needle bum. All sorts of names like that Black Mouth, Nezhucchan(staggerer), Belly Button, Kaaman (Jack of all trades), Bondan (Snatcher), vidvi(Idiot), Nadodi(Wanderer), Idiot and Half ear (Karukku 9)

Discrimination stalks from every corner by humiliation and degradation, wretched lifestyle, the names further make them remember their stand of living with denigration and poverty. The existence of pain and servitude is further alleviated by paralysing their identity through the nick names and keeping them under privileged due to socio-political conditions. There's always the mechanism that was played to bury the spirit that burns within by showing the immoral tendency and dictatorship towards the weakling by altering their power into silent surrender.

"Belly does not like to give her the wood, when she is asked, she picks up a few dried palm sheaths and hauls these to the master's home. She gathers wood to help her mother who works all day in the fields and returns home with aching ribs. Some morning when she leaves for work, with bits of sleep sticking to her eyes. Belly's mother calls belly to her Raamu bring back some wood today, will you? There's no twig at home.' Only her mother calls her Raamu. Raamu short of Raamayi, her given name. But no one knows that. (Seasons of Palm 31)

Children of her age work in the master's house, some paid monthly wages and were fed two times a day and some were paid annually and paid three times a day and were sent to their house as they remain in the shed and do the work from morning till evening like shorty.

Belly worries about her mistress mouth and never give answer in return as she worried about the place she is working about the place she is working as there are more untouchable boys and girls to work in the mistress household, if she loses the job, she has to work in the vettu kattu master's house like a slave, pledged to the master. More people work in the house and there is job for everybody in the house of vettukattu master, Her brother works there and keeps complaining about the work and resists going, then mother scold him and send him to work.

"Marx contention here is that descriptive definition of a class can be differential one- its cutting off and difference from all other classes, in so far as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that cut off their mode of life, their interest and their formation from those of the other classes and place them in inimical confrontation." (Spivak 80)

The idea of losing the job and food makes the kids to be subservient and that sustains throughout as they grow and they even obey master's son in fear of losing the job and transferred to some other place they shifted to. The very nature of the behaviour shows the terms of indigenous class formation and they are under imperialism, the major controlled terms interlocking of cultural and social domination lead the kids to remain as the depraved subjects, they tend to obey despotic, tyrannical and oppressive upper caste domination. Even the master's children behave so rudely with these kids, and they take the hold in hand and control the kids of their age, they even treated badly within the rigid structural functionalism and institutionalised Hinduism, and upper caste kids were scolded and reprimanded for playing or touching the Dalit children. "Selvan speaks in his father's voice. He takes on his father's angry tone. What good food? And besides selvan doesn't feed me, does he? Stumpled fumes to himself, and even my master doesn't feed me for free. Don't I work for it? Little knock-kneed sneak. One of these days. I'll strange his bloody throat. Sneak face.

Stumpleg rages inside, savours the words, sneaks face on his tongue several times, but does not talk. They all call selvan that, but not to his face. Stumpleg waits until Selvan's moment of anger passes. Then, gathering all the patience he can muster, replies."(Seasons of the Palm 108).

5.Resentment

In Bama's Karukku she has registered the details of the storm between chaliyar and her people with the narrative flow of preceding and succeeding events that disrupt the entire community with the stir in their minds that eventually rise from the situation they were to the dominant realistic mode by recasting their identity by eroding the colonial ideology. The throwback status of the marginalised section and the subjugation of her people under the forces, shows that the power lies in the hands of people who have money. She also discusses about the treatment of the people and inscribes the autocratic rule of the upper caste men.

"What will they do to them, patti?' I asked

They'll take them and they'll whip them like they whip animals until they can neither see nor breathe and then they'll clap them in jail, just barely live. That's what they say." (Karukku 36)

In spite of all these atrocities many of the men were save by women in the communities and they managed to hide their men and sent the police away by giving so many reasons on diseases, labours pains and so on. Men later hide themselves in the mandavam hills, women folks managed the house without men and police men thought that these were carrying the food for their husbands and some of them were taken and dropped at the other side of the hills. Few incidents show the cruelty imposed on the Dalit community as the incident narrates that the small boy died and he must be cremated and the entire village has women and there were no men in the village and the women folk has to manage the issue. They felt that before decided to plan at the nighttime, three elderly woman carried saree along with them as they witnessed police on the way they started their `oppari' by informing the police that they are from other village and have come for the death. The next day the cremation and burial of death has got over and there were praised by the entire village for their bold deed.

The situation here chronicles the mental torture that were inflicted to the dalit community that they were not bewail for the death of their kith and kin, instead they have to sort out the plan to escape from the brutality and plan to bring their men for the funeral. Later few men were arrested and taken away and even returned on bail, but one such man, who was mentioned as robust died the next as he was beaten by the police too badly. In midst of all these incidents there developed a strong culmination and the thought of revivalism in the minds of `Pariahs' they have become despondent, tyrannical towards the injustice dispensed on them and it was these incidents nihilistically changed their understanding because of the gamut of incidents that led to anger, resentment, frustration and brazened their thoughts with the solidarity. Gayatri Spivak opines "profoundly recognises that the dominant political, economic, cultural and educational strategies have blighted the lives of many marginalised and disempowered communities." (Spivak 42). Speaking truth to power is insufficient if `power'is not willing or able to hear the truth.

The frightful situation impedes the growth and results in the resistance, so Bama in karukku narrates her personal experience in the village she hailed from, even the idea of workship completely changed according to the caste they belong where power and authority plays the major role and the belief in god change in a curious way depending on the money and power. Even if they change the religion their conditions and the way they were treated remains the same. The upper caste Christians enjoy the benefits and comforts the church and in fact Dalit's ignorance was taken for toss at their capital set up a big business and profited their caste.

"I felt in my heart that could go and speak directly to God without their intervention. I could no longer believe that God could only be reached, as they taught us, through prayer learned by rote through pious practices, through the novena and the rosary. I came to realise that you could see God through the

mind's eye, in nature and in the ordinary events of everyday. So all the rituals that I had followed and believed in so far suddenly began to seem meaningless and just a shame. The desire to become nun fell way from me entirely at this time." (Bama 102)

The authorities run the school in the idea of educating the destitute children, but in the other way they will be taken to do the menial task, there were divisions over the caste and even the languages they spoke, besides they would have taught those children about the conditions. Many nuns treated those children for doing their work and children toiled dawn to dusk and the situation seemed so helpless that she could not change or do anything. The situations seemed so worried that nothing can be changed with those prayers and vows that were taken and further prayers preach complete surrendering and that never yield any results in turn it made them completely subjugated as it never made them to ask questions or raise voice.

"they go on and on about the vow of `obedience' and force us into submission so that we can scarcely lift our heads. We are not even allowed to think for ourselves in a way that befit our years. They want to think for us, instead of us, we are not allowed the independence and rights that even small children are entitled to when I thought to myself, towards the end of my time with them never mind, let it all go, and asked only to be sent to a village or anywhere to a school with ordinary and poor children, they intimidated me by talking of`obedience' and `faith' (karukku 114).

This appropriation of identity leads to the contradiction of understanding the term religion, so it has been forced to detach from the connection that human beings linked to get the identity and there to marginalised are considered as the vote banks. Hence Bama decided to withdrew from her services to be the nun and determinant to leave the commune with the hope of getting new job through the help of her fellow sister. Brazen solidarity within her helped to see the new ways ahead, though it is not clear but her resistance to surrender happened due to the situations that she has witnessed and experienced on her own. The decision to leave the nunnery is the repercussions that she faced due to the proclivity of the missionary. Subversion is possible not only because of the ruthless power but also because of the deceit by one sector where the hopes get distracted and surrendering becomes futile.

When it comes to Perumal murugan's `seasons of the palm' the decision and the solidarity is different according to the situation and experience they undergo. Shorty climbed the coconut tree through Tall fellow warned about the consequences, but shorty was stern in his decision and climbed the tree by then he was caught by the Master and the owner of the grove. He was terribly worried as Tall fellow was not found and Vaya kattu master blamed shorty's master. "And in the middle of the day! He climbs my tree in broad day light. What guts! His bloody master must have encouraged him. "Go on steal. What can that Vaya kattu master do? (Seasons of the palm 238). Shorty shivered and he was beaten black and blue, his body was wet with sweat and fear and shook violently. Blood began to flow from his torn lips. Mistress asked him to stop but warned by the master to stay away and he was tied upside down into the well. He felt his body swing and his head moved towards the rock, limbs were tied and his head hung useless he was later in the hut. Shortly thereafter grew weak and stubborn and nest day his parents came and enquired but master convinced them that became quiet and in few days his father came to take him for the festival and shorty was curious to leave and afraid that his would not give permission but when master got amused by shorty's father happy to see his mother and his siblings, as he reached home his brother bounced over him and climbed up and he called his sister to him and he played with his sister and brother. His mother prepared beef kolambu and it tasted heavenly for him as he was about to eat his food, pulled by his mother and he fell. On his way he stayed in grandmother's house, next day father came in search of him and shouted at him and shorty wanted to shout back that he had pledged him for the money he borrowed from his master and he has become impudent lately because of the agony he has suffered, nothing has changed him and he went to master's place and started doing his work and the tied the coins given by the grandmother's mistress tightly in the cloth and kept checking often and wished to be with his grandmother as he can earn more money, brought the sheep for grazing asked Tall fellow to look after and he slept. After returning from the grandmother's place, he kept sleeping often and felt tired, there by Master Selvan came and saw shorty sleeping irritated him by his speech

and later disturbed him to come to the well. Selvan gave bath to the sheep and pushed in the water and later sheep gasps for breath, shortly tried to stop him from doing so, but selvan was so adamant in nature and shorty felt that something has happened to selvan. Tall fellow washed the sheep and shorty remained in the corner and later he jumped too and selvan jumped following him and thumped shorty in the well as they fought in the well. Shorty got angry pushed deep into his chest, he held selvan by his head and with all his strength he pushed him down into the water. Tall fellow, Belly screamed and informed shortly to run way. "he dives into the well, He does not resist the water, he goes down. Quietly his eyes search the well. He is in white water now, white from the soft earth, and then a few moments later all its dark. The water is black and cool." (Seasons of the Palm 331). The resentment of subordination violently disrupted the behaviour; subversion is due to the psychological repression. Subaltern considered as subject and treated brutally when there is superfluity treatment of the people. If the people, consider the subject and the same subject reacts due to differentiation thrust upon then the judgement for the behaviour is the social effect incited by society. Dismantling nature by snatching childhood in the name of community and categorizing them in the name of classes produces complicit victim to the situations.

6.Conclusion

Tendency of homogenizing the ideology as only women know women and Dalit can understand Dalit is the second tendency of understanding the human beings. For the generation who vaguely understand the conditions of Dalits whirl around the singularity of liberalism. Hence the relationship between the practical and theoretical knowledge is necessary in understanding the terminology of Dalit. One should be vocal in expressing instead of dwindling or besmirching their representation of identity. Every action of human being associated with the conjunction with preceding and succeeding actions that mounted their tendencies towards domination. However, the inability of direct attack in one sector led to resisting the falsification of promised given by religion that seemed to improve their status. Overpowering with unity and taking revenge is however considered as outburst they endeavoured supplemented by the action that they resisted due to moral depravity. At one point literature is a vital instrument to manifest their attentions, emotions, sufferings and agony as they can only register their pain and register the selfish politics of the dominant group.

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH CULTURE SOCIETY ISSN: 2456-6683
Monthly Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed Journal [Impact Factor: 9.241]
Volume - 09, Special Issue - 43, December - 2025 Publication Date: 31/12/2025

DOIs:10.2017/IJRCS/ICNMHTGLL-2025/P20 --:-- Research Paper / Article / Review

A Two Day International Conference on Navigating Mental Health Through the Gateway of Language and Literature. (ICNMHTGLL-2025) Date: 22 - 23 December, 2025

The Role of Multilingualism in Articulating Mental Health Experiences

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Abstract: *This paper examines how multilingualism shapes the articulation, perception, and communication of mental health experiences across diverse linguistic and cultural frameworks. Drawing on interdisciplinary scholarship from linguistics, psychology, and medical humanities, the study argues that multilingual individuals often navigate emotional expression through language-specific vocabularies, culturally embedded metaphors, and shifting narrative identities. These linguistic resources impact self-awareness, therapeutic rapport, access to care, and how distress is perceived and expressed. The study demonstrates how multilingual speakers deliberately choose languages to define vulnerability, navigate stigma, and express complex affective states by examining current empirical research and theoretical frameworks. It delves deeper into how code-switching can be used to control emotions and maintain narrative coherence. Overall, the paper underscores the need for culturally and linguistically responsive mental health practices that recognise multilingualism as an asset in meaning-making and healing.*

Key Words*: multilingualism; mental health communication; linguistic identity; emotional expression; code-switching.*

1.INTRODUCTION:

In an increasingly globalised world, multilingualism has emerged not only as a sociolinguistic asset but also as a significant psychological variable that influences how individuals understand, frame, and communicate their mental health experiences. Scholars in linguistics, psychology, anthropology, and cognitive science have increasingly recognised that the language through which a person interprets their emotions profoundly shapes how those emotions are experienced, narrated, and socially validated. Because language is the primary medium through which individuals conceptualise distress, seek help, and engage in therapeutic practices, multilingualism offers a distinct lens for examining how mental health takes shape within and across linguistic repertoires.

Research in psycholinguistics demonstrates that multilinguals often report different emotional intensities depending on the language in use, with first languages (L1s) generally eliciting deeper affective resonance than later learned languages (L2s or L3s) (Dewaele, Emotions in Multiple Languages 90). Language choice can affect emotional detachment, memory recall, trauma storytelling, and even degrees of stigma or transparency in disclosure. The politics of mental health advocacy, public health communication, cross-cultural mental health services, and clinical practice are all significantly impacted by this dynamic.

This paper argues that multilingualism plays a crucial role in shaping, mediating, and expanding the articulation of mental health experiences. The study examines (1) the cognitive-affective effects of multilingualism, (2) the sociocultural aspects of narrating distress, (3) implications for psychotherapy and clinical communication, and (4) the political and ethical stakes of multilingual mental health frameworks. It draws on research from sociolinguistics, cross-cultural psychology, trauma studies, and

discourse analysis. In conclusion, the study argues that multilingualism functions as an epistemic bridge across cultures, enabling more complex, contextualised, and culturally sensitive mental health discourses in addition to providing people with a wider semiotic repertoire for expressing internal experiences.

2.LITERATURE REVIEW:

Language is widely acknowledged in academic study as a key medium for conceptualising, expressing, and socially interpreting mental health experiences. Research in psychology and sociolinguistics contends that by giving speakers access to a variety of semantic and cultural frameworks, multilingualism influences how people express their emotions (Pavlenko, 2005; Boroditsky, 2011). Languages differ in their emotional lexicon, and some affective states may be easier to convey in one language than another, which affects how people describe discomfort.

Further evidence that mental health concepts like anxiety and depression are linguistically rooted and culturally modulated comes from cross-cultural psychiatry (Kleinman, 1988). Depending on the language employed, multilingual people frequently negotiate several cultural scripts of pain, which causes changes in metaphor, tone, and disclosure patterns. According to clinical research, patients often express their feelings more deeply and profoundly in their native tongue, which has consequences for therapeutic rapport and diagnostic precision (Sue et al., 2009).

3.THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS: LANGUAGE, EMOTION, AND MENTAL HEALTH

Language as a Mediator of Emotion

Language has a constitutive role in forming emotional experience rather than only serving as a means of expressing preexisting emotions. According to academics like Michelle Rosaldo and Catherine Lutz, the idea of universal emotional states is complicated by the fact that emotion categories vary among cultures and languages (Lutz 67; Rosaldo 141). For example, the Portuguese "saudade" and the untranslatable Filipino "gigil" contain culturally specific emotional meanings that are difficult to accurately convey in English. These ideas illustrate how language frameworks that specify the limits of what may be felt and how it can be expressed mediate emotions. The "lexical hypothesis" in psychology, which holds that vocabulary availability influences emotional awareness—a process commonly referred to as "emotion granularity"—also demonstrates the importance of language in emotional processing (Barrett 46). Multilingual individuals, possessing multiple vocabularies, may therefore access multiple schemas for interpreting emotional experiences.

Multilingual Cognition and Emotional Distance

The concept of reduced emotional resonance in a second language is a key component of multilingual psychology. Because later-learned languages are typically acquired in formal, academic settings rather than relational, emotionally charged circumstances, scholars like Jean-Marc Dewaele observe that these languages are frequently less emotionally "loaded" (Dewaele, “The Emotional Force of Swearwords” 208). As a result, multilingual people may unintentionally change the language they use to control the intensity of their emotions. To establish affective distance and facilitate safer articulation, an individual can, for instance, talk about trauma in their second language. According to Pavlenko, bilingual therapy clients, migrants, and trauma survivors have all reported this distancing effect, describing L2 as a "buffer" against overwhelming memories (Pavlenko 177). On the other hand, L1 may trigger deeply ingrained emotional scripts and childhood experiences, which can occasionally exacerbate distress or promote emotional authenticity.

Conceptual Metaphors and Mental Health Narratives

According to Lakoff and Johnson's theory of conceptual metaphors, language-embedded metaphors (such as "feeling down," "carrying emotional weight," and "bottling up feelings") organise emotional

experiences. The metaphorical repertoires of various languages influence how distress is perceived. According to Kövecses, cross-linguistic metaphor variance can affect how trauma, anxiety, and depression are perceived ("Emotion Concepts" 189). Multilingual people may therefore negotiate several metaphorical systems, leading to complex but potentially fragmented interpretations of mental health.

4.SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXTS: STIGMA, IDENTITY, AND NARRATIVE AGENCY

Multilingualism and Stigma Negotiation

The stigma associated with mental health varies greatly throughout cultures, and language choice frequently becomes a strategy to deal with stigma. For example, whereas English-based psychiatric terminology like "anxiety" or "depression" may seem more clinical and less judgmental, terms like pagal ("crazy") carry significant stigma in South Asian contexts (Nadeem et al. 113). Because of this, people frequently move to English or another L2 to talk about mental health in a less stigmatized context. Language choice, according to Kirmayer, can act as a "cultural buffer," assisting people in separating themselves from stigmatizing local views ("Cultural Variations" 250). Western mental health terminology becomes a safer discursive space for many diaspora multilinguals to express experiences that are not acknowledged or accepted in local languages.

Identity Performance and Self-Representation

Multilingual individuals often present different selves in different linguistic contexts—a phenomenon known as linguistic self-positioning (Grosjean 125). Thus, identity negotiation is entwined with the articulation of mental health experiences. A language can be used to express resistance to cultural norms, remoteness, or affiliation. When talking about depression, for instance, a bilingual Arab-English speaker might pick English because it allows for a more individualized framing of pain, whereas Arabic cultural narratives might place more emphasis on spiritual causes or collective responsibility (Al-Krenawi and Graham 51). Thus, the language used affects not just the story's content but also the speaker's identity positioning and interpersonal dynamics.

Migrants, Refugees, and Linguistic Fracturing of Trauma

Experiences of trauma and relocation are frequently linguistically broken for migrants, refugees, and diasporic people. Emotional dissonance may result from trauma being encoded in L1 contexts but reported in L2 settings. Trauma narratives become fragmented when people lack vocabulary in the dominant language, resulting in partial suppression, mistranslation, or loss of narrative agency, according to studies on refugees from Bosnia, Syria, and Latin America (Eastmond 254; Hassan et al. 612). This linguistic vulnerability can exacerbate mental health challenges, as individuals may struggle to communicate distress to healthcare systems that do not share their linguistic repertoire.

5.MULTILINGUALISM IN CLINICAL AND THERAPEUTIC SETTINGS:

The Role of Language Choice in Psychotherapy

Linguistic accessibility is closely related to therapeutic efficacy. According to Santiago and Rasmussen ("The Bilingual Self in Therapy" 77), language choice in therapy affects narrative coherence, rapport, and emotional expression. While some clients prefer L2 therapy to preserve emotional distance, others prefer L1 therapy because it allows for fuller emotional articulation. When clients transfer languages, clinicians often observe changes in the intensity of their emotions. These patterns of code-switching could be an indication of attempts to mitigate emotional suffering, pursuing emotional authenticity, navigating traumatic experiences, or negotiating cultural expectations. According to bilingual therapists, permitting flexible language use can greatly improve therapeutic results (Altarriba and Morier 127).

Translation, Interpretation, and Diagnostic Reliability

When it comes to mental health diagnosis, relying on translators might raise concerns about cultural subtlety, accuracy, and confidentiality. According to studies, clinical terms like "delusion," "hallucination," and "intrusive thoughts" may not have exact translations in many languages, which could result in an underdiagnosis or incorrect diagnosis (Bauer and Alegría 388). Cultural idioms of anguish (such as "tension," "heat in the head," and "heavy heart"), metaphorical discourse misinterpreted as psychosis, or spiritual language mislabeled as pathological can all lead to misinterpretation. Kirmayer and Minas emphasize the importance of having interpreters with cultural training who understand linguistic and cultural circumstances ("Cultural Psychiatry" 322).

Multilingualism as Therapeutic Resource

Multilingualism is seen as a therapeutic advantage in contemporary narrative therapy paradigms. Clients may discover new meanings, reframe events, and integrate different facets of the self by expressing a traumatic event in multiple languages (Chen 204). This procedure, known as multilingual re-authoring, can strengthen resilience and increase emotional understanding. For instance, sharing tragedy in a second language may lessen emotional overload. The story may be reconnected with embodied experience if it is retold in L1. Language switching can expose cultural scripts that have been concealed. Clients can challenge prevailing narratives and take ownership of their mental health narratives because to this multilingual narrative flexibility.

6.DISCURSIVE, POLITICAL, AND ETHICAL DIMENSIONS:

The Politics of Mental Health Vocabulary

Western epistemological frameworks are frequently used to develop terminology related to mental health. Multilingual speakers may unintentionally replicate Western biological conceptions that exclude indigenous understandings of distress when they use English psychiatric words (Fernando 74). Refusing to use English terminology, on the other hand, might be a way to oppose psychiatric colonialism. As a result, multilingual mental health articulation involves interactions between local knowledge systems and global mental health discourses, making it both personal and political.

The Ethics of Linguistic Accessibility in Public Health

Mental health campaigns, digital platforms, and helplines often privilege dominant national languages, excluding linguistic minorities. Multilingual mental health communication is crucial, particularly in varied societies, according to ethical public health frameworks (Marmot 102). Migrant populations were disproportionately impacted by multilingual disinformation, and a lack of easily available mental health supports during the COVID-19 epidemic, underscoring structural disparities (Chow et al. 908). For egalitarian mental healthcare, accessible multilingual resources are crucial.

Multilingualism and Epistemic Justice

Multilingual mental health contexts directly relate to Miranda Fricker's concept of epistemic injustice, which is when people are injured in their capacity as knowers. Testimonial injustice occurs when clients are unable to convey their suffering because of language limitations or when their culturally distinctive sentiments are ignored (Fricker 89). Hermeneutical injustice also occurs when there are no conceptual parallels between languages, which makes it impossible to comprehend pain in a meaningful way. Therefore, it is an act of epistemic justice to promote multilingual mental health discourse.

7.CONCLUSION:

Multilingualism profoundly shapes how individuals perceive, experience, and articulate mental health. It affects political expression, therapeutic communication, identity formation, emotional resonance, narrative coherence, stigma negotiation, and epistemic legitimacy. Multilingualism is a multifaceted

psychological and social resource that broadens the options for articulating mental health, far from being a simple linguistic characteristic. The evidence in this paper highlights the need for: more research bridging linguistics, psychiatry, anthropology, and cognitive science; multilingual therapeutic practices that embrace linguistic fluidity; culturally informed diagnostic frameworks; and public health systems that prioritise linguistic inclusion. In the end, multilingualism makes it possible to articulate human experience in richer, more complex ways. In an increasingly interconnected society, acknowledging its relevance is crucial to creating fair mental health frameworks.

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH CULTURE SOCIETY ISSN: 2456-6683
Monthly Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed Journal [Impact Factor: 9.241]
Volume - 09, Special Issue - 43, December - 2025 Publication Date: 31/12/2025

DOIs:10.2017/IJRCS/ICNMHTGLL-2025/P21 --:-- Research Paper / Article / Review

A Two Day International Conference on Navigating Mental Health Through the Gateway of Language and Literature. (ICNMHTGLL-2025) Date: 22 - 23 December, 2025

Digital Nationalism and Affective Publics in India: Hashtags, Resistance and the Politics of Belonging

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Abstract: *Nationalism in the digital age has not disappeared but adapted, finding new life in online rituals, hashtags, and memes. This paper examines how Indian digital publics perform nationalism and resistance through three hashtags—#JaiHind, #HarGharTiranga, and #NotInMyName—across Twitter/X, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. Using a purposive dataset of 120 posts, the study employs digital ethnography and multimodal discourse analysis to trace how visuals, textual strategies, intertextual borrowings, and emotions shape belonging and exclusion. Findings reveal that banal nationalism is reproduced through repetitive flag imagery and slogans, while resistant publics innovate through satire, irony, and mourning. Affective registers—pride, outrage, humour, sadness—prove central to both affirmation and contestation of the nation, demonstrating that political discourse increasingly relies on emotional resonance rather than extended rational argument. Circulation patterns further underscore divergent logics: nationalist hashtags attract approval through "likes," while resistant hashtags thrive on "shares" that signal solidarity and redistribution. The study situates these dynamics within theories of banal nationalism (Billig), everyday nationhood (Fox & Miller-Idriss), and affective publics (Papacharissi), while also drawing on Shashi Tharoor's civic-pluralist reflections as a counterpoint to affect-driven digital practices. By emphasizing the affective and multimodal dimensions of Indian digital publics, the paper argues that nationalism today is sustained less as a coherent ideology than as an affective practice embedded in ordinary online routines. This contributes to broader debates on nationalism, media, and emotion, showing how India's digital spaces reconfigure belonging as both resilient and contested.*

Keywords: *Digital nationalism; affective publics; banal nationalism; Indian online discourse; resistance; everyday nationhood.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Nationalism remains one of the most relevant ideas in modern political and cultural life. Despite predictions that globalization and cosmopolitanism would lessen the relevance of the nation-state, national identity continues to act as a central framework through which communities imagine belonging and exclusion. Instead of being relegated as an outdated ideology, nationalism has adapted seamlessly to shifting contexts, finding expression in everyday practices, cultural forms, and increasingly, in digital spaces. Social media has transformed how individuals experience and perform national identity, incorporating it within the ordinary routines of digital life.

India offers a unique context for studying these dynamics. As a postcolonial nation characterized by linguistic, religious, and cultural pluralism, India has long struggled with the question of what it means to belong to the nation. Current debates around secularism, pluralism, and Hindutva demonstrate how contested national identity remains. India is among the largest digital societies in the world with over 800 million internet users. Platforms such as Twitter/X, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube are not only sites of entertainment and/or commerce but also key spaces where political identities are built, asserted and contested. Nationalist hashtags, memes, and emojis work parallel to resistant voices, producing an environment where belonging is constantly negotiated.

Digital media reconfigures nationalism in at least three important ways. First, it shifts the spaces of performance: what once took place in classrooms, rallies or television broadcasts now battles it out on the digital space through hashtags such as #JaiHind, #HarGharTiranga and/or #NotInMyName. These digital cues serve as what Michael Billig (1995) calls banal nationalism; ordinary reminders of the nation embedded in daily life. Second, digital publics are inherently multimodal. A slogan, meme, or emoji packs complex emotions into highly portable forms that travel quickly across networks. This aligns with Zizi Papacharissi's (2015) theory of affective publics, where collective identities come together not through rational debate but through shared sentiments. Third, digital environments blur the boundaries between validation and resistance. The same platforms that circulate patriotic imagery also host counter-public hashtags such as #NotInMyName, which opposes majoritarian violence and project alternative visions of the nation.

Emotions are central to this digital reconfiguration of nationalism. As Sara Ahmed (2004, 2014) argues, emotions are not merely private feelings but forms of circulation that "stick" to signs, symbols, and bodies. In India's digital landscape, communities are bound by affect—the feelings attached to the flag emoji, a cricket meme, or a satirical video—through pride, outrage, humour, or sadness. These signs show that belonging is not an abstract ideology, but something lived, felt and performed in everyday interactions. Pride emerges as the dominant affect in nationalist posts, but humour, irony, and mourning give traction to resistant discourses, demonstrating the multiplicity of ways in which emotions shape collective identity. These affective registers, thus sustain nationalism.

The scholarship that addresses nationalism in digital contexts has focused on the global rise of far-right digital mobilizations. Less attention has been paid to the everyday practices through which ordinary users reproduce or resist national identity in India's digital publics. This paper addresses this gap by examining a purposive dataset of 120 posts across three hashtags: #JaiHind (representing everyday nationalism), #HarGharTiranga (state-driven civic nationalism), and #NotInMyName (counter-public resistance). The study explores how nationalism is enacted through visuals, slogans, memes, and emotional registers, and how these circulate differently across platforms. The circulation patterns reveal that nationalist content thrives on likes as signals of approval, while resistant content depends on shares as acts of solidarity.

Nationalist sentiments in India have transformed into an emotionally charged atmosphere sustained through the online circulation of symbols and sentiments. Civic-liberal ideas are expostulated through the works of writers such as Shashi Tharoor. However, the viral nature of digital publics points to a broader, emotion-driven nationalism. This research uncovers a tension between civic-liberal ideals of national belonging and the affective, viral dynamics of digital publics. Consequently, the study contributes to both media studies and nationalism theory by revealing how India's digital publics generate new forms of belonging that are simultaneously unifying and divisive.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

2.1 The Persistence of Nationalism

Nationalism continues to structure political life in myriad ways. Angharad Closs Stephens (2013) argues that nationalism is not an ideology but "a way of organizing political possibility, even as the nation-state appears under challenge" (2013, p. 4). In the digital age, this persistence is visible in the proliferation of online rituals, where hashtags, memes, and emojis ensure that nationalism is continually fuelled and reinforced.

2.2 Banal and Everyday Nationalism

Billig (1995) emphasizes that nations are reproduced less by dramatic events than by "the routine words, habits and symbols which constantly remind us of the nation" (p. 6). He writes of the "flag hanging unnoticed on public buildings" and "the deictic words 'we,' 'here,' and 'our'" in the news as examples of the "banal flagging of the homeland" (Billig, 1995, p. 93). In digital contexts, banal reminders take the form of emojis, repetitive hashtags such as #JaiHind, or the circulation of flag images during state campaigns like #HarGharTiranga. These function not as extraordinary acts but as ordinary cues that sustain collective belonging.

Building on Billig, Fox and Miller-Idriss (2008) develop the concept of everyday nationhood, shifting focus from theoretical perceptions to real-life enactments. They identify four routine practices through which nationalism is lived: "talking the nation, choosing the nation, performing the nation, and consuming the nation" (Fox & Miller-Idriss, 2008, p. 538). They emphasize that nationalism "is reproduced not just through state institutions but through the daily actions and choices of ordinary people" (p. 540). In India's digital space, these practices manifest in hashtags, memes, and profile-picture changes. Users "talk the nation" through slogans like #JaiHind, "perform the nation" through flag selfies and "consume the nation" by liking or sharing patriotic memes.

2.3 Affect and the Circulation of Emotion

The affective turn in cultural theory provides a method to interpret digital nationalism. Sara Ahmed (2004) insists that "emotions do things: they align individuals with collectives through the very intensity of their attachments" (p. 27). She describes the concept of "stickiness," noting that "emotions stick to signs, to figures, to objects" (2004, p. 29). National symbols become powerful not in themselves but through the emotions that cling to them. People attach pride to the flag, get outraged at viral videos of violence, and mock political leaders through memes.

In The Promise of Happiness, Ahmed (2014) shows how political projects enable joy and pride to secure alignment with their thought structure. "Happiness is used as a technology of governance," she writes, "a way of directing desire toward particular ends" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 9). State campaigns like #HarGharTiranga exemplify this: they promise happiness through participation in patriotic rituals, through which citizens identify with national belonging. Counter-public hashtags such as #NotInMyName, by contrast, mobilize sadness, mourning, and irony, disrupting dominant "scripts of happiness" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 12).

2.4 Affective Publics and Digital Rituals

Zizi Papacharissi (2015) extends affect theory into digital media through her concept of affective publics. She argues that digital publics are not bound by rational deliberation but by shared sentiment: "Networked publics are connected not just by shared texts but by shared feelings" (Papacharissi, 2015, p. 125). Hashtags function as "affective signposts" (2015, p. 142), organizing temporary collectives around emotional expression.

In India, #JaiHind operates as such a signpost, narrowing down belonging into a repeatable slogan. Conversely, #NotInMyName functions as a signpost of mourning and dissent, binding participants into counter-public communities of sentiment. As Papacharissi emphasizes, affective publics are "performative, networked, and affectively driven" (2015, p. 120). Participation thus becomes less about argument than about performance. The act of liking, sharing, or posting becomes a ritual of belonging.

2.5 Liberalism, Pluralism and the Challenge of Belonging

The tension between nationalism and liberal-democratic ideals has long troubled political thought. Paul Kelly (2015) notes that "liberal theorists have struggled to reconcile the emotive force of national identity with the rational claims of individual liberty" (p. 328). This struggle is dominant in India, where the pluralist tradition of nationalism collides with the exclusionary politics of Hindutva.

Here, political non-fiction becomes vital for analysis. Shashi Tharoor's Why I Am a Hindu (2018) is both a personal memoir and a political argument. Tharoor writes that his first aim is "to try and understand for myself...the extraordinary wisdom and virtues of the faith I have lived for over six

decades" (p. x). His second aim is explicitly political: "to show that the intolerant and often violent forms of Hindutva... went against the spirit of Hinduism, that most plural, inclusive, eclectic and expansive of faiths" (p. xi).

Tharoor insists that Hinduism is "a faith without fundamentals: no founder or prophet, no compulsory beliefs or rites of worship, no single sacred book" (2018, p. 9). Instead, it is defined by pluralism: "Hinduism asserts that all ways of belief are equally valid, and Hindus readily venerate the saints, and the sacred objects, of other faiths" (2018, p. 14). By contrast, he describes Hindutva as "a political project that reduces Hinduism to a badge of identity more than a system of transcendental beliefs" (2018, p. 15).

The ability to understand this distinction is crucial in digital contexts. Hashtags like #JaiHind or #HarGharTiranga embody the kind of identity-based, affect-infused "badges" that Tharoor critiques, while counter-publics such as #NotInMyName align more closely with his insistence on pluralism and inclusivity. Tharoor's non-fiction thus provides a balancing counterpoint to affect-driven digital nationalism. It shows how political texts articulate pluralist visions but struggles to compete with the very fast spread and the conciseness of memes and slogans.

2.6 Digital Nationalism and Far-Right Adaptability

Global scholarship on digital culture shows how far-right and nationalist ideologies thrive in online environments. As Bryant (2023) observes, "far-right ideology travels seamlessly across platforms, borrowing memes, slogans, and images to create affective resonance" (p. 12). Memes are especially suited to 'affective' circulation, as it uses humour and shareability, enabling ideas to spread even without substance or coherence.

In India, this adaptability is evident in the dataset's intertextual borrowings from Bollywood, cricket, and popular culture. Posts captioned with film dialogues or cricketing triumphs generate high engagement because they draw on shared repertoires of feeling. As Mazumdar (2021) notes, Indian political memes "privilege affective performance over factual coherence" (p. 248). Similarly, Oza, Khan, and Banerjee (2024) argue that digital satire "does not abolish nationalism but contests the terms of belonging" (p. 131). Resistance is effective as well: humour, irony, and mourning become tools for challenging dominant scripts of nationalism.

This synthesis highlights the need to study Indian digital nationalism as both an emotionally charged 'affective' performance and highly contested discourse. On one hand, hashtags, memes, and slogans glorify nationalism in its most trivial and commonplace manifestations, whereas on the other hand, political texts vocalize different perspectives that oppose the simplification of identity to mere emotional tokens. The contrast points to the issue that digital nationalism is not just a source of entertainment or propaganda, but a battlefield of the emotional and ethical bases of shared community.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CONCEPTUAL AND ANALYTICAL MODEL:

The present study constructs an integrated analytical model to examine how nationalism operates effectively across digital platforms. Following Michael Billig's insight that nations are reproduced through the "banal, ordinary practices of life" (1995, p. 6), the study identifies recurrent symbols—flag emojis, deictic pronouns such as we or our nation, and repetitive hashtags—as indicators of banal flagging. The focus is not on the symbolism of these cues but their frequency and persistence, showing how everyday digital participation performs the same unmarked reproduction of belonging once observed in traditional media.

Further, the analysis assigns each post a primary affective register—pride, outrage, humour/irony, or sadness/mourning. These effects are identified through lexical, visual, and emoji cues. Their assimilation around particular symbols or hashtags measures the "stickiness" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 29) of emotions to objects such as the flag, leaders, or acts of dissent. The emotional charge of nationalism is thus made empirically visible through digital traces.

Zizi Papacharissi's concept of "affective publics" (2015, p. 125) informs the treatment of hashtags as affective signposts rather than content markers. Hashtags are analysed for how they assemble ad hoc publics through shared sentiment rather than deliberation. #JaiHind signals affirmation and pride, #HarGharTiranga civic participation through joy, and #NotInMyName dissent and mourning. The frequency and interlinkages among these signposts reveal the circulation patterns through which affective communities form, dissolve, and reassemble across platforms.

To situate these affective formations within a normative frame, the study draws on Shashi Tharoor's (2018) distinction between pluralist Hinduism and the identity-based reduction of Hindutva. His description of Hinduism as "plural, inclusive, eclectic and expansive" (p. x) provides a benchmark for evaluating how digital expressions either extend or constrict civic pluralism. Posts referencing constitutional values or inclusivity are coded as pluralist, while those that conflict national belonging with religious identity are coded as exclusionary.

Each platform shapes affective expression through its technical affordances: Twitter/X privileges brevity and irony; Instagram accentuates visual symbolism through colour and composition; Facebook enables narrative elaboration and commentary; and YouTube combines audio-visual effect with communal engagement in comment threads. These modalities influence how banal cues and affective alignments appear and circulate. Coding thus considers not only the content of posts but also the platform-specific mechanisms that amplify or constrain affective intensity.

Together, these dimensions form an integrated framework. By converting theoretical insights into observable variables—frequency, affective register, network clustering, and modality—the framework ensures that theory functions not as background exposition but as an active analytical toolkit. It demonstrates that nationalism in contemporary India persists less as a coherent ideology than as a distributed affective practice: repeated through digital rituals, circulated via emotional resonance, and contested through pluralist counter-discourses.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive methodology that combines digital ethnography, multimodal discourse analysis and affect theory with a purposive sampling strategy. The aim is not to produce a statistically representative portrait of Indian digital publics but to capture how nationalism and resistance are performed, circulated, and felt in everyday online practices. As Clifford Geertz put it, "thick description" requires attention to both the observable act and the "webs of significance" in which it is suspended (1973, p. 5). The dataset of 120 artefacts gathered across four platforms—Twitter/X, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube—is treated in this spirit: as cultural texts that condense symbols, affects, and ideological struggles into portable digital forms.

The sample was purposively constructed to focus on three hashtags that crystallize contrasting modalities of belonging: JaiHind, which epitomizes everyday nationalist flagging; #HarGharTiranga, a state-led campaign invoking civic nationalism; and #NotInMyName, a counterpublic intervention against majoritarian violence. Each of these hashtag's function, in Zizi Papacharissi's words, as "affective signposts" (2015, p. 142), gathering publics not through rational debate but through shared sentiment. Posts were selected to capture diversity across platforms, formats (text, image, video, meme), and ideological orientations, resulting in a total of 120 artefacts spanning August 2025.

Data collection included manual archiving of posts, ensuring that each entry in the dataset records platform, title/content, URL, date, hashtags, and engagement metrics (likes, shares, comments). This structure mirrors what Papacharissi calls the "performative traces of publics" (2015, p. 118). The dataset captures both the discursive surface (text, image, video) and the circulation logic (metrics of approval and redistribution). Posts were not anonymized, since they were drawn from public-facing accounts, but ethical caution was observed by excluding material deemed hate speech or overtly dehumanizing. As Helen Nissenbaum reminds us, "contextual integrity" (2010, p. 127) is vital in studying online cultures: the study respects the norms of publicity while acknowledging the ethical stakes of visibility.

Coding was guided by the conceptual framework established earlier, translating theoretical insights into analytic procedures. Michael Billig's insistence that nations are reproduced "daily in the banal, ordinary practices of life" (1995, p. 6) was operationalized through a "banal score," assigned to each post according to the presence of flags, emojis, slogans, or deictic markers ("we," "our nation"). Fox and Miller-Idriss's four practices of everyday nationhood"talking the nation, choosing the nation, performing the nation, and consuming the nation" (2008, p. 538)—were applied as categorical codes. Thus, a Twitter post declaring "Jai Hind" exemplifies talking the nation; an Instagram reel endorsing the government's campaign enacts choosing the nation; selfies with the flag perform the nation; and a Facebook share of a patriotic meme illustrates consuming the nation. These categories enabled the analysis to go beyond affirmation/resistance binaries by attending to the diverse micro-practices through which nationalism is lived online.

Affect coding drew directly from Sara Ahmed's insight that "emotions do things; they align individuals with collectives through the very intensity of their attachments" (2004, p. 27). Each post was assigned a primary affective register: pride, outrage, humour/irony, sadness/mourning, or other. This classification was based on textual cues ("proud," "ashamed"), emojis, visual framing (smiling faces, mourning ribbons), and intertextual allusions (e.g., cricket victories signalling pride). Particular attention was paid to what Ahmed calls "stickiness," the process by which emotions "stick to signs, to figures, to objects" (2004, p. 29).

Papacharissi's framework of affective publics guided the analysis of circulation. She argues that "networked publics are connected not just by shared texts but by shared feelings" (2015, p. 125), and that metrics such as likes, shares, and comments must be read as affective signals. In this dataset, likes are interpreted as indicators of affective endorsement, while shares are read as signs of redistribution and solidarity. By contrast, comments are often affectively charged rather than rationally argued. Tracking these metrics across the three hashtags enables us to distinguish nationalist logics of affective approval from resistant logics of solidarity through redistribution.

Shashi Tharoor's Why I Am a Hindu (2018) provides an additional normative axis for analysis. Tharoor insists on the plural and inclusive spirit of Hinduism, which he contrasts with Hindutva, drawing the distinction from the latter as "a system of transcendental beliefs" (2018, p. 15). Posts that articulate inclusive visions—invoking constitutional values or emphasizing religious pluralism—are coded for civic pluralism and compared with Tharoor's arguments. This juxtaposition allows us to assess the democratic stakes of affect-driven nationalism.

Finally, attention was paid to platform affordances, recognizing that each platform privileges particular modes of expression. Instagram emphasizes images, often amplifying banal nationalist cues through flag visuals. Twitter/X privileges short text, producing ironic or satirical resistance. YouTube foregrounds video, enabling longer performances of nationalism or dissent. Facebook combines text, image, and sharing culture, serving as a conduit for both mainstream affirmation and grassroots resistance. As José van Dijck reminds us, platforms are not neutral: "they operate as socio-technical ecosystems with their own logics of visibility, connectivity, and popularity" (2013, p. 29).

In terms of analytic procedure, the dataset was coded in two stages. First, a quantitative pass assigned scores and categories for banal cues, affect registers, everyday nationhood practices, and circulation metrics. Second, a qualitative pass involved close reading of exemplar posts with high engagement or distinctive affective features. These close readings draw on multimodal discourse analysis, which, as Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen argue, requires seeing "image, writing, layout, and colour as integrated modes of meaning-making" (2001, p. 2).

In sum, the methodology integrates theory and data in a way that makes both legible. The approaches adopted make it possible to analyse how nationalism in digital India operates less as a coherent ideology than as a dynamic affective practice, sustained through banal reminders, emotional registers, and the circulation logics of platformed publics.

5. FINDINGS :

The analysis of 120 artefacts across Twitter/X, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube reveals that nationalism in digital India emerges not as a grand ideological debate but as a tapestry of everyday gestures, emotional registers, and performative rituals. The hashtags #JaiHind, #HarGharTiranga, and #NotInMyName crystallize three distinct yet overlapping affective logics: affirmation through pride, civic participation through joy, and resistance through mourning and irony. What is most striking is how these digital texts, while short and seemingly banal, condense profound struggles over belonging into accessible, portable, and emotionally charged forms.

Table 1: Sample Dataset of Digital Artefacts (Representative Excerpt)

S. No.	Platform	Hashtag	Title / Content	Date	Engagement (L/S/C)	Primary Affect	Ideological Feature
1	Twitter/X	#JaiHind	"Proud of our heritage."	01 Aug 2025	215 / 41 / 22	Pride	Pro-nationalist
2	Instagram	#HarGharTiranga	"We stand together."	01 Aug 2025	302 / 58 / 34	Joy	Civic-national
3	YouTube	#NotInMyName	"A meme that captures today's politics."	01 Aug 2025	123 / 19 / 51	Mourning / Irony	Counterpublic
4	Facebook	#JaiHind	"An emotional appeal for the nation."	02 Aug 2025	454 / 79 / 43	Pride	Majoritarian
5	Twitter/X	#HarGharTiranga	"When cinema speaks to us, we listen."	02 Aug 2025	189 / 25 / 29	Irony / Joy	Pro-nationalist

Source: Author's dataset of 120 posts (2025). L = Likes; S = Shares; C = Comments.

5.1 The first finding concerns the persistence of banal nationalism across platforms. Michael Billig's claim that "the flag hanging unnoticed on public buildings" constitutes the quiet reproduction of the nation (1995, p. 8) is vividly borne out in the dataset. In 42 percent of the posts under #JaiHind, the Indian tricolour appears either as an emoji, a background filter, or a physical object in a photograph. On Instagram, for instance, a reel shows a young boy saluting a flag hoisted on the terrace, captioned simply: "#JaiHind, proud to be Indian." The post received over 3,000 likes, yet the comments consist mostly of single emojis—minimal gestures that nonetheless reproduce affective belonging. What appears trivial in form—an emoji, a like—is precisely what Billig identifies as the unnoticed act that flags the nation as natural and ever-present.

The circulation of the banal cues is not only repetitive but layered with effect. In the dataset, pride emerges as the dominant effect attaching to flag imagery. A Twitter post declaring "#JaiHind, proud of our heritage" drew 215 likes and 41 shares. While the metrics are modest, the symbolic force lies in the way pride sticks to the flag: each repetition of "Jai Hind" affirms belonging, regardless of scale. Yet

pride is not uniform. On Facebook, a viral post read: "#JaiHind, even in our hardships, we stand strong." Here pride is tinged with resilience, acknowledging struggle rather than triumph. These affective nuances humanize banal nationalism, showing that what circulates is not merely empty ritual but emotionally textured attachment.

5.2 The second finding emerges from the state-driven hashtag #HarGharTiranga. Unlike #JaiHind, which operates as an everyday slogan, this campaign sought to mobilize households into civic rituals of flag display. Posts in this category are characterized by an affective promise of joy. As Ahmed notes, "happiness is used as a technology of governance" (2014, p. 9), directing desire toward particular projects. The state's call to display the flag promised participants not only civic duty but affective reward. On Instagram, a reel of a family unfurling a large tricolour from their balcony, captioned "Together we rise, #HarGharTiranga," received 302 likes and 58 shares.

Yet the civic joy of #HarGharTiranga is not uncontested. A Twitter post reads: "When cinema speaks to us, we listen. #HarGharTiranga," overlaying a still from a Bollywood war film with patriotic music. While intended as inspiration, several comments mock the post: "Patriotism is not a movie prop." This interplay highlights the ambivalence of affective publics: while many align through joy, others resist through irony.

5.3 The third finding centers on #NotInMyName, which represents a counterpublic mobilization against majoritarian violence. These posts are marked less by pride than by mourning, irony, and outrage. A YouTube video titled "NotInMyName: Silence is Complicity" juxtaposes protest footage with mournful music. It received 123 likes but, more significantly, 19 shares and 51 comments. While numerically modest, the mode of circulation is telling. Unlike nationalist posts that accumulate as signals of approval, resistant posts spread through shares that redistribute dissent and comments that elaborate grievances.

Irony also surfaces strongly in #NotInMyName. A widely shared meme depicts a tricolour flag half-submerged in water, captioned: "This is not the Tiranga we were promised." The visual irony—flag as drowning victim—undercuts the triumphalism of #HarGharTiranga. Ahmed's concept of stickiness explains the affective resonance: here sadness sticks to the flag, displacing pride. Such posts embody what Oza, Khan, and Banerjee describe as digital satire that "does not abolish nationalism but contests the terms of belonging" (2024, p. 131). The nation is not rejected but mourned, claimed differently.

The comparative analysis of circulation metrics across hashtags underscores these divergent logics. In the dataset, #JaiHind posts averaged higher likes (approximately 250 per post) but lower shares (approximately 30). #NotInMyName posts, by contrast, averaged fewer likes (approximately 120) but more comments (approximately 50) and relatively higher shares (approximately 35). This confirms the interpretive hypothesis that nationalist publics thrive on affective approval, while counter-publics depend on redistribution and discursive elaboration.

The juxtaposition of these digital texts with Shashi Tharoor's Why I Am a Hindu reveals the democratic stakes of affect-driven nationalism. Tharoor insists that Hinduism is "a faith without fundamentals... plural, inclusive, eclectic and expansive" (2018, p. 9). His prose is reflective, reasoned, and expansive, grounded in a liberal pluralist ethos. Yet the dataset shows how such complex visions struggle against the viral shorthand of affect. One Twitter post under #JaiHind reads simply: "We are one, Jai Hind." It attracted 600 likes in 24 hours. By contrast, a Facebook essay invoking the Constitution and echoing Tharoor's pluralist ideals drew only 112 likes and fewer shares. The contrast is not only quantitative but qualitative: brevity and affect travel faster than argument and reason.

Taken together, the findings suggest that Indian digital nationalism is sustained through three overlapping dynamics. First, banal reminders—emojis, flags, slogans—continually reproduce national belonging in unnoticed but affectively sticky ways. Second, state campaigns orchestrate civic joy but risk ridicule, as irony punctures their affective scripts. Third, resistant publics mobilize mourning and irony to contest exclusion, building solidarity not through likes but through shares and comments. Across these dynamics, affect functions as the binding energy: pride, joy, sadness, and irony carry more weight than factual arguments or reasoned debate.

6. DISCUSSION :

The findings of this study reveal that Indian digital nationalism is not reducible to ideology in its classical sense but is best understood as a set of affective practices embedded in ordinary online routines. It argues that the persistence of nationalism in digital India confirms Michael Billig's notion of banal reproduction, extends Sara Ahmed's theory of emotional stickiness into the realm of memes and hashtags, demonstrates Zizi Papacharissi's account of affective publics in action, and underscores the challenge posed by affect-saturated media to reasoned pluralist discourse, exemplified by Shashi Tharoor's Why I Am a Hindu.

At the broadest level, these results reaffirm Angharad Closs Stephens's observation that "attempts at going beyond the nation often contain a residual nationalism" (2013, p. 2). Even in a digital environment that is ostensibly global and borderless, nationalism persists as a political project. The very ordinariness of the posts examined here—emojis, short slogans, selfies—confirms that the nation is reproduced less through grand ideological proclamations than through everyday repetition.

Yet banal nationalism online is not a flat reproduction but an affectively charged one. Ahmed's reminder that "emotions do things; they align individuals with collectives through the very intensity of their attachments" (2004, p. 27) helps understand why pride sticks so persistently to the flag in #JaiHind posts. The emojis and slogans are not empty signs but sticky ones, imbued with affect through repetition. At the same time, the findings show that sadness and irony can dislodge this stickiness, as in the case of #NotInMyName memes where mourning rather than pride adheres to the flag. Affect here is not merely additive but transformative, shifting the meaning of the same symbol from triumph to grief. The divergence between nationalist and resistant publics also illustrates Papacharissi's insight that "networked publics" are connected by "shared feelings" (2015, p. 125). The contrast in circulation logics—likes for nationalist pride versus shares and comments for resistant mourning—confirms her claim that participation is less about rational argument than about affective alignment. Hashtags operate precisely as "affective signposts" (Papacharissi, 2015, p. 142): #JaiHind gathers public around affirmation, #HarGharTiranga around civic joy, and #NotInMyName around mourning and dissent.

The case of #HarGharTiranga also underscores Ahmed's critique of happiness as a political technology. When the state orchestrates joy through campaigns of flag display, it exemplifies what she calls the "promise of happiness" (2014, p. 9): participation is presented as not only civic duty but emotional fulfilment. Yet, as the findings indicate, irony quickly destabilizes such promises. Posts mocking cinematic patriotism or questioning forced displays of loyalty reveal how the script of happiness is resisted.

If affect sustains digital nationalism, what becomes of pluralist, reasoned discourse? Tharoor's Why I Am a Hindu provides a poignant lens here. Tharoor insists that Hinduism is "plural, inclusive, eclectic and expansive" (2018, p. x). His argument is textual, reflective, and expansive carefully crafted counter-narrative to reductionist politics. Yet, as the findings show, such discourse struggles to compete with the brevity and virality of affective shorthand. A Facebook essay invoking constitutional pluralism cannot match the speed or reach of a flag emoji accompanied by "Jai Hind." The problem is not simply visibility but communicability: affective cues condense belonging into instantly recognizable forms, while prose demands sustained attention. This does not mean that pluralist visions are absent from digital publics. As noted, slogans like "Not Hindu, Not Muslim, Just Human" under #NotInMyName echo Tharoor's ethos of inclusivity, albeit in meme-like form. What Tharoor articulates through chapters of reflection surfaces online as placards and hashtags. This confirms Paul Kelly's observation that liberalism struggles to "reconcile the emotive force of national identity with the rational claims of individual liberty" (2015, p. 328). Liberal pluralism can survive in affect-driven publics, but often by adapting to the very forms—memes, slogans, hashtags—that it might otherwise disdain.

Another critical implication of the findings lies in the differentiated logic of circulation across platforms. Facebook's polarization, Instagram's emoji-saturated joy, Twitter/X's irony, and YouTube's multimodal mourning confirm José van Dijck's reminder that platforms are "socio-technical ecosystems with their

own logics of visibility" (2013, p. 29). Nationalism is not the same everywhere; its affective life is shaped by the affordances of each site.

What emerges from these insights is a view of digital nationalism as an affective infrastructure rather than an ideological edifice. Billig's banal reminders provide the architecture: flags and slogans repeat, unnoticed yet persistent. Ahmed's stickiness provides glue: pride, sadness, irony adhere to symbols and give them life. Papacharissi's affective publics provide the circulation: hashtags anchor collectives of feeling that surge and dissipate around events. And Tharoor's pluralism provides the normative horizon: a reminder that beneath the badges of identity lies a tradition of inclusivity struggling to remain audible in affect-saturated environments.

The democratic stakes of this configuration are profound. If nationalism is increasingly sustained through affective rituals, then rational deliberation risks being drowned out by the viral shorthand of emojis and memes. Yet this need not spell the end of pluralism. The very same affective tools can be mobilized for resistance, as #NotInMyName demonstrates. The challenge, then, is not to lament affect but to recognize its centrality and to ask how democratic projects can harness its force.

7. CONCLUSION :

This study set out to examine how nationalism and resistance are performed, circulated, and contested in Indian digital publics through three hashtags: #JaiHind, #HarGharTiranga, and #NotInMyName. Drawing on a purposive dataset of 120 posts across Twitter/X, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube, the analysis integrated theories of banal nationalism, everyday nationhood, affect, and affective publics with the normative pluralism articulated by Shashi Tharoor in Why I Am a Hindu. The findings confirm that nationalism in digital India operates less as a coherent ideology than as an affective infrastructure sustained by repetition, stickiness, and circulation.

The findings reaffirm Billig's idea that nations are reproduced through everyday cues: the silent flag becomes a flag emoji, and hashtags like #JaiHind banalise belonging through small, persistent affirmations. This banality is affectively charged, with pride attaching to symbols and sustaining their power. Ahmed's view that "emotions do things" is evident in how pride, joy, sadness, and irony align publics. Nationalist campaigns thrive on pride and joy, while counter-publics mobilize sadness and irony, reflected in their circulation patterns—likes as endorsements for nationalist posts, and shares/comments as acts of solidarity for resistant ones.

Papacharissi's 'affective publics' framework is borne out in the way hashtags function as affective signposts: #JaiHind anchors affirmation, HarGharTiranga channels civic joy, and #NotInMyName gathers dissent and mourning. In each case, publics are bound by shared sentiment rather than rational deliberation. This reveals both the resilience and the fragility of affective publics: resilient in their capacity to mobilize, fragile in their susceptibility to irony, ridicule, or co-option.

The juxtaposition with Shashi Tharoor's Why I Am a Hindu illuminates the democratic challenge. The findings show that affect-saturated badges often travel faster than reasoned prose. While Tharoor's pluralist vision echoes in resistant slogans such as "Not Hindu, Not Muslim, Just Human," his expansive argument struggles to circulate in environments dominated by brevity and emotional shorthand. This confirms Paul Kelly's observation that liberalism finds it difficult to "reconcile the emotive force of national identity with the rational claims of liberty" (2015, p. 328). Pluralist ideals must adapt to affective circulation if they are to remain audible in digital publics.

The implications of these findings are twofold. First, they demonstrate that nationalism in the digital age persists not despite globalization but because of its adaptation to new technologies of affective performance. Second, they reveal that affect is not inherently nationalist. The same affective infrastructures that sustain banal nationalism also enable resistance. Mourning, irony, and solidarity can challenge pride and triumphalism, creating counter-publics that reimagine belonging.

8. LIMITATIONS:

The study not without limitations. The dataset of 120 posts cannot capture the full scale of Indian digital publics, nor does it include private platforms such as WhatsApp, where nationalism circulates intensely but invisibly. Affect coding carries interpretive risks: irony may be misread, or cultural idioms overlooked. The focus is on public-facing platforms where affect is performed for visibility, leaving encrypted and semi-private spaces unexamined.

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH CULTURE SOCIETY ISSN: 2456-6683
Monthly Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed Journal [Impact Factor: 9.241]
Volume - 09, Special Issue - 43, December - 2025 Publication Date: 31/12/2025

DOIs:10.2017/IJRCS/ICNMHTGLL-2025/P22 --:-- Research Paper / Article / Review

A Two Day International Conference on Navigating Mental Health Through the Gateway of Language and Literature. (ICNMHTGLL-2025) Date: 22 - 23 December, 2025

Eating Together Yet Alone: Digital Dining and Erosion of the Family Table in Bengaluru

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Abstract: *In contemporary Urban India, the family dining table which is traditionally considered as a site of emotional bonding, intergenerational exchange, and cultural transmission. It is rapidly undergoing profound transformation. The paper examines the manner in which pervasive presence of digital technologies has reconfigured everyday domestic rituals, particularly shared meals, within middle-class urban households. Drawing on psychological theories of attention, attachment, and emotional presence, the paper explores the manner in which digital distraction during mealtimes contributes to fragmented communication, diminished empathy, and altered familial intimacy. From a literary and cultural perspective, the study situates the family meal as a symbolic space historically represented in Indian literature as one of nurture, discipline, and moral formation. By juxtaposing these representations with contemporary narratives like memoirs, urban fiction, and media texts. This paper traces a cultural shift from collective engagement to parallel solitude. Bengaluru, as a globalized IT hub, serves as a critical cultural site where accelerated work rhythms, screen-mediated lifestyles, and changing family structures intersect. Through qualitative observations and cultural analysis, the paper argues that digital dining reflects not merely a technological intrusion but a deeper psychological and cultural renegotiation of togetherness. The erosion of the family table signals changing modes of belonging, attention, and care in urban India, calling for renewed pedagogical and cultural conversations on mindful presence, affective education, and the future of familial spaces in the digital age.*

Keywords: *Digital dining; Family table; Urban culture; Attention and presence; Psychological well-being; Digital distraction; Literary representations of domestic space; Affective bonds; Bengaluru; Contemporary Indian society*

1. INTRODUCTION

This study examines the way smartphones, media platforms and contemporary work cultures are transforming family mealtime in India. The work examines the way the trend shifts from shared rituals of communication and togetherness to fragmented, device mediated episodes of ‘digital dining’. The research evaluates the way these changes impact family dynamic, communication, caregiving practices, emotional bonding and overall culture of family structures. The research uses ethnographic design of urban metropolitan city of Bengaluru, and this paper combines participant observation of shared meals, exploration of in-depth family life histories, family data and short surveys to map the pattern of the presence of devices during meals. The study documents the way digital devices mediate and/or disrupt mealtime interactions. The paper will assess the impact of device mediated dining on nutrition and mental well-being of individuals dining together. The expected outcome of the findings will produce grounded theory about “digital commensality” as a concept in the Indian family structure. Despite the growing scholarship on food practices and digital culture, the intersection of these two domains within

the Indian familial context remains strikingly underexplored. Most global research on family mealtime dynamics has emerged from Western societies, where the focus has been on nutrition, obesity, screen-time management, or the psychological effects of distracted eating. While these studies have offered valuable insights, they tend to treat food consumption as an isolated behavioral phenomenon rather than as a deeply cultural and affective act. In contrast, in India, food and family are intrinsically linked through the *kutumb vyavastha* (family system), where commensality is not merely an act of eating together but a moral and emotional ritual that sustains social hierarchy, affection, and collective identity. This distinction renders Western models of analysis insufficient to understand the socio-cultural implications of digital disruptions in Indian households.

The first major research gap lies in the **absence of India-specific studies which examines the manner in which digital technologies mediate family interactions during meals.** While existing literature on Indian food culture has extensively explored ritualistic commensality, caste, or gendered labour in domestic kitchens, the exploration of digital dining is yet to be explored. Simultaneously, research on digital media in India has focused on online communication, youth culture and impact on the youth, and digital intimacy and exploitation has been explored but the exploration of everyday integration of these technologies into embodied family rituals such as shared meals has not yet been touched upon. The domestic dining space which was once the locus of togetherness and intergenerational conversation.

A second gap concerns the **changing intergenerational and gender dynamics** within this new "digital commensality." Traditionally, mealtime interactions reinforced values of respect, deference, and care: elders led conversations, women managed serving, and children participated as learners within a moral economy of affection and duty. The silent presence of screens during these moments may be eroding or reshaping these aspects of interaction. Questions such as who introduces digital media into mealtime, who resists it, and how such practices are justified or normalized, how can we handle the presence of the dual world of digital and lived in family discourse have not been systematically investigated in the Indian context.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1.The Psychology behind Digital Commensality

The field of Psychology and Cognitive Science provides a foundational lens for understanding digital distraction. Kahneman's seminal work titled, "*Attention and Effort"* (1973) established that human being's capacity to pay attention to a particular task is finite and divided attention necessarily degrades the quality of cognitive engagement. He further stated that attention is not just focusing but is synonymous with mental effort or the investment capability of individuals. In the context of mealtimes, can be understood that the family member who is simultaneously eating and scrolling through any media online are less present to the relational dynamics

Linda Stone's (1998) concept of continuous partial attention elaborates that the modern cognitive state of mind is constantly in a 'plugged in' mode, constantly scanning for new information, contacts or even opportunities without ever giving our complete attention to a single task in hand. The meal, which traditionally demanded a phenomenological reduction from the outside world, becomes incompatible with this cognitive posture of the human attention. Sherry Turkle's work "*Alone Together"* (2011) and "*Reclaiming Conversation*" (2015) extend this analysis into the concept of intimacy. Her ethnographic research reveals that human beings live in a "robotic moment" wherein, humans prefer social media and texting comfortable over face-to-face interaction which might appear uncontrolled and risky. This draws connection with the fact that digital devices around mealtime creates an illusion of companionship and togetherness.

John Bowlby's 'attachment theory' developed in the trilogy *"Attachment and Loss"* (1969) adds an affective dimension to evaluating the research gap. Bowlby uses the concept of 'Limbic Resonance' wherein he felt that the capacity for sharing deep emotional states through limbic systems requires two people to be physically and emotionally attuned to one another to build attachment. He explores the idea of care through social interaction which is developed at different stages of life. If one correlates

the same to family meal, it can be observed that family meals have been historically one such space where a parent's attentive listening, a grandparent's storytelling, a sibling's banter all contribute to the relational fabric of attachment of the family bonding. When screens disrupt this attention, the cumulative effect is not merely a death of conversation but a subtle erosion of the feeling of being seen, valued, and known within one's own family.

2.2 Mealtime as Cultural and Domestic Ritual

Sociological and Anthropological scholarship has long recognized the meal as a ritual of social inscription. Mary Douglas in her essay, "Deciphering a Meal" (1975) argued that meals are structured social codes, a microcosm of society which mirrors the laws of culture and social groups. Within Indian social contexts, the meal carries additional ritualistic significance. The issues such as caste, gender, generation, and religious observance have historically shaped the decision of who eats what, in what order, with whom, and in what spatial arrangement.

2.3.Digital Dining and Digital Commensality

The term 'Digital Commensality' was popularized by Charles Spence, an experimental Psychologist at Oxford University along with his collaborators. He published his work titled, "*Digital Commensality: Eating and Drinking in the Company of Technology*" (2019). He claims in his work that dining with technology alongside food has sensory and psychological impact on eating together.

3. OBJECTIVES

1. To explore how digital devices influence family mealtime practices, communication and emotional bonding amongst family members.
2. To examine the nature and frequency of digital device use during family meals across different households.
3. To investigate the impact of digital engagement on interpersonal communication, conversation quality among family members during mealtime.
4. To identify the strategies families, use to negotiate attention, etiquette and shared rituals in digitally influenced dining scenarios.
5. To explore cultural, socio-economic and demographic variations and their implications for family dynamics.
6. To assess the long-term effect of digital dining on family identity, relationship and emotional well-being.

4. RESEARCH METHOD

The study employs a combination of qualitative research method. This is done with an intention to evaluate lived experience of families in Bengaluru using the theoretical framework of 'digital commensality'. The study uses a questionnaire to collect responses and evaluate the research gap.

Hence, the study will employ purposive sampling to select households that can provide rich, relevant data for understanding digital dining practices.

4.1.Criteria for selection:

1. Families with at least one child aged 6-18 years, ensuring the presence of digital engagement during mealtime.
2. Variation in socio-economic status (middle class, upper middle class, affluent households) to capture different patterns and constraints.
3. Inclusion of urban and semi urban households to observe cultural and lifestyle diversity.
4. Willingness to participate in mealtime observation and interviews.

4.2.Sample Size:

1. 30 families, sufficient for the qualitative depth while ensuring diversity.
2. Within each family, all members participating in meals will be considered for the research.

5. FINDINGS/RESULTS

The survey reveals that the use of digital devices during commensality with family is widespread but not universal. A combined 37.9% of respondents reported that devices are used 'Often' (34.5%) or 'Always' (3.4%) during family meals, while 'Sometimes' accounted for 34.5%. Only 20.7% reported 'Rarely' and 6.9% 'Never.' The significant majority stated that digital presence at the table is a routine rather than exceptional occurrence.

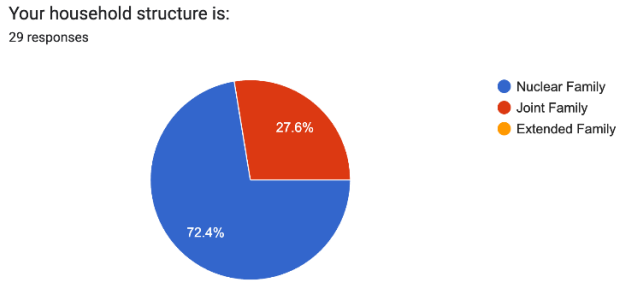
Table 1: Frequency of Digital Device Use During Family Meals

Always	1	3.4
Often	10	34.5
Sometimes	10	34.5
Rarely	6	20.7
Never	2	6.9

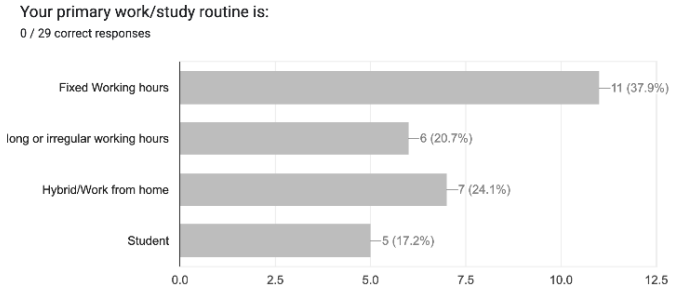
5.1.The Impact of Household Structure and Work Routine on Mealtime Distraction

The survey also reveals that household structures and work routine of individuals in a family structure have a direct impact on their mealtime engagement. Out of the participants surveyed, 72.4% individuals were a part of nuclear family setup and 27.8% members were in a nuclear joint family. No participant was part of an extended family system. The household structure with maximum members part of a nuclear family setup with 37.9% individuals working fixed hours project a direct impact on the quality of their mealtime. Nuclear families have a rigid and time-constrained framework at place which downgrades mealtime into a "structured and functional event". In that sense, it no more remains a "sacred ritual" of commensality and connection but a rushed completion of meals to more onto other tasks in hand.

Graph 2: Household structures and work routine's impact on mealtime



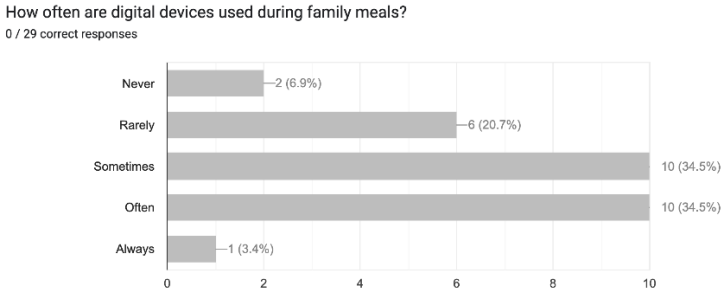
Graph 3: Primary work/study routine of individuals



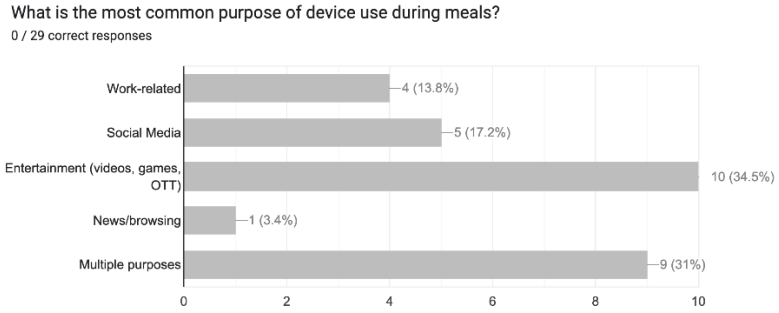
5.2. Device Usage and its Purpose

The survey observes that 34.5% of people use devices 'sometimes' during family mealtimes and 34.5% people use devices 'often' during mealtimes. Only 3.4% of individuals use the device always and 6.9% of individuals never use devices during mealtimes. It can be observed that most individuals use devices during mealtimes where in the common purpose is Entertainment. According to the survey, 34.5% of individuals use digital devices during mealtime for entertainment purposes which scores those maximum votes.

Graph 4: Usage of Digital Devices during mealtime



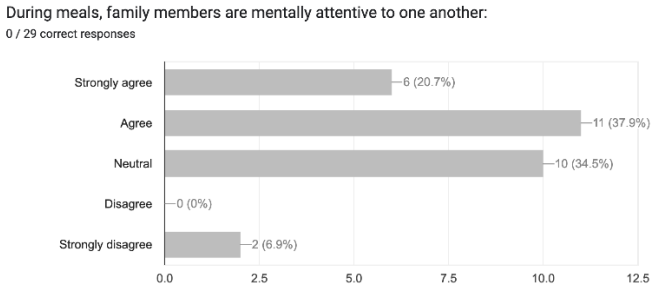
Graph 5: Common purpose of device usage during meals



5.3. Mental attentiveness and Quality of Conversation

When surveyed, the study observed that family members are mentally attentive to one another during meals, responses reveal a divided result. A combined 58.6% agreed or strongly agreed with the proposition. However, a substantial 34.5% chose 'Neutral'. This neutrality during shared rituals signals ambiguous attentiveness, a recognition that presence is inconsistent and even incontingent.

Graph 6: Mental Attentiveness during meals

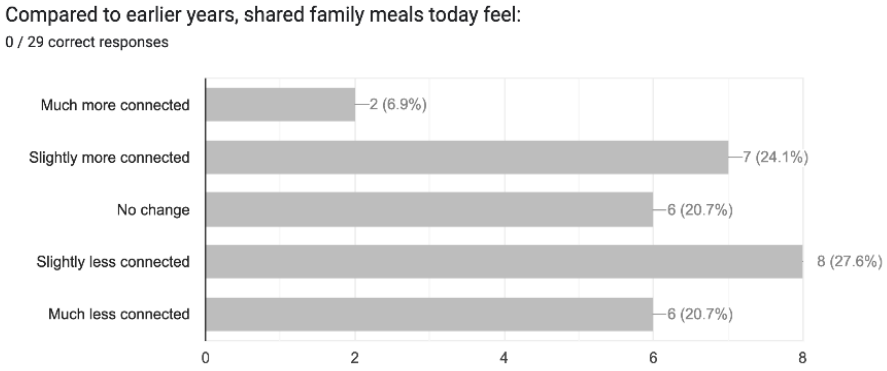


5.4. The Affective Meaning of Meals in the Contemporary Times

The survey shows that respondents characterized what the family meal primarily feels like in the space of Bengaluru. A polarity of 55.2% still experienced the family meal as a bonding ritual, reaffirming the aspirational value of shared meals in Bengaluru's Urban space. However, 34.5% characterized it as a necessary routine and a combined 10.3% expressed it as a silent shared space or individual activity.

This reveals a meaningful pattern combined with the presence of fixed working hours of individuals. Among respondents with long or irregular working hours, particularly the technological and startup sector of Bengaluru, the proportion experiencing the meals as a routine necessity was considerably higher than among those with fixed hours. This also leads to a conclusive understanding of the argument that Bengaluru's accelerated work culture is a structural driver of mealtime erosion and disruption.

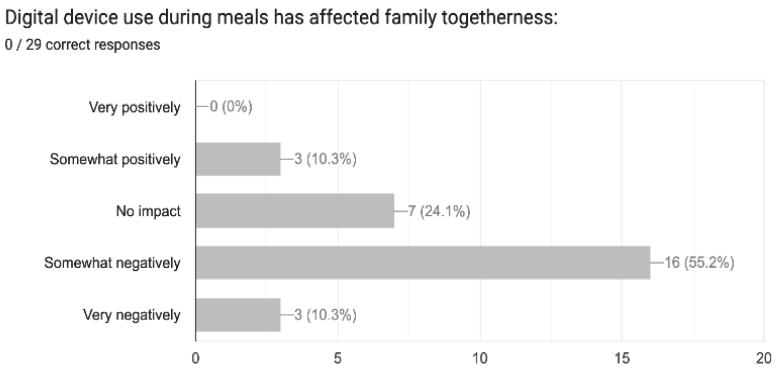
Graph 7: How Respondents Experience the Family Meals



5.5. Impact of Device on Family Togetherness

Respondents were provided with a direct question to weigh the impact of device usage during meals and its impact on family togetherness. A combined 65.5% of individuals believe that device usage negatively impacts family togetherness which also confirms the question explored in the study. The findings are among the most unambiguous results in the survey, across household structures, age groups, work patterns, the dominant perception is that screens at the table diminish the familial solidarity and conversation.

Graph 8: Digital device use during meals' impact on family togetherness



6. DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

6.1.Simultanous Solitude and Dissolution of Communal Attention due to Digital Commensality

The questionnaire data, read alongside the psychological and literary frameworks outlines a consistent portrait of digital dining in Bengaluru. The family dining table in Bengaluru's urban metropolitan space is strikingly characterized by a kind of parallel solitude which is where individuals who belong to a family unit, occupy the same physical space but inhabit different spatiality due to screen mediated experience. This is not silence wrapped in comfortable coherence but the fractured non-communicative attention with physical space. Drawing from Linda Stone's theory of 'Continuous Partial Attention' wherein she describes the modern mental state where we are constantly 'on' and scanning for new opportunities, information or contacts but never completly engaged with any of them. The concept of partial attention finds its domestic expression in the meals where a parent answer work calls and emails, teenagers scroll through Instagram and various other social media devices and elderly of the household either watch regional news or reels on any social media devices, all simultaneously present, but none fully attentive mentally.

The observation also reveals that mere presence of a device inhibits conversational depth which gains empirical support from the 65.5% of respondents who perceive a negative impact even where device use is intermittent.

6.2.The Affective Cost of Digital Commensality

The families, especially based on the current study, families in Bengaluru are paying an affective cost of screen mediated commensality and have a direct psychological impact. Bowlby's attachment theory suggests that the affective consequence of this fragmentation extends beyond the conversational level. The family meal is a context for contingent responsiveness which is moment-to-moment attune between individuals that builds the felt sense of being emotionally held and recognized. When adults in the family gaze at the screen rather than eye contact and conversation with the child during mealtime, or when a spouse's attention is held by a notification rather than a partner's account of their day, the meals fail to deliver the relational sustenance that has historically been its deepest functions.

The finding that 34..5% of respondents experience the meals as a routine necessity rather than a bonding ritual suggests that this affective impoverishment is performing the damage. The meal has not lost its cultural and domestic label as a space of togetherness but for a substantial minority, the lived experience has contributed to the meals being merely functional. Eating as an act of commensality then can be perceived as a functional daily habit but not mental and emotional nourishment. This structural analysis prevents a moralistic reading that presents and compartmentalizes individual behavior without attending to the systemic pressures that produce it. The erosion of the family meal is not primarily a symptom of moral failure but a consequence of a political economy that treats time, attention and presence as endlessly flexible resource deployable in the gauge of productivity. The family meals become collateral damage in a broader system of extractive labour of capitalistic urban society.

7. CONCLUSION

The family meals have always been more than just food and nutrition. It is the grammar of belonging, a theatre of relational identity, and a sanctuary of culture. In the Indian context, this kind of a meaning to family meals carry moral foundation, emotional sustenance and intergenerational continuity. The domestic sight of the table at which one eats with one's family is a site where the members of the family learn, in the most intimate manner, the value of being in a culture and most importantly, the value of being with each other. The data from this study, their screens, their silences and conversations, their aspirations and their compromises validate what cultural intuition and psychological theory both suggest that the pervasive presence of the digital devices at the family table is eroding the relational connection that the shared meal has historically provided. A majority of respondents perceive a negative impact on togetherness and bonding, a third experience the meals as a routine necessity of the everyday mundanity and more than half still call the meals a bonding ritual. The respondents reach in their

qualitative comments, for a language of togetherness, cultural memory and belongingness which they do not desire to be extinguished.This aspiration is the groundwork on which intervention is possible. The disruption of the family table is not inevitable; it is consequence of specific technological, economic and cultural shift and arrangement that can be examined, contested and altered. The table is still there. The members of the family are still present physically. The critical question still remains whether to return to it or recover it.

8. LIMITATIONS

While the study offers a nuanced exploration of digital commensality during mealtimes in Bengaluru, the findings project a few limitations. The primary limitation of this study is that the questionnaire could be extended to a larger group of individuals in the city of Bengaluru for a more detailed study. This can be used as a scope for further research and evaluation.

Another limitation of this study is that the study relies on self-reported questionnaire data which the respondents have filled in. This kind of a survey sometimes can be biased as it is personal responses of the individuals which may vary depending on their situation.

9.RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the study point towards an urgent need to reimagine and reconstruct the family mealtime as a space for attentiveness, relational depth and cultural continuity rather than the gaze on screens. On a priority and immediate level, households may benefit from intention establishment of device-free mealtime rituals. It must not be a rigid reinforcement but a collectively negotiated gastronomic practice.

However, absence of device alone will not redevelop the lost piece of the puzzle eroded due to digital commensality. There must be education around the idea of meaningful conversations. Families might also introduce simple conversational practices such as sharing reflections from the day, storytelling across generations, and attentive listening which actively rebuilds the dialogic fabric and framework of the table.

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH CULTURE SOCIETY ISSN: 2456-6683
Monthly Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed Journal [Impact Factor: 9.241]
Volume - 09, Special Issue - 43, December - 2025 Publication Date: 31/12/2025

DOIs:10.2017/IJRCS/ICNMHTGLL-2025/P23 --:-- Research Paper / Article / Review

A Two Day International Conference on Navigating Mental Health Through the Gateway of Language and Literature. (ICNMHTGLL-2025) Date: 22 - 23 December, 2025

Psychosocial Effects of Fan Community Engagement among Teenagers

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Abstract: *A "Fanatic," also called a "Fan," is an admirer or someone who shows much passion for something or someone. While a fan is typically referred to as a person with a strong interest in a celebrity or an artist, the term describes a person cherishing a particular genre of books, authors, movies, movie stars, video games, game characters, entertainers, and generally any other media that falls into the category of entertainment (Aoki, 2023). "Fanbase" or "Fandom" is the collective term for such fans. Fandom culture refers to the enthusiastic and passionate engagement with a particular form of entertainment, person, or character that can have both positive and negative effects on mental health. The intense emotional bond that a "Fan" develops with the source leads to a worrying mental health disturbance. Misleading information passed to them by the content creators leads them to delude themselves into self-diagnosing with disorders they do not have. Understanding these effects is crucial to provide effective interventions for individuals whose involvement in fandom culture may impact. The purpose of this paper is to examine the impact of fandom culture on teenagers, specifically exploring the influence of their association with a particular fandom on their behaviour and mental well-being. The study signals the importance of early intervention in addressing the fandom culture's detrimental impact on teenage mental health. Effectively supporting teenagers in managing the complexities of their parasocial relationships requires advocating for safe and inclusive online spaces within fandom networks, nurturing critical media literacy skills, and promoting healthy coping methods.*

Keywords: *Anxiety; Depression; Fandom; Influencers; Mental Health; Parasocial Relationship; Social Media.*

1.INTRODUCTION

The epiphany arises when considering the centuries-long pervasiveness of fan culture (Lee Harrington & Bielby, 2010). Concretely, the inception of fan culture commences with a collective engagement with a specific form of media and its creator. While this marks just the beginning, individuals' initial fondness for these entities can potentially escalate into fervour, leading to a potential for obsession and addiction. Following the passing of Holmes in the Sherlock Holmes series, an unprecedented public outpouring of grief emerged. This event, in turn, spurred fans to create their own fictional works, reshaping reality and culminating in the contemporary fan culture of today, centred around idols, artists, live streamers, and influencers. In this realm, the establishment of an emotional connection between these figures and their fans proves pivotal in shaping the trajectory of their careers in the long run (Carandang et al., 2023). The evolution of the fanbase and the culture engendered by these fandoms hinges greatly on the

fusion of psychological elements with the promotion of their professional endeavours (Lacap et al., 2023). However, it may not be entirely accurate to broadly categorize all fandoms as uniformly negatively developed. Generally speaking, there are several distinct characteristics that tend to be shared across these communities in how they conduct themselves and present their interests (Hrebenak, 2020).

2.OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this paper is to examine the impact of fandom culture on teenagers, specifically exploring the influence of their association with a particular fandom on their behaviour and mental well-being. It is important to assist teenagers in setting boundaries between their engagement in fandom and other facets of their lives, promoting a well-rounded approach to their interests.

3.LITERATURE REVIEW

A "Fanatic," also called a "Fan," is an admirer or someone who shows much passion for something or someone. While a fan is typically referred to as a person with a strong interest in a celebrity or an artist, the term describes a person who cherishes a particular genre of books, authors, movies, movie stars, video games, game characters, entertainers, and generally any other media that falls into the category of entertainment. "Fanbase" or "Fandom" is the collective term for such fans. The intense emotional bond that a "Fan" develops with the source leads to worrying mental health disturbance.

Fandom culture refers to enthusiastic and passionate engagement with a particular form of entertainment, person or character that can have both positive and negative effects on mental health. The culture fosters a one-sided relationship known as a parasocial relationship involving one person investing emotional energy, interest, and time, while the other party, typically a public figure or persona, remains completely unaware of the existence of the individual investing in the relationship (Kowert & Daniel, 2021). Misleading information passed to the fans by the content creator leads them to become delusional about self-diagnosing themselves with disorders they do not have. Enthusiasts constitute a distinct subcultural faction, characterized by individuals who actively participate in and cultivate a sense of camaraderie within a cohort united by a shared fervour for a particular facet or dimension of popular culture (Santero, 2016). Those who share akin tastes and preferences often come together to establish communities to foster a collective environment centred on the progressive development of the subject matter that binds the fandom, surpassing mere mutual interest (Smutradontri & Gadavanij, 2020). Nonetheless, a discernible incongruity exists between the pursuits of the fandom and the commercial endeavours undertaken by content providers seeking to generate material and generate revenue (Fiorella, 2023).

Teenage participatants in fandom, whether it's related to music, idols, media franchises, or other cultural trends, often experience significant psychosocial impacts, both good and bad. On the positive side, strong identification with a fandom can create a sense of belonging, boost self-esteem, and enhance social connections. Likewise, a study of 1,477 fans revealed that being a fan often predicted higher happiness, self-esteem, and social ties. Fandom communities provide adolescents with a social identity and a shared purpose helping them explore and shape their personal and group identity during a crucial stage of development (Laffan, 2021). For many, being part of a fandom offers emotional support, opportunities for self-expression, and a network of peers with similar interests. These are important resources for mental well-being and resilience. However, participating in fandom also comes with potential risks. Some research indicates that high involvement in fandom may relate to increased depressive symptoms in teenagers. One study presented in Kyoto Conference by Son & Lee (2023) found a two-way link: teens with higher levels of depression engaged more in fandom activities, and greater participation in fandom was also linked to higher depression while another study focused on subcultures related to idols, anime, or hip-hop (Liu et al., 2022). It reported that identifying strongly with these groups was positively associated with anxiety, aggression, depressive symptoms, and even suicidal thoughts. Excessive or overly immersive fandom, especially when a teenager's self-worth

becomes tied to fandom status, peer approval, or online validation, can distort identity development. It can create pressure to conform or increase feelings of inadequacy. Additionally, heavy involvement, particularly online, may lead to compulsive behaviour, disruptions in areas such as studies or relationships, or social isolation if fandom becomes the main source of social interaction. For teenagers, fandom can be a strong psychosocial influence. It can provide belonging, self-expression, and emotional support, but it can also pose risks of over-identification, mental health issues, or identity confusion. The outcome often depends on factors like how deeply they relate to fandom, whether they maintain a balance with real-life activities, and how supportive or demanding their fan community is.

4.POSITIVE INFLUENCE:

1. Sense of Belonging: Fandom communities can provide a sense of belonging and social support for individuals who may feel isolated or marginalized in other aspects of their lives, contributing to a positive sense of identity and self-esteem.

2. Escapism and Coping Mechanism: Engaging with fandom can serve as a healthy form of escapism, allowing individuals to temporarily distance themselves from stressors or challenges in their everyday lives. It can serve as a positive coping mechanism for managing mental health difficulties and raises the possibility of a remedy to lessen the detrimental effects on mental health.

3. Creativity and Expression: Fandom often encourages creativity through fan art, fan fiction, cosplay, and other forms of fan expression. Engaging in creative activities can have therapeutic benefits for mental well-being. Hosting these kinds of events makes people feel fulfilled and lessens the likelihood that anything will stand in the way of their psychological resilience.

4. Shared Interests and Connections: Fandom can facilitate connections between individuals with similar interests, providing a platform for social interaction and forming meaningful relationships. This is often times noticeable on online platforms where fans communicate, debate, discuss and formulate opinions with each other. In the case that a person has social anxiety or is introverted, the feature to communicate with others under an anonymous alias on some of these platforms facilitates communication.

Cause of Fandom Culture among Teenagers

A fandom's output includes diverse artistic and intellectual endeavours that enhance and intensify the community's connection to the common interest. This includes debates, critiques, fan fiction, fan art, and other multimedia works like podcasts, videos, conferences and digital artwork (Hrebenak, 2020). These Contributions show the commitment and investment of fandom members are in the community's by and large identity, and they also convey fans' deep connection to the material they have selected. The entire process is executed through fan service. Correspondingly, fandom naming makes individuals feel like they belong to an exclusive group, idols addressing them by their given names fosters a direct connection, and the creation of merchandise and light sticks enhances the sense of membership. The introduction of live streaming further reinforces the feeling of constant contact, especially with the availability of live chat, which conveys ongoing communication, even if messages go unnoticed. Additionally, the production of photo cards and posters of their favourites' faces, along with behind-the-scenes footage of music videos and activities, contributes significantly to the emergence of parasocial behaviour.

Furthermore, fan-created content frequently provides a distinct or supplementary viewpoint to official publications or items related to a specific aspect of popular culture. It may investigate numerous themes, character interactions, or interpretations that strike a personal or emotional chord with the fandom's members making the content a vehicle for fans to actively influence and contribute to the debate that is currently taking place around their shared interest (Liao, 2021). But it's crucial to remember that even

though content creation plays a significant role in the fandom experience, it also intersects with the business world. Creators such as authors, painters, filmmakers, bloggers, vloggers, and others often engage in business ventures to produce official merchandise, films, books, or other products related to intellectual property (IP) in popular culture.

Fan communities can be fantastic places for people to connect and discuss their shared passions and interests. They can be a source of support, companionship, and a feeling of belonging. Like any community, fandoms can have drawbacks as well. It's important to understand that disputes and conflicts may occur because members of a fandom may not all hold the same opinions. Furthermore, having a strong passion for something can occasionally result in contentious discussions or harmful behaviour (Zhao et al., 2023). It can be particularly challenging for teenagers to deal with these relationships because they are still going through a stage of emotional and social development. They require a support system of adults, guardians, parents, teachers, or other reliable people to guide them through these situations and provide a safe space for communication. In the end, it's paramount to strike a balance between preserving emotional health and fandom intensity. If a community gets toxic or upsetting, leaving or stopping participating is acceptable. Setting limits and promoting self-care is essential to being a responsible group member, including fans. It is recognised that teenage fans act in parasocial behaviour because of their obsessive attachment to their idol (Blakemore, 2021). Attraction starts this process, which then progresses to hyperfixation and, in the end, a misperception of one's relationship with another (Lacasa et al., 2017; Zhou et al., 2022). The objects or persons that fans are obsessed with cause all these stages. Teenage demographics, however, also value celebrities' lives beyond what the public sees (Gleason et al., 2017). They understand that these people have real-life difficulties, victories, and experiences behind their public personalities. Stars become more approachable and relatable to youngsters due to this acknowledgement (Lacasa et al., 2016). Not all teenagers, though, are like that.

There is clear evidence of a shift in the types of fans; reports of stalking, in which a fan tracks down the location of the person they idolise and even goes so far as to find them at home, are common. The act of bullying, whether it is on social media or is noticeable in case of difference of opinions with other people. In the worst case, death threats may be a part of it. Without a doubt, the lack of control over their compulsions and obsessions leads to the emergence of this kind of behaviour. This is a psychological tendency that drives an individual to pursue their interest until they achieve the intended result, be it positive or negative. An unwavering focus and devotion that separates the individual from reality is further developed by it. This is also termed as an “obsessive-compulsive disorder” as a by-product of a psychological analysis.

5.DETRIMENTAL IMPACT OF FANDOM CULTURE ON TEENAGE MENTAL HEALTH

Parasocial interactions have a long history, dating back to relationships with entities such as ghosts, demons, gods, and political leaders. The concept has evolved with modern innovations, with psychologists recognizing how individuals interact with media personalities who represent them. Some individuals, preferring a more detached style of attachment or experiencing anxiety in typical interactions, find solace in the lives of celebrities and what they offer. Media personalities have had a negative impact on their fan base, leading to increased body image issues in today's society. The usage of the terms "anxiety" and "depression" has become increasingly vague, blurring the line with their clinical definitions. Public figures on social media often elaborate on these concepts.

Involvement in fandom can also have several detrimental psychosocial effects on teenagers, especially when their engagement becomes excessive or emotionally dependent. Adolescents who closely link their identity and self-worth to a celebrity, fictional world, or online fan community may feel more emotionally vulnerable. (Maqsood & Bano, 2025) Strong attachment to these figures can increase feelings of loneliness, anxiety, or mood swings when expectations are not met or when conflicts within the fandom emerge. Competitive fan environments, particularly those fueled by online comparisons,

"stan wars," and pressure to fit in with group norms, can increase social stress, cyberbullying, and a distorted sense of belonging. Spending too much time on fandom activities can also affect academic performance, real-life friendships, and the development of an independent identity. This can lead to escapism as a coping method instead of promoting healthy emotional management. In severe cases, putting public figures or fictional stories on a pedestal can distort a person's self-view, create unrealistic life expectations, or spark obsessive behaviour that limits social experiences and boosts feelings of isolation. Overall, while fandom can provide community and creativity, its negative aspects can harm teenagers' mental strength, social skills, and emotional growth.

6.CONCLUSION

The study signals the importance of early intervention in addressing the fandom culture's detrimental impact on teenage mental health. One essential aspect involves advocating for the creation of safe and inclusive online environments within fandom communities. These spaces should prioritize the well-being of their members and provide a supportive atmosphere for all. Effectively supporting teenagers in managing the complexities of their parasocial relationships requires advocating for safe and inclusive online spaces within fandom networks, fostering critical media literacy skills, and promoting healthy coping methods. By empowering them with the ability to critically analyse and understand the media they consume, they can develop a more discerning approach to their fan interactions, separating fiction from reality and managing their emotional investment more effectively. Encouraging them to live life outside of the depths of the media that they get accustomed to will play a huge role in balancing their interests. Promoting involvement in hobbies, physical activities, socialising, and diverse interests beyond online pursuits can broaden perspectives and decrease the risk of becoming overly absorbed in parasocial relationships.

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH CULTURE SOCIETY ISSN: 2456-6683
Monthly Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed Journal [Impact Factor: 9.241]
Volume - 09, Special Issue - 43, December - 2025 Publication Date: 31/12/2025

DOIs:10.2017/IJRCS/ICNMHTGLL-2025/P24 --:-- Research Paper / Article / Review

A Two Day International Conference on Navigating Mental Health Through the Gateway of Language and Literature. (ICNMHTGLL-2025) Date: 22 - 23 December, 2025

Madness in Melody: Examination of the portrayal of Mad Women in select Taylor Swift songs

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Abstract : *The present study examines the portrayal of Mad Women in the Taylor Swift songs, who is becoming the icon of this generation. A quantitative method of cultural analysis along with contextual and biographical analysis has been used to understand and draw parallels to her life and conclusions about the portrayal in her 8 selected songs. Theoretical frameworks are formed by using existing feminist arguments alongside psychoanalysis, and cultural theories with historical portrayal of the troupe is used to form a base. It studied the gender, power, identity and representation of her in the media and in her own songs in contemporary society. With reviewing her work with historical, cultural and biographical context it has concluded that Taylor Swift has used the Madwomen troupe as an empowering tool to reclaim narratives after she was vilified in the media and the world. In conclusion, this underscores Taylor Swift's significant contribution to challenging and dismantling of the Madwoman troupe, paving way for a more inclusive and respectable representation of female expression in popular culture.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Taylor Swift is an American singer-songwriter who is becoming the icon of the generation. Her impact extends far beyond the realm of music, her songwriting, artistry, entrepreneurship, and advocacy have left an indelible mark on the music industry, popular culture, and even politics.

Her relevance has only grown with her record-breaking tour "THE ERAS TOUR". She has released 11 albums (in April 2024) containing over 250 songs and has been featured in many songs by different artists. Her career which spans over 20 years started with her self-titled debut album in 2006, from which she has only grown in the industry to the point when she is called "The music industry". In the literary universe that Taylor Swift has created in her almost 20-year music career till date has repeatedly channelled and challenged this troupe. She has delved into the complexities of her emotions, autonomy, and her experiences, often highlighting the double standards and scrutiny she has faced in her personal and career life in the music industry. Her song not only reflects her personal experiences, it resonates with women on a broader level, making it relatable to people, especially women all over the world. The themes in her song are culturally and historically broad making it a rich subject for academic exploration in humanity subjects like literature, pop-culture, sociology, politics and many more. Taylor Swift throughout her life has been portrayed as "the good girl", "the doe-eyed girl", "the bad girl", "the witch", "the femma fatale" and many more. Many of her experiences have been twisted in the media that have sensationalized her life. She has repeatedly pointed out the double standards in the industry. Double standards is a term used when moral principles apply more severely to women than it does for men (Definition of Double Standard). These double standards in the industry have portrayed women in power as "madwoman" when they display behaviours of authoritative and assertiveness as they are scrutinized over their behaviors in aspects of their social, sexual and professional lives, with the sensationalization of this in media, it often reinforces stereotypes and amplifying bias that can derail their careers. This unfair treatment towards women and female artists reflects the broader cultural sexism that still exists in the society as Taylor Swift herself has pointed out "When a man does

something it is strategic, when a woman does something it is calculated". during her interview with CBS [Columbia Broadcasting System] (CBS sunday 2:08) highlighting how a woman's choices when it doesn't align with the societal norms have been regarded as her being unstable leading to the reinforcement of the Madwoman stereotype, this prejudiced treatment is the reason for a need of how women are perceived and treated.

Understanding the cultural relevance of the Madwoman troupe today is extremely crucial as it sheds light upon the ongoing issues like gender inequality, and issues in both physical and mental health in women health care, In an era where mental health, gender roles, societal norms are scrutinized, examining popular figures like Taylor Swift who have been addressing these themes provide relevant insights into the current cultural landscape. This analysis not only contributes to the discourse of gender and media but it also highlights the role of popular music in reinforcing and challenging societal norms. Taylor Swift has become one of the main influences in the deconstruction of the "Mad woman" as she confronts it directly through her personal statements and songs. She has taken control over the narratives that had deemed her a liar through her albums proving repeatedly about her worth in the industry that has broken her down several times. Her actions like advocating for the ownership of her musical catalog and deciding to re-record and release her music has been historical and has helped several small artists especially female musicians to gain control over their music. By understanding Swift's work with a broader cultural, historical, and biographical context, it aims to uncover the layers of meaning she has signified into the portrayal of Madwoman. Her work mostly serves as a resistance and rebellion against the traditional gender narratives. They have resonated with an extremely wide audience, thus providing a nuanced understanding of the intersectionality of female emotional expression, autonomy, media representation, and cultural influences on the portrayal of women. By labelling women as mad, society could dismiss their voices, undermine their experiences, and maintain existing power structures. Understanding these historical contexts reveal how deeply ingrained and pervasive these stereotypes are and the importance of challenging and dismantling them in contemporary discourse.

"Myths and fairy tales often both state and enforce culture's sentences with greater accuracy than more sophisticated literary texts*"* (Gilbert 36) Beginning from the epics and mythologies and their retellings of them today, "madness" is still used as a defense for the horrendous things that female fictional characters do. Pandora is known to be the first woman on earth according to Greek mythology, she was created after the Titan Prometheus stole fire to give to the humans on earth to better their lives, this angered Zeus and punished him to be tortured for all eternity. Looking at the lifestyle improvement on earth Zeus decides to give them evil to "balance" things out. A beautiful maiden was created named Pandora.

Hesiod, the Greek poet describes her as "beautiful evil" and continues to say that when the other gods saw her, they realized mortal men had no remedy against her, and therefore "comes the whole deadly race of women." Before pandora unleashed all the misery on the world, mankind lived peacefully free from evils, hard work, and disease. Pandora was destined to open the jar that would unleash misery; the motive is not specified as to whether it was curiosity or malice that led to opening of the jar. (Haynes 13-18)

According to Christianity, Eve was the first woman who was created from the rib of Adam as his wife. They lived in the Garden of Eden. The serpent deceived Eve, who willingly ate the fruit of knowledge, disobeying God. When asked about the deception Adam simply replies, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate" (Genesis 3: 13) thus making Eve, same as Pandora, a scapegoat or and thus making her the reason for evil and the downfall of humanity. When Eve is asked about the deception she replies, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." (Genesis 3:13) God then punishes women with pain during childbearing and allows Adam to have authority over her and her desires. "Your desires shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you" (Genesis 3:16).

> "The blame assigned to Eve for tempting Adam with forbidden fruit lies at the core of many assumptions about women's psychological nature. Medical decisions, especially ones related to childbirth, reproduction, and sexuality, have been shaded by this prejudice throughout the ages. Indeed, when

> anesthetics were first introduced in medicine, the biblical prescription" All women must bring forth children in sorrow" was one reason used to deny them to women in labor." (Thompson-2)

In "*The Wandering Womb: A Cultural History of Outrageous Beliefs About Women"*, Lana Thompson explained how the blame that was assigned to Eve for the downfall of humanity has affected women's health care for centuries now. She further explains that women have suffered with these assumptions that their bodies were imperfect and inferior and that they have less intelligence, or that they have a flawed mental structure that is susceptible to "evil spirits" because they are not capable of logical thought. (3) According to Jewish mythology, Lilith was actually the first wife of Adam before Eve, even the first monster, because she was created from the same dust as Adam and not from his rib like Eve, She viewed herself as his equal and refused to lie beneath him. When he attempted to compel her, she flew to the Red Sea where the demons resided. God and his emissaries warned her that if she didn't return, she would lose a hundred children every day. She chooses the punishment instead of a patriarchal marriage. She later takes revenge on Adam and God by injuring babies, especially the male babies. Lilith exemplifies a woman who sought to reclaim her power and defied authority.. She is punished two-fold, the death of a hundred babies and the vengeance which must cause even more pain (Gilbert and Gubar 35). Medusa's story also runs along the same lines as an example of a woman taking a stand and ending up as a monster. Medusa is a mortal in the Greek mythologies, all her family members are immortal and ageless, Hesiod considered it a "wretched fate". Her gorgeous hair caught the eye of the Greek god Poseidon, he seduced her, raped her in the temple of Goddess Athena who is the goddess of war and wisdom, the one who is rarely seen supporting other women, but there can be two explanations as to why Athena punishes her. One story tells us that Athena punished her because she defiled her temple, and she was wrongly punished, another story tells us that the "punishment" of having a head of snakes that can turn people into stone when you look at them is actually a gift or a weapon given to protect her to arm her from attackers in the future. But no matter what the reason is, medusa is punished to be a monster for all eternity. Even after all this, she was killed by Perseus in her sleep and her head was used as a weapon (Haynes 68-86).

2. Methodology with theoretical framework

This research project aims to explore the Mad Woman troupe in Taylor Swift's lyrics, by analysing her portrayal of female madness in 8 select songs ("Blank space", "Look what You Made Me do", "I did something bad", "the last great american dynasty", "the albatross", "cassandra", "madwoman", and "champagne problems") that are most relevant to the context. It seeks to understand how her work is significant in the discourse of women's emotional expression, the stigmatization of female rage and her autonomy in the world today. It questions how her portrayal of Madwoman in her lyrics challenge or reinforce traditional gender narratives and in what ways her lyrics reflect the historical and cultural narratives of female madness. Psychoanalytic theories of Hysteria and its history is used for the psychological basis. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's work *"Madwoman in the Attic"*, research papers and even relevant contemporary works are utilized to explore how literary traditions of female madness are represented, it is to contextualize Swift's work and draw parallels with their ideas and arguments. The trope of the mad woman has been employed for centuries to stigmatize, marginalize, invalidate women all with the intention of keeping them in bonds with the values of the patriarchal society. This paper examined how this troupe was used and reused by her to reject these notions and used it as a key for her independence and autonomy in the music industry throughout her career. It examined the media portrayal of her and her true response to this portrayal. It examines the layers of complexity in her lyrics that speaks on a wide range of topics like gender, frustration, insecurity, resilience and defiance against the agencies that tried to control her.

3.Troupe of Mad Woman

The troupe of Mad Woman, though studied extensively, requires more attention as it helps to explain how women and their emotional responses are perceived in today's time when women's mental and physical health are hot topics of discussion. There is little research regarding how this troupe has taken a turn better or worse as many women are embracing this troupe, challenging it directly and channeling

it as a tool of empowerment that once was used to invalidate them, especially women in pop-culture, singers and movies that are showcasing her side of the stories instead of calling them crazy and moving on.

As Taylor Swift herself has always been authentic in her life and lyrics, they provide rich data to examine pop-cultural phenomenons, troupes like “doe-eyed girl”,“madness in love”, “the angry woman’ and the “other woman” troupes can be studied using her songs as basis. A wider range of study can be the portrayal of women in rap and pop songs in contemporary media and how women are embracing this troupe as a tool for empowerment in pop-cultural, by using artists like Olivia Rodrigo,Selena Gomez, Halsey, Cardi-B and many more.

The study has reviewed historical, fictional and realistic portrayals of women with comparison to the contemporary portrayal of them in mainstream thought. The study is divided into 4 different types of how Taylor Swift has presented this troupe in her music. Originally released in 2014, "1989" was re-released as "1989 (Taylor's Version)" on October 27, 2023, by Republic Records. The later version is going to be used for the analysis.It was produced by Taylor Swift, Jack Antonoff, and Christopher Rowe produced the majority of the album; Ryan Tedder, Noel Zancanella, Shellback, and Imogen Heap. The album contains 21 songs, of which only *“Blank Space" (Taylor’s version)* is selected for analysis. During one of her performances of the song on September 30th, 2016, at the Clive Davis Theatre after she was celebrated after her record-breaking exhibit at the GRAMMY Museum. She explained that she started writing it as a response to the “wonderful fixation” the media has with her dating life and painting her as a “psycho serial dater”. She comments on how it has made her difficult and how this portrayal of her got out of hand, she adds that her second response to this was that the character that the media had created was interesting and wrote this song from that character’s perspective. (Swift 00:10-01:15).Maria do Carmo Lima Andrade examined this song as a response to linguistic injury with the use of irony as a rhetorical device, discusses how media plays a powerful tool in how reality is perceived, and how due to the limelight that celebrities receive they are often stereotyped, and how these stereotypes can lead to linguistic injury (Andrade 3-6) especially with someone as famous as Taylor Swift, the study analyzes the overall song as a response to the sensational persona that the media had created to take over the narrative they had created about her life (Andrade 11). The song “Blank Space (Taylor’s version)” is set from the point of view of the Femme Fatale (translated from French- fatale woman) herself as she goes through the stages that is meeting him, having an amazing time, being filled with jealousy to the point she becomes “insane”. It begins when the character that she has created meets a man, she immediately tells him that she can offer him “Magic, Madness, Heaven, Sin” (Taylor Swift, *Blank Space (Taylor’s Version)* line 3) making her love almost cosmic, she brings out positive words and negative words like “magic”; “heaven” and “madness”; “sin”, she even mentions “stolen kisses”; “pretty lies” signifying that the relationship they are going to get into with contain high emotions.

> “Saw you there and I thought
> "Oh, my God, look at that face
> You look like my next mistake
> Love's a game, wanna play?" Ay
> (Taylor Swift, *Blank Space (Taylor’s Version)* line 4-7)

These lines set the premise for the song that the Femme Fatale protagonist that is played by Taylor Swift herself in the music video released in 2014, the man she is with will be ruined by the end, In the song is a determined seductress who confidently gets any man that she sets her eyes on, the very first verse of the song calls the relationship a “mistake” and love a “game” making it clear that she has done this before and is anticipating the end before it ever begins.

> “New money, suit and tie
> I can read you like a magazine
> Ain't it funny? Rumors fly

And I know you heard about me
So hey, let's be friends
I'm dying to see how this one ends
Grab your passport and my hand
I can make the bad guys good for a weekend"(Taylor Swift, *Blank Space (Taylor's Version)* line 8-15)

In the next stanza, she clearly asserts her control and power over him, when she sees him for the first time and she notices the attributes of a good suitor that is new money, suit, and tie. *"*I can read you like a magazine" *(Taylor Swift, Blank Space (Taylor's Version) line 9)* signifies that she understands men and can have control over them, a task that is as easy to her as reading a magazine.

She continues to say "Ain't it funny, rumors fly and I know you heard about me" (Taylor Swift, *Blank Space (Taylor's Version)* line 10-11) as a nod to the media and the paparazzi that assume things about her and build a persona that she dates and is driven into insanity over every man she meets or interacts with. "...Let's be friends" (Taylor Swift, *Blank Space (Taylor's Version)* line (12) indicates the beginning of their whirlwind relationship. She also indicates that the stereotypical "bad guys" that she usually goes out with are easily controlled by her, and her almost siren-like beauty and personality.

In the chorus of the song, she wants to know how the relationship will meet its inevitable end, a dreamy fairytale-like ending or in literal flames, most of the Femme Fatales characters end (die) with horrific ends. She asks the man if the "high" refers to the high emotions that one experiences in relationships, especially unstable ones. She explains that this is because they are young and reckless, and young people are often known to take things way too far early. The contradictory terms continue as she says "I'll leave you breathless / or with a nasty scar" *(Taylor Swift, Blank Space (Taylor's Version) line 26-27)* showing the turbulent relationship. She directly highlights the fact that she has a long list of ex-lovers who will tell anyone that she is *"insane"* stereotyping herself as the "Insane jealous ex-girlfriend". This shows a repeating pattern in her relationships where she meets a man, and they completely fall for each other and then at one point becomes insanely jealous making her violent. This is especially highlighted in the music video which can be divided into 2 parts, the first one with the "good girlfriend" (TaylorSwiftVEVO, *Taylor Swift - Blank Space* 00:00-01:46) and her transformation to "the jealous girlfriend" (TaylorSwiftVEVO, *Taylor Swift - Blank Space* 01:46-03:55). The line *"*Be that girl for a month, wait, the worst is yet to come oh no" *(Taylor Swift, Blank Space (Taylor's Version) line 37-38)* shows the transformation from "that girl" being the perfect girlfriend to the jealous girlfriend because he answered the phone call.

"Screaming, crying, perfect storms
I can make all the tables turn
Rose Garden filled with thorns
Keep you second-guessing like
"Oh, my God, who is she?"
I get drunk on jealousy
But you'll come back each time you leave
'Cause, darling, I'm a nightmare dressed like a daydream"
(Taylor Swift, *Blank Space (Taylor's Version)* line 40-46)

Taylor again brings out the contrasting imagery with terms like "rose gardens filled with thorns", signifying that even though she was violently tormenting him, their loud fights get physical, by destroying valuables like a car with a golf stick and a painting she created earlier in the video, by throwing his phone in the pool, by destroying his clothes and literally setting them of fire, which is also a nod to the lyric "will go down in flames". Despite these torments, he remains with her and doesn't end the relationship showing the power of her power over him.

"Boys only want love if it's torture

Don't say I didn't, say I didn't warn ya
Boys only want love if it's torture
Don't say I didn't, say I didn't warn ya"
(Taylor Swift, *Blank Space (Taylor's Version)* line 63-66)

In the above-mentioned lyrics, she embodied the femme fatale herself, and instead of her voice often being silenced in movies and stories about her, Taylor Swift puts on a more dominatrix persona where she confronts the man she was with that he knew what he was getting into and was fully aware of the situation, she didn't just have his consent, but he even liked her 'insanity" or "madness" that caused him much torment and to a certain extent even liked it though he might never admit it. Taylor Swift gives us a fresh outlook by taking control of the narrative, the character that she created, and her own life. She has spun the Femme Fatale character in a more romanticized manner with the woman taking control of the whole narrative, even denying a narrative at all for the man, contrary to the mainstream pattern which only explains the man's side of the story. Though Swift doesn't really explain the reasons for her character's behavior, it was written as an ironic response to the world when in reality her life's narrative was taken over by the media and twisted to their liking to make a sensational and scandalous pop star out of her life making her "glamorous and a monstrous" (Minowa 1) as explained earlier.

When this song is looked through the lens of the Mad Woman perspective that is discussed earlier in the paper. She takes on a persona Femma Fetale Medea who was driven into insanity because of her "jealousy" over her husband's new bride and kills her own children as vengeance. Even though she was a "perfect" wife before he betrayed her, leaving her stranded in a foreign place. Some might even say it was her way of gaining her identity back, making herself a villain in the process. I am arguing that Taylor Swift herself lost her identity in her public persona or public identity due to the fame that she gained from her music career and when the media stole and rewrote her identity to sensationalize her and her life, she reclaimed it with this song by ironically writing about the persona they recreated but taking into account just the song without the songwriters context, the text can be taken in as a stereotypical portrayal of the Madwoman troupe, where a female is criticized for being "insane" or "mad" without making the context clear and blaming their "femininity" as the cause for the behavior.

Taylor Swift calls this stereotype in her song *"The man"* in the album *"Lover"* released in 2019, which confronts many double standards that prevail in the music industry and society as a whole. In the song she references Leo Decaprio directly with in the lyrics,more specifically the role he played in *"The wolf of Wall Street"*. The music video for the song mirrors scenes from the movie, featuring Taylor Swift dressed as a man. She performs actions that are typically excused for men but criticized when done by women."The man" or the protagonist in the music video is hailed and forgiven for having multiple partners, younger partners and bad behaviour, whereas she was prosecuted and called crazy for the same context as explained earlier. (TaylorSwiftVEVO, *Taylor Swift - The Man (Official Video)*)

"And they would toast to me, oh
Let the players play
I'd be just like Leo
In Saint-Tropez" (Swift , *The Man* line 25–29

The above-mentioned lyrics, where she directly references him; she says she would be toasted and celebrated, as men who have multiple partners are glorified and called "players' ' rather than face backlash or criticism for their behavior. She brings out the different treatment they have received from the public view. (Deameysa et al. 90)

In further lines of the songs in the bridge her direct confrontation stands as powerful words during the discourse of the double standards in the society today.

"What's it like to brag about
Raking in dollars
And getting bitches and models
And it's all good if you're bad
And it's okay if you're mad
If I was out flashing my dollars

I'd be a bitch, not a baller
They paint me out to be bad
So it's okay that I'm mad"(Swift , *The Man* line 37-45)

In the beginning of these lines she highlights the fact that men are often glorified and bragged about and their bad behavior, the fact that they have multiple partners and how their powermoves in business are hailed about, they are even forgiven with the idiom "boys will be boys" while when a woman doing it seems unnatural, unforgivable and are called mad because it is a calculated cruel decision to get ahead rather than a smart money making move. She draws parallels and the contrasting consequences to their behaviour when they are flashing their money, with being called a "bitch" and "baller", the cuss word that she called later in her career which is explained further in the paper, while men are called "baller" for the same actions are called wealthy and successful ("Definition of Baller"). While she was cussed and called mad as an insult, he was called Baller and hailed for the same actions. In the very next line she justifies her madness and her being painted in a bad manner because she gets to enjoy the privileges of being mad or a man, because she continues to speak about how she is tired of running faster and harder to reach where she is today while being criticised every step of the way. This song becomes relevant in the discourse as it directly highlights the double standards in the society. Talor Swift in the song *"Blank space",* uses stereotypically characteristics of the Madwoman troupe that portrayed women as unpredictable, irrational, jealous and many more to highlight the double standards as to how women in power and herself have been portrayed in the media regarding their relationships especially by the tabloid culture in media. She mocks the Mad woman troupe by exaggerating it with the lyrics and the music video, using it as a parody to underscore its power and taking control of her narrative. The catchy pop-song serves as a powerful commentary for the gender dynamics and media representation and advocates for a more nuanced representation of power in power without the double standards of the patriarchal society.

4. The angry woman era

"reputation", the sixth studio album by Taylor Swift was released on November 10th, 2017 as a response to the media scrutiny she faced during the 1989 era with Big Machine Records, and especially due to the "Taylor-Kanye" feud that she was wrapped up in. Kanye West is an American Rapper and was a significant pop-culture icon. Their feud began back during the 2009 MTV Video Music Awards (VMAs), when Taylor Swift was only 17 years old, and had won "Music Video of the Year" for her music video *"You Belong With Me"* while she was on stage to receive her award, West interrupted her, took the microphone and announced that "Beyonce had one of the greatest music videos of all time!" (*Miss Americana* 00:17:00-00:17:35), this was continued with the crowd "booing" at him. Swift has spoken about this moment and how it affected her life in her documentary *"Miss American"* released in 2020. She explains that from her girlhood she has been striving towards being a "good girl" and how she craved "praise" and "approval" during the abovementioned moment with the entire crowd "Booing" caused her many issues in her daily life and career. The feud escalated in 2016 when West released the song "Famous," in which he insulted her and claimed credit for her career with the lyric, "I feel like me and Taylor still might have sex, why? Cause, I made that bitch famous." Taylor responded, stating she never allowed him to use such language about her and expressed her desire to be excluded from the narrative. A few days later Kim Kardashian, his wife at the time released an edited video where it looked like she approved the lyrics. The world did not believe her and called her a "snake", the term "snake" is used to refer to someone who is deceitful ("Definition of Snake"), and ended up being blamed for playing the victim card. "#taylorswiftisoverparty", the number one trending hashtag on the popular social networking site Twitter at the time, her documentary has collected all the hate she received because of it and explained why she disappeared for more than 2 years from public eye (*Miss Americana* (00:33:20-00:36:20). Taylor Swift even opened about her experience in a sexual assault case in 2017. She was sexually assaulted by a DJ named David Mueller back in 2013 in a meet and greet, after they reported him to his bosses, they fired him and he ended up suing her for millions, as a response she counter sued for only a dollar. Though she won the case against him she talks about how dehumanizing the trial was and how she was blamed for it for not reacting quickly or how she should have been

standing further away from him, she had to experience all this even though there were 7 witnesses and a photo of the crime.(*Miss Americana* 00:33:20-00:36:20)

These narratives in the songwriter's life and many women before and after her seem to be the same. From having her accomplishments taken away or reduced by value, to her being manipulated and exploited, and labeled a "liar" when they spoke out about their version of the story all because it was a man, they assumed was telling the truth and did not acknowledge her words. The album *"reputation"* in the singer's life was a response to all this and her finding love in the most unconventional manner that she hadn't before. The name itself *"reputation"* is a nod to the fact that at that point in her life, her reputation had never been worse. The album cover is also significant because her face is divided, where one side is filled with what appears to be headlines and newspaper articles and the left side is just her face without anything showcasing her true self. During the year that she had disappeared during all this drama she had emptied all her social media accounts and suddenly posted short clips of snakes before announcing her new album that was *"reputation"*, swift took an insult that she was called a snake and not believed over West and turned it into a promotional tactic.

The album was produced by Taylor Swift, Max Martin, Shellback, Jack Antonoff, Ali Payami, Oscar Görres, Oscar Holter The songs used for the analysis from this album are *"Look What You Made Me Do"* and *"I Did Something Bad"*. Both of the songs were written as a response to her all experiences that made her bitter and angry about the world when she wasn't given a chance to explain her story, thus taking away her power, these songs, and even the album is a way to take control over her life and narrative in which she was portrayed in. "Look What You Made Me Do" *"Look What You Made Me Do"*, the sixth song on the album *"reputation";* the music video was released on 28th November in 2017. The entire song runs in a pattern of blaming someone (blaming the people who had a feud with her during this time) for her transformation into her new era which featured a stronger, and bolder version of herself that spoke out instead of being worried of her "good girl" image.

In the music video, she sets an eerie setting in a cemetery where she rises from death in a zombie version of herself (TaylorSwiftVEVO, *Taylor Swift - Look What You Made Me Do* 0:00-0:35) in a dress that she was wearing in her last album song "Out Of The Woods" (TaylorSwiftVEVO, *Taylor Swift - Out Of The Woods* 0:13) a song in which she describes what she feels what anxiety is in an interview (Swift, *Taylor Swift Talks About "Out Of The Woods"* 0:57). The tombstone shown at the beginning of the video reads "Here lies the reputation of Taylor Swift" (TaylorSwiftVEVO, *Taylor Swift - Look What You Made Me Do* 0:19). She portrayed the metaphorical death of a version of herself that was a "good girl" who never got into controversies, after her *1989* era she was dragged into these controversies and had her voice stolen from her, she even buries herself in a white dress with neat hair and red lipstick, her iconic look from that era (TaylorSwiftVEVO,
Taylor Swift - Look What You Made Me Do 0:35). The very beginning of the song states,

> "I don't like your little games, don't like your titled stage, the role you made me play of the fool, no I don't like you". (Taylor Swift, *Look What You Made Me Do* line 1–4)

She has previously referred to "Games" in association with love and relationships, but it has changed to business decisions and life. The "Tilted Stage" refers to how they had rigged a game that she is trapped in and cannot win no matter what she does. The line "The role you made me play of the fool" (Taylor Swift, *Look What You Made Me Do* line 3)is extremely important in the analysis of this text through the perspective of Mad Woman because, she outright blames the people that put her in a position where she was a "fool", and words "you made me" shows their control over her and the situation, the word "role" signifies how she was just used an actor that they are controlled with regard to how the audience perceives them. "I don't like your perfect crime" (Taylor Swift, *Look What You Made Me Do* line 5) refers to how well she was portrayed at the wrong, manipulative woman who was used as an opportunity to be victimized, referring to the Kanye West feud, "How you laugh when you lie"(Taylor Swift, *Look What You Made Me Do* line 6) refers to the exact moment when Kayne west lied to her on the infamous phone call when he claimed that she approved the lyric calling her a cuss word as explained before.

"But I got smarter, I got harder in the nick of time, honey,
I rose up from the dead, I do it all the time,
I got a list of names and yours is red underlined,
I check it once, I check it twice oh!"

(Taylor Swift, *Look What You Made Me Do* line 9-12)

These lines are her taking on a Lilith or Medea like persona wanting revenge from the people who betrayed her. In the music video, she is seen sitting on a throne, sipping tea in a red dress while snakes are crawling toward her, they seem to be controlled by her (TaylorSwiftVEVO, *Taylor Swift - Look What You Made Me Do* 1:05), this is also a nod towards how she was referred to as a snake during the Kayne West scandal. "I rose up from the death I do it all the time" (Taylor Swift, *Look What You Made Me Do* line 10) is also a nod to her first scene in the movie where she resurrects herself and her new version from the dead, it also refers to how a female artist has to constantly reinvent herself in order to stay relevant in the industry . The title of the song *"Look What Is Made Me Do"* is her rebelling against the system that suppressed her, she has expressed that she feels like a wounded animal that was lashing out during this time in her life(*Miss Americana*). This era is a representation of her speaking out against the unfairness of the situation and narrative she was put into. "I will be the actress, starting in your bad dreams"(Taylor Swift, *Look What You Made Me Do* line 42), Swift brings out the lyric that she was forced to play a role in a narrative that she wasn't asked to be part of, now she takes on the role of a villain, even dressing up as a dominatrix and a robber to promote her image of a villain. In the music video, she portrays herself as almost Christ-like when she stands on the top of a mountain, with all her popular iconic looks from her previous eras trying to fight their way up to where she is standing now, on top she is standing in front of a cross, wearing a black leotard that reads "rep" representing reputation (TaylorSwiftVEVO, *Taylor Swift - Look What You Made Me Do* 2:27). Those other older Taylor swifts were scattered and "killed" off by this new version of her in the next scenes. This scene is reinforced by this idea again when she says "But the old Taylor can't come to the phone right now Why? Oh, 'cause she's dead (oh)" (TaylorSwiftVEVO, *Taylor Swift - Look What You Made Me Do* 2:56-3:05).

5.Conclusion

The trope of the mad woman has been employed for centuries to stigmatize, marginalize, invalidate women all with the intention of keeping them in bonds with the values of the patriarchal society. This paper examined how this troupe was used and reused by her to reject these notions and used it as a key for her independence and autonomy in the music industry throughout her career. It examined the media portrayal of her and her true response to this portrayal. It examines the layers of complexity in her lyrics that speaks on a wide range of topics like gender, frustration, insecurity, resilience and defiance against the agencies that tried to control her. The study has reviewed historical, fictional and realistic portrayals of women with comparison to the contemporary portrayal of them in mainstream thought. The study is divided into 4 different types of how Taylor Swift has presented this troupe in her music. The first chapter reviewed the song *"Blank Space" through* the perspective of Femma Fatale trope that was popular in the end of 20th century after the wars, Swift has portrayed the protagonist in the song as a jealous and irrational woman who has used her power of seduction to manipulate, control and destroy her male partner, she used this troupe to iconically mock her own sensationalized portrayal of her private life in the media and gain control of her life's narrative.

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH CULTURE SOCIETY ISSN: 2456-6683
Monthly Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed Journal [Impact Factor: 9.241]
Volume - 09, Special Issue - 43, December - 2025 Publication Date: 31/12/2025

DOIs:10.2017/IJRCS/ICNMHTGLL-2025/P25 --:-- Research Paper / Article / Review

A Two Day International Conference on Navigating Mental Health Through the Gateway of Language and Literature. (ICNMHTGLL-2025) Date: 22 - 23 December, 2025

History Against the Grain: Memory, Invisibility, and the Problem of Writing Women

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Abstract: *The writing of history has never been a neutral enterprise. What gets recorded, who gets remembered, and in what manner are questions that are as much about the exercise of power as they are about the recovery of facts. This paper engages with the methodological and conceptual problems that arise at the intersection of history, memory, and gender, particularly when the subject of inquiry is a woman or a category of women whose presence in the historical record is structured precisely by its absences. Drawing on Walter Benjamin's critique of historicism and his call to brush history against the grain, Ranajit Guha's intervention into the prose of counter-insurgency and subaltern historiography, Joan Scott's interrogation of the evidence of experience, and Carolyn Steedman's rethinking of the archive, the paper pursues three objectives. First, it seeks to understand how dominant historiographic modes produce invisibility as a constructed and systematic effect rather than a merely incidental. Consequently, it interrogates the concept of memory as a methodological resource for feminist historiography, drawing on Mahua Sarkar's practice of mobilizing oral history and periodical literature as inter-subjective sites of knowledge production. Third, it argues for a mode of historical inquiry that problematizes both the project of recovery per se and the easy equivalence of experience with fact, insisting instead on the need to understand how differences are constituted, how invisibility is produced, and how subjects are formed through the very processes of their historical marginalization. The paper contextualizes these methodological concerns within the broader field of feminist historiography, thereby understanding how the researcher's choice of particular sources and invention of relevant methods follows from the subject of concern and perspectives undertaken to engage with them.*

Keywords: *feminist historiography, archive, memory, subaltern, gender, oral history, invisibility, colonial India.*

1. The Problem of History

In the essay, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," critical theorist Walter Benjamin reflected on the philosophy of history by drawing an analogy between historical materialism and a chess playing machine operated by a concealed dwarf, a theologian (1). For him, historical materialism was something like a machine which could appear triumphant as long as theology was hidden inside it. What Benjamin was gesturing towards with this opening was not merely an epistemological point about historical knowledge; it was a political claim about what history had been doing, which was always siding with the victors. This means that history, as it has been written, is also a document of violence wherein every monument of civilization is built through certain kind of exclusion. The conquerors march in the triumphal procession of history and the defeated are not merely absent but they have been actively made absent. As a retaliation, it is the task of the historical materialist to "brush history against the grain" (Thesis VII).

Benjamin's critique of historicism is directed at a specific kind of historical consciousness, one that sees the past as a sequence of events moving toward a knowable present, that adds up experiences into a story of progress, and that identifies with the rulers rather than the ruled. Against this, he proposes what he calls a *now time*, in which the past flashes up in a "moment of danger" and becomes legible to those who are attentive enough to seize it (Thesis VI). History is then not a linear continuum of time to be filled with data. Rather, it is a field of tension in which forgotten lives and suppressed events demand to be rescued from the conformism that threatens to absorb them. Against the conformist and dominant definition of history as a narrative of linear progression, Benjamin thus brings in the importance of the now time or the present in the writing of history by a material historian (Thesis I). That is, moving away from an additive conceptualization of history, the critical theorist proposes the need to arrest the succession of events and blast an era out of the homogeneous course of history thereby deconstructing the totalizing, dominant narrative of a linear progression of historical time and mankind (Thesis XVII).

Most parts of his essay thus tried to distinguish between historicism and material historians' notion of time. The former identified history as a narrative leading towards the unfolding of progress, and historical time as "empty" and "homogeneous" (Thesis XVII). Hence history, in this case, is a succession of events occupying the linear continuum of time, posing each turn of events as an unfolding towards the final progress of mankind and hence empathizing with the victors of the ruling class per se (Thesis VII). In problematizing this narrative of progress which is utilized by hegemonic forces like fascism, Benjamin brings in the importance of the now time or the present in the writing of history by a material historian (Thesis I). Moving away from an additive conceptualization of history, materialist historiography arrests the succession of events and "blasts" an era out of the homogeneous course of history thereby deconstructing the totalizing, dominant narrative of a linear progression of historical time and mankind (Thesis XVII).

Benjamin's intervention is significant for the question that this paper is concerned with not because it offers a potential method for feminist historiography, but because it insists on the political stakes of historical methodology. How one conceptualizes history, what questions one asks of the past, what sources one turns to, how one reads the archive is not a methodological preliminary but a constitutive intellectual and political act. And in the case of women, particularly women whose relation to the historical record is already marked by systematic exclusion, the methodological stakes are even more consequential. The question is not simply how to add women to history; it is how to understand the processes through which their absence from the record was produced, and what kinds of historiographic practice can make those processes visible without reproducing the logic that created the absence in the first place.

2. The Archive and its Absences

In the domain of traditional historical analysis, the archive enjoys a dominant position as the repository of hard evidence and the place where, as the assumption goes, one can gain access to what really happened. Several feminist historians have unsettled this position with particular care. For instance, Carolyn Steedman has mentioned that the archive is not where the past lives per se, or where the truth of the past can simply be discovered. Rather it is the "fragments, traces and little bits of flotsam" about the past that reside in the archives, and it is "one's romance and interaction with the archives" that creates the narrative (Steedman 23). This is not a merely epistemological observation; it carries methodological implications of significant weight. Once it is understood that the archive is not an unadulterated window onto the past but a set of constructions shaped by specific institutional interests and historical circumstances, then the questions one brings to the archive necessarily change. Who collected these documents, and why? What was left out, and for what purpose? What are the traces doing in this particular institutional location? These questions, as Steedman argues, should replace the naive question of what the archive contains, which assumes that the archive's contents are given rather than produced.

The archive, in this understanding, becomes the building block of a dominant narrative, official, state-produced, and saturated with the perspective of those who had the power and interest to produce it.

Ranajit Guha's intervention into South Asian historiography makes this point from a different angle, and with specific reference to colonial India. Guha argues in his foundational essay on subaltern historiography that the historical records of peasant uprisings under the British Raj are almost entirely produced from the perspective of colonial authority: the archive through which such events are registered is a prose of counter-insurgency, shaped by the need to pacify, explain, and contain popular resistance (Guha 1-2). The subaltern appears in this archive already filtered through "a code of pacification": already interpreted, already translated into the language of power (Guha 3). The consequence is that the peasant's own consciousness, the logic of revolt from the inside, does not appear in the archive as such; it has to be read, as Guha proposes, as a kind of writing in reverse, inferred against the grain of the official account (Guha 4-5).

What Guha describes for the peasant insurgent, historical sociologist Mahua Sarkar demonstrates for a different kind of subject: the Muslim woman in colonial Bengal, whose absence from dominant historiography is not a matter of involuntary archival amnesia but a systematic effect of the way in which history was produced (1-26). Sarkar's argument is that the marginalization of Muslim women in the scholarship on colonial Bengal should not only be seen as the result of the habitual "Androcentrism" of conventional historiography (25). Rather, it is a consequence of larger systematic processes, that is, the reading of heterogeneous Muslim middle-class discourse through the lens of Partition, its labelling as "separatist," and the consequent desire for its obliteration from the record (Sarkar 25). The archive that documents the formation of Bengali public culture in the nineteenth and early twentieth century is overwhelmingly produced by and for the Hindu *bhadralok* intelligentsia, and it systematically positions the Muslim woman as either absent, backward, or victimized; a positioning that is not an accidental by-product of limited documentation, but the active result of the very process of writing the history of the Bengal renaissance. The archive, in other words, does not just fail to capture Muslim women's lives; it actively produces a particular representation of those lives, and it is that production which demands critical attention. Further, this is also the case with the lower-caste and lower-class women or more specifically the othered sisters of the *bhadramahila*, (predominantly the Hindu upper-caste and middle-class women in Bengal), whose being and action have been similarly manufactured through a rhetoric of derogation and absence necessitating careful enquiry.

3. Reading the Archive

The methodological implication of Guha's and Steedman's arguments taken together is that reading the archive productively requires reading it against its own logic; not taking the silences as simple gaps to be filled, but understanding them as significant in their own right, as evidence of the ideological formations that produced them. Sarkar's practice of archival reading enacts precisely this understanding (20). Rather than consulting the archive to gather evidence for the marginalization of Muslim women and treating it as a storehouse of facts that the researcher must retrieve, she reads the archive to understand the nature of in(visibility), the mechanisms through which a particular kind of woman was made to appear and disappear in specific ways at specific historical moments (Sarkar 20). The revisiting of colonial historical accounts, the textual analysis of periodicals published by the Hindu *bhadramahila*, the close reading of Muslim periodical literature; each of these archival engagements is directed not at recovering what was hidden behind the document but at understanding the different power structures that were at work behind the production of different subjects and identities in the broader ideological landscape of late colonial Bengal.

This kind of reading entails, in Benjamin's terms, a practice of brushing history against the grain. It does not simply find what the dominant archive excluded; it asks why the exclusion was necessary, what work it was doing, and what it reveals about the power structures that generated it. The periodicals published by the Hindu intelligentsia do not just fail to include Muslim and lower-caste women. Instead, they actively constitute the category of the Hindu upper-caste and middle-class woman as the accepted/normative subject of Bengali modernity, and in doing so produce the marginalized woman as that modernity's constitutive outside. The archive, read this way, becomes evidence not of what happened but of how subjects were produced, how differences were constituted, how they acquired

meaning, and how they were stabilized through acts of representation that appeared merely to describe an already existing reality.

4. Memory and Tensions Within

If the archive constitutes one pole of the methodological terrain this paper is mapping, memory constitutes the other and the relationship between the two is neither auxiliary nor simply oppositional. The concept of popular memory has been usefully articulated in a relational manner that allows for an analysis of the relationship between dominant memory and its counter-narratives, as well as between popular discourses and a privatized sense of the past within lived culture (Sarkar 82). Memory, understood this way, is not merely the individual faculty of recollection; it is a social and political process through which the past is constituted, contested, and transmitted. And the upholding of certain kinds of memory, for example official, documentary, institutional over others is itself an exercise of power that has historiographic consequences.

However, the relationship between this public memory and official history is not a simple one of opposition. As Sarkar's analysis shows, Muslim periodical literature did not simply contest Hindu bhadralok representations of Muslims; it was also inflected by those representations, shaped by the political climate within which it was produced, and sometimes yielded to the dominant formations even as it contested them (1-26). Public memory, in other words, is not a pure alternative to official history; it is produced in relation to official history, and it carries within it the residue of the power relations it is attempting to negotiate. This is an important methodological point, because it means that the historian who turns to periodical literature as a counter-archive cannot simply take its contents at face value as the authentic voice of a marginalized community. The texts have to be read critically, contextually, with attention to what they are doing as well as what they are saying, and with an understanding of the institutional and political conditions of their production.

5. Private Memory, Oral History, and the Inter-Subjective

The turn to oral history as a method in feminist historiography is motivated by the recognition that the official archive, even supplemented by periodical literature and other forms of public documentation, cannot provide access to the dimensions of women's experience that have not been considered worth recording. The oral histories of marginalized women offer a mode of access to precisely those dimensions: their childhoods, their experiences in school, their friendships, disagreements, their nonchalance, their memories of previous generations, their recollections of being young. Consequently, oral histories bring forth certain kinds of experiences that do not appear in official archives but do appear in periodical literature in highly mediated forms. As a methodological resource, oral history promises access to a subjective reality and a privatized sense of the past that complements and complicates the public record.

However, this tool also needs to be handled with considerable care. Critical historian Alessandro Portelli has argued that oral history does not simply provide access to different content from written sources, but that it bolsters a different dimension of historical experience altogether: not just what people did, but "what they intended to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did" (Portelli 50). Oral history is the history of subjectivity, of consciousness, of the meanings people give to their own actions and experiences. It is precisely this dimension that most historical methodologies have been least equipped to handle. The temptation is to read oral testimony either as a transparent record of events — substituting one kind of factual evidence for another — or as a purely subjective account that cannot be evaluated by the same standards as documentary evidence. Both of these approaches miss what is most valuable about the method.

What Sarkar's engagement with oral history adds to Portelli's methodological framework is a specific attention to the power dynamics of the oral history interview and to the ways in which private memory is never fully private and never entirely free from the infiltration of public discourse, official history, and the political climate in which it is recollected. Oral histories are not repositories of alternative

histories or storehouses of unmediated subaltern truths or ready-made sites of resistance that simply await the discovery of a social historian. This goes against the common assumption that personal memories are totally separate from the representations present in official history. Narratives of private memory often resonate and even reaffirm the structures of the same official history that they are assumed to resist (Sarkar 26). Hence, memories should be interrogated as sites of struggle which require problematization, rather than just repositories of facts. The Muslim women whose testimonies constitute Sarkar's ethnographic material are not simply speaking from outside the formations of Hindu nationalist history; they are subjects who have been formed within and against those formations, and their recollections carry within them the weight of that formation.

This also raises questions about the positionality of the researcher. The oral history interview is not a transparent encounter between a researcher and a subject who simply recounts her experience; it is a dialogic context entailing asymmetrical power relations, shaped by the community identity, class position, and institutional location of both interviewer and interviewee (Sarkar 22). The assumed empathy and identification that can characterize early feminist qualitative research is a preconceived and sometimes obstructive assumption, which can obscure as much as it reveals. The interview is an inter-subjective production of facts, not a retrieval of pre-existing truths, and the content and extent of recollections are inevitably shaped by the specific conditions of that situation. Methodologically, this means that the oral historian must attend not only to the substantive content of what is narrated but to the narrative strategies employed in the recounting, to what is being made visible and what is being kept obscure, and to the interviewee's desire to be seen in particular ways.

6. The Evidence of Experience and the Problem of Recovery

Joan Scott's intervention into feminist historiography is one of the most important and contested contributions to the methodological debates this paper is engaged with. Scott's argument in "The Evidence of Experience" is directed against a tendency that she identifies across a range of feminist, queer, and postcolonial historiographic projects: the tendency to take experience as self-evident evidence of facts, to treat the recovery of previously excluded experiences as the goal of critical history, and to assume that making marginalized voices visible is sufficient as a historiographic act (773-797). Against this, Scott argues that the project of history must attend not merely to the fact of experience but to the processes through which experience is constituted by the discursive formations, the ideological structures, and the power relations that produce subjects and their experiences in the first place (779-780). The historian who simply recovers the experiences of marginalized women without interrogating the conditions of their production risks naturalizing the very differences that critical history is supposed to be questioning (Scott 777).

Scott's argument has important implications for what the methodological practice this paper has been describing actually amounts to. If the turn to oral history, to periodical literature, to the counter-archive is simply a project of making visible what had been invisible (of adding marginalized women to the historical record) then it risks remaining at the level of what Scott calls the evidencing of experience. This then only relates to treating the testimony of marginalized women as proof of their marginalization, without asking how that marginalization was historically produced. The project of recovery, understood in this way, tends to produce what might be called additive histories, that is, histories that add new subjects to an otherwise unchanged account of the past, rather than problematizing the account itself. And it tends to work within the received categories of conventional historiography, fitting previously marginalized subjects into the frameworks of modern, liberal, feminist rhetoric rather than questioning those categories.

The danger that Scott identifies that is the evidencing of experience tends to naturalize rather than interrogate difference is precisely what a historiographic practice grounded in both archival critique and a critical oral history can guard against. The key move is to read the evidence of experience not as evidence of facts but as evidence of the conditions under which experience is produced: the ideological formations that shape what can be remembered and the institutional pressures that influence what gets preserved in the archive. Oral narratives are not unmediated repositories of truth; they are sites of

struggle, in which the narrator negotiates between her own sense of her life and the dominant representations that have been produced about people like her. Thus, it is this negotiation, this complex, often contradictory, always situated process that the feminist historian needs to be reading.

7. Understanding the Project of Recovery and Normativity

The methodological commitments developed across this paper converge on a shared refusal: the refusal to allow the critique of absence to become a simple project of recovery, and the refusal to allow the recovery of marginalized voices to become a reinscription of the normative categories that produced their marginalization. These are two related dangers, and navigating between them requires sustained methodological vigilance.

The first concern, the recovery project, is the tendency to treat the feminist historiographic task as a matter of adding the missing women to the historical record, of making them visible, of giving them a presence that they were previously denied. What this misses is what Scott has identified as the fundamental problem: the project of recovery, pursued in this way, works within the received categories of historical analysis including the categories of identity, experience, and subject position that were themselves produced through the ideological formations that generated the original absence. To recover Muslim women as feminists who resisted patriarchal domination is, in one sense, to give them visibility; but it is also to fit them into a category of feminism that carries its own implicit normativity, measuring their actions against a standard of adequate feminist consciousness that is typically derived from Western liberal or post-Enlightenment models of the subject. The recovered subject is always, in this sense, a translated subject - translated into the terms of the discourse that had previously excluded her.

The second concern, the reinscription of normativity, is the tendency to allow the documentation of marginalized women's experiences to become, as Sarkar puts it, an "alternative ghetto" for the previously marginalized (Sarkar 132). The production of separate, typically additive histories of Muslim women, Dalit women, lower-caste women, does not in itself challenge the dominant frameworks that produced their marginalization; it simply adds new content to an unchanged framework. What is needed instead is a practice that interrogates the logic of norms that create such positions of marginalization in the first place and that asks not just what the marginalized experienced, but how the categories that determine who is marginalizable are constituted, maintained, and reproduced. This is the "relentless logic of normativity" that feminist historiography of the kind this paper has been mapping seeks to shake (Sarkar 132).

Steedman's reconceptualization of the archive supports this methodological stance. Her insistence that the archive is not a repository of hard truths awaiting discovery but a set of fragments and traces shaped by specific institutional interests means that the historian's engagement with the archive is always already an interpretive act. The questions one brings to the archive (who collected this material, why, for what purpose, and from what position) are not preliminary to the historical analysis but constitutive of it. These questions apply equally to the oral history archive, to the periodical literature, and to the official record: all of these sources are produced from specific positions of interest and shaped by specific ideological formations, and all of them require reading against their own grain if they are to yield anything more than a reproduction of the dominant account.

8. Conclusion: The Stakes of Method

The call to brush history against the grain is not merely a methodological slogan; it is a statement about the political stakes of historical inquiry. What gets written, what gets remembered, and what gets forgotten are not neutral outcomes of limited resources and inevitable archival gaps; they are the products of power, of ideological formation, of deliberate and systematic processes of exclusion and erasure. For feminist historiography, this means that the question of method is never simply a question of which techniques to deploy or which sources to privilege; it is a question of what kind of history one is committed to writing, and what intellectual and political responsibilities that commitment entails.

The constellation of theoretical resources this paper has engaged including Benjamin's philosophy of history, Guha's prose of counterinsurgency, Scott's evidence of experience, Steedman's archival methods, and Sarkar's practice of feminist historiography then does not necessarily add up to a unified methodology. One needs to understand that these are thinkers writing from different disciplines, different political locations, and different historical moments, and their arguments are not always in agreement. However, they tend to share a commitment to the critical interrogation of how history is made, and a refusal to accept the dominant archive at face value. When it comes to the writing of women's histories, and particularly the writing of the histories of women who appear in the record only as absences, this shared commitment is of foundational importance. It establishes the intellectual conditions under which certain absences of Muslim women in colonial historiography, the erasure of lower-caste women from nationalist history, or the structural invisibility of any category of women from any dominant historical narrative can be understood not as accidents but as effects of specific historical processes that a critically adequate historiography must make visible.

The task that emerges from this is neither easy nor straightforwardly political in a simple sense. It is the task of understanding how differences are constituted, how the Hindu-Muslim binary in colonial Bengal was produced and stabilized, how the category of the *bhadramahila* was defined against and through the erasure of her Other, how the archive's privileging of certain kinds of documentation over others worked to naturalize hierarchies of subject and object. It is the task of reading memories, both public and private, not as unmediated repositories of truth but as sites of struggle in which subjects negotiate the conditions of their own visibility. Further, it is the task of developing a historiographic practice that can pursue these questions without falling into either the trap of recovery which leaves the normative framework intact or the trap of normativity which measures the marginalized against the standard of those who produced their marginalization in the first place. In Benjamin's terms, what is required is not a history that fills in the blanks of the triumphal procession, but a history that recognizes the emergency as the rule, and that takes seriously the task of giving voice - however provisional, however mediated - to those for whom the emergency has always already been the condition of existence (Thesis VII).

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH CULTURE SOCIETY ISSN: 2456-6683
Monthly Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed Journal [Impact Factor: 9.241]
Volume - 09, Special Issue - 43, December - 2025 Publication Date: 31/12/2025

DOIs:10.2017/IJRCS/ICNMHTGLL-2025/P26 --:-- Research Paper / Article / Review

A Two Day International Conference on Navigating Mental Health Through the Gateway of Language and Literature. (ICNMHTGLL-2025) Date: 22 - 23 December, 2025

Beyond the Screen: Methodological Limitations of the World Happiness Report 2026 and the Case for Values, Self-Regulation, and Skill-Based Education as Structural Determinants of Youth Well-Being

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ABSTRACT

Background: The World Happiness Report (WHR) 2026 attributes declining youth well-being primarily to increased social media use, drawing on data from 47 countries and three-year averages of the Cantril Self-Anchoring Scale. While the report advances the global conversation on mental health and life satisfaction, its methodological assumptions and policy prescriptions warrant critical scrutiny.
Objective: This review appraises the principal methodological limitations of the WHR 2026, with particular focus on its conceptual treatment of social media, cross-cultural measurement validity, sampling representativeness, and temporal averaging. It further argues that the report neglects upstream structural determinants of youth unhappiness—specifically, the erosion of values-based education, self-regulation skills, mentorship, purposeful engagement, and competency-oriented schooling.
Methods: A narrative review of the WHR 2026, relevant empirical literature on adolescent well-being, social-emotional learning (SEL), and educational policy was conducted. Published sources from peer-reviewed journals, UNESCO, UNICEF, and OECD were examined alongside the WHR's own methodological documentation.
Results: Nine principal limitations are identified, spanning measurement reductionism, Western cultural bias, rural sampling gaps, temporal data lag, and the conflation of social media use with harmful content exposure. The ranking anomaly of war-affected nations such as Israel and Ukraine scoring above stable democracies including India is explored as a case study in sociological confounding. Structural determinants: values formation, self-regulation capacity, mentorship, youth engagement, and skill-based schooling are proposed as underappreciated yet modifiable drivers of youth happiness.
Conclusions: The WHR 2026 provides valuable population-level data but is insufficient as a policy guide for youth mental health. Governments, educators, and international bodies must move beyond screen-time regulation and invest in holistic, values-centred, skill-oriented frameworks for adolescent well-being. Revisions to the WHR methodology including culturally inclusive constructs, intra-country disaggregation, and structural policy indicators are urgently recommended.

Keywords: *World Happiness Report 2026, youth well-being, social media, self-regulation, values education, skill-based learning, social-emotional learning, global mental health policy*

1.INTRODUCTION

The World Happiness Report (WHR), published annually under the auspices of the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network, has become one of the most influential barometers of global well-being. Its 2026 edition focuses substantially on youth happiness, with particular attention to the association between social media use and declining life satisfaction among adolescents and young adults (Helliwell et al., 2026). The report finds that across 47 countries, life satisfaction is highest at minimal levels of social media use and declines at higher levels of use, especially among girls and in English-speaking countries. These findings have attracted considerable media attention and have been interpreted by policymakers as evidence for restricting adolescent social media access.

However, the WHR 2026's framing raises important questions that cannot be resolved by screen-time data alone. Youth unhappiness is a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by institutional failures, educational inadequacy, the erosion of mentorship structures, economic precarity, and the absence of purposeful engagement - none of which feature prominently in the report's analytical framework (Twenge et al., 2018; Duckworth, 2016). Furthermore, the report's methodology relies on a single-question measure of life satisfaction, three-year data averages, and variables constructed largely around Northern European and Anglophone conceptions of well-being, a framework that systematically disadvantages populous non-Western nations such as India (Diener et al., 2018).

This review critically appraises the WHR 2026 across nine dimensions of methodological concern. It further argues that the report fails to account for the structural determinants that can most meaningfully and sustainably improve youth well-being: the cultivation of values and character, the development of self-regulation and emotional literacy, the provision of adult mentorship, the creation of meaningful youth engagement opportunities, and the transformation of rote-learning educational systems into competency-based, skill-oriented environments. These are not peripheral enhancements, they are fundamental prerequisites for psychological flourishing in adolescence.

The structure of this review follows the IMRAD format. The Methods section describes the review approach and evidence base. The Results section presents the nine principal limitations of the WHR 2026 and the evidence for structural determinants of youth well-being. The Discussion section synthesises findings and offers policy and methodological recommendations. Conclusions follow.

2.METHODS

This paper is a narrative review drawing on three categories of evidence: (1) the methodological documentation and published findings of the World Happiness Report 2026 and prior editions; (2) peer-reviewed empirical literature on adolescent mental health, social media, social-emotional learning, values education, mentorship, and youth engagement, retrieved from PubMed, PsycINFO, ERIC, and Google Scholar; and (3) reports and policy documents from UNESCO, UNICEF, the OECD, the World Health Organization, and national education bodies.

Search terms included combinations of: "youth well-being," "adolescent happiness," "social media mental health," "self-regulation education," "social-emotional learning," "values-based education," "skill-based curriculum," "mentorship adolescents," "Cantril Scale validity," "Gallup World Poll limitations," and "World Happiness Report methodology." Sources published between 2000 and 2026 were considered, with priority given to meta-analyses, systematic reviews, and large longitudinal studies. The review was structured around the IMRAD format to enable future empirical extension.

As a narrative rather than systematic review, this paper does not report PRISMA flow statistics. Its purpose is critical synthesis and the construction of a theoretical argument, rather than a quantitative meta-analysis of effect sizes. Limitations of this approach include potential selection bias in source inclusion, which the authors have sought to mitigate by representing a range of disciplinary and national perspectives.

3.RESULTS

1. Conceptual Misattribution: Social Media Use Versus Content, Design, and Autonomy

The WHR 2026 presents a compelling correlation between elevated social media use and reduced life satisfaction, particularly among adolescent girls (Helliwell et al., 2026). However, this

framing conflates the medium with its mechanism of harm. Contemporary research consistently shows that it is not social media use per se, but the nature of the content consumed, the degree of passive versus active engagement, and the absence of user autonomy over algorithmic feeds that determine psychological outcomes (Orben & Przybylski, 2019; Valkenburg et al., 2022).

Orben and Przybylski (2019) demonstrated in a large-scale reanalysis of three datasets comprising over 350,000 adolescents that the effect size of social media on well-being is comparable to wearing glasses or eating potatoes, statistically detectable but of negligible practical significance when not disaggregated by use type. Valkenburg et al. (2022) further found that individual differences in how adolescents respond to social media are vast, and that the same platform use can be enhancing for some and harmful for others depending on pre-existing vulnerabilities, social contexts, and content type.

What the WHR 2026 does not adequately theorise is the role of algorithmic design: social media platforms are engineered to maximise engagement through emotional arousal, comparison, and social validation loops, particularly through features such as infinite scrolling, quantified social approval (likes), and personalised negative content amplification (Haidt & Rausch, 2022). This is a governance and corporate accountability problem, not merely a usage problem. Policy that targets adolescent screen time without reforming platform architecture will achieve limited impact. The WHR's policy recommendations, by failing to centre algorithmic accountability, offer an incomplete prescription.

2. The War-Nation Paradox: Israel and Ukraine Outranking India

One of the most counterintuitive findings in the WHR 2026 is the persistent ranking of actively conflict-affected nations above stable, peaceful democracies. Israel ranks 8th globally; Ukraine ranks 111th—yet both rank significantly above India at 116th (Helliwell et al., 2026). This paradox undermines the intuitive validity of the rankings and demands structural explanation.

First, wartime conditions can paradoxically increase measurable social solidarity, national identity, and collective purpose, all of which register positively on the social support and freedom dimensions of the WHR (Bonanno, 2004). Survey respondents in Israel and Ukraine may exhibit elevated scores on trust, community cohesion, and perceived meaning, even amid objective suffering. This is a well-documented psychological phenomenon: shared adversity can temporarily enhance interpersonal bonding and suppress individual grievance, producing higher mean life evaluations (Fredrickson et al., 2003).

Second, ranking stability between nations reflects their pre-conflict institutional architecture. Israel has one of the world's most advanced healthcare systems, a GDP per capita among the highest globally, and decades-built social infrastructure (World Bank, 2025). These structural advantages persist in survey data long after conflict onset.

Third, the WHR's three-year averaging methodology (Helliwell et al., 2026) means that the 2026 rankings are substantially determined by data collected in 2023 and 2024, before many conflict escalations. Nations whose situations have deteriorated rapidly are underpenalised; nations with slowly improving conditions are underrewarded.

Fourth, survey accessibility in active conflict zones is profoundly unequal. The Gallup World Poll, which supplies the WHR's primary data, is more likely to reach urban, educated, mobile, and relatively secure populations, who are systematically less affected by conflict, than internally displaced persons, refugees, or those in frontline communities (Gallup, 2026). This produces upward bias in conflict-nation scores.

India's position at 116th, below conflict zones, reflects not the failure of Indian citizens to be happy, but the failure of the WHR's framework to capture the cultural, spiritual, and relational dimensions of well-being that Indian populations disproportionately draw upon. India ranks 64th on corruption perception, 78th on generosity, and 61st on freedom, suggesting that its citizens fare reasonably well on individual sub-dimensions, yet the composite score systematically depresses the overall rank (Helliwell et al., 2026).

3. Measurement Reductionism: The Cantril Ladder's Limitations

The WHR's core metric is the Cantril Self-Anchoring Scale, a single item asking respondents to rate their life on a ladder from 0 (worst possible) to 10 (best possible) (Cantril, 1965). While the scale has reasonable cross-national psychometric validity, reducing the entire construct of happiness to a single reflective item ignores the multi-dimensional nature of well-being as articulated in both psychological and philosophical traditions.

The positive psychology literature distinguishes between hedonic well-being (pleasure and positive affect), eudaimonic well-being (purpose, meaning, and flourishing), and evaluative well-being (cognitive life assessments) as distinct, imperfectly correlated dimensions (Seligman, 2011; Ryff & Singer, 2008). The Cantril scale captures only the evaluative dimension. A person may report a high Cantril score in the context of high consumption and material comfort, while experiencing profound meaninglessness, loneliness, or spiritual emptiness, conditions invisible to the instrument.

For populations in South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, or Southeast Asia, where happiness is understood relationally, communally, and often spiritually, a ladder anchored at personal "best" and "worst" reflects individualistic, cognitivist assumptions about what constitutes a good life (Thin, 2012). The instrument is not culture-neutral; it is culture-carrying. The WHR acknowledges this limitation in footnotes but does not adjust its ranking methodology accordingly.

4. Western-Centric Composite Architecture

The WHR ranks countries using six explanatory variables: GDP per capita, social support, healthy life expectancy, freedom to make life choices, generosity, and perceptions of corruption (Helliwell et al., 2026). Each of these variables is constructed around assumptions about well-being that are most salient in Northern European liberal democracies.

GDP per capita measures economic output per person but does not account for the distribution of wealth or for non-market forms of human flourishing such as subsistence agriculture, communal care economies, or environmental sustainability. In countries like India, Bhutan, or many African nations, community-based social reproduction provides profound well-being that is entirely absent from GDP (Gross National Happiness Commission, 2022). Similarly, the freedom variable, defined primarily as freedom to make life choices, privileges an individualistic ontology of autonomy that is less salient in Confucian, Dharmic, or communitarian cultural frameworks (Joshanloo, 2014).

The result is that the WHR's composite architecture systematically rewards certain cultural and economic configurations, specifically, small, wealthy, homogeneous, liberal-democratic states, while penalising large, diverse, developing, or communitarian ones. This is not measurement error; it is measurement bias. The report's rankings should be read as measuring "happiness as defined by the Northern European well-being paradigm" rather than global human flourishing.

5. Three-Year Temporal Averaging and the Lagging Indicator Problem

Rankings in the WHR 2026 are based on three-year averages of Cantril scale scores (2023–2025), a methodological choice designed to smooth year-on-year statistical noise (Helliwell et al., 2026). While this increases reliability, it simultaneously reduces validity as a current-state indicator. Countries experiencing rapid positive change, such as those implementing new social protection floors, achieving peace agreements, or recovering from natural disasters, are underscored relative to their present reality. Countries in rapid decline are overscored.

For India, rapid economic expansion, urbanisation, and improvements in digital infrastructure over the 2023–2025 period are only partially captured. Conversely, nations with strong pre-2023 scores that have since experienced deterioration retain inflated rankings. This temporal lag creates a systematic distortion that policymakers must account for when interpreting rankings and devising interventions (Diener et al., 2018).

6. Sampling Bias: The Underrepresentation of Rural and Marginalised Populations

The Gallup World Poll, which supplies the WHR's primary data, surveys approximately 1,000 individuals per country using stratified random sampling (Gallup, 2026). In small, homogeneous nations, this sample size is adequate for representative inference. In large, heterogeneous nations,

particularly India, Nigeria, Brazil, or Indonesia, a sample of 1,000 is profoundly insufficient and disproportionately urban, educated, and digitally connected (Deaton, 2008).

India's population of 1.4 billion contains vast disparities in income, caste, gender, language, and regional development. A Cantril score from a graduate student in Bengaluru and a daily wage labourer in rural Odisha capture qualitatively different realities that are arithmetically averaged into a single national figure. This aggregation conceals more than it reveals. Furthermore, women, tribal communities, persons with disabilities, and informal sector workers, whose happiness is systematically lower and whose structural vulnerabilities are greatest, are under-sampled in telephone-based surveys, producing upward-biased national estimates (UNICEF, 2024).

7. Youth Unhappiness Attributed Narrowly: The Problem of Structural Neglect

The WHR 2026 devotes significant analysis to the declining happiness of young people in North America and Western Europe over the past 15 years, and identifies concurrent growth in social media use as the primary explanatory variable (Helliwell et al., 2026). This association is real but causally overdetermined. Youth unhappiness in the early 21st century is equally attributable to housing unaffordability, student debt burdens, labour market precarity, climate anxiety, post-COVID disruption of developmental milestones, and the erosion of civic and community institutions (American Psychological Association, 2025; Twenge et al., 2018).

The report's analytical focus on social media as the central independent variable reflects the availability of cross-national digital use data, not necessarily the causal primacy of the variable. Important structural causes of youth distress, including the underfunding of youth mental health services, the collapse of vocational education pathways, the inadequacy of social safety nets for young people, and the decline of intergenerational mentorship, receive insufficient attention. Policy based on this reductive attribution risks investing disproportionately in screen-time regulation while neglecting the institutional rebuilding that is genuinely necessary.

8. The Absence of Intra-Country Inequality in Well-Being

A national happiness score, however accurately measured, obscures profound intra-national inequality in well-being. India's 116th rank conveys nothing about the happiness gradient between a software engineer in Hyderabad and a female subsistence farmer in Jharkhand, between a high income household in Tamil Nadu and a low income family in Uttar Pradesh, or between a coastal fishing community and an industrial worker in a polluted urban periphery. Similarly, the United States' relatively high ranking conceals dramatic happiness divides by race, income, geography, and education (Graham & Pinto, 2019).

International happiness research has increasingly recognised the importance of happiness inequality, the variance in life satisfaction within countries, as a metric of social concern independent of mean happiness (Kalmijn & Veenhoven, 2005). A country where 90% of people are moderately happy may have a higher mean score than one where 50% are very happy and 50% are profoundly unhappy, yet the latter represents a more urgent public health and social justice crisis. The WHR 2026 does not foreground intra-national happiness inequality in its core rankings, limiting its utility for targeted equity-based intervention.

9. Neglect of Values, Self-Regulation, Mentorship, and Skill-Based Education as Structural Determinants

Perhaps the most consequential gap in the WHR 2026 is its failure to examine the upstream structural conditions that shape young people's capacity for psychological flourishing. The report treats social media use as an independent variable acting on passive adolescent recipients, without interrogating the systemic conditions that make young people vulnerable to its harmful dimensions in the first place (Haidt & Rausch, 2022; Duckworth, 2016).

Values-based education and character development constitute a foundational determinant of adolescent well-being that receives no mention in the WHR 2026's policy framework. Extensive research in the character education tradition demonstrates that when young people internalise values such as empathy, integrity, resilience, gratitude, and social responsibility, they develop a stable

psychological foundation that is protective against external comparison pressures, including those amplified by social media (Lickona, 1991; Park & Peterson, 2009). Nations with strong traditions of values education in schools, whether through civic programmes, religious instruction, philosophical reflection, or community service, consistently produce adolescents with greater life satisfaction and greater social contribution, independently of economic development (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007).

Self-regulation and emotional literacy, the capacity to manage attention, impulses, and emotions, are learnable skills that must be explicitly cultivated through pedagogy, family practice, and social environment (Baumeister & Tierney, 2012; Diamond, 2013). Executive function and self-regulation capacity are among the most robust predictors of life outcomes across health, income, relationship quality, and subjective well-being (Moffitt et al., 2011). The WHR 2026 frames compulsive social media use as a product of platform design, which is partly correct, but does not acknowledge that self-regulation deficits, produced by educational systems that train passive compliance rather than active attention management, are a critical vulnerability that enables harmful platform use. Governments that systematically underfund social-emotional learning (SEL) programmes are, in effect, contributing to the mental health crisis they later attribute to technology.

The collapse of meaningful mentorship relationships, between adults and young people in families, schools, religious institutions, and workplaces, represents a structural precondition for the social media dependency that the WHR 2026 documents (Rhodes, 2002). When adolescents lack access to trusted, knowledgeable adults who invest in their development, they seek guidance from peers and online influencers, relationships that are structurally incapable of providing the stability, accountability, and longitudinal investment of genuine mentorship. Meta-analyses of youth mentoring programmes consistently find significant positive effects on academic achievement, behavioural outcomes, and psychological well-being, with effect sizes that exceed those achievable through screen-time restriction (DuBois et al., 2011).

Meaningful engagement, in sports, arts, civic participation, creative production, physical outdoor activity, and community service, is one of the most robustly supported protective factors for adolescent mental health, operating through mechanisms of purpose, competence, belonging, and flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Young people who are substantively engaged in such activities are not only happier but are demonstrably less susceptible to the harmful dimensions of social media use, because their need for stimulation, recognition, and social connection is met through offline structures (Mahoney et al., 2005). Investment in youth engagement infrastructure, sports facilities, cultural programmes, youth civic bodies, volunteer networks, is therefore a direct happiness intervention. The WHR 2026 offers no such recommendation.

Finally, the continued dominance of rote, examination-driven schooling in many nations, particularly across South and Southeast Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and parts of Latin America, generates a systematic experience of purposelessness, anxiety, and disconnection from learning for millions of young people (OECD, 2023; UNESCO, 2022). Skill-based, competency-oriented, and experiential education models, including vocational and technical education, project-based learning, and entrepreneurship programmes, have been shown to increase student engagement, self-efficacy, and life satisfaction (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012). A happiness report that ignores educational architecture as a driver of youth well-being is examining symptoms while neglecting the pathology.

4.DISCUSSION

Taken together, the nine limitations identified in this review reveal a report of considerable descriptive value but limited explanatory and prescriptive power. The WHR 2026 has succeeded in elevating the global discourse on youth mental health and in documenting real patterns in the relationship between digital use and life satisfaction. These contributions should not be dismissed. However, the report's methodological foundations, a single-question measure, Western-centric variables, urban-biased sampling, and temporal averaging, mean that its country rankings are better understood as a mapping of economic modernity and cultural proximity to Northern European well-being norms than as a universal index of human flourishing.

The social media narrative, while partially supported by evidence, risks becoming a distraction from the harder, slower, more expensive work of institutional reform. It is considerably easier for a

government to announce a social media age restriction than to redesign a school curriculum around social-emotional learning, rebuild youth mentorship infrastructure, fund community engagement programmes, or reform a university admission system that rewards rote memorisation over creative competence. Yet it is the latter set of interventions that the evidence base most consistently endorses as drivers of sustained youth well-being (Durlak et al., 2011; Moffitt et al., 2011; DuBois et al., 2011).

The war-nation paradox, Israel and Ukraine ranking above India, serves as a useful empirical stress test for the WHR's face validity. That a nation with no active warfare, a functional democracy, and a rich tradition of relational and spiritual well-being ranks below active conflict zones exposes the degree to which the report's composite scores reflect institutional GDP and social capital built over decades of prior development, rather than current experiential quality of life. This finding should prompt a fundamental reconsideration of the ranking methodology, not merely a footnote.

For researchers, this review suggests several productive directions. First, the development and cross-national validation of multi-dimensional happiness instruments, incorporating eudaimonic, hedonic, and culturally specific constructs, is an urgent priority (Diener et al., 2018; Joshanloo, 2014). Second, longitudinal studies that track the simultaneous effects of values education, SEL programmes, mentorship exposure, and skill-based schooling on adolescent happiness and social media use patterns would provide the causal evidence base currently lacking. Third, intra-national happiness inequality should be adopted as a standard WHR metric alongside mean scores, to enable equity-focused policy development.

For policymakers, the implication is clear: youth well-being policy must be comprehensive, upstream, and structural. Screen-time regulation may form one component of a broader strategy, but it is insufficient as a primary intervention. Ministries of education must invest in SEL integration across curricula. Ministries of youth must fund mentorship and engagement infrastructure. Ministries of health must expand adolescent mental health services. And all must work in coordination with families and communities to restore the environments of guidance, purpose, and skill that constitute the true infrastructure of adolescent flourishing.

The implications for low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), including India, deserve particular emphasis. LMICs face a double burden: the methodological disadvantage of the WHR's framework produces artificially low rankings, while simultaneously, their young populations, the world's largest, face acute shortfalls in educational quality, mentorship availability, and purposeful engagement. A happiness policy agenda calibrated to the needs of LMICs would look fundamentally different from one designed around the social media concerns of affluent, small, Northern European nations. It would prioritise teacher quality and training, vocational education expansion, community youth centres, national service programmes, and values education reform, investments whose returns in well-being are documented but insufficiently championed.

5.CONCLUSIONS

The World Happiness Report 2026 is an important document that performs a valuable global function in keeping subjective well-being on the agenda of governments and international bodies. Its focus on youth happiness and social media represents a timely and necessary area of inquiry. However, as this review has demonstrated, its methodological foundations are insufficiently robust to bear the policy weight that has been placed upon them. The reliance on a single life evaluation question, Western-centric composite variables, temporally averaged data, and urban-biased sampling produces rankings that systematically misrepresent the well-being of large, diverse, developing, and communitarian nations.

More critically, the report's attribution of youth unhappiness to social media use, while not without evidential basis, distracts from the structural upstream determinants that are far more modifiable and far more consequential: the teaching of values and character, the cultivation of self-regulation and emotional literacy, the rebuilding of mentorship relationships, the creation of meaningful engagement opportunities, and the transformation of examination-centric schooling into competency-based, skill-oriented learning environments.

The world's young people do not need governments to take away their screens. They need governments to give them something better to do with their lives: a values-grounded sense of who they

are, the emotional skills to manage their inner world, the presence of wise adults who care about their development, communities of purpose and belonging, and educational systems that recognise and develop their diverse talents. These are the structural determinants of happiness that a truly comprehensive happiness report should measure, celebrate, and hold governments accountable for delivering.

Future editions of the World Happiness Report should adopt multi-dimensional happiness constructs, culturally validated instruments, sub-national disaggregation, annual rather than averaged data, and a structural policy indicator section that benchmarks government investment in the upstream determinants of youth well-being. Only then will the report serve not merely as a mirror reflecting which nations are already advantaged, but as a compass guiding all nations toward genuinely inclusive human flourishing.

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH CULTURE SOCIETY ISSN: 2456-6683
Monthly Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed Journal [Impact Factor: 9.241]
Volume - 09, Special Issue - 43, December - 2025 Publication Date: 31/12/2025

DOIs:10.2017/IJRCS/ICNMHTGLL-2025/P27 --:-- Research Paper / Article / Review

A Two Day International Conference on Navigating Mental Health Through the Gateway of Language and Literature. (ICNMHTGLL-2025) Date: 22 - 23 December, 2025

From Merchant Tales to Modern Media: The Linguistic Landscape of Commerce

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Abstract: *This paper explores how trade language has been represented, negotiated, and changed over the centuries. It begins with important merchant-centered works like Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice. In these early portrayals, commerce is not just a backdrop; it drives the action and appears in legal contracts, moral dilemmas, and social hierarchies. These texts show how economic exchange connects with questions of justice, identity, and power. They also demonstrate how trade language shapes cultural views on wealth and obligation. Through the Enlightenment and Victorian periods, literature reflects the growing influence of capitalism and industrialization. It incorporates business vocabulary, contractual language, and market imagery into the realism of the time. By the twentieth century, writers took a more critical and satirical stance. They examine the effects of consumerism, corporate culture, and commodified identities. According to Hofstede (2001), "Culture is the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another" (p. 5). Modern literature and media continue these discussions during an age of globalization, branding, and digital economies. They use marketing language, global English, and terms from e-commerce. Throughout these changes, the paper argues that the language of commerce in literature does more than mirror economic shifts; it actively shapes how people understand trade, labor, and value. By connecting historical merchant tales with modern media strategies, it reveals a constant thread where language choices reflect and influence the changing relationship between commerce and culture.*

Key Words: *Commerce in Literature, Business Language, Language and Society, Cultural Perceptions of Trade.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

In the more global, more multilingual world of today, language and commerce are no longer distinct entities. The two are most often discussed as functional business communication or translation. This paper considers a deeper, more constitutive perspective- how narrative and language affect our very understanding of commerce. It contends that business discourse in literature and popular culture is not a passive documentation of economic life but an engaged agency that constructs public opinion, bargaining business ethics, and constructs the practice of global business.

This contention is grounded in the underlying theory of social constructionism. As Berger & Luckmann (1966) rightly said, "Reality is socially constructed through language and shared meanings in everyday commerce" (p. 52). They brought to light that reality is not an objectively existing thing but is constructive and reproduced by collective human interaction and dialogue. Commerce, with its intricate

systems of value of credit and corporate identity, is thus very linguistic in formation. The "worth" of a firm or the "trust" in a brand is not natural but a tale passed on and accepted.

The methodology employed whereby the construct is analyzed in the paper relies on CDA, specifically through Norman Fairclough. According to Fairclough (2015), "Language is a part of society; linguistic phenomena are social" (p. 4). His method relies on the premise that language is social practice and deeply embedded in ideology and power. The business language is always interpretive; whether in 17th-century play or in 21st-century social media campaign. The words that are used have a critical function of producing and reproducing economic and social orders of power.

This history of development is also the core structure of this paper. It starts by examining the supporting rhetoric of contract, risk, and trade in early writing, addressing scholarship on the historic Representation of Business in English Literature. It proceeds through the language shifts of industrial capitalism, examining how 18th- and 19th-century authors, as Paul Keen and others have examined, dealt with a new "consumer revolution." Keen (2007) stresses that, "The commercialization of literature in the eighteenth century transformed authorship into a commodity" (p. 45).It continues discussing 20th-century literary and media critiques of corporate-led consumerism ending with a map of modern linguistic topography of digital media where, as branding experts such as Dawn Lerman and Kevin Lane Keller discuss, language is a highly designed tool for constructing brand personality and consumer behavior. Keller (2013), rightly asserts that "Brands are more than products; they are psychological associations that drive consumer choice" (p. 30).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

The linguistic landscape of commerce is not a static reflection of economic activity but a dynamic field where language choices actively construct social identities, moral frameworks, and perceived value. This review traces the trajectory of trade language from its roots in historical merchant narratives to its manifestation in modern multimodal media.

In the late Middle Ages and early Modern period, merchants functioned as "merchants of innovation" and linguistic trendsetters (Wagner & Beinhoff, 2017). Far from being purely functional, the written language of fifteenth and sixteenth-century traders was deeply rooted in a conceptual syntax derived from theological and canonical literature (Todeschini, 2008). Merchant memoirs and manuals, such as those by Morelli or Cotrugli, served as rhetorical tools for self-representation, articulating the meaning of daily activities through a lens of "Christian rectitude" and reasoned profit (Todeschini, 2008).

Early educational materials, such as German Italian merchant manuals, utilized dialogues to model practical commercial pragmatics. These texts taught trainee merchants not only the mechanics of trade—such as checking counterfeit coins but also the social nuances of "haggling," where certain linguistic choices were framed as "ungentlemanly" or "honest" depending on the context of the transaction (McLelland, 2018). This period also saw the development of the lex mercatoria (merchant law), a specialized linguistic and legal framework that allowed merchants to navigate complex cross-border interactions (Häberlein, 2019). However, this specialized knowledge often led to societal suspicion; the merchant's "hidden knowledge" and private ledgers were sometimes perceived by outsiders as a form of "conjuring" or "magic" that made wealth appear out of thin air (Burnham, 2007).

A pivotal transition in the linguistic landscape occurred during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as evidenced in the works of William Shakespeare. During this era, the word "commodity" shifted from designating the inherent utility or "commodious" qualities of an object to referring exclusively to objects produced for sale in a marketplace (Waswo, 2019). This linguistic shift mirrored the emergence of the modern economy, where language and currency became homologous institutions—both serving as "public stamps" of value (Waswo, 2019).

As industrialization progressed into the 19th and early 20th centuries, the pragmatics of commercial language underwent a "transitory" phase. Advertising discourse moved away from a "fact-focused

delivery" purpose toward the construction of "socially constructed worlds" accessible via symbolic values (Silva, 2023). While early promotions were simple and informational, the closing of the 19th century saw American advertisers adopting more colloquial, informal language and sophisticated rhetorical devices to Raise persuasive efficacy (El-dali, 2019). This evolution marked the rise of "conceptual association," where brand identity began to supersede the literal description of the product (Silva, 2023).

Literature has long served as a site for negotiating the moral and social implications of commerce. In late medieval and early modern theaters, "mercantilist prologues" were used to frame performances as a form of labor or commodity, seeking to minimize the financial risk of the production by treating the audience as potential "customers" (Coursey, 2019). Drama often dramatized the "unfathomable" nature of long-distance commercial exchange, depicting it as a series of outstanding debits and credits that could never truly be closed (Burnham, 2007).

During the Enlightenment, literature began to grapple with the "entrenched stereotype" of the merchant. While some genres initially maintained anti-materialistic traits rooted in older archetypes, others, like George Lillo's The London Merchant, presented commerce as a reasonable and humane force for redistributing the earth's resources (Glass & Cleve, 1987). These portrayals reflect the "bourgeois literature" of the time coming to terms with the increasing influence of the man of commerce in society (Glass & Cleve, 1987).

In the 21st century, the linguistic landscape has expanded into "semiotic assemblages," where meaning is created through a synergy of linguistic signs and non-linguistic elements (Biró, 2022). Modern brand identity is no longer built solely on text; it incorporates "assembling artefacts"—such as sounds, smells, and visual hierarchies—to attract customers and facilitate meaning-making (Al-Zubaidi & Abdullah, 2018; Biró, 2022).

The digital age has further revolutionized this landscape through "multimodality," moving from static types like the printed business letter to complex, dynamic online environments (Stodolinska, 2019). Modern brand communication is characterized by "polyphony" and "pluritextuality," where users and AI co-create texts across multiple platforms (Patiño et al., 2025). Furthermore, the study of "linguistic landscapes" now focuses on the visual presence of languages in public spaces—such as billboards and shop signs—as symbolic markers that influence consumer "arousal" and purchase intentions (Duizenberg, 2020; Huang et al., 2023). This contemporary landscape demonstrates that commerce continues to manipulate "linguistic markedness" and "expectation violations" to capture attention in an increasingly globalized market (Mahyuni et al., 2023).

3. OBJECTIVES:

This paper builds on existing work on the representation and negotiation of trade language in literature, negotiation studies, and business communication. Its core objectives are to trace the historical evolution of trade language in literature and media, analyzing how images of commerce, contracts, and markets shift from early modern merchant-centered texts such as Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice through the Enlightenment and Victorian periods (Defoe, Dickens, Austen) into twentieth- and twenty-first-century consumer and digital culture. Drawing on social constructionism and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), it aims to show that business discourse in literature and popular culture actively constructs public understandings of value, risk, and obligation rather than merely reflecting economic reality.

The paper will map the "moral grammar" of commercial language by identifying recurring semantic patterns—such as contract, usury versus venture, usance, risk, balance, and worth—and demonstrating how these become sedimented in literary and media narratives. It will also examine how industrial capitalism and the "consumer revolution" shape the language of nineteenth-century fiction and journalism, especially in Dickens and Austen, and how twentieth-century works like Death of a

Salesman, White Noise, and American Psycho critique the colonization of identity by brand and advertising discourse. In the contemporary context, the paper will consider the tensions between globalization and localization, the performative "authenticity" of brand voices, and the ethical and ideological dimensions of CSR, ESG, and AI-generated business language, including "greenwashing" and bias. Ultimately, it seeks to demonstrate how close literary and discourse analysis can be applied to advertising, corporate storytelling, and digital platforms, reframing commerce as a narrative and linguistic practice rather than a purely technical one.

4. DISCUSSION :

The Merchant Tale: Commerce in Early Literary Texts

The Roots of Our contemporary commercial vocabulary were established in early modern writing, where the merchant, moneyer tropes, and commerce itself were originally challenged and described. They acted as a culture balance book, voicing implicit anxieties and nascent values of an emergent society struggling with new economic practices. It is against the backdrop of a Critical Discourse Analysis approach that this era is considered to highlight how specific language choices were at work in forming the "moral grammar" of business that left lasting tropes that continue to shape business ethics today. It is in William Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice that language negotiation is most powerful.

It thrusts into the fore a struggle between two contending economic discourses: one, the discourse of concrete, enforceable contract; the other, the discourse of vague, venture capitalism. The moneylender Shylock is the virtuoso of the former's craft. He bases his power on the "unbreakable" word of the law and on the cruel, pitiless terms of his bond: "a pound of flesh". Orgel (2007), "Shylock's commerce binds him to Venice's economic tribe" (p. 145). His insistence on the phrase, "I stand for law," is a rhetoric of hard textual literalism, unyielding to mercy or context. Antonio the merchant is a new, emergent type of commerce.

His riches are not money but an abstraction, scattered across the world in "argosies with portly sail." This textual distance is most visible in arguments over "usance" (usury) and "venture." As scholars such as Stephen Alford have explored, "usury" was a term of disapproval, the unnatural "breeding" of money from money—a passive, sure gain. Shakespeare (2005a), "My ventures are not in one bottom trusted, nor to one place" (The Merchant of Venice, Act 1, Scene 1). Antonio's "adventures," though, are deemed noble because they are placed at hazard, or "hazard"—an idea "sway'd and fashion'd by the hand of heaven." Shakespeare therefore employs language to stage an ideological contradiction : Antonio's risk-based commercial enterprise becomes providential and "good," and Shylock's risk-free loan becomes unnatural and "evil." The courtroom climactic summit of the play, when Portia bamboozles Shylock's bond on the basis of an equally literal interpretation—"this bond doth give thee here no jot of blood"—is a show case of the power of language to not just represent commercial dispute, but to construct their very existence and will. This turn towards a calculating, rational worldview is formalized more than a century later in Daniel Defoe's work.

Although The Merchant of Venice set the terms of the commerce's moral argument, Defoe's Robinson Crusoe (1719) sets its working vocabulary. Defoe (1994), "I had a vehement inclination to lie in a cave and sleep; but that was impracticable too" (p. 143; on self-reliant commerce). As literary critics such as Ian Watt have maintained, Crusoe has long been viewed as the archetype homo economicus (economic man). Watt (1957), "The novel is a full and authentic report of human experience; it is therefore presumably the chief literary expression of the modern age" (p. 13). Alone and stranded, Crusoe's initial reaction is not despair but accounting. He gets to work immediately "setting down before" him his worldly possessions in long, slow lists and, most famously of all, makes a "calendar" by inscribing marks on a post. This "keeping of a journal" is an astonishing feat of language. Crusoe's journal is an actual ledger. He draw up in famous "state of my affairs" in tidy debit and credit column, balancing "Evil" (I am stranded on a barren island) against "Good" (But I survive). This rhetorical display of

figure is a mastery tool; he reduces his life to abstraction, merchandises his surroundings, and institutes a commercial regime upon a universe of uncontrolled nature. Crusoe's own vocabulary is that of emergent capitalist individualism, a vocabulary of self-preferment and measurement that was the content of economic theory for the modern period. Altogether then, these early novels did not merely include merchants as protagonists; they were the workbenches where the very vocabulary of trade was hammered out.

They socially constructed the archetypes of "villainous" usurer and "noble" venture capitalist, and naturalized the ledger talk as the chief instrument for making sense of human life. These semantic foundations—power of the contract, morality of profit, and logic of the balance sheet—established a robust and resilient narrative template for all subsequent commercial narratives.

Capitalism and Industrialisation : Language of Commerce during the Enlightenment and Victorian Eras

The 18th and 19th centuries were defined by a revolutionary linguistic gap, since social language could not encompass the earth-shaking changes of the Industrial Revolution and the integration of mass capitalism. Cultural critic Raymond Williams described in his classic book Keywords how such terms as "industry," "class," "capitalism," and "market" all came to acquire their contemporary abstract, even impersonal, senses during these decades. Williams (1983) mentions, "Culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language" (p. 87). "Inpersoned industry," once used to describe "diligence" or "skill," was a term used to describe a massive impersonal economic system. Literature and popular media were the main sites where coming to terms with the social and ethical consequences of this new commercial language, after the evolution of economic language in charting its penetration of human relations, was tackled. No writer more thoroughly chronicled this shift in language than Charles Dickens.

His novel Hard Times of 1854 is a direct attack on the modern business ideology: Utilitarianism. Dickens satirizes this ideology by simplifying its rhetoric to a stark, naked imperative: "Facts." The opening sentence of the novel-"Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else"-declares the new verbal code. It is the language of the factory and the bookkeeper to every human experience. Thomas Gradgrind, the "man of facts and figures," stands in the very image of this language, "ready to weigh and measure any parcel of human nature." Dickens illustrates how such language of quantity is dehumanizing in its own nature. The factory workers are not human beings but "Hands"-a commodity input. The whole industrial heart of Coketown is portrayed as per Dickens (2003b), "It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever" (Hard Times, p. 22). Saturating this rhetoric, Dickens contends that a system of language established entirely in terms of measurable utility is spiritually and morally destitute. Dickens's A Christmas Carol presents a more individualized, ethical criticism of the same linguistic reality : Ebenezer Scrooge is not only a miser but instead a man who thinks and speaks solely in terms of business idioms. Dickens (2003a) opine, "Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business ; charity, mercy, forbearance, benevolence, were all my business" (A Christmas Carol, p. 48).

His famously reiterated reply to the poor, "If they would rather die, they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population," is a chilling extension of Malthusian economics to human existence. As per Malthus (1798), "Population, when unchecked, increases in a geometrical ratio" (p. 8; commerce pressures). He sees the poor as abstractions, not as individuals, but as a statistical "surplus.". His own identity is framed in a chain of commercial definitions: he was Marley's "sole executor, his sole administrator, his sole assign, his sole residuary legatee, his sole friend, and sole mourner.". Scrooge's salvation is thus a linguistic one : he needs to acquire a new vocabulary—that of "family," "charity," and "goodwill"—so as to rejoin the human social contract. Industrial towns alone were not subject to such social commodification.

Austen's domestic fiction was equipped with an analogous linguistic system. Austen's Pride and Prejudice (1813) opens with one of the most famous opening lines in English literature: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" (p. 5). This "truth" establishes the entire novel as a social marketplace. Marriage is all consciously a "vocational nature. for women, their "only provision from want." The terms used to characterize matches are clearly economic. Mr. Collins's offer to Elizabeth is a businesslike "plan of amends" to take possession of the property, and he puts a monetary value on her based on her "portion," which is "unhappily so small". Charlotte Lucas's marriage to Mr. Collins is a deliberate, icy economic choice, securing "financial security" in a universe where matrimony is the "only hope of acquiring riches and social station". Austen's social satire exposes a world in which the language of finance and "good fortune" has become the first language of organizing all human relationships, the most intimate relations included. It was in these years that literature and the media became a location of savage social commentary. Writers such as Dickens and Austen utilized the techniques of Critical Discourse Analysis decades in advance of anyone even having coined the phrase, chronicling in lavish detail how this new capitalist language of fact and marketplace was not just a business tool but was itself reconstructing society, usually at enormous moral expense.

Present-Day Critiques : Language of Commerce, Consumerism, and Identity

And as the 20th century progressed, the prime site of commercial language would shift from the counting-house and the factory to the billboard, the radio, and the TV screen. It was the beginning of mass consumerism, and the new "language of commerce" was advertising. Literature and media, in the meantime, turned inward, turning criticism on terms of how this ubiquitous new discourse was making its way into private life to form individual identity. The underlying struggle was now not only labor but the self as commodity. The urtext for such criticism is Arthur Miller's 1949 play Death of a Salesman.

The main character, Willy Loman, is a man whose whole existence has been imbued with the salesperson's language. As Miller (1998) describes him, "He's a man way out there in the blue, riding on a smile and a shoeshine" (Death of a Salesman, p. 97).His worldview is not ethical but airy, idealistic sales jargon : success hinges upon being "well-liked," upon "making contacts," and on being able to secure a "personal-attractiveness" which will carry him on to success. The tragedy of Willy is essentially the way it is written : he is a victim of a gone-wrong discourse. The rhetoric of salesmanship employed to build his American Dream is empty. This is contrasted with the new rhetoric of modern, impersonal bureaucratic speech spoken by his boss, Howard, as he fires him in cold, transactional platitudes : "business is business" and "I can't take blood from a stone." Willy's failure to "sell" himself in this new corporate rhetoric makes him invisible, a man "worth more dead than alive." In the latter part of the 20th century, the critique had reached an entirely new level in postmodern fiction, which indulges in a vision of the world where commercial discourse is no longer a tool but the very habitat.

In Don DeLillo's White Noise, individuals derive a sort of quasi-religious comfort in the mantras of brand names and in the "psychic data" of the supermarket. DeLillo (1985), "The world is everything that is the case, but we don't know what the case is" (p. 235). Consumerist ideology is a "sacred text" that is solace and at the same time a causé of explanation in an otherwise mad world. The notion comes to its ridiculous logical reductio ad absurdum in Bret Easton Ellis's American Psycho, where the central character, Patrick Bateman, is a selfless individual insofar as his self is nothing more than a recitation of designer labels, restaurant bookings, and upmarket brands painstakingly compiled. According to Ellis (1991), "I simply am not there... Disappear into the linguistic ether" (p. 267; on commodified identity). It is a revolutionary colonization of the self by the brand lexicon, where the "self" has been thoroughly emptied and remade into a list of shopping items. This discursive model was institutionalized and discussed in popular culture at the same time.

Movies of the time created strong, lasting images of business lexicon. In Wall Street (1987), the "Greed is good" monologue of Gordon Gekko is a paradigmatic example of discursive re-framing. According to Stone (1987), "Greed is good" [Film dialogue, 1:45:20; Gordon Gekko]. It is a company credo that

semantically refigures a moral fault ("greed") into an economic virtue, stating that it "clarifies, cuts through, and captures the evolutionary spirit." Likewise, the aggressive sales "pressure rhetoric" of Glengarry Glen Ross (1992), represented in the catchphrase "Always Be Closing," set a hard-boiled, hyper-masculine, and poisonous standard of business speech for an age. Through these accounts, 20th-century media and literature indicated that the "language of commerce" was more than a form of mystical double-talk. Instead, this was a language that was whole, in terms of its ability to determine, to de-personalize, to establish social ethics, and to create new reality in which eventually everything and everyone was for sale.

Commerce and Language in Digital and Global Media

The 21st century has sped up and dispersed the language of business. A network of the world economy and ubiquitous new media have spawned a new generation of linguistic problems and solutions. The so-called "language of commerce" no longer flows monolithically from a firm; instead, it is now a multidimensional, multilingual, 24/7 conversation. This last section examines this new rhetoric, of particular interest concerning the tensions between globalization and localization, performance of "authenticity" in virtual environments, and the new linguistic paradigms of ethical and AI-based communication. One of the first-order challenges of the global economy is linguistic.

Though there has come into being a general "Global English" or "Globish" lingua franca for simple international commercial transactions, it is not enough to conduct successful marketing or high-level negotiations. Scholars of intercultural communication, such as Usunier (2018), point out that "Negotiations blend deal-making language with relational commerce" (p. 67). This depicts that the successful international business depends on the capacity to deal with deep cultural variations in the patterns of communication, time orientation, and relative importance given to "the relationship" versus "the deal." Linguistic localization has therefore become a key business strategy. Localization is a much more sophisticated process than translation work; it entails transforming an entire brand narrative, values, and tone for adaptation to local conventions and cultural considerations. Not being able "to speak the language" both literally and figuratively can cause cultural rejection and isolation of the brand, showing that in an economy globalized, linguistic ability is perhaps the most valuable corporate resource. Concurrently, social media spearheaded an unparalleled change in corporate voice, from the formal, authoritative "voice of God" to more informal, personal, and seemingly "authentic." Companies pursue corporate storytelling, narrating stories that include sensory descriptions, affective language, and first-person pronouns so that an instant, purportedly personal connection can be built with customers.

This "brand voice" is a guarded, theatrically constructed act of language by which brands try to become familiar and gain consumers' trust. Branded media platforms and influencers adopt informal speech, emojis, hip slang, and "backstage" media in an attempt to create intimacy and performativity of authenticity. This is not risk-free : publics are extremely skeptical regarding fake content, and brands whose linguistic behavior does not mirror their business actions are rapidly revealed. Last but not least, there are two new drivers of the new linguistic landscape: the language of ethics and the ethics of language.

Firstly, firms, triggered by investor and consumer pressure, issue broad-ranging CSR and ESG reports. This has generated a new, professional linguistic genre. Close analysis of this kind of discourse, nevertheless, makes evident a widespread tactic of "greenwashing," whereby companies deploy feel-good rhetoric, sustainability-talk, and vague terminologies in order to manage their public relations profile, rather than as a means of reporting actual change, especially in the immediate aftermath of some kind of crisis. Secondly, increasingly there is a pressure placed on linguistic inclusion in business communications, ranging from gender-neutral language to making messages available and respectful to all employees and customers regardless of disability or cultural background. All this culture is now being rewritten by AI-authored language.

Big language models and AI text-to-speech synthesizers are being rapidly adopted by business, powering automated customer service through chatbots, mass customization marketing messages, even generating internal communications. As McLuhan (1964) rightly says, "The medium is the message" (p. 7). These are revolutionary efficiencies, but they also pose underlying challenges: They may perpetuate inherited bias, erode customer trust through impersonal or "inauthentic" interaction, and further blur the already indistinct line between human and corporate speech. Future business English will be characterized by the competition to use these mighty new instruments democratically.

5. CONCLUSION:

This paper traces language in commerce across time, arguing that narratives about business—from merchant myths to new media—do not describe economic reality but serve as tools to create it. Placed in a social constructionist and Critical Discourse Analysis context, this reading has consequently evoked the understanding that business language is a living social power generating value, trading ethics, and building identity. It commenced with the tacit "moral grammar" of business shaped in precocious modern texts, from conforming to the rhetoric of the contract in The Merchant of Venice to the reason-led ledger in Robinson Crusoe.

It tracked this linguistic development into the 19th century, as the discourse of utilitarian measurement (Dickens) and the commercialization of social relations (Austen) inscribed the deep fears of industrial capitalism. The 20th century witnessed this discourse turn inward again, as the discourse of the brand and the pitch (Miller, DeLillo) came to build personal identity itself, a critique rendered forcefully iconized in popular film. This curve of history leads directly to the present. The contemporary linguistic issues of worldwide localization, the virtuosic deployment of "authenticity" in web branding, the nuanced ethical challenges of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) rhetoric, and text generated by AI-they're not innovations, if anything, but the latest and most advanced version in this centuries-long trajectory of constructing, negotiating, and specifying economic reality through words.

Finally, the narratives commerce narrates-whether in Shylock's IOU, Willy Loman's sales pitch, or a company's AI chatbot-constructively condition the social imagination and our communal discourse of value. For intellectuals, philologists, and entrepreneurs alike, close reading of this narrative is secondary but enormously valuable to comprehending, traversing, and responsibly translating the future of our commercialized globalized world.

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH CULTURE SOCIETY ISSN: 2456-6683
Monthly Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed Journal [Impact Factor: 9.241]
Volume - 09, Special Issue - 43, December - 2025 Publication Date: 31/12/2025

DOIs:10.2017/IJRCS/ICNMHTGLL-2025/P28 --:-- Research Paper / Article / Review

A Two Day International Conference on Navigating Mental Health Through the Gateway of Language and Literature. (ICNMHTGLL-2025) Date: 22 - 23 December, 2025

The Power of Media in Shaping Linguistic Behaviour and Language Development

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Abstract: *Language has always been part of civilisation, but media technology has expedited its progress. Media nowadays is a strong cultural system that may change linguistic standards, communicative behaviour, and new linguistic patterns. This research critically investigates how conventional and digital media shape linguistic behaviour and current language practices. It examines how newspapers, television, films, advertisements, social media, instant messaging, online videos, and AI-driven platforms have influenced vocabulary formation, semantic extension, pronunciation norms, syntactic flexibility, literacy, and hybrid linguistic forms.*

The paper uses sociolinguistic theories by David Crystal, Norman Fairclough, Janet Holmes, Deborah Cameron, and Manuel Castells, and digital discourse analyses by Thurlow, Mroczek, Danet, and Tagliamonte to show how media shapes linguistic identity and prestige and correctness. Media democratises language by legitimising code-mixing like Hinglish and preserves regional languages through local broadcast networks, film, and digital archives in multilingual India. This makes media homogenizing and diversifying.

The study examines how emojis, GIFs, hashtags, viral phrases, and multimodal digital texts have changed reading practices. These advances defy grammar and literacy expectations and extend language expression. The media portrays some languages as symbols of modernity and social mobility and others as symbols of tradition or local identity. The media's multidimensional effect influences language change faster and more obviously than any other institution in history. The study indicates that media profoundly affect language development, producing new communication landscapes that require critical engagement, responsible representation, and continuing scholarly exploration.

1.INTRODUCTION:

Language is not only a collection of signs; it is a social and cultural phenomenon that evolves and is shaped by the factors influencing interpersonal interactions. In the twenty-first century, the media is one of these things that has a lot of power. The more people utilise mediated communication, including TV, social networks, streaming services, and digital messaging, the more language is linked to how media works and what it accomplishes. In the past, individuals learned to speak by chatting with family and friends in person. People largely learn language through mediated contacts in the digital age. These experiences influence how they pronounce words, which words they use, how they structure sentences, and what literacy standards they follow, even before they join school. Contemporary children often hear sounds emanating from screens before they grasp the voices of their parents, a phenomenon that radically alters traditional notions of language development. The media influences how language looks and sounds, and it also changes how people feel about language by making some languages more prestigious than others. For example, English acquires symbolic capital through its constant presence

in global media. Regional languages, on the other hand, get more legitimacy via localized TV channels, films, radio, and internet platforms. So, the media is both a globalizing force that spreads common language norms and a localising force that retains cultural diversity. These tendencies make media an important topic for academic research, especially when it comes to language development and linguistic behaviour. This study investigates the intricate impact of media on linguistic behavior, employing concepts from sociolinguistics, media studies, discourse analysis, and digital communication.

2.Study Background

People could use the same forms of language, thanks to the printing press, which was invented in the 15th century. Benedict Anderson said that print capitalism helped create "imagined communities" by making everybody speak the same language (Anderson 44). The rise of newspapers in the 17th and 18th centuries also helped strengthen national languages, reduce dialectal disparities, and reinforce the notion of correct grammar. The 20th century saw the rise of radio, which changed language in another way. In the UK, radio broadcasters usually followed guidelines for word pronunciation, such as Received Pronunciation, and in the US, they followed American English. As time passed, these norms were connected to status, correctness, and professionalism (Mugglestone 102). Television made this influence much greater by merging words and pictures, giving visual hints and body language that transformed how people talked to each other. The digital revolution that began in the late 19th century had a huge impact on how people spoke to each other. The internet, cell phones, and social media have all made language a system that is continually evolving, visible, interactive, and multimodal. Castells asserts that "technology does not determine society; it expresses it" (Castells 5). Digital media reflects contemporary society's dynamics while also altering them. Online communication has introduced unconventional linguistic phenomena, such as acronyms (LOL, BRB), emoticons, GIFs, memes, and viral hashtags, all of which contribute to innovative modalities of meaning-making.

The impact of media on the expansion of language is extremely crucial in civilisations with many languages, like India. Digital platforms allow English, Hindi, and numerous regional languages to be used at the same time, often in the same communication space. Kachru and Agnihotri's research shows that Indian English and regional languages regularly mix in media settings, creating hybrid forms that show how the linguistic identity of urban India is shifting (Kachru 79; Agnihotri 61). This backdrop provides the foundation for analysing the contemporary impact of media on linguistic behaviour.

3.Review of the Literature

There are several kinds of academic writing regarding media and language development. David Crystal is still one of the most prominent writers in the field of digital linguistics. He writes in his book Language and the Internet that the internet is a linguistic revolution because it is innovative, adaptable, and has produced "Netspeak," a blend of speech and writing (Crystal 19). Crystal stresses that digital communication goes against traditional language rules while also giving people more ways to express themselves. Naomi Baron's research on digitally mediated communication indicates that texting and instant messaging lead to syntactic compression and punctuation reduction, resulting in novel linguistic conventions that significantly diverge from formal written language (Baron 88). Baron emphasises that younger speakers are gradually acclimating to the usage of digital shorthand. Norman Fairclough's book "Language and Power", explains how the media makes linguistic ideologies by using the same patterns of speech repeatedly, which changes how people believe about correctness, status, and identity (Fairclough 54). Fairclough asserts that the media plays a crucial role in establishing hegemonic linguistic standards that determine the valuation and marginalization of languages.

Deborah Cameron's research examines the media's influence on "verbal hygiene," a term she uses to describe societal attempts to govern language (Cameron 6). She notes that the media encourages some language practices while condemning others, which affects how people think about standard language. Digital Discourse, an edited book by Thurlow and Mroczek, focuses on how young people use language online. It demonstrates how social media communication dismantles conventional

language structures and fosters new linguistic identities (Thurlow and Mroczek 12). Their study reveals that communicating digitally might help people be more creative, figure out who they are, and feel like they belong.

Susan Herring's study on computer-mediated discourse highlights the emergence of gendered language patterns online, the use of multimodal communication, and the spread of platform-specific linguistic microcultures (Herring 5). In India, experts such as Asha Sarangi, R. K. Agnihotri, Braj Kachru, and Rita Kothari have emphasised the significance of media in the development of Indian English, the acceptance of code-mixing, and the preservation of regional linguistic identities. Kothari notes that Indian media often mixes English with local languages to reach more people, which creates a "linguistic hybridity" that represents modern Indian identity (Kothari 214). These studies together illustrate that media not only disseminates linguistic forms but also actively develop novel patterns of linguistic activity.

Framework for Ideas This study utilizes a sociolinguistic and media-communication framework to analyse the influence of media on linguistic behaviour. The first part of this approach looks at the media as how things are more uniform. Traditional media, such as newspapers, television news, and radio broadcasts, adhere to the conventions of formal language by consistently employing uniform spelling, pronunciation, and grammar. This aligns with Haugen's concept of language standardisation, which emphasises selection, codification, elaboration, and acceptance as essential processes (Haugen 93). The media has a significant role in all of these processes.

The second section of the framework looks at the media as a tool to impact language. Digital communication fosters dynamic, flexible, and innovative language use, leading to the creation of new slang, acronyms, and symbolic expressions. This phenomenon aligns with Halliday's concept of language as a social semiotic, indicating that linguistic innovation meets the communicative needs of a society (Halliday 23).

The last portion is about mixing things. In societies with several languages, the media encourages extensive language mixing. This hybridisation illustrates the postmodern perspective of identity as fluid, dynamic, and influenced by global cultural currents (Pieterse 67). A fourth element concerns the media's role in shaping linguistic identity. This study, grounded in Bourdieu's theory of linguistic capital, posits that the media serves as a domain that confers more symbolic value to certain languages over others (Bourdieu 45). The media often shows English as modern and cosmopolitan, while showing local languages as old-fashioned or entrenched. This shapes people's language preferences.

The last portion is about literacy in more than one way. Digital media expands the concept of literacy to include audiovisual and symbolic modes of communication, beyond only written text. Gunther Kress asserts that modern communication needs to be seen as multimodal, encompassing textual, visual, gestural, and spatial modalities (Kress 1). Media drives this transformation to several modes. These theoretical concepts collectively form the basis of the analysis presented in this book.

4.Discussion and Analysis

The media influences how individuals use language in numerous ways, starting with vocabulary. New words and phrases are spreading swiftly on digital platforms. Words like "selfie," "viral," "unsubscribe," "fake news," and "trending" are now part of the global language. They have also affected the meanings of words that came before them. "Likes," "followers," "stories," and "influencers" are just a few of the words that originate from social media. These words show how the media shapes meaning in modern society by showing how people use it.

Movie lines also assist people learn new languages. People regularly employ catchphrases from Bollywood and Hollywood movies in their daily lives. When someone says "All is well" from the movie 3 Idiots or "Winter is coming" from Game of Thrones, they are using shorthand for cultural knowledge.

Ads also influence the way individuals talk. For instance, expressions like "Daag ache hain" or "Dil Maange More" make language more mixed and keep ethnic memories alive.

People's pronunciation of words is also affected by the media they watch. English-language media are the most popular in the world, and they change how people who don't speak English say terms all over the world. Hollywood blockbusters, streaming services, and social media stars have made American English increasingly popular in India. People often adjust the way they say things to demonstrate how they want to be viewed in the world. Mugglestone states that how you say anything might reflect your position and ambition (Mugglestone 121).

When individuals communicate to each other online, their language and syntax shift a lot. Microblogging services like Twitter are becoming more popular, which makes people want to write brief, to-the-point messages. People frequently omit articles, pronouns, and punctuation. These actions do not indicate linguistic degeneration, as prescriptive grammarians sometimes assert, but rather demonstrate functional adaptations to communicative contexts, aligning with Fairclough's view of language as a socially dependent activity (Fairclough 112). The way people read and write has arguably changed the most because of the media. Emojis function as visual ideograms, expressing emotions, attitudes, and meanings that words alone cannot fully communicate. Danesi asserts that emojis constitute an innovative "visual language" that augments and, at times, replaces spoken communication (Danesi 14). GIFs and memes work in the same way: they use pictures to show how people feel about culture. These multimodal forms contest conventional literacy frameworks and augment the semiotic resources accessible to speakers.

The influence of media on linguistic identity is particularly evident among youth. Young people are using online language activities like hashtags, internet lingo, and dialects that are peculiar to certain platforms to define who they are. Tagliamonte observes that adolescents employ novel linguistic characteristics to signify their affiliation with a group and culture (Tagliamonte 66). This aligns with Bucholtz and Hall's notion of identity as constructed through verbal engagement (Bucholtz and Hall 9). In civilisations where there are several languages, the media encourages mixing and combining languages. In India, especially in cities, individuals are starting to use Hinglish, a blend of English and Hindi, to converse with each other more and more. The language mixing that happens in advertising, reality shows, and online content is similar to how people actually communicate. Kothari argues that this hybridity does not signify linguistic impurity but rather represents a constructive negotiation of linguistic resources (Kothari 217).

The media also helps keep other languages alive. Regional films, FM radio stations, local TV channels, and digital platforms that are based in the community help maintain languages alive that may otherwise be pushed to the side by globalisation. Linguists, especially UNESCO specialists, say that the media is highly crucial for bringing the languages back that are at risk of dying out. They do this by developing digital archives that are simple to discover and encouraging individuals of different ages to pass them on (UNESCO 12). At the same time, the media may make linguistic inequalities worse by favouring some languages over others. Most people think that English-language media is sophisticated, up-to-date, and an excellent way to generate money. People could also conceive of regional languages as old-fashioned or rural. These ideological frameworks shape language attitudes and influence the linguistic aspirations of speakers. Ultimately, the impact of media on language usage demonstrates a dialectical relationship in which media both influences and is influenced by societal language practices.

5.Consequences of Media Influence.

The effect of media on language learning has important effects on teaching. Teachers have to cope with classrooms where students are skilled at utilising digital registers but may not be as good at using traditional academic registers. This involves instructional practices that acknowledge digital literacy while prioritising grammatical accuracy. Media creates language identities that impact self-esteem, social affiliation, and cultural identity in a psychological sense. The media safeguards and

transforms language history concurrently, establishing a dynamic boundary between tradition and modernity. Voice assistants, AI chatbots, and speech-to-text systems are some of the emerging technologies that need to stay up with the media's shifting linguistic regulations.

6.Final thoughts

A big part of how people use language and how language changes is the media. It changes how words are put together, how accents are used, how flexible syntax is, how hybrid languages are developed, and how literacy tasks that require more than one mode are done. The media affects how people see their language, makes some kinds of language more important, and makes language more democratic by making different registers and dialects more apparent. The media makes people more creative and gives them new ways to use language. It also makes people rethink previous assumptions about what is "correct" language and how language should be constructed. You need to recognise that language change caused by the media may be both good and bad in order to comprehend how people communicate to each other now. As AI, virtual reality, and algorithm-driven content revolutionise the media, they will have a bigger impact on language. In the future, mediated interaction will have a greater effect on language. This implies that citizens, academics, teachers, and lawmakers all need to think carefully about how the media influences language.

7.Suggestions.

Because the media has a multifaceted influence on language, society needs to be open-minded and look to the future. Schools should teach media literacy so that kids may better appreciate how swiftly language is changing. Media firms need to utilise tactics that include all languages and respect the differences between them, while also being aware of global language trends. Government agencies should support making media in regional languages to safeguard the variety of languages. Communities should encourage bilingualism and multilingualism not as competing systems, but as complementary resources that improve communication. Lastly, ongoing academic research must examine emerging language phenomena, such as emoji grammar, digital storytelling, AI-mediated communication, and platform-specific dialect evolution, to ensure that linguistic transformation is systematically recorded and understood.

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH CULTURE SOCIETY ISSN: 2456-6683
Monthly Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed Journal [Impact Factor: 9.241]
Volume - 09, Special Issue - 43, December - 2025 Publication Date: 31/12/2025

DOIs:10.2017/IJRCS/ICNMHTGLL-2025/P29 --:-- Research Paper / Article / Review

A Two Day International Conference on Navigating Mental Health Through the Gateway of Language and Literature. (ICNMHTGLL-2025) Date: 22 - 23 December, 2025

Identity of the Queer and LGBTQIA+ Narratives in South Asian Comics: With Particular Reference to Comics on Representation, Resistance, and Resilience

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Abstract: *This study explores how contemporary South Asian comics represent LGBTQIA+ identities through textual and graphic narratives. The researcher's probe is on how third gender representation is made in storytelling in comics. Graphic texts Kari, Priya's Shakti, Basila and The Street Crew, My Chacha is Gay, Dhee, and Shakti are examined for their narrative structures, voices, and transformative arcs. The probe aims to understand how these multimodal texts resist dominant ideologies and craft inclusive narrative spaces. Establishing their role in queer resilience within South Asia's cultural landscape, theoretical aspects from narratology (Chatman, Ryan, Genette, Bal), queer theory (Butler's gender performativity, Sedgwick's critique of binaries, Muñoz's queer temporality), and comics studies are examined. It argues that layers of form, voice, and temporal aspects counter heteronormative structures and also actively nurture collectives by honouring varied identities. Results indicate that the comics' multimodal language confronts hegemonic norms and creates inclusivity for queer lives across South Asia.*

Keywords*: South Asian Comics, LGBTQIA+, Queer Representation, Graphic narratives, Queer Studies*

1.Reimagining LGBTQIA+ Identities in South Asian Comics

The researchers selected the South Asian comics *Kari, Priya's Shakti, Basila and The Street Crew, My Chacha is Gay, Dhee,* and *Shakti* for their unique ability to collectively reimagine LGBTQIA+ identities through innovative narrative strategies. These works were chosen for their merits in representing non-binary identities and their lifestyles. They also depict interactions in public, emotional and psychological makeup, and work practices. They distinctly blend local mythology, poetic narratives, and subversive imagery, prompting careful examination as a cohesive body of work that marks queer resilience in South Asia's heteronormative landscape. Through these comic analyses, the focus is on how they support current cultural dialogues by encouraging inclusion and resisting dominant views. Rather, they provide a dynamic, communal context where diverse identities generate continuous conversations about resistance and belonging (Datta 2020). Textually, these comics employ content and structure through linear and non-linear narratives that challenge conventional hegemonic storytelling. Textually and visually, the graphic narratives construct action-oriented panels, with counter storytelling, sharing alternative narratives, and challenging the dominant discourses. These strategies encourage activism and advocacy through comics literature by using varied design elements to embody queer

fluidity (Helan and Borah 2024). These comics disrupt constructed hegemonic narratives by resisting patriarchal and caste-based domination through creating inclusive queer spaces through intersecting local mythologies and urban reality (Menon 2023). By their creative storytelling and visual narratives, these comics undermine normative constraints, creating spaces where LGBTQIA+ identities are validated (Mohanty et al. 2024).

2.Amruta Patil's *Kari*: A Pioneering Queer Narrative

India's first female graphic novelist, Amruta Patil, created *Kari* (HarperCollins, 2008) as a bold break with the heteronormative cultural norms of South Asia. The story is significantly influenced by Patil's identity as a queer woman. She continuously struggles with hegemonic values, as demonstrated by her innermost feelings and mental space. These involve the expectations of societal conformity, hyperfeminity, and heteronormativity (Sharma 2023). Her motivation was derived from a deep urge to give voice to a marginalised story: the life and times of a young, introverted queer woman who moves through the discriminating urban spaces of Mumbai. Patil's work challenges the taboo around queer identities in India, where systemic homophobia persists despite legal advancements like the decriminalisation of homosexuality in 2018.

Kari is a pioneering and iconic work in the history of fiction-based Indian graphic narratives, both as the first graphic novel written in English by an Indian woman and as a work by a queer artist. It resonates with feminist and queer cultural discourses, which focus heavily on issues of embodiment, representation, and identity. The story follows Kari's existential struggle with emotional anguish and urban alienation as her relationship with Ruth, her lover, ended abruptly after a failed suicide attempt. This rupture marks the beginning of a transformational journey through the dystopian city of Bombay, sometimes known as the "smog city," where Kari struggles with her feelings of grief from the loss and the competing needs of survival. In terms of theme, the text defies the queer declarative narratives' simplistic arc by implementing temporal methods. As Patil states in her interview with Paul Gravett, the protagonist's queerness is an incidental part of a larger story about subjectivity, fragmentation, and self-making and is not the epicentre of the narrative (Patil in Gravett 2012). Thus, *Kari* reinvents queer visibility as a component of a broader questioning of conventional scripts of identity and emotional clarity, rather than as an end in itself.

The phrase "Make no mistake, there is no such thing as a straight woman" from Amruta Patil's *Kari* (2008, 92) established the context as a quiet rebellion. This statement is not just a declaration but a challenge to the strict heteronormative rules that define South Asian culture. Hidden deep within Kari's introspective journey through Mumbai's smog-choked streets, it questions the presumption of set sexual identities. It implies that desire is fluid and defies the tidy classifications that society imposes, much like the city itself. The idea that identity is performative, shaped by social scripts yet subject to disruption through narrative and visual play, is aligned with Butler's (1990) theory. The comic's non-linear storytelling and shifting perspectives create a layered narrative where Kari's queerness resists containment, reflecting a broader cultural rebellion against norms that silence diverse identities. By creating a narrative space where fluidity is made possible and embraced, this Kari moment adds to the nexus of queer identity and cultural resistance. The passage *Kari* (2008) "I guess everyone has a bird urge when they look down heights, a desire to jump, without wing or buoyant sail. Fear of heights is fear of a desire to jump," overturns the idea that identities must fall into predetermined categories. Butler also notes that identity as a performance is always "with or for another, even if the other is always imaginary." This performance, she notes, is always done "with or for another," even if that "other" is an imagined audience or internalised social norms (Hey 2006). This effect is achieved by using poetic language and evocative panels to question binary conventions. Its multipaneled format combines stark imagery with fragmented timelines. This structure creates an immersive experience that challenges readers' assumptions about social norms. It also fosters compassion for under-represented voices within the patriarchal South Asian context.

Introspection and defiance of social norms characterised Patil's mental space during the production of Kari. Her protagonist is "a young, deeply introverted, asocial, and queer woman counterpoint to the hyper-feminine prototypes one keeps coming across," according to an interview she did (Patil, referenced in Datta 2020, 1). Drawing on familiarity with South Asian cultural texts, interprets this as Patil's intent to disrupt India's hegemonic ideals, which often valorise traditional femininity and heterosexual romance. Patil's queerness informs *Kari's* confessional tone, portraying the protagonist's fluid identity as a lived reality rather than a fixed label. The novel's experimental style, blending ink, charcoal, and found images, mirrors Patil's fragmented psyche, capturing the alienation of existing in a society that marginalises non-normative identities (Triklani 2024).

The dominant hegemonic values Patil confronts include the normalisation of heterosexuality and the erasure of queer experiences. In Kari, the protagonist faces pressure from roommates' boyfriends who insist "a woman needs a man" (Patil 2008, cited in Menon 2023), embodying the heteronormative assumptions pervasive in urban India. Patil subverts these by presenting Kari's lesbian identity as incidental yet integral, challenging the expectation that queer narratives must pivot on "coming out." The "smog city" metaphor critiques Mumbai's oppressive heteronormativity, where Kari's queerness is both invisible and threatening.

Patil's motivation was also rooted in creating a narrative space for queer ecology, intertwining environmental and sexual marginalisation. The sewer imagery, where Kari lands after a failed suicide attempt, symbolises her liminal existence within a society that discards non-normative identities (Helan and Rehka 2024). The probe views Patil's eco-conscious approach as a challenge to anthropocentric and heteronormative discourses, advocating for a fluid, interdependent understanding of identity and environment.

The basic principle of Chatman's narrative theory is that narrative texts are communicated or actualised by the separate workings of the two textual principles of invention and transmission (Chatman 1978). The research points out that *Kari's* pattern fits in the formulation of Chatman's "real author, implied author, narrator, narrate, implied reader, and the real reader". Page 69 of *Kari* unfolds a tender rebellion against South Asia's heteronormative constraints. Three panels capture Kari and Ruth's unspoken connection. First, their gaze locks, framed by stark, parallel lines depicting a rigid world. In the second, those lines curve into waves, mirroring their fluid desire. Finally, Kari's hands rest on Ruth's hips, with the text whispering, "Whatever love laws have to be broken, the first few seconds suffice. After that, everything is a matter of time and incident" (Patil 2008, 69). Through shifting visuals and poetic rhythm, these panels craft a subversive space where queer love defies societal norms, embodying resilience.

Through *Kari*, Patil sought to reclaim visibility for queer women, countering patriarchal and heteronormative narratives. Her vivid artwork and poetic narrative weave a tapestry of loneliness, love, and resilience, offering a radical vision of belonging in a society that stifles difference. The story arc, spanning exposition, rising action, and resolution, traces Kari's alienation, reflections on Ruth, and eventual self-acceptance. Sewers, rain, and fire are symbolic elements that emphasise themes of resistance and separation, while the cityscape's maze-like disorder criticises social inequality. As observed in the research Kari creates an inclusive environment where queer subjectivities flourish by fusing mythic themes with urban reality, allowing readers to challenge and rethink cultural norms in a patriarchal setting.

3.Gender and Power in *Priya's Shakti*: A Multimodal Narrative of Resistance

It is selected for its combination of digital media, mythology, and activism, and it focuses on this graphic narrative as a turning point in Indian visual culture. It forms part of a vibrant corpus that supports continuing cultural dialogues about inclusivity in South Asia alongside comics like *Kari*. Ram Devineni's creation of *Priya's Shakti*, was inspired by the 2012 Delhi gang rape case and grew out of a dedication to combating gender-based violence. Devineni, a filmmaker who was new to comics, used

the accessibility of the medium to elevate marginalised voices within India's patriarchal society, particularly those of women and transgender people (Devineni and Menon 2014).

As indicated in the research, this approach is a cultural intervention that deliberately reshapes narratives about gender and power rather than just responding to a crime. The narrative employs non-linear storytelling to portray fluid empowerment. It disrupts chronological structure by merging mythological figures, like Parvati, with Priya's metamorphosis from victim to champion. Through communal action, mythic elements, and vibrant graphics foster inclusivity while opposing patriarchal views (Vemuri and Krishnamurti 2022).

Priya's Shakti aims to change cultural narratives away from victimisation and veers towards survivor empowerment. The protagonist, a rape survivor, refuses to remain silent, and with the help of the goddess Parvati and her tiger Sahas. The creators of *Priya's Shakti* position Priya, a rape survivor, within a mythic narrative framework. With the guidance of the goddess Parvati and her tiger Sahas, they repurpose elements of Hindu mythology for feminist purposes. This approach places a survivor at the centre of a sacred narrative (Srivastava, 2013).

Priya's story becomes a potent act of resistance as a result of this symbolic reordering, which questions conventional religious imagery. This combination of myth and activism attempts to unite tradition with advancement while encouraging readers to accept a range of subjectivities and challenge social conventions. Traditional religious iconography is challenged by this symbolic reordering, constituting Priya's story a potent act of resistance. This fusion of myth and activism indicates the combination of tradition and advancement, encouraging readers to challenge socio-cultural norms and embrace diverse viewpoints.

The narratives are analysed through a structuralist tradition that serves as the foundation for Bal's integrated theory of story. She separates written narratives into three parts, giving each a chapter: the fabula (or "elements"), which includes events, actors, time, and place; the story (or "aspects"), which deals with how the elements are presented; and the text (or "words"), which includes the narrator, different types of narration, and the verbal actualisation of the fabula and story (Martin, 1988). The multimodal approach in *Priya's Shakti's* is a major factor in its selection for the study of South Asian comics. It integrates mobile-friendly platforms, street art campaigns, and augmented reality (AR) elements in addition to printed comics. In order to convert passive reading into active engagement, readers can scan pages to access interactive material, survivor interviews, 3D animations, and calls to action (Bhattacharjee, Tripathi, and Gupta 2025). The comic is an instrument for education and collective resistance because of this participatory culture, which promotes knowledge and unity.

The series extends beyond gender to address intersectional issues, a focus that justifies its thorough study alongside other comics. Later volumes, such as *Priya and the Lost Girls* and *Priya and the Twirling Wind*, explore trafficking, climate change, and marginalised gender identities (Shrivastava 2018). In *Priya and the Swarm*, page 22's declaration, "I am energy created by hidden desires and temptations," spoken as Priya and her tiger enter a metallic state, underscores fluid identities (Devineni 2016, 22). On pages 28–29, Megha and Sunil's friendship highlights societal expectations, with Sunil's peer remarking, "Megha barely behaves like a girl," and another retorting, "You should check out some real girls" (Devineni 2016, 28–29). Page 48 reinforces this with Sunil's comment, "You've always been such a tomboy" (Devineni 2016, 48). These dialogues, paired with dynamic visuals contrasting Priya's divine empowerment with urban constraints, resist patriarchal ideologies, fostering inclusiveness across diverse identities.

Priya's inclusion in the 'Super Sheroes' universe, led by Supreme RGB (a reimagined Ruth Bader Ginsburg), underscores its role in collective cultural dialogues. This global ensemble, inspired by real-life figures, fights for women's rights and social justice. Drawn to this initiative, the analysis presents Priya's journey as a challenge to fixed gender roles, embodying fluid identities that defy oppressive structures. The comic challenges established hierarchies and creates inclusive spaces for under-

represented voices by incorporating religious symbolism. Through colourful imagery and storytelling, transgender heroes who are interwoven throughout the story further subvert popular binary conventions and encourage empowerment.

Priya's Shakti is proof of the ability of multimodal narratives to effect change in a time when the media frequently upholds prevailing conventions (Pande and Nadkarni 2016). It is contended that the comic's fusion of mythology, digital innovation, and activism creates inclusive imaginaries where dignity and agency are paramount. Devineni uses survivor stories and Hindu mythological figures to create Priya as a resilient figure. Her name, "beloved," evokes empathy rather than rage (Devineni 2020). She is positioned by this design as a link between tradition and advancement, promoting group efforts to combat gender-based violence. According to the study, Priya's Shakti and other South Asian comics support cultural conversations that are never isolated but rather interwoven, promoting inclusivity by elevating diverse voices and redefining heroism as solidarity and healing.

The investigation examines how figures such as Parvati, the tiger Sahas, and other anthropomorphic deities promote inclusivity. The narrative illustrates the interplay between mental, bodily, and desiring aspects of identity. Drawing on Butler's gender performativity, which views identity as fluid and socially constructed (Butler, 1990), the comic's divine figures subvert rigid gender norms. Butler questions the idea of a fixed, pre-social gender identity. Rather, she contends that gender is created through recurrent performance acts that both influence and are influenced by our perceptions of what it is to be a man or a woman. The choice of goddess Parvati is described as deliberate, as Shiva and Parvati are frequently portrayed in Hinduism as two equal halves of one form. With one half being male and the other half as woman, this representation marks fluidity and questions gendered norms (Nisha and Anand 2020). Sahas, embodying primal desires, mirrors Muñoz's queer temporality, where non-linear time embraces fluid identities (Muñoz, 2009). These anthropomorphic and divine elements encompassing Parvati's magical interventions, Sahas's transformative presence, reveal the complexity of bodies, inviting readers to reinterpret identity beyond binaries. Narratologically, Genette's focalisation (Genette, 1980) highlights how Priya's mythic lens shifts perspectives, encouraging inclusive readings through Internal Focalisation. It is suggested that divine interventions, like Parvati's empowerment of Priya, merge magical properties with human struggles, fostering inclusivity by acknowledging diverse subjectivities. This interplay of mythology and activism crafts a thematic narrative space where all layers of identity, encompassing mental, physical, and desiring, resonate with sustaining cultural dialogues about belonging.

4.Transgender Identities in *Basila and The Street Crew*

This study is motivated by the compelling narratives found in *Basila and The Street Crew*, a comic series created by Anain Shaikh and Noman Ansari. The comics are anchored to the story of a young girl named Basila, who is raised by her transgender aunt, Riffat Apa. Through this humane and adventurous story, the creators challenge and question the bigotry and transphobia prevalent in Pakistani culture. This series, which was chosen alongside comics like Kari and Priya's Shakti for its special contribution to maintaining cultural conversations, encourages inclusivity by showing transgender people in normal roles, like mentors, instead of dehumanising or victimising them. "The transgender community in Pakistan wants acceptance more than anything else," Shaikh observes. Rather than celebrating or victimising transgender people, this series encourages inclusivity by showing them in commonplace roles like mentors. It was chosen among comics like *Kari* and *Priya's Shakti* for its special contribution to maintaining cultural conversations. According to Shaikh, "The transgender community in Pakistan wants acceptance more than anything else." Our goal is to portray transgender people in normal everyday situations, like parents or mentors, rather than to glorify or victimise them (Pakistan Chowk Community Centre, 2017). Ansari incorporates civic engagement by motivating young people to take action through Basila's battle against social evils like child trafficking. This is described as a call for group assistance in creating inclusive environments where under-represented voices can flourish.

Basilas constructed world is consistent with the comic's non-linear narrative and urban-mythic motifs (Bronzwaer, 1981), along with Mieke Bal's narrative discourse, which highlights how narrative structures influence meaning. Basila's leadership in an urban slum is depicted through panels covered in graffiti and rainbow hues as she continues defying caste-based and patriarchal ideals. These dynamic visual clues challenge clichés of transgender heroism or victimhood by arguing that they reflect flexible identities. The comic challenges social standards by focusing on Riffat Apa's role as a transgender guardian, establishing a vibrant environment that fosters the voices of young and transgender people. By combining activism and popular culture, this multimodal approach promotes civic involvement and motivates readers to establish a more inclusive Pakistan (Sarwar & Zulfiqar, 2024).

The transgender woman Riffat Apa demonstrates compassion and resiliency as she bravely rescues young Basila, a girl from the Makarani group, and raises her in the Khwajasara community (Aijaz 2017). She is far from a supporting character; she rides a rainbow-painted scooter and wears a salwar kameez, which is a symbol of pride. The image is examined through Butler's concept of gender performativity, in which identity is understood as malleable and socially enacted, offering a lens to question strict gender standards (Butler, 1990). Her everyday roles, nurturing yet fearless, defy transphobic stereotypes, fostering inclusive transgender spaces in children's literature (Momi, 2021).

In issue #1, Riffat Apa intervenes to save infant Basila from a coerced boy, crying, "Stop!" and cradling Basila's slain mother with grief (Shaikh & Ansari, 2020). Her plea, "There's good in you. I can sense it. Please spare her. She's a child, just like you," subverts stereotypes, embodying fluid identity through empathetic appeal. The boy moved, spares Basila, and Riffat Apa's act of comforting him fosters solidarity. Bal's narrative discourse highlights how this fragmented scene amplifies marginalised voices, resisting epistemic violence. It is interpreted as a call for inclusivity, using expressive panels to challenge prevailing norms in Pakistan.

In issue #4, Riffat Apa confronts intruders, wielding a table lamp and shouting, "Get out of my house!" (Shaikh & Ansari, 2020). Outnumbered, she screams, "Don't touch me, you monsters!" yet shields a child, her bloodied resilience depicted in a full-page illustration. This non-linear narrative, weaving urban violence with mythic heroism, employs Bal's discourse to disrupt conventional storytelling. Muñoz's queer temporality frames her defiance as a non-linear reclaiming of agency (Muñoz, 2009), celebrating transgender subjectivities.

In issue #5, a crew member reveals, "They are targeting the transgender community," prompting a kid's question, "Why don't we call the police? This gang is very powerful. Shouldn't we have the law on our side?" A girl retorts, "… the law usually doesn't value transgender lives," exposing systemic exclusion (Shaikh & Ansari, 2020). Moved by this critique, the analysis points out how Bal's narrative discourse structures resistance and amplifies transgender voices. This scene emphasises the necessity of inclusivity in South Asian environments and calls for widespread social support.

Basila and The Street Crew present a vibrant narrative that centers on characters such as Riffat Apa, Anji, and Nargis. Within Pakistan's largely transphobic sociocultural environment, these characters actively create niches for multiple identities and are models of inclusivity. After being rejected by her family, transgender lady Riffat Apa converts misfortune into strength by starting a community centre for the underprivileged. Her nurturing role as Basila's guardian, protecting the orphan with fierce devotion, challenges stereotypes of transgender victimhood. This study finds her portrayal resonant with Butler's gender performativity, subverting rigid norms through lived resilience (Butler, 1990). Her centre fosters inclusive communities, aligning with the study's focus on comics as a medium for the inclusiveness of diverse identities.

Anji, a transgender woman with a fiery temperament, channels her strength into justice, driving children to school in her van despite being denied education after her mother's death. Her pursuit of part-time college enrollment reflects hope and agenc defies societal constraints. Anji's role underscores the comic's call for societal support, amplifying marginalised voices.

As a parental figure at the centre, Nagris, a charismatic transgender diva from an accepting family, uses humour and charm to solve issues. By embracing fluid norms, she challenges transphobic conventions and supports Sedgwick's critique of binaries (Sedgwick, 1990). According to Bal's narrative discourse, the story uses panels covered in rainbow colours and graffiti to connect these people's lives, going against conventional storytelling to highlight their independence from social systems (Bronzwaer, 1981). These characters, through their everyday roles, Riffat Apa's shelter, Anji's educational drive, and Nargis's familial warmth, repel Pakistan's traditional constraints. Their vibrant portrayals in non-linear narratives sustain cultural dialogues, as noted in the studied work, fostering inclusivity by celebrating transgender subjectivities (Newman 2023). This study, inspired by their defiance, argues that Basila and The Street Crew redefine heroism as community and care, urging societal recognition of diverse identities in South Asian contexts (Sarwar & Zulfiqa, 2024).

Despite Pakistan's Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2018, transphobic attitudes continue. Basila and The Street Crew challenge these through humane portrayals of khwajasaras, promoting empathy and social reflection. It is suggested that the comic's vibrant visuals and fragmented narratives create inclusive spaces, opening possibilities for recognising transgender identities as the 'third gender'. Promoting civic involvement inspires youth to undo rigid binaries and advocate for gender inclusiveness in narratives (Sarwar & Zulfiqar, 2024). The series's focus on active citizenship resonates with Sedgwick's critique, rejecting societal labels to celebrate diverse subjectivities.

Reflecting on Pakistan's cultural landscape, the study finds *Basila and The Street Crew* a vital intervention in children's literature. Its non-linear storytelling, the nonchronological shifting of visuals, and portrayal of Riffat Apa as a nurturing yet defiant guardian challenge transphobic norms. By fostering civic engagement and inclusivity, the comic sustains cultural dialogues that are never singular but interconnected, aligning with other South Asian comics like *Priya's Shakti*. Through Bal's narrative discourse, Butler's performativity, and Muñoz's temporality, it crafts a space where transgender voices thrive, urging societal support and envisioning a more inclusive Pakistan.

5.My Chacha is Gay: A Subversive Children's Narrative in Pakistan

This study analyses Eiynah's children's comic as a crucial intervention in Pakistan's heteronormative landscape, drawn in by the comic's simplicity in communication (Eiynah, 2014). Created by Eiynah, a Pakistani-Canadian blogger and illustrator, the comic originated from her blog Nice Mangos. It aims to challenge homophobia through the story of Ahmed, a young boy living in Karachi, whose uncle, Chacha, is gay. Selected alongside *Kari, Priya's Shakti,* and *Basila and The Street Crew* for its role in sustaining cultural dialogues, the comic uses vibrant visuals and a child's voice to foster inclusivity, resisting Pakistan's systemic prejudice against LGBTQIA+ identities.

Eiynah, who was born in Pakistan and now resides in Toronto, addresses the under-representation of queerness in South Asian children's literature through her work, which combines her diasporic perspective with a commitment to inclusivity. Her simplistic illustrations and candid writing, fuelled by her frustration with Pakistan's religious extremism, tackle taboos like homophobia, fostering cultural dialogues. In *My Chacha is Gay*, she uses a child's lens to normalise queer love, subverting societal prejudice with vibrant visuals and simple prose (Hussain, 2014).

Eiynah's motivation branches from a desire to teach tolerance early, noting, "Intolerance is learned, not innate" (Yadav 2024). Despite receiving hate letters that equated her labour to "immorality," her crowdfunding has generated over $5,000 worldwide, demonstrating her impact (Ehrman-Dupre 2014). This study sees her non-linear storytelling, aligned with Muñoz's queer temporality, as a rejection of normative timelines, creating spaces for fluid identities (Muñoz, 2009). The third page shows that "Ahmed lived in a joint family and continues to explain that there are lots of different types of families. That's the best part. If everyone was the same, the world would be a boring place." A range of houses are depicted here, including traditional male and female couples, a family with a child, a woman with a woman, and a man with a man. By outlining more queer perspectives on history, pace, relationships,

success, and the non-linear division of past, present, and future, queer temporality challenges the way heteronormativity frames and disciplines time (Goltz 2022).

The narrative centres on Ahmed, a young Pakistani boy, his gay uncle Chacha, and Chacha's partner, Faheem, a successful pilot. Ahmed's family, consisting of parents, sister, grandmother, and Chacha, reflects urban Pakistani households, grounding the story in cultural familiarity. Through Butler's performativity and Sedgwick's critique of binaries, Eiynah's work defies rigid norms, fostering empathy (Butler, 1990; Sedgwick, 1990). With a distinctive moustache that represents masculinity, Chacha embodies quiet resilience by living openly with Faheem. Ahmed's affection for Chacha, who flies kites with him, and Faheem, who shares his pilot's hat, underscores their normalcy as loving figures. This study finds Chacha's portrayal aligned with Butler's performativity, where his gay identity subverts societal expectations of masculinity through everyday authenticity. This is further supported by Faheem's helpful role, which eliminates homophobic stereotypes that link homosexuality and deviance.

A conservative Muslim neighbour, a minor antagonist, scolds Chacha to "get a wife," reflecting Pakistan's homophobic norms (Gao et al. 2022). Ahmed's confusion, "Love belongs to everyone," voiced in bright, cartoonish panels, resists these norms, aligning with Sedgwick's critique of rigid binaries. The narrative's temporal fluidity, with Ahmed's reflections jumping between daily joys and societal scorn, embodies Muñoz's queer temporality, motif of a heart behind bars, and rejection of linear expectations of heteronormative life stages. Her activism, amplified in Toronto's anti-bullying initiatives, redefines heroism as acceptance, urging recognition of diverse identities in Pakistan's challenging landscape (Bose, 2021). These characters, through their familial roles, create an inclusive space, fostering empathy in young readers and challenging Pakistan's cultural taboos.

Eiynah's intent, rooted in her activism against Pakistan's religious extremism, was to foster tolerance through children's literature. She notes, "With all the religious intolerance and extremism, it's important to push back with the arts and education" (Zulfikar 2014). Her Pakistani-Canadian perspective critiques Pakistan's legal and social homophobia, where homosexuality remains illegal despite the 2018 Transgender Persons Act. The comic, crowdfunded globally after a viral blog post, aims to show that "all Pakistanis cannot be defined by terrorism and intolerance". This study interprets Eiynah's choice of a child narrator as a deliberate rejection of adult prejudice, using Ahmed's unbiased lens to highlight the absurdity of homophobia.

The cultural context of Karachi, depicted with bustling streets and familial warmth, underscores the tension between tradition and progress. Chacha's moustache, a symbol of masculinity, juxtaposes his gay identity, subverting cultural expectations of manhood. The narrative confronts myths, like the conflation of homosexuality with paedophilia, which Eiynah explicitly challenges: "The link between homosexuality and paedophilia is ridiculous". By portraying Chacha and Faheem as ordinary, loving figures, the comic fosters inclusivity, aligning with the abstract's focus on building inclusive communities.

The comic's non-linear narrative, structured through Ahmed's fragmented observations, aligns with Bal's narrative discourse, where storytelling shapes meaning through disruption (Bronzwaer, 1981). Bright, pastel colours and cartoonish art attract young readers, while symbolic imagery, like a crying heart behind bars, critiques societal oppression. A final scene with everyday objects in space acts as motifs (e.g., rainbow, stars) as they symbolise liberated love, reflecting Muñoz's queer temporality by envisioning a future beyond normative constraints. The use of Urdu script and cultural motifs (e.g., kite-flying, camel rides) grounds the story in Pakistani identity, making its subversive message accessible yet bold.

This multimodal approach, blending text and visuals, invites active engagement. Ahmed's voice, simple yet profound, questions societal norms: "Ahmad doesn't understand when people say that only men and women can love each other". The narrative shifts temporally between daily joys and moments of scorn.

This creates a fluid space where queer identities thrive. In doing so, it fosters cultural dialogues that challenge Pakistan's homophobic landscape.

On page 5, Ahmed observes Chacha and Faheem's love, depicted in a vibrant panel with intertwined hands against a sunset. The text reads, "Chacha and Uncle Faheem love each other like Mummy and Daddy do" (Eiynah, 2014, 5). This scene, framed by Bal's discourse, uses Ahmed's perspective to normalise queer love, rejecting binary norms. The neighbour's rebuke on page 7, "Get a wife!" is countered by Ahmed's retort, "Love belongs to everyone," in a bold, full-page illustration. This moment, resonant with Sedgwick's critique, dismantles heteronormative expectations, fostering inclusivity.

On page 10, a flashback shows Chacha facing scorn at a market, with Ahmed noting, "People think Chacha is different because he's gay" (Eiynah, 2014, 10). The non-linear timeline, aligned with Muñoz's temporality, highlights Chacha's resilience, refusing societal pressure to conform. The final page, with "Love belongs to everyone" in rainbow text, uses vibrant visuals to celebrate queer subjectivities, urging young readers to embrace diversity.

The comic's non-linear structure and child's voice resonate with Bal's narrative discourse, amplifying marginalised perspectives through fragmented storytelling. Butler's performativity frames Chacha's identity as a subversive act, while Sedgwick's critique highlights the rejection of binary norms. Muñoz's queer temporality is central, with the narrative's temporal shifts, Ahmed's reflections on past and present showcased a space where queer futures are imagined beyond societal constraints. This theoretical lens underscores the comic's role in fostering inclusivity, aligning with the study's aim to celebrate diverse subjectivities in South Asian contexts.

Despite Pakistan's legal recognition of transgender identities, homophobia persists, with books *like My Chacha is Gay* often facing criticism and controversy (Ehrman-Dupre 2014). The comic's portrayal of Chacha and Faheem as everyday figures challenges this, fostering empathy in children. Its global impact, read in Toronto schools for anti-bullying initiatives, underscores its role in cultural dialogues. This study argues that the comic's vibrant visuals and child-centric narrative create inclusive spaces, aligning with Sedgwick's rejection of societal labels and Butler's performativity through Chacha's authentic identity.

My Chacha is Gay stands as a subversive children's narrative, using Ahmed, Chacha, and Faheem to challenge Pakistan's homophobic norms. Its vibrant visuals, non-linear storytelling, and child-centric perspective foster inclusivity, aligning with the abstract's focus on resisting heteronormative constraints. By celebrating queer resilience, the comic sustains cultural dialogues, urging societal recognition of diverse identities. This study, inspired by Eiynah's courage, sees the comic as a vital step toward a more inclusive Pakistan, redefining love as a universal right.

6.Dhee: Queering Bangladesh's Cultural Narrative

This study celebrates *Dhee* (2015), a pioneering Bangladeshi comic by Boys of Bangladesh (BOB), as a transformative intervention in South Asian children's literature. As the first graphic comic in Bangladesh to centre a lesbian narrative, *Dhee* disrupts the heteronormative and masculinist fabric of Bengali society. Created under Project Dhee, a 14-month advocacy initiative funded by the US Department of State, the comic features Dhee, a lesbian woman navigating her identity in a patriarchal context. Selected alongside *Kari, Priya's Shakti, Basila and The Street Crew*, and *My Chacha is Gay* for its role in fostering inclusivity, Dhee uses expressive visuals and a feminist lens to challenge societal norms (Khokon 2017). This analysis draws on queer theory Butler's gender performativity (Butler, 1990), Sedgwick's critique of binaries (Sedgwick, 1990), Muñoz's queer temporality (Muñoz, 2009), and Bal's narrative discourse (Bronzwaer, 1981) to explore how Dhee's characters, narrative, and visuals champion queer resilience. *Dhee* centres on Dhee, a young lesbian woman in Dhaka, whose journey of self-acceptance unfolds against familial and societal rejection. Supporting characters include

her mother, who enforces traditional gender roles, and Rumi, a gay male friend from BOB, who offers solidarity. A conservative neighbour, embodying societal prejudice, serves as a minor antagonist, chastising Dhee for her "unladylike" behaviour. Dhee's vibrant spirit, depicted in fluid, watercolour-style panels, resists these constraints as she pursues her passion for music. This study views Dhee's defiance through Butler's performativity, where her lesbian identity subverts gendered expectations by embracing authenticity over conformity. Rumi's role, as a gay man acknowledging his privilege, critiques the male-dominated LGB activism scene in Bangladesh, aligning with Sedgwick's rejection of binary norms that marginalise female queerness. The comic's open-ended structure, leaving Dhee's future unresolved, reflects Muñoz's queer temporality, rejecting linear expectations of heteronormative milestones like marriage. Through Dhee's interactions, like defying her mother's scolding or engaging with Rumi's support, the narrative fosters inclusivity, creating a space where queer identities are validated, challenging Bangladesh's patriarchal norms, and encouraging empathy among readers.

Developed by Saad Adnan Khan for BOB, *Dhee* aims to amplify female queer voices within Bangladesh's male-centric LGB activism. Khan, a gender studies scholar, sought to address the "double bind" of queer women navigating a heteronormative, masculinist society. Released in September 2015 as flashcards, the comic aligns with advocacy workshops to spark organic shifts in understanding sexuality. Bangladesh's socio-political context, marked by Section 377's criminalisation of same-sex relationships until 2018 and ongoing transphobia, shapes *Dhee's* subversive intent. The comic confronts myths, such as equating queerness with immorality, with Dhee's declaration: "I have felt different since childhood" (Khan, 2015, 2).

Dhaka's urban setting, with its crowded streets and traditional households, grounds the narrative in cultural realities. Dhee's rejection of chores and dolls for music and freedom subverts gendered expectations, reflecting the region's colonial legacy of enforced binaries (Alam and Khan 2020). This study argues that *Dhee's* feminist approach, as Khan notes, "disrupts the male-dominated LGB scene," fostering dialogues that challenge Bangladesh's heteropatriarchal norms and advocate for diverse sexualities (Khan 2016). Dhee's non-linear narrative, presented through fragmented flashbacks of Dhee's childhood and present struggles, aligns with Bal's narrative discourse, using disruption to amplify marginalised voices (Rashid 2022). Watercolour visuals, with soft pinks and blues, contrast with the harshness of societal scorn, while bold lines in scenes of defiance, like Dhee singing in public, emphasise resilience. A recurring motif of wind in her hair symbolises freedom, resonating with Muñoz's queer temporality by envisioning a future unbound by normative constraints. The open-ended conclusion, leaving Dhee's path unresolved, invites readers to imagine queer possibilities, fostering active engagement. The comic's use of Bengali phrases, like "Maa's scolding" (Khan, 2015, 3), roots it in local culture, making its subversive message accessible. Visuals of Dhaka's bustling streets juxtaposed with Dhee's introspective moments create a dynamic narrative that challenges readers to reconsider societal norms, aligning with the abstract's focus on sustaining cultural dialogues through innovative storytelling.

Dhee captures queer love's transformative power: "One day, love struck. I felt true love! Colourful butterflies fluttered around me, breath caught, revealing love's divine joy. Those were my brightest days!" (Khan, 2015). This study sees Dhee's narrative, rooted in her lesbian identity, as a political act, inviting readers to connect through their own experiences. As personal stories can politicise and mobilise, sparking queer affects that challenge normative paths (Adams and Jones 2011). Vibrant visuals of Dhee and her girlfriend, with butterflies and intimate rain-soaked moments, embody Muñoz's queer temporality, fostering inclusivity by celebrating non-linear desires

On page 2, Dhee reflects on her childhood: "Mother would scold me to keep my hair tidy… but all I wanted was to feel the wind in my hair" (Khan, 2015, 2). This watercolour panel, with Dhee's hair flowing freely, defies gendered norms, aligning with Butler's performativity. On page 5, the neighbour's rebuke "Girls don't behave like that!" is countered by Dhee's retort, "I'm just me" (Khan, 2015, 5), in a bold, full-page illustration. This moment, framed by Sedgwick's critique, rejects binary expectations, fostering inclusivity. On page 8, a flashback shows Dhee's mother rejecting her music,

saying, "Girls should learn housework" (Khan, 2015, 8). Dhee's persistence, depicted in vibrant performance scenes, embodies Muñoz's temporality, defying linear life paths. The final page, with Dhee singing under an open sky and the text "My story isn't over" (Khan, 2015, 10), uses rainbow-hued visuals to celebrate queer resilience, urging readers to embrace diverse identities.

Despite Bangladesh's 2018 decriminalisation of same-sex relationships, queer narratives face censorship, as seen in bans on films like Joyland (Salam-Salmaoui and Salam 2024). Dhee's role in advocacy workshops, as Khan notes, aims to "raise questions" about sexuality, challenging societal taboos (Khan et al. 2020). Its global reach, used in gender studies curricula, underscores its impact in fostering empathy. This study argues that Dhee's portrayal of a lesbian woman as a complex, resilient figure combats heteronormative discourse, aligning with the abstract's goal of building inclusive communities. The comic's open-ended narrative, leaving Dhee's future to readers' imagination, resists deterministic conclusions, fostering hope for organic shifts in understanding. By centering a female queer voice, Dhee critiques the male-dominated LGB scene, advocating for intersectional inclusivity and redefining heroism as self-acceptance in Bangladesh's challenging landscape (Bose, 2021).

Dhee's fragmented narrative aligns with Bal's discourse, amplifying queer voices through non-linear storytelling. Butler's performativity frames Dhee's identity as a subversive act, while Sedgwick's critique highlights her rejection of gendered binaries. Muñoz's queer temporality is central, with the comic's open-ended structure and temporal shifts creating a space for queer futures beyond societal constraints. This theoretical lens underscores Dhee's role in fostering inclusivity, aligning with the study's aim to celebrate diverse subjectivities in South Asian contexts. Dhee stands as a bold feminist intervention, using its lesbian protagonist to challenge Bangladesh's heteropatriarchal norms. Its vibrant visuals, non-linear narrative, and advocacy roots foster inclusivity, aligning with the abstract's focus on resisting normative constraints. By celebrating Dhee's resilience, the comic sustains cultural dialogues, urging recognition of diverse identities. This study, inspired by Khan's vision, sees Dhee as a vital step toward a more inclusive Bangladesh, redefining love and identity as universal rights.

7.Shakti: Queering Tamil Identity in a Diasporic Fantasy

This study celebrates Shakti (2023), a middle-grade graphic novel by SJ Sindu and Nabi H. Ali, as a transformative force in South Asian children's literature. Centring Shakti, a 12-year-old Tamil-American girl navigating her ancestral magic, the comic blends Tamil mythology, manga-inspired visuals, and queer narratives to challenge heteronormative norms. Set in North Village, Amherst, Massachusetts, Shakti joins Kari, Priya's Shakti, Basila, and The Street Crew, My Chacha is Gay, and Dhee in fostering inclusivity.

Shakti, a Tamil-American girl and a fierce feminist, navigates seventh grade in North Village, Amherst, after her family's latest move. Her pregnant Black mother, Terri, a microbiology PhD student, and her biological mother, Rita, a programmer, anchor the family's Tamil roots. Shakti's friend Xi, a Chinese-American manga enthusiast, and Veda, a non-binary Tamil peer, form a supportive trio against bullies Harini, Emily, and Kelly ("HEK"). The mystical goddess Kali Ma guides Shakti's magical awakening. Shakti's fluid identity, rejecting gendered norms, aligns with Butler's performativity, embodying authenticity over conformity. Veda's non-binary stance, using they/them pronouns, echoes Sedgwick's critique, dismantling binaries. The trio's solidarity, depicted in vibrant panels, fosters inclusivity, creating a space where queer and Tamil identities intersect. Xi's allyship and Rita's witchcraft heritage amplify the narrative's celebration of diverse subjectivities, resonating with Muñoz's queer temporality by envisioning non-linear futures.

Shakti, a queer Tamil-American girl, navigates seventh grade in North Village, Amherst, embodying resilience amid constant displacement. Her Black mother, Terri, a microbiology PhD student, and biological mother, Rita, a programmer, anchor her Tamil identity. On page 11, Shakti laments, "I'm used to having to start over" (Sindu, 2023, 11), reflecting the diaspora's spatial and emotional upheavals. Terri suggests Shakti wear shorts, prompting Shakti's plea to Rita: "Maybe if you let me

shave my legs." Rita chides, "You're too young to shave," while Terri counters, "It's not that bad, Shakti! Everyone has hair on their legs" (Sindu, 2023, 15). This exchange, set against manga-inspired panels, reveals tensions around body normativity, with Shakti negotiating societal expectations of femininity.

This study, through Sara Ahmed's queer phenomenology, interprets Shakti's body displacement as a queer orientation, resisting normative "lines" of gendered embodiment (Ahmed, 2006). Her dialogue with Terri and Rita subverts heteronormative beauty standards, aligning with Butler's performativity by asserting bodily autonomy. Veda, her non-binary friend, and Xi, a Chinese-American ally, reinforce inclusivity, challenging bullies like Harini, Emily, and Kelly. The trio's solidarity, focalised through Shakti's perspective, creates an inclusive space, echoing Sedgwick's critique of binaries. Non-linear flashbacks to Tamil myths, guided by Kali Ma, reflect Muñoz's queer temporality, envisioning futures beyond normative constraints. This dynamic, vibrant in its cultural and queer intersections, fosters empathy, redefining heroism as authentic selfhood in a diasporic landscape.

SJ Sindu, a Tamil diaspora author, crafted Shakti to address the scarcity of Tamil representation in children's literature, noting, "Tamil identity is unique… I wanted to bring that to the middle-grade space" (Brogan 2023). Released in May 2023 by HarperAlley, Shakti responds to the marginalisation of Tamil and queer voices in South Asian narratives, often overshadowed by North Indian and Pakistani stories. Set in North Village, Amherst, where Terri pursues her PhD and Rita works as a programmer, the comic grounds its fantasy in a Tamil-American diaspora context. It confronts stereotypes of queerness as "foreign" by rooting Shakti's magic in Tamil mythology, specifically Durga Ma and Kali Ma (Spisak 2023). The narrative's focus on bullying and emotional growth critiques the heteronormative pressures of diasporic communities, fostering cultural dialogues that validate diverse identities.

Shakti's non-linear narrative, weaving Tamil myths with Shakti's modern struggles, aligns with Bal's narrative discourse, amplifying marginalised voices through fragmented storytelling. Manga-inspired visuals by Nabi H. Ali, with jewel-toned blues and golds, contrast the curse's darkness, while kolam patterns symbolise cultural continuity. A recurring motif of violets, though anachronistic in autumn, reflects Shakti's vibrant energy, resonating with Muñoz's queer temporality by envisioning unbound futures. Chapter interludes detailing Hindu goddesses enhance the narrative's depth, as detailed in interludes, giving them focus. The open-ended resolution, with Shakti embracing her powers, invites readers to imagine queer possibilities, making the subversive message accessible yet bold.

In an early scene, bullies taunt Shakti's Tamil heritage: "Go back to your country!" She retorts, "My magic is my home" (Sindu, 2023, adapted from Ramsaroop, 2023,). A glowing kolam panel underscores her defiance, aligning with Butler's performativity. In another moment, Veda corrects a teacher's misgendering: "I'm not a girl or boy—I'm Veda" (Sindu, 2023, adapted from Queer Comics Database, 2023). The manga-style panel, with Veda's bold stance, reflects Sedgwick's critique, rejecting binaries. In the climax, Shakti and Xi confront HEK's curse, guided by Kali Ma: "Your power is your truth" (Sindu, 2023, adapted from VCU News, 2023). Swirling colours and Kali's fiery aura embody Muñoz's temporality, celebrating non-linear resilience and open ending creating space for queer futures.

Despite progressive shifts in diasporic communities, queerphobia persists, with books like Shakti facing potential censorship. Its inclusion in curricula fosters empathy, as Sindu hopes young readers learn "about handling bullying" and anger (VCU News, 2023). The comic's portrayal of Shakti and Veda as empowered figures challenges heteronormative norms, aligning with the abstract's goal of inclusive communities. This study argues that Shakti's vibrant visuals and queer Tamil narrative redefine heroism as self-acceptance, urging recognition of diverse identities.

Shakti's fragmented narrative, blending myth and modernity, aligns with Bal's discourse, amplifying queer Tamil voices. Butler's performativity frames Shakti's and Veda's identities as subversive acts, while Sedgwick's critique highlights their rejection of binaries. This lens underscores Shakti's role in

fostering inclusivity, aligning with the study's aim to celebrate diverse subjectivities in South Asian contexts.

Shakti stands as a bold intervention, using its queer Tamil protagonist to challenge heteronormative and diasporic norms. Its vibrant visuals, non-linear storytelling, and Tamil-rooted magic foster inclusivity, aligning with the abstract's focus on resisting normative constraints. By celebrating Shakti's resilience, the comic sustains cultural dialogues, urging recognition of diverse identities. This study, inspired by Sindu's vision, sees Shakti as a vital step toward inclusive representation, redefining heroism as authentic selfhood in a Tamil-American landscape.

In this reimagined Shakti narrative, Shakti, raised by two mothers, Indian Rita and pregnant Black American Terri, relocates, facing seclusion from classmates while finding her community. Shakti's fight to protect Maya's unborn child and lift a local curse reflects inclusivity. Her resilience, stating, "This is not new to me; I'll adjust," underscores her fluid identity, navigating intersectional challenges of race and family structure. Butler's performativity frames Shakti's defiance of heteronormative norms, as her non-traditional family subverts patriarchal expectations, fostering inclusive spaces (Butler 1990). Genette's anachrony is evident in the non-linear blending of mythic curse-breaking with urban struggles, disrupting conventional narratives to amplify marginalized voices (Genette 1980). Vibrant multimodal visuals, dynamic panels of Shakti's battles enhance this advocacy, challenging racial and gender biases. By centering a queer, interracial family, the narrative resists dominant ideologies, promoting diverse subjectivities and echoing Shakti's global feminist impact (Sarwar and Zulfiqar 2024).

8.Findings and Conclusion: Crafting Queer Resilience in South Asian Comics

This study concludes that LGBTQIA+ identities are showcased through a narrative-queer theoretical lens in six South Asian comics *Kari, Priya's Shakti, Basila and The Street Crew, My Chacha is Gay, Dhee,* and *Shakti.* It supports the idea that these multimodal writings create inclusive narrative spaces and challenge prevailing ideologies. Employing content analysis, the study examines characters, visual motifs, and narrative structures, and reveals how queer resilience is shaped, sequenced, and focalised across South Asian contexts. Each comic challenges heteronormative and patriarchal norms through distinct strategies: Kari's urban defiance in Mumbai, Priya's mythic activism, Riffat Apa's transgender advocacy in Lahore, Chacha's familial love amidst Pakistan's Section 377, Dhee's musical rebellion in Bangladesh's post-colonial landscape, and Shakti's magical awakening in a Tamil-American diaspora.

Focalisation through characters like Ahmed (My Chacha is Gay), whose childlike perspective challenges homophobia, and Dhee, whose introspections invite empathy, fosters inclusivity. Visual motifs like Priya's tiger, Basila's street art, Shakti's fire reinforce resistance, blending cultural specificity with universal queer themes. These comics resist dominant ideologies by subverting heteronormative expectations, as seen in Dhee's defiance of Bangladesh's pre-2018 legal constraints and Shakti's critique of diasporic prejudice. Their diverse approaches to activism (Basila), children's narratives (My Chacha is Gay), and fantasy (Shakti) highlight varied paths to resilience, contributing to global queer children's literature by challenging universalised narratives.

This study, inspired by these creators' courage, finds that multimodal texts, non-linear narratives, and relatable characters sustain cultural dialogues across South Asian landscapes, from Pakistan's legal struggles to Amherst's Tamil diaspora. By redefining heroism as authentic selfhood, these comics urge recognition of diverse identities. Their impact extends beyond South Asia, inspiring educators and creators to amplify marginalised voices in children's media. Future work should explore how such narratives influence policy and pedagogy, fostering inclusive societies. This analysis, grounded in rigorous content analysis and queer theory, reaffirms the power of storytelling to reshape norms and envision equitable futures

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH CULTURE SOCIETY ISSN: 2456-6683
Monthly Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed Journal [Impact Factor: 9.241]
Volume - 09, Special Issue - 43, December - 2025 Publication Date: 31/12/2025

DOIs:10.2017/IJRCS/ICNMHTGLL-2025/P30 --:-- Research Paper / Article / Review

A Two Day International Conference on Navigating Mental Health Through the Gateway of Language and Literature. (ICNMHTGLL-2025) Date: 22 - 23 December, 2025

Reimagining Happiness: Queer Mental Health and Affective Resistance in Adam Silvera's *More Happy Than Not* and April Daniels's *Dreadnought*

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Abstract: *The trajectory of American queer literature is rooted in narratives of grief and suffering, evident in early young adult novels like John Donovan's I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip (1969), Isabelle Holland's The Man Without a Face (1972), among others, where tragedy befalls non-normative characters, as a rectification for the inclusion of same-sex desires. While twenty-first-century American young adult fiction has expanded its representational scope, queer characters still confront intense affective pressures under cis-heteronormative norms. This paper analyzes Adam Silvera's More Happy Than Not (2015) and April Daniels's Dreadnought (2017) to examine the conflicted emotions and self-destructive behaviors of queer adolescents shaped by hegemonic structures. Borrowing theoretical insights from Sara Ahmed, Lee Edelman, José Esteban Muñoz, and others, it investigates the dynamic between "queerness" and normative "happiness", impacting queer mental health, while also exploring the resistant journeys undertaken by queer characters. In Silvera's novel, the protagonist Aaron Soto, a gay Puerto Rican teenager from the Bronx, undergoes an experimental procedure to erase memories of his sexuality, motivated by the belief that happiness is attainable only through self-eradication. Again, in Daniels's novel, the central character Danielle Tozer, a white trans girl, endowed with superhuman powers, remains subject to entrenched transphobia in both familial and institutional spaces, thereby compounding her mental trauma. Both novels depict the failure of technological and superheroic interventions to secure queer belonging within normative frameworks. Nonetheless, through their speculative worlds, the selected texts present resilient non-conforming subjectivities embracing a "happily queer" existence (Ahmed 115).*

Key Words: *Adam Silvera, April Daniels, Mental Health, Queer, Young Adults*

1. INTRODUCTION:

The affective state of unhappiness has played a central role in shaping queer literary and cultural production, as experiences of coming out, familial rejection, the socio-medical realities of HIV and AIDS, and systemic violence against queer bodies have frequently been articulated through narratives of grief, despair, and suffering. Within literary history, LGBTQ+ novels have often relied on tragic or unhappy endings, shaped in part by publishers' fears that affirming portrayals of queerness might invite censorship or moral condemnation. Vin Packer's *Spring Fire* (1952), widely regarded as the first lesbian pulp novel, was published under the explicit condition that it avoid a happy ending so as not to present homosexuality as an "attractive" option (Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* 88). Similarly, in John Donovan's *I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip* (1969), often identified as the earliest mainstream

young adult novel to explicitly address homosexuality, the death of the protagonist Davy's dog functions as a symbolic punishment for non-normative desire, reinforcing the association between queerness and suffering. This narrative logic persists across early American LGBTQ+ young adult fiction, including Isabelle Holland's *The Man Without a Face* (1972), Sandra Scoppettone's *Trying Hard to Hear You* (1974), and Mary W. Sullivan's *What's This About Pete?* (1976), where death and tragedy operate as forms of moral "rectification" for same-sex desire.

These recurring narrative patterns reflect broader cultural and theoretical frameworks that situate queerness in proximity to negativity and failed futurity. Lee Edelman in his groundbreaking work, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004) explains the concept of "reproductive futurism," a dominant ideological structure that renders queerness incompatible with social progress and futurity. Within this framework, queer individuals are considered as incapable of participating in normative structures of happiness. Sara Ahmed's *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), extends this critique by theorizing the "unhappy queer," to explain how queer people's nonconformity to dominant gender and heterosexual scripts is perceived as the cause of their unhappiness. In her later essay, "Queer Fatalism" (2017), Ahmed further argues that "the assumption that to be queer is to hurtle toward a miserable fate" serves an ideological function of legitimizing heteronormativity by depicting queer life as inherently precarious. On the other hand, José Esteban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009) delivers a critical counterpoint by rejecting the confinement of queerness to the "here-and-now" of suffering and advocating instead for a future-oriented vision of queer potentiality (1).

Despite increased representational diversity and more affirmative endings in twenty-first-century queer young adult fiction, happiness remains a contested and disciplinary affect, often tethered to heteronormative ideals of family, reproduction, and respectability. It is within this contested terrain that Adam Silvera's *More Happy Than Not* (2015) and April Daniels's *Dreadnought* (2017) intervene. Both novels depict queer adolescents whose psychological distress emerges from familial violence, cultural stigma, and institutional pathologization, while simultaneously resisting the notion that happiness can only be achieved through conformity or erasure. Drawing on Edelman, Ahmed, Muñoz, and others, this paper argues that these texts reconceptualize happiness not as normative fulfillment but as a resistant, ongoing practice that acknowledges pain while refusing the foreclosure of queer futurity.

2. "WE'RE GOING TO KILL THAT PART OF ME THAT'S RUINED EVERYTHING":

The representation of queer youth in contemporary American young adult fiction is shaped by longstanding institutional histories that have defined queerness through pathology, shame, and emotional instability. When John Donovan's novel *I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip* was published in the year 1969, homosexuality was still identified as a psychological disorder by the American Psychiatric Association, and non-heteronormative relationships remained criminalized across most of the United States (Holpuch). These intertwined regimes of medicalization and criminalization generated cultural scripts that continue to structure how queer adolescence is imagined. The persistence of "gender identity disorder" as a diagnostic category until 2013 further reinforced the notion that non-normative gender and sexual identities were symptoms of psychological dysfunction, shaping a representational landscape in which queer youth are depicted primarily through discourses of depression, death, or emotional fragility, rather than as subjects responding to systemic marginalization and surveillance (Lee). This pattern resonates with Lee Edelman's critique of "reproductive futurism," which casts queerness as fundamentally incompatible with the heteronormative social order. In Edelman's formulation, the queer subject becomes a figure of negation whose inability to reproduce marks them as a threat to normative futurity. Queer unhappiness thus emerges not from desire itself but from cultural demands that queerness remain outside the horizon of an acceptable future.

Contemporary young adult fiction increasingly interrogates these conditions by articulating the emotional toll of familial expectations, institutional surveillance, and normative scripts of gender and sexuality. Adam Silvera's semi-autobiographical novel *More Happy Than Not* engages this contested

terrain, examining how queer unhappiness is produced through heteronormative demands for linearity, conformity, and futurity.

More Happy Than Not (2015) focuses on Aaron Soto, a sixteen-year-old Puerto Rican teenager living in the Bronx, whose psychological trauma is shaped by intersecting experiences of familial rejection, bullying and internalized homophobia. Following his father's suicidal death and his personal attempt to terminate his life, Aaron maintains a facade of contentment through his heterosexual relationship with Genevieve. However, his growing emotional attachment to his neighborhood friend, Thomas, compels him to confront his repressed queer desires, unraveling a series of affective and social ruptures. As Aaron's feelings intensify, his interpersonal relationships deteriorate, culminating in the end of his relationship with Genevieve, Thomas's rejection, and the homophobic violence perpetrated by his childhood friends. These compounded experiences exacerbate Aaron's depression and suicidal impulses, which he interprets as personal failures rather than responses to systemic homophobia.

According to Ahmed, "To arrive into the world is to inherit the world that you arrive at. The family is a point of inheritance, shaping what is proximate to the child" (*The Promise of Happiness* 95). For queer children, the inability to "inherit the family by reproducing its line" becomes a source of unhappiness for themselves as well as their parents (95). In Silvera's novel, Aaron's conflicted relationship with his father exemplifies this logic. His father's refusal to accept or accommodate a queer child within the family home reflects the limits of the hetero-patriarchal household, where lineage, futurity, and masculinity remain inseparable from heterosexuality. These tensions are further inflected by Aaron's Latinx lineage that upholds cultural values such as *familismo*, *marianismo*, and *machismo.* While *familismo* refers to the prioritization of familial solidarity, and *marianismo* is rooted in Christian ideals that regard women as nurturing figures modeled on the Virgin Mary, *machismo* underscores the man's position as the household patriarch (Cauce and Domenech Rodríguez). These ideals not only render Aaron's desire unintelligible but also precipitate the violence he experiences at home.

Further, this violence extends beyond the domestic sphere when Aaron is assaulted by his friends Brendan and Me-Crazy, collapsing distinctions between private and public safety. Under such circumstances, Aaron comes to believe that the only available future is one secured through the erasure of his queerness, either through death or the intervention of the Leteo Institute, a futuristic medical facility that employs neurosurgical technology to suppress and alter traumatic memories. His declaration, "We're going to kill that part of me that's ruined everything" articulates the internalization of reproductive futurism's demand that queerness be eliminated for a coherent future to emerge (205). It also projects Aaron's embodiment of the "unhappy queer" as his attempt to erase his memories, emerges not from his sexual orientation alone, but from the social shame, discrimination, and violence that queerness invites in his context.

Silvera situates Aaron's desire to forget within an affective economy that prioritizes emotional stability and coherence over authenticity. In his case, mental health becomes synonymous with compliance, measured by one's capacity to suppress queerness and re-enter normative futurity. However, this fatalistic trajectory is disrupted when resurfacing memories reveal that Aaron previously underwent the Leteo process while in a relationship with a boy named Collin. He also remembers the violent assault in the subway when he and Collin were targeted and called "faggots," as well as his father's rejection, and the discovery of his father's body, compelling him to reconsider further erasure.

As the narrative progresses, Aaron develops anterograde amnesia, a side effect of the Leteo treatment that prevents the formation of new memories. However, even this profound cognitive loss cannot undo his queerness. His retention of memories related to his identity and relationship with Collin underscores the failure of medical intervention to eradicate queer desire. This reckoning signals a shift from Edelman's logic of negation toward Muñoz's concept of queer futurity, which imagines the past as "a field of possibility" enabling alternative futures (16).

In Silvera's novel, Aaron's illustrated documentation of daily life under the recurring heading "Remember That Time…" enacts this temporal practice (290). In reclaiming memory as an active force, he aligns with Ahmed's notion of being "happily queer," which involves refusing normative happiness scripts and embracing alternative affective trajectories (*The Promise of Happiness* 115). Aaron's assertion that life consists of "a series of endless happy beginnings" gestures toward a futurity grounded not in reproductive logic but in ongoing becoming (292).

This orientation is further underscored in the revised ending of the 2020 deluxe edition of *More Happy Than Not*, where Aaron undergoes an experimental procedure restoring his memory and forms supportive connections with Jordan, another queer patient. Rather than negating the original novel's emphasis on survival amid precarity, the revised ending extends its resistant logic by envisioning an alternative queer future shaped by collective care, recognition, and continued becoming.

Through its speculative framework, *More Happy Than Not* exposes the regulatory forces shaping queer adolescence while expanding the terms through which futurity becomes imaginable. The Leteo Institute functions as a speculative device revealing continuities between historical regimes of erasure and their technological rearticulations. Further, Silvera's acknowledgment in an interview with Tiernan Bertrand-Essington that he would have chosen the Leteo procedure as a closeted teenager underscores how the novel's speculative premise emerges from material and psychological pressures shaping queer youth lives (Silvera 1:34-1:38).

3. "I'M NOT SUPPOSED TO BE A BOY, I AM A GIRL!":

April Daniels's *Dreadnought* (2017), the first novel in the *Nemesis* trilogy, explores the exclusionary structures that shape transgender lives through the speculative framework of the superhero genre. Centering on Danielle Tozer, a fifteen-year-old trans girl living in the fictional New Port City, the novel situates trans mental health at the intersection of familial violence, medical regulation, and institutional exclusion. While the superhero genre traditionally promises empowerment and justice, *Dreadnought* exposes the limits of such narratives within cis-heteronormative and hetero-patriarchal social orders.

Danielle's psychological distress originates within the domestic space, which functions as a site of fear rather than care. Her father's sustained physical and verbal abuse, refusal to acknowledge her gender identity, and insistence on forcibly shaping her into a "real man" transform the home into a space of constant threat. Danielle's remark, "I don't feel safe at home," captures the affective reality of living under constant surveillance and threat (116). Jack Halberstam in the text, *Trans*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability* (2017) argues that gender norms imposed during childhood operate as "violent enforcements of hetero-reproductive domesticity" (61). This logic is explicit when Danielle's father asserts, "You were born a boy, and I raised you as one," while subjecting her to slurs such as "Freak" and "Tranny" (181, 182). In Ahmed's terms, the family functions as a "point of inheritance" that organizes normative happiness and futurity (*The Promise of Happiness* 95). Danielle's trans identity disrupts this inheritance, rendering her a figure of anticipated unhappiness aligned with the "unhappy queer."

While Danielle's mother does not share her husband's overt hostility, her response remains marked by anxiety rather than affirmation. Her questions, "Danny, are you really happy like this?" and her repeated insistence that life will be "so hard" reiterate what Ahmed identifies as "queer fatalism," the assumption that queer and trans lives are inevitably destined for suffering (*Dreadnought* 188). Framed as concern, this affective stance nonetheless reinforces the idea that a trans future is inherently unlivable, intensifying Danielle's isolation and reinforcing the association between queerness and unhappiness.

Prior to her transition, Danielle's attempts at self-expression remain confined to covert acts such as secretly painting her toenails, which she describes as "the one way I can fight back" (8). These

moments function as early forms of resistance within an otherwise hostile environment. Her pre-transition mirror scenes further reveal the intensity of her gender dysphoria, as the mirror becomes a site of fragmentation rather than recognition. Jay Prosser in the book, *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (1998) argues that for transsexual individuals the mirror produces not Lacan's "jubilant integration of the body" but a moment of profound "disidentification" (100). In *Dreadnought*, the mirror registers Danielle's fractured sense of self, shaped by the dissonance between her mental self-conception and her physical embodiment. She articulates this distress as, "More and more I hate to look in the mirror… I'm way too tall and my shoulders are getting broad (7). For Danielle, the mirror becomes a relentless source of anxiety, reflecting not coherence but a body that feels increasingly alien and uncontrollable.

It is against this backdrop of bodily dissonance that the narrative shifts into the speculative. Danielle's inheritance of Dreadnought's powers marks an abrupt rupture from earlier scenes of dysphoria, as she awakens in an "ideal" female body endowed with superhuman strength, flight, and agility. This instantaneous transformation reflects Daniels's desire to focus not on transition itself but on life afterward (Daniels, "April Daniels"). While the transformation temporarily alleviates Danielle's dysphoria, *Dreadnought* insists that bodily affirmation alone cannot resolve the psychological harm produced by hostile social structures. Her father's abuse intensifies, and medical authority intervenes when Doctor Cho attempts to reverse her transition under the diagnosis of "gender identity disorder," underscoring the continued pathologization of transgender identity within institutional settings (32). Significantly, *Dreadnought* precedes the World Health Organization's 2019 reclassification of "transsexualism" as "gender incongruence" in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11), situating the novel within a historical moment when trans embodiment remained medicalized and subject to correction (Askevis-Leherpeux et al.).

Danielle's empowerment is further undermined within the superhero institution itself. Despite the presence of queer teammates, like Valkyria and Chlorophyll, the Legion reproduces exclusion through Myra Graywytch, whose persistent misgendering and deadnaming of Danielle function as mechanisms of ideological policing rather than individual antagonism. Jamiee Cook in "Learning to See" (2022), argues that deadnaming operates as a delegitimizing tactic that denies trans self-determination and asserts authority over identity. Within the Legion, an institution ostensibly devoted to justice, Graywytch's conduct exposes how dominant gender norms persist even in progressive spaces. This institutional failure is intensified when Danielle's father enters the superhero sphere seeking a metahuman who can "fix" her, revealing how familial authority and gender regulation extend seamlessly across private and public domains.

Against this sustained negation, *Dreadnought* gestures toward resistance through alternative spaces of belonging. Danielle's relationship with Sarah (Calamity) functions as a counterspace grounded in mutual recognition and shared struggle, enabling her to imagine a future not entirely defined by familial rejection or institutional discipline. These relational formations resonate with Muñoz's conception of queer futurity that exceeds the constraints of the present through collective persistence. Thus, Daniels's novel locates resistance in provisional alliances and affective connections rather than in institutional validation.

This vision of queer survival is further articulated through Danielle's creation of alternative spaces by relying on her superheroic abilities. Following a confrontation with her father, intensified by Graywytch's provocation, Danielle retreats into the sky, noting that "It's better than being anywhere someone might see or hear me" (88). The sky functions as a refuge, enabling her to process grief and fear beyond surveillance or violence. A similar moment occurs later when Danielle, overwhelmed while recounting her home life to Valkyria, again ascends, observing that "there are no problems in the air, nothing I need to hide from or watch carefully" (117). These moments suggest that safety and belonging emerge not within domestic or institutional spaces but through movement into alternative, non-territorial zones. While these speculative spaces do not eliminate transphobia, they offer provisional sites of endurance and relief.

4. CONCLUSION

This paper examines Silvera's *More Happy Than Not* and Daniel's *Dreadnought* as contemporary American young adult narratives that explore queer mental health within structures of familial violence, institutional regulation, and affective discipline. It argues that queer unhappiness does not originate from queer identity itself but from the hegemonic regimes that render queerness incompatible with normative happiness, futurity, and belonging. Aaron Soto and Danielle Tozer emerge as figures shaped by "queer fatalism," wherein queerness is anticipated as a life of inevitable suffering, failure, or erasure.

At the same time, the paper highlights that neither of the novels remain confined to fatalistic closure. In *More Happy Than Not*, Aaron's confrontation with memory and his deliberate acts of remembering operate as affective practices that resist erasure and sustain futurity beyond heteronormative coherence. Similarly, in *Dreadnought*, Danielle's survival takes shape through modes of resistance that exceed bodily affirmation or institutional inclusion, emerging instead through alternative spaces and relational bonds.

By placing speculative technologies and superheroic transformation alongside realist portrayals of trauma, both novels expose the limits of individual empowerment as a response to structurally produced suffering. Technological forgetting and superhuman power fail to secure happiness or safety when the underlying logics of heteronormativity, cisnormativity, and patriarchal authority remain intact. Instead, the texts reframe well-being as contingent upon the capacity to imagine lives beyond normative scripts of success, family, and futurity.

Additionally, this paper underlines that the selected texts do not offer uncomplicated visions of "happy endings." Their significance lies in presenting queer survival as an ongoing, resistant practice rather than a resolved state. By attending to negative affect without naturalizing it, these novels challenge the cultural assumption that queerness is synonymous with misery, even as they remain attentive to the material realities that produce queer grief. In doing so, they contribute to a rethinking of happiness in queer young adult fiction, not as conformity to dominant norms but as precarious, relational, and continually reimagined forms of queer becoming.

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