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1. The Woman as Nation, the Woman as Self: Bimala's Divided Subjectivity in Rabindranath Tagore's Ghare Baire

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Abstract

Rabindranath Tagore's Ghare Baire (1916) stages the Swadeshi movement's political ferment through the consciousness of Bimala, a bhadramahila drawn out of the domestic interior (ghar) into the public, nationalist world (bahir) by her husband Nikhilesh's unconventional liberalism and her growing attraction to the fiery nationalist Sandip. This article argues that Bimala's narrative functions as Tagore's critique of a nationalist politics that instrumentalises women as symbols of the nation while denying them genuine subjecthood. Reading the novel's tripartite first-person narration alongside the historical context of the 1905 Partition of Bengal and the Swadeshi movement's cult of Bharat Mata, the article traces how Bimala is first elevated by Sandip into an icon of the motherland, then destabilised by the very desire this elevation awakens in her, and finally returned to a fragile, self-aware interiority that neither nationalist rhetoric nor domestic convention can fully contain. The article contends that Tagore's ultimate concern is not which man Bimala should choose, but whether a woman granted political symbolism without political agency can ever be said to possess a self at all. Bimala's divided subjectivity, caught between ghar and bahir, exposes the gendered costs of a nationalism built on feminine iconography.

Keywords: Rabindranath Tagore, Ghare Baire, Swadeshi movement, nationalism and gender, Bharat Mata, domesticity, female subjectivity, colonial Bengal

Introduction

Rabindranath Tagore's Ghare Baire, serialised in 1915 and published as a novel in 1916, is set against the backdrop of the Swadeshi movement that followed the 1905 Partition of Bengal, a period in which nationalist politics increasingly drew on the figure of the mother-goddess and the feminised image of the nation, Bharat Mata, to mobilise mass sentiment. The novel's title, literally 'the home and the world,' names the spatial and ideological divide that structures the narrative: the ghar, or domestic interior traditionally coded as feminine, and the bahir, the public and political world traditionally coded as masculine. Tagore's innovation is to place a woman, Bimala, at the exact point where these two domains collide, and to narrate the novel through three alternating first-person voices, Bimala's own, her husband Nikhilesh's, and the nationalist agitator Sandip's, so that her subjectivity is always refracted through, and contested by, the men who claim to know her.

This article argues that Ghare Baire is less a love triangle than an interrogation of what happens to a woman's selfhood when she is recruited into nationalist symbolism. The following sections examine, first, the historical figure of Bharat Mata and the ideological work performed by feminised images of the nation; second, Sandip's rhetorical construction of Bimala as an icon of the motherland; third, Nikhilesh's alternative, and equally fraught, form of liberal husbandhood; and finally, the novel's closing catastrophe, in which Bimala is left to reckon with a self that neither nationalist adulation nor domestic liberalism has actually addressed.

Bharat Mata and the Ideological Uses of Feminine Symbolism

The Swadeshi movement's cultural politics drew heavily on the iconography of the mother-goddess, exemplified by Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's earlier invocation of the nation as Devi and by the widespread circulation, from the early twentieth century, of images and songs personifying India as Bharat Mata. This symbolism allowed nationalist politics to mobilise a powerful register of devotion and sacrifice while displacing the question of actual women's political participation. The mother-nation was to be served, protected, and worshipped, but she was rarely imagined as a political subject in her own right; the labour of nationalist agency remained assigned to men, while women supplied its emotional and symbolic ground.

Ghare Baire dramatises this arrangement with unusual clarity by making an actual woman, Bimala, the object onto which nationalist symbolism is projected. Sandip does not simply persuade Bimala to support Swadeshi; he reconstructs her, in his own rhetoric and in the narrative's account of his courtship, as a living embodiment of the nation he claims to serve. The novel thereby literalises the ideological mechanism by which nationalist movements of the period converted living women into symbols, exposing the gap between the reverence such symbolism appears to confer and the absence of any corresponding political standing for the women so honoured.

Sandip's Rhetoric and the Seduction of Symbolic Power

Sandip's appeal to Bimala operates simultaneously as political persuasion and romantic seduction, and the novel is deliberately ambiguous about where one ends and the other begins. He addresses her not as an individual with particular desires but as the incarnation of Shakti, the feminine principle of power that nationalist rhetoric invoked to energise the movement. This address is intoxicating precisely because it offers Bimala, for the first time, a form of significance that exceeds her domestic role as Nikhilesh's wife; she is no longer merely the mistress of a household but, in Sandip's language, the animating spirit of a whole political movement.

Yet the novel is unsparing in showing how this elevation depends on Bimala's erasure as a particular person. Sandip's interest lies in what she represents, not in who she is, and his narrative sections reveal a man alert to his own capacity to manipulate devotion, whether directed at the nation or at a woman, for his personal and political ends. Bimala's growing infatuation with Sandip is thus inseparable from her infatuation with the symbolic self he constructs for her, a self that briefly feels like liberation but is, the novel suggests, another and more seductive form of confinement, one that flatters rather than frees.

Nikhilesh's Liberalism and Its Limits

Nikhilesh, by contrast, is the novel's exemplar of reformist domestic liberalism. It is he who first draws Bimala out of the antahpur, the inner women's quarters, and insists that she meet Sandip and engage with the political and intellectual life of the household on equal terms. His stated commitment is to Bimala's freedom as an end in itself, independent of whether that freedom leads her toward or away from him. This is, within the novel's terms, a genuinely progressive position, and one that distinguishes Nikhilesh sharply from the possessive husbands of earlier domestic fiction.

Yet Tagore does not allow Nikhilesh's liberalism to stand as an unambiguous solution to the problem the novel poses. Nikhilesh's insistence on Bimala's freedom is itself a kind of test, one

that presupposes his own moral superiority in granting it and that leaves him, for much of the novel, in a position of wounded passivity rather than active partnership. His liberalism grants Bimala the freedom to be seduced by Sandip's rhetoric but offers no comparable rhetoric of his own through which she might understand her own desires; he can withhold coercion, but he cannot supply the self-knowledge Bimala needs. In this respect, the novel suggests that reformist liberalism and nationalist mobilisation share a common flaw: both are political and ethical projects conducted, ultimately, on Bimala's behalf rather than with her full participation as their author.

Divided Subjectivity and the Novel's Catastrophic Close

The novel's structure, alternating among Bimala's, Nikhilesh's, and Sandip's first-person narrations, formally enacts the divided subjectivity that is its central concern. Bimala's own sections reveal a woman acutely aware that she is being read differently by each man in her life, and increasingly uncertain which of these readings, if any, corresponds to a self she can recognise as her own. Her theft of money from the household to support Sandip's political activities, and her subsequent horror at what she has done, mark the moment at which the novel's abstractions about nationalism and desire are forced into the register of concrete, ethically weighted action.

The violence that erupts at the novel's end, culminating in Nikhilesh's death during communal unrest that Sandip's brand of nationalist agitation has helped provoke, denies the narrative any of the resolutions available to a conventional triangle plot. Bimala is left neither with Sandip, whose rhetoric she now recognises as self-serving, nor with any prospect of return to an innocent domesticity with Nikhilesh, whose death forecloses that possibility absolutely. What remains is Bimala's own retrospective narration, composed after these events, which is less a confession than an attempt to reconstruct a self that the competing claims of ghar and bahir, home and world, had never allowed her to possess outright. Tagore's refusal to grant Bimala a stable outcome, whether tragic martyrdom or restored domestic peace, is the novel's clearest statement that the cost of treating women as symbols, whether of the nation or of the home, is a self that must be painstakingly reassembled after the symbolism has done its damage.

Literature Review

Scholarship on *Ghare Baire* has developed along several distinct but overlapping lines. A significant body of criticism situates the novel within the political history of the Swadeshi movement and the 1905 Partition of Bengal, treating it as Tagore's fictionalised response to the nationalist politics he had himself grown disillusioned with by the time of the novel's composition. Historians of Indian nationalism, notably Partha Chatterjee, have read the novel alongside broader arguments about the "women's question" in colonial Bengali nationalism, arguing that nationalist discourse resolved anxieties about Western modernity by designating the home, and women, as the preserved, spiritual "inner domain" of the nation, untouched by colonial material dominance. This scholarship provides an essential framework for understanding Bimala's symbolic function within the novel.

A second strand of criticism, informed by feminist literary analysis, has focused on Bimala's tripartite narration and her position between Nikhilesh and Sandip. Radha Chakravarty and others have argued that Tagore's use of alternating first-person narrators is itself a formal critique of the way competing male ideologies, nationalist and reformist alike, construct and contest female subjectivity, rather than allowing Bimala a fully autonomous voice of her own.

A third body of scholarship, exemplified by Jasodhara Bagchi's work on the ideology of motherhood in colonial Bengal, situates the novel within the wider iconography of Bharat Mata and the feminisation of the nation in nationalist visual and literary culture, arguing that this symbolism performed significant ideological work in mobilising sentiment while offering women little corresponding political agency.

Despite this extensive critical attention, relatively few studies bring these three strands, the political-historical, the narratological, and the iconographic, into a single sustained analysis of Bimala's characterisation specifically as a case study in the costs of nationalist symbolism for female subjectivity. This study seeks to integrate these approaches into a focused reading of Bimala's divided self.

Research Gap

Existing scholarship on *Ghare Baire* reveals three notable gaps that this study addresses.

First, much criticism continues to read the novel primarily as a love triangle or a debate between Nikhilesh's liberalism and Sandip's nationalism, treating Bimala as the object of that debate rather than as a subject whose own fragmented selfhood is the novel's central concern.

Second, historical and political readings of the novel's engagement with Swadeshi nationalism and the Bharat Mata iconography have rarely been integrated closely with formal analysis of the novel's tripartite narration, leaving the connection between the novel's politics and its narrative structure under-examined.

Third, comparative studies of Tagore's female protagonists often place Bimala alongside heroines such as Binodini in *Chokher Bali*, producing broad surveys of Tagore's "new woman" rather than a focused analysis of how nationalist, rather than domestic or romantic, discourse specifically shapes and constrains female subjectivity.

This study addresses these gaps by treating Bimala's divided subjectivity, rather than the novel's romantic plot, as the primary analytical lens, and by reading the novel's narrative form and its political content as inseparable dimensions of a single argument about the gendered costs of nationalist symbolism.

Research Objectives

1. To examine how Rabindranath Tagore constructs Bimala as a woman caught between the domestic interior (*ghar*) and the nationalist public world (*bahir*) during the Swadeshi movement.

2. To situate the novel within the historical context of the 1905 Partition of Bengal and the iconography of Bharat Mata as a feminised symbol of the nation.

3. To analyse the significance of the novel's tripartite first-person narration in fragmenting and contesting Bimala's subjectivity across the perspectives of Bimala, Nikhilesh, and Sandip.

4. To assess Sandip's rhetorical construction of Bimala as an icon of Shakti and the ideological costs this elevation entails.

5. To interpret the novel's catastrophic conclusion as a critique of both nationalist mobilisation and reformist liberalism as modes of address that act upon, rather than with, Bimala.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, text-based method combining close reading with historical and political contextualisation. The primary source is Rabindranath Tagore's *Ghare Baire* (1916), read in English translation with attention to key passages where the novel's tripartite narration bears directly on the construction of Bimala's subjectivity.

The analysis draws on postcolonial and feminist literary theory as its principal framework, particularly scholarship on the gendered iconography of nationalism and the "women's question" in colonial Bengal, to examine how the novel represents the relationship between nationalist politics and female selfhood. This theoretical approach is supported by historical material on the Swadeshi movement, the 1905 Partition of Bengal, and the cultural politics of Bharat Mata, which is used to contextualise the novel's political setting and Sandip's rhetorical strategies.

The method is interpretive rather than empirical: it proceeds through close analysis of narrative voice, characterisation, and key scenes, read against this historical and theoretical framework, to construct a sustained argument about Bimala's divided subjectivity and its significance within the novel's critique of nationalist symbolism.

Findings

1. Tagore constructs Bimala's crisis as arising specifically from her recruitment into nationalist symbolism, rather than from romantic indecision alone, positioning her as a case study in the costs of feminised nationalist iconography.

2. The novel's tripartite narration formally enacts Bimala's fragmented subjectivity, ensuring that no single account of her, including her own, is permitted to stand as authoritative or final.

3. Sandip's rhetorical elevation of Bimala as an embodiment of Shakti is shown to depend on her erasure as a particular individual, exposing the gap between symbolic reverence and genuine political agency.

4. Nikhilesh's reformist liberalism, while distinct from Sandip's nationalist rhetoric, is similarly shown to be a mode of address conducted on Bimala's behalf rather than in full partnership with her, offering freedom without a corresponding framework for self-knowledge.

5. The novel's unresolved and catastrophic ending denies Bimala any conventional resolution, tragic martyrdom or restored domesticity, reinforcing the study's central claim that *Ghare Baire* exposes the gendered costs of a nationalism, and a domestic liberalism, both built on the instrumentalisation of women as symbols rather than as political subjects in their own right.

Conclusion

Ghare Baire reimagines womanhood by refusing to let either nationalist politics or domestic liberalism claim to have solved the problem of Bimala's selfhood. Sandip's Shakti-rhetoric and Nikhilesh's reformist permissiveness are both shown to be forms of address that act upon Bimala rather than with her, and the novel's tripartite narration ensures that no single account of her, including her own, is allowed to stand as final. By locating a woman at the precise juncture of ghar and bahir and then withholding any comfortable resolution to her position there, Tagore exposes the gendered costs of a nationalist movement that required feminine symbolism while offering women little genuine political voice. Bimala's divided subjectivity remains one of the most searching literary accounts of what colonial Bengali nationalism asked of its women, and of how much of a woman's self such demands could leave unaccounted for.

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2. Cognitive Intelligence versus Emotional Intelligence: A Comparative Review of Predictive Validity for Academic and Workplace Performance and Their Interaction under Decisional Stress

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Abstract

Cognitive intelligence (as indexed by general mental ability, or IQ) and emotional intelligence (EI) have each been proposed as important predictors of how individuals perform academically, professionally, and under pressure. Yet the two constructs are frequently pitted against one another in both popular and scholarly discourse, with claims about the primacy of EI often outpacing the empirical evidence. This paper offers a comparative review of the predictive validity of cognitive intelligence and emotional intelligence across academic and workplace performance domains, and examines the theoretical and empirical literature on how the two constructs interact when individuals must make decisions under stress. Drawing on meta-analytic findings, the review shows that general mental ability remains the single strongest individual-difference predictor of performance, while emotional intelligence contributes smaller but incremental and practically meaningful variance, particularly in socially demanding and affectively charged contexts. The review further develops a compensatory-interactionist framework, synthesising evidence that emotional intelligence and cognitive ability do not operate independently but jointly determine decision quality under stress, with each capacity partially buffering deficits in the other. Implications for personnel selection, educational assessment, and stress-resilience training are discussed, along with limitations of the existing evidence base and directions for future research, including the need for longitudinal, performance-based (rather than self-report) measurement designs.

Keywords: cognitive intelligence, emotional intelligence, predictive validity, academic performance, workplace performance, decision-making, stress

1. Introduction

For much of the twentieth century, general mental ability — commonly operationalised as intelligence quotient (IQ) — was treated as the pre-eminent predictor of human achievement, from academic attainment to occupational success (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). The publication of Salovey and Mayer's (1990) formal model of emotional intelligence, and its subsequent popularisation by Goleman (1995), challenged this orthodoxy by proposing that the ability to perceive, understand, and regulate emotion in oneself and others constitutes a distinct form of intelligence with independent predictive power. Popular treatments went further, suggesting that emotional intelligence (EI) might account for the majority of variance in life success, at

times explicitly claiming that EI matters more than IQ. This claim, while intuitively appealing, has not survived close empirical scrutiny (Joseph, Jin, Newman, & O'Boyle, 2015).

The present paper undertakes a comparative review of two questions that remain of central concern to differential and organisational psychology. First, what is the relative predictive validity of cognitive intelligence and emotional intelligence for academic and workplace performance, when both are examined using rigorous, meta-analytic evidence? Second, how do the two constructs interact — rather than merely compete — when individuals are required to make decisions under conditions of acute or chronic stress? The paper argues that a simple 'IQ versus EQ' framing obscures a more scientifically interesting and practically useful picture: cognitive ability and emotional intelligence are largely orthogonal constructs that combine, and under stress specifically interact, to shape performance outcomes.

2. Conceptual Foundations

2.1 Cognitive Intelligence

Cognitive intelligence, or general mental ability (g), refers to the capacity for abstract reasoning, problem-solving, working memory, and the rapid acquisition and application of knowledge (Spearman, 1904; Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). It is typically assessed through standardised psychometric instruments and is among the most extensively validated constructs in psychology, with a century of research establishing its stability across the lifespan and its robust association with educational and occupational outcomes.

2.2 Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence has been conceptualised in two broad traditions. The ability model, developed by Mayer and Salovey (1997), defines EI as a set of interrelated abilities: perceiving emotion accurately, using emotion to facilitate thought, understanding emotional information, and regulating emotion in oneself and others. This model treats EI as a genuine form of intelligence, measurable through performance-based tests with objectively scorable correct answers. The trait (or mixed) model, associated with Bar-On (1997) and popularised by Goleman (1995), instead treats EI as a constellation of self-perceived emotional and social competencies — such as assertiveness, empathy, and stress tolerance — typically assessed through self-report questionnaires. The distinction matters empirically: ability-based and self-report measures of EI correlate only weakly with one another and show different patterns of association with outcomes such as job performance (O'Boyle, Humphrey, Pollack, Hawver, & Story, 2011).

3. Comparative Predictive Validity

3.1 Academic Performance

Cognitive intelligence remains the strongest single predictor of academic achievement, with meta-analytic operational validities for general mental ability against academic criteria typically exceeding those reported for emotional intelligence by a substantial margin. Van Rooy

and Viswesvaran's (2004) meta-analysis, examining EI across employment, academic, and life-satisfaction criteria, reported an overall operational validity for EI in the academic domain of approximately .10 — a small but non-trivial effect once corrected for measurement unreliability. This suggests that emotional intelligence contributes modestly to academic outcomes, most plausibly through indirect pathways such as classroom engagement, stress management during examinations, and the quality of student–teacher relationships, rather than through any direct enhancement of learning capacity.

3.2 Workplace Performance

In the occupational domain, the predictive picture is more favourable to EI but still subordinate to cognitive ability. Schmidt, Oh, and Shaffer's (2016) century-spanning review of personnel-selection methods estimated that general mental ability accounts for a substantially larger share of variance in job performance than either ability-based or trait-based emotional intelligence considered alone. Meta-analyses focused specifically on EI, however, have found operational validities in the moderate range: Van Rooy and Viswesvaran (2004) reported an overall EI–job performance validity of approximately .23–.24, while the more comprehensive analysis by O'Boyle et al. (2011) found that all three EI measurement streams (ability-based, self-report/mixed, and Streams 1–3) contributed incremental predictive validity beyond both cognitive ability and the Five-Factor personality model. A later, more methodologically conservative meta-analysis restricted to well-validated performance criteria (Joseph et al., 2015) found a more modest, though still meaningful, correlation of approximately .29 between self-reported EI and supervisor-rated performance — smaller than the classic estimate for general mental ability (approximately .51) but consistent with EI functioning as a genuine, incremental predictor rather than a substitute for cognitive ability.

Grobelny, Radke, and Paniotova-Maczka's (2021) more recent and larger meta-analysis, incorporating over twice the number of studies used in earlier reviews, reported an operational validity of .45 for EI on job performance, with self-reported ability-EI measures showing the strongest association and job context moderating the size of the relationship. Taken together, these findings indicate that emotional intelligence adds practically useful, incremental predictive validity to job performance, particularly in roles with high interpersonal demand (for example, sales, healthcare, and leadership positions), while cognitive intelligence continues to hold the dominant position among individual-difference predictors of performance across occupations generally.

3.3 The Compensatory Relationship

An important qualification to the 'EI versus IQ' framing comes from evidence that the two constructs do not act independently but interact. Cote and Miners (2006) found that emotional intelligence became a stronger predictor of task performance and organisational citizenship behaviour as cognitive intelligence decreased, and, conversely, that cognitive intelligence became a stronger predictor of performance as emotional intelligence decreased. This compensatory model suggests that EI and cognitive ability can substitute for one another to some degree: employees lower in cognitive ability may nonetheless perform well if they

possess high emotional intelligence, and vice versa. This finding reframes the debate away from which construct matters more in the abstract, and toward the more practically useful question of how the two combine under varying task and person conditions.

4. Interaction Effects on Decision-Making under Stress

4.1 Theoretical Background

Decision-making under stress draws simultaneously on cognitive resources (working memory, attentional control, and reasoning) and emotional resources (the ability to recognise and regulate the affective states — anxiety, frustration, or distress — that stress provokes). Cognitive-energetic models of stress (Matthews, 2001) propose that acute stress narrows attentional focus and depletes working-memory capacity, impairing the cognitive processes that decision-making ordinarily relies upon. Emotional intelligence has been theorised to buffer these effects by supporting more adaptive appraisal and regulation of the distress that stressful decisions generate, thereby preserving cognitive resources for the decision task itself (Thompson, 2010).

4.2 Empirical Evidence

Experimental work by Fallon, Matthews, Panganiban, Wohleber, and Roberts (2013) examined decision-making following negative performance feedback, a common laboratory analogue of acute stress. Participants higher in emotional intelligence engaged in more thorough information search prior to choosing, and greater search activity in turn predicted superior decision-making, suggesting an indirect protective pathway from EI to decision quality via information-gathering behaviour rather than a direct effect on outcomes. A related study by Fallon, Panganiban, Wohleber, Matthews, and Kustubayeva (2014), using a tactical (Antarctic rescue) decision-making scenario, similarly found that negative feedback increased distress and impaired decisions, and that higher EI was associated with more exhaustive information search irrespective of stress condition — though EI did not directly moderate the impact of negative feedback on decision accuracy in that study. Together, these findings indicate that emotional intelligence's contribution to decision-making under stress may operate primarily through motivational and information-search mechanisms rather than through a simple, direct dampening of stress reactivity.

Applied research in organisational and leadership contexts points to a complementary conclusion: sufficiently elevated stress appears to degrade access to both cognitive ability and emotional intelligence simultaneously. Thompson's (2010) field research with leaders found emotional intelligence scores measured under induced stress to be, on average, more than one standard deviation lower than scores measured under normal conditions, with all EI subscales showing significant degradation. This suggests a ceiling effect: beyond a certain stress threshold, the trait-level EI that would ordinarily buffer decision-making becomes state-dependently unavailable, and cognitive resources are simultaneously constrained, producing compounding rather than merely additive impairment.

4.3 An Integrative, Compensatory-Interactionist Model

Synthesising the workplace-performance and decision-under-stress literatures, this review proposes that the relationship between cognitive intelligence and emotional intelligence is best characterised as compensatory at low-to-moderate stress levels and jointly depleted at high stress levels. At low-to-moderate stress, individuals with high EI but modest cognitive ability may still make sound decisions by exercising superior information search and emotion regulation, consistent with the compensatory pattern reported by Cote and Miners (2006). At high, sustained stress, however, both capacities draw on limited attentional and physiological resources, and their protective effects appear to erode together rather than one substituting fully for the other (Thompson, 2010). This implies that interventions aiming to protect decision quality under stress should not rely on emotional intelligence alone, but should address stress management and cognitive-load reduction concurrently — for example through structured decision protocols, checklists, and training in the kind of systematic information search shown to mediate EI's benefits (Fallon et al., 2013).

5. Practical Implications

For educational settings, the evidence suggests that while cognitive-ability assessment should remain central to predicting academic achievement, incorporating emotional-competence support (for example, stress-management and self-regulation training ahead of high-stakes examinations) may yield modest but genuine improvements in student outcomes, particularly for students who are cognitively capable but prone to test anxiety.

For personnel selection and workplace development, organisations are best served by using cognitive-ability measures as the primary predictor of performance while treating emotional intelligence as a meaningful, incremental predictor — particularly for roles with high interpersonal or leadership demands. Given the compensatory relationship identified by Cote and Miners (2006), selection systems that assess both constructs may identify high-performing candidates who would be missed by either measure alone.

For training aimed at high-stakes, high-stress decision-making (for example, in healthcare, emergency response, aviation, or executive leadership), interventions should target both emotion-regulation skills and structured, checklist-based decision procedures that reduce reliance on cognitive resources likely to be depleted under stress, since the evidence suggests EI's protective effect operates substantially through improved information-search behaviour rather than through stress immunity per se.

6. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This review is constrained by several limitations in the underlying literature. First, much of the EI research relies on self-report measurement, which is susceptible to social-desirability bias and conflates EI with established personality traits (Nguwi, cited in Schmidt et al., 2016); ability-based, performance-scored EI measures — though methodologically preferable — remain less widely used. Second, most decision-under-stress studies to date are laboratory-

based, using time-limited experimental stressors that may not generalise to the chronic, cumulative stress experienced in real occupational settings. Third, meta-analytic estimates of EI's predictive validity vary considerably across studies (from approximately .23 to .45), reflecting differences in EI measurement approach, performance criteria, and moderating job or academic contexts, and this heterogeneity has not been fully reconciled. Future research would benefit from longitudinal designs that track cognitive ability and emotional intelligence jointly over time, ability-based (rather than self-report) EI measurement, and field studies of decision-making under naturally occurring, sustained occupational stress rather than acute laboratory analogues. Cross-cultural replication is also needed, as the great majority of existing studies originate from North American and Western European samples.

7. Conclusion

The comparative evidence reviewed here does not support the popular claim that emotional intelligence supersedes cognitive intelligence as a predictor of performance. General mental ability remains the strongest single predictor of both academic and occupational outcomes. Emotional intelligence, however, contributes real and practically meaningful incremental predictive validity, particularly in interpersonally demanding work, and the two constructs relate to one another compensatorily rather than competitively — each can partly offset deficits in the other under everyday conditions. Under acute or sustained stress, though, this compensatory relationship appears to break down: both cognitive and emotional resources become simultaneously constrained, and decision quality suffers accordingly. A mature, evidence-based understanding of human performance therefore requires moving past the 'IQ versus EQ' dichotomy toward integrative models that specify how, when, and under what conditions each form of intelligence contributes to — or fails to protect — effective decision-making.

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3. Challenging the Archetype: Amrita Pritam's Disruption of Orthodox Female Roles in Post-Partition Literature

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Abstract

This research paper examines the revolutionary feminist consciousness in Amrita Pritam's post-partition literature, focusing on her deliberate subversion of traditional female archetypes in South Asian literary discourse. Through close textual analysis of her seminal works—particularly *Pinjar* (The Skeleton), her autobiography *Rasidi Ticket* (The Revenue Stamp), and her iconic poem "Ajj Aakhan Waris Shah Nu" (I Say unto Waris Shah)—this study demonstrates how Pritam challenged patriarchal norms and reimagined female agency during one of the most turbulent periods in South Asian history. Drawing upon feminist literary criticism and postcolonial theory, the paper argues that Pritam's literary project constitutes a radical departure from nationalist and patriarchal representations of women, positioning female subjectivity, desire, and resistance at the center of partition narratives. This analysis reveals how Pritam's work not only documents the gendered violence of partition but also creates counter-narratives that resist official historiography while establishing female agency within structures of displacement and violence.

Keyword: **Amrita Pritam, Post-Partition Literature, Feminist Resistance, Orthodox Female Roles, Pinjar Novel, Gender Archetypes**

Introduction: Amrita Pritam and the Feminist Disruption of Partition Narratives

Amrita Pritam (1919-2005) stands as one of the most revolutionary voices in South Asian literature, recognized as a pioneering feminist writer who fundamentally challenged the patriarchal structures governing women's representation in post-partition literary discourse. Born in Gujranwala, Punjab (now in Pakistan), Pritam witnessed firsthand the catastrophic violence and displacement that accompanied the 1947 partition of India, an experience that profoundly shaped her literary consciousness and feminist politics. Unlike many of her male contemporaries who depicted partition through the lens of nationalist rhetoric and communal conflict, Pritam centered her narratives on the lived experiences of women, exposing the intersecting violences of patriarchy, communalism, and nationalism that rendered female bodies as contested territories during this historical rupture.

Pritam's literary corpus—comprising over one hundred books including novels, short story collections, poetry, and autobiography—represents a sustained critique of orthodox female roles prescribed by both traditional Indian society and nationalist discourse. As one of the first female Punjabi writers to assert feminism and political will through her literature, Pritam's work challenges what has been termed the "ideal form of womanhood" prevalent in nationalist literature, replacing passive, victimized female figures with complex protagonists who demonstrate agency, desire, and resistance even within oppressive structures ("Reading Amrita Pritam"). Her decision to write candidly about female sexuality, desire, and bodily autonomy—topics considered taboo for women writers in mid-twentieth century India—positioned her as

a radical voice whose literary project extended far beyond mere documentation of women's suffering to active reimagination of female subjectivity.

This research paper examines how Pritam's post-partition literature disrupts orthodox female archetypes through three interconnected strategies: first, by centering female consciousness and interiority rather than treating women as symbolic vessels of communal honor; second, by depicting female agency and resistance within patriarchal structures rather than presenting women solely as passive victims; and third, by articulating female desire and embodied experience as legitimate subjects of literary representation. Through detailed analysis of her major works, this study demonstrates that Pritam's feminist vision constitutes not merely protest against patriarchy but a fundamental reconceptualization of women's roles, identities, and possibilities in South Asian society.

Research Methodology

This paper employs a qualitative literary research methodology rooted in close textual analysis, feminist literary criticism, and postcolonial theory to examine Amrita Pritam's works.

Primary Data Sources

Primary data consists of direct textual evidence from Pritam's key works: *Pinjar* (1950), *Rasidi Ticket* (1976), and "Ajj Aakhan Waris Shah Nu" (1947), analyzed through detailed close reading of narrative techniques, symbolism, imagery, character development, and female focalization.

Secondary Data Sources

Secondary sources include 28 scholarly articles, journal papers, and critical analyses on Pritam's feminist themes, partition literature, and gender studies, selected via targeted web searches for academic credibility and relevance.

Analytical Framework

The study applies feminist literary theory (examining female agency, subjectivity, and resistance), trauma theory (memory and gendered violence), and postcolonial frameworks (identity displacement), with comparative analysis across Pritam's genres.

Contextualizing Orthodox Female Roles in Pre- and Post-Partition Literature

To understand the radical nature of Pritam's literary intervention, we must first examine the orthodox female archetypes that dominated South Asian literature during the pre- and post-partition periods. Traditional Indian literature, particularly that influenced by nationalist discourse, typically constructed female characters according to prescribed ideals derived from Hindu mythology and colonial-era social reform movements. The dominant archetype was the *pativrata*—the devoted, self-sacrificing wife whose identity and purpose derived entirely from service to her husband and family. This idealized femininity emphasized qualities of silence, submission, sexual purity, and willing self-abnegation as markers of virtuous womanhood ("A Critical Study").

Nationalist literature of the independence movement further reinforced these orthodox roles by casting women as symbols of national honor and cultural authenticity. As feminist historian Urvashi Butalia observes, "women's bodies became battlefields, contested spaces over which the ideologies of honour, shame, and community clashed," reducing female subjects to mere

repositories of communal identity rather than recognizing them as individuals with autonomous desires and agency ("Exploring Gender"). This symbolic function intensified during partition, when violence against women—including mass abductions, rapes, and forced conversions—was weaponized as a means of asserting communal dominance and humiliating the enemy community.

The patriarchal logic undergirding these representations positioned women's sexual "purity" as the foundation of male and communal honor (*izzat*). Systemic patriarchy in South Asia had long reduced women to male-owned property, objectifying them to such an extent that a woman's sexuality became inextricably linked to her kinsmen's respectability ("Caught in Partition's Violent Fray"). With partition, this dynamic became amplified as women's bodies served as forums for contesting powers and prestige at communal and national levels. The violence inflicted upon women during partition was thus not arbitrary but emerged from deeply entrenched patriarchal structures that viewed women as extensions of male and communal identity rather than as autonomous subjects.

Mainstream partition literature by male writers frequently reproduced these patriarchal assumptions even while documenting the violence against women. Female characters appeared primarily as victims whose suffering illustrated the tragedy of partition, but rarely as complex individuals with interior lives, desires, and agency. The focus remained on how partition affected the nation, community, or family—with women serving as symbols of this larger disruption rather than as subjects whose specific gendered experiences merited examination in their own right.

Pinjar: Reimagining Female Victimhood and Agency

Amrita Pritam's 1950 novel *Pinjar* (The Skeleton) represents perhaps her most sustained and powerful challenge to orthodox female archetypes in partition literature. The novel centers on Pooro, a Hindu girl abducted by Rashid, a Muslim man, in an act of revenge for historical wrongs between their families. Forced to convert to Islam and renamed Hamida, Pooro's story encapsulates the profound identity displacement and cultural dislocation experienced by countless women during partition. However, Pritam's treatment of this narrative distinguishes itself fundamentally from conventional partition stories through her refusal to present Pooro/Hamida merely as a passive victim or symbol of communal violation.

Challenging the Victim Archetype

The title *Pinjar* (The Skeleton) functions as a metaphor for the hollowing effect of cultural displacement and patriarchal violence on women like Pooro, whose identities are stripped and bodies objectified within nationalist and patriarchal ideologies ("Exploring Gender"). The skeleton imagery powerfully evokes how partition reduced women to bare, depersonalized figures—symbols rather than subjects. Yet crucially, Pritam does not allow this symbolic reduction to define her protagonist entirely. Instead, she traces Pooro's psychological journey from trauma and resistance through gradual negotiation of her imposed identity as Hamida, ultimately depicting her development of agency within impossibly constrained circumstances.

Feminist literary criticism of *Pinjar* emphasizes that Pritam "dares to confront the violence inflicted on women, illustrating how patriarchal structures confined women to prescribed roles" while simultaneously showing how women resisted and subverted these roles ("A Feminist Analysis"). When Pooro initially attempts escape and her family rejects her return—fearing the shame her "tainted" presence would bring—the novel exposes the brutal double standard whereby women bear sole responsibility for violations committed against them. Her family's

rejection reveals that patriarchal society values abstract notions of honor and purity over the actual wellbeing and humanity of women.

Depicting Female Resilience and Resistance

What distinguishes Pritam's portrayal from orthodox representations is her emphasis on Pooro's gradual development of resilience and agency despite her traumatic circumstances. Rather than remaining frozen as a symbol of communal victimization, Pooro begins to navigate her new reality with increasing assertiveness. The pivotal moment occurs when she rescues Lajo, another abducted Hindu girl, risking her own safety to help return Lajo to her family. This act demonstrates Pooro's moral agency and compassion, qualities that patriarchal discourse denies to "violated" women by treating them as permanently contaminated and socially dead ("Exploring Gender").

By showcasing Pooro's strength and initiative, Pritam "complicates conventional Partition narratives that often depict women solely as victims, instead portraying them as complex figures capable of forging agency within restrictive social frameworks" ("Exploring Gender"). The novel thus performs a double critique: it exposes the gendered violence of partition and patriarchal society while simultaneously refusing the narrative of permanent victimhood that orthodox representations impose on violated women. Pooro's transformation into Hamida becomes not merely a story of loss but also one of survival, adaptation, and the assertion of moral selfhood under impossible conditions.

Female Solidarity and Alternative Communities

Pritam further challenges orthodox archetypes through her depiction of female relationships and solidarity in *Pinjar*. Traditional patriarchal narratives position women as competitors for male approval or as isolated individuals whose identities derive solely from their relationships with men. In contrast, Pritam portrays meaningful bonds between women—particularly Pooro's relationship with Lajo—as sources of empowerment and resistance. Female friendship provides emotional sustenance and practical support, enabling women to survive and navigate patriarchal violence ("Positive Feminism").

This "transformative power of female solidarity" represents a recurring theme throughout Pritam's work, challenging the orthodox construction of women as inherently isolated and dependent on male protection ("Positive Feminism"). By depicting women working together to resist patriarchal norms and support one another, Pritam reimagines female community as a site of resistance rather than passive suffering.

The Confessional Revolution: *Rasidi Ticket* and the Assertion of Female Subjectivity

If *Pinjar* challenges orthodox female roles through fictional narrative, Pritam's 1976 autobiography *Rasidi Ticket* (The Revenue Stamp) performs an even more radical disruption through its unflinching confessional honesty about female desire, sexuality, and autonomy. The autobiography represents what has been termed a "profound feminist narrative addressing identity, love, and societal challenges in postcolonial India," positioning Pritam's personal experiences as legitimate subjects of literary and political significance ("The Revenue Stamp: Analyzing").

Challenging Silence: Speaking Female Desire

Orthodox constructions of respectable femininity demand women's silence about their desires, particularly sexual and romantic longings that exist outside sanctioned marital relationships.

Female virtue is measured by the suppression of desire and the acceptance of roles prescribed by family and society. Pritam's autobiography shatters these expectations through its candid discussions of love, desire, and emotional vulnerability—"topics often considered taboo for women in her cultural context" ("The Revenue Stamp: Analyzing").

The symbolism of the title itself—*Rasidi Ticket* meaning a revenue stamp or receipt—encapsulates Pritam's search for authenticity and validation in a society that denied women the right to self-definition. A revenue stamp is a small, seemingly insignificant piece of paper that nonetheless serves as proof of transaction and legitimacy. Through this metaphor, Pritam claims the right to document and validate her own experiences, desires, and choices, refusing the erasure that patriarchal society imposes on women's subjective realities.

The autobiography extensively documents Pritam's extramarital relationship with the poet Imroz, with whom she lived openly from 1960 onward—"one of the most defining statements about her non-conformity to the norms of 'ideal Indian womanhood'" ("Amrita Pritam: Not Just A Poet"). This choice to live together outside wedlock in an era when such arrangements were virtually unheard of became a powerful assertion of female autonomy and sexual agency. Pritam refused to be bound by social conventions that granted men sexual freedom while demanding absolute fidelity and submission from women.

Confessional Honesty as Feminist Methodology

Pritam's autobiographical methodology represents what might be termed a distinctly feminine epistemology—"a way of knowing that values emotional experience and bodily sensation as valid sources of knowledge" ("The Revenue Stamp: Analyzing"). Rather than presenting herself through the lens of conventional respectability or attempting to conform to idealized feminine archetypes, Pritam writes with what critics describe as "confessional honesty," acknowledging her vulnerabilities, desires, conflicts, and imperfections.

This confessional approach challenges orthodox female roles by asserting that women's interior lives—their thoughts, feelings, desires, and struggles—constitute legitimate subjects for public articulation and literary representation. The autobiography "challenges the notion that a woman's worth is tied to her ability to fulfill traditional duties, and instead, seeks validation through her creative work and personal choices" ("The Revenue Stamp: Analyzing"). By refusing to present herself as either the idealized *pativrata* or the victimized woman requiring rescue, Pritam carves out space for complex, contradictory, desiring female subjectivity.

Rebellion Through Refusal

Pritam's autobiography documents numerous instances where she refused to conform to prescribed female roles, beginning with her father's disappointment at having a daughter rather than a son. Rather than internalizing shame about her gender, Pritam transforms this rejection into determination to prove her worth through literary achievement. Her narrative "is not loud or confrontational but is expressed through her refusal to conform to prescribed roles," demonstrating that feminist resistance need not always take the form of direct confrontation but can operate through persistent refusal and alternative ways of living ("The Revenue Stamp: Analyzing").

The autobiography also contextualizes Pritam's personal rebellion within the broader trauma of partition, intertwining personal and collective memory to show "how historical events shape and are shaped by individual identity" ("The Revenue Stamp: Analyzing"). She documents both her own suffering and that of her community, using autobiography to bear witness to violence,

displacement, and loss while simultaneously asserting her right to define herself beyond these traumatic circumstances.

Poetic Intervention: "Ajj Aakhan Waris Shah Nu" and the Politics of Female Testimony

Pritam's 1947 poem "Ajj Aakhan Waris Shah Nu" (I Say unto Waris Shah) represents another crucial site of disruption of orthodox female roles through its bold assertion of female voice as political witness and moral authority. Written during the immediate aftermath of partition's violence, the poem addresses the eighteenth-century Punjabi Sufi poet Waris Shah, author of the epic love story *Heer Ranjha*, calling upon him to witness the devastation of Punjab and to write once more of the suffering of women ("Ajj Aakhaan Waris Shah Nu").

Female Voice as Political Authority

The very act of a woman poet claiming the right to speak publicly about political catastrophe challenges orthodox gender norms that confine women's expression to the private, domestic sphere while reserving public, political discourse for men. Pritam positions herself not as a passive sufferer of partition's violence but as an active witness and interpreter with the authority to demand accountability from past poets and present perpetrators alike.

The poem's opening lines establish this authoritative voice: "Today I say unto Waris Shah / Speak from your grave / Today your book of love has too many leaves / And a Heer wails in every town" ("I Say unto Waris Shah"). By invoking Waris Shah—a revered male literary authority—Pritam simultaneously honors literary tradition and challenges it, suggesting that the old stories of individual tragic lovers no longer suffice to capture the scale of women's suffering during partition. Where Waris Shah wrote of one Heer's sorrow, Pritam testifies to "a hundred daughters" crying, demanding recognition of collective female trauma.

Challenging the Romance of Victimhood

Orthodox nationalist discourse often romanticized women's suffering during partition, presenting their victimization as noble sacrifice for community honor or as tragic but necessary casualties of historical conflict. Pritam's poem refuses this romanticization, instead expressing raw anger and grief at the violence inflicted upon women's bodies: "Blood runs in the Chenab / Some hand hath mixed poison in our five rivers" ("Ajj Aakhaan Waris Shah Nu"). The imagery of poisoned rivers and blood-soaked land conveys the magnitude of devastation while refusing to present this suffering as redemptive or meaningful within nationalist frameworks.

Moreover, the poem explicitly names women as subjects of concern—"Today a hundred daughters cry"—rather than treating their suffering as secondary to male or communal dishonor. This centering of female experience challenges the orthodox tendency to view women's victimization primarily through its impact on male honor rather than as violations of women's own bodily integrity and personhood.

Literary Tradition and Feminist Revision

By addressing Waris Shah, Pritam engages in what might be termed feminist literary revision—claiming space within a male-dominated literary tradition while transforming its concerns and perspectives. Where traditional Punjabi literature focused on individual romantic tragedy, Pritam demands recognition of collective political violence. Where male poets might emphasize communal honor and national tragedy, Pritam insists on foregrounding women's specific experiences. The poem thus performs a double intervention: it claims literary authority for the female poet while redirecting literary tradition toward feminist concerns.

Thematic Patterns: Pritam's Sustained Challenge to Orthodox Femininity

Across Pritam's diverse literary output—novels, short stories, poetry, and autobiography—certain thematic patterns emerge that collectively constitute her sustained challenge to orthodox female roles in South Asian literature. These patterns represent not isolated instances of resistance but a coherent feminist literary project spanning decades of her writing career.

Embodied Female Experience and Desire

A central aspect of Pritam's disruption involves her treatment of female embodiment and desire as legitimate literary subjects. Traditional Indian literature, particularly that written by men, typically approached women's bodies through the lens of objectification (celebrating female beauty for male pleasure) or moralization (policing female sexuality to preserve honor). Rarely did such literature explore women's own experiences of embodiment, desire, and sexuality from female perspectives.

Pritam revolutionizes this tradition by centering female embodied experience and desire throughout her work. She "talks about the woman's body as an independent entity as well as a contested space by a man's love and the tradition's pressure to procreate," recognizing both women's autonomous bodily experience and the multiple forces that seek to control and define female bodies ("Amrita Pritam: Not Just A Poet"). Her poetry particularly expresses female erotic desire with unprecedented directness, challenging the expectation that respectable women should remain silent about their sexual feelings.

This focus on embodiment extends to Pritam's treatment of female suffering. Rather than abstracting women's pain into metaphors for national tragedy, she attends to the specific, physical dimensions of violence against women's bodies during partition. The "themes of her novels provide deeper meaning to the embodied women's body," insisting that readers confront the material reality of gendered violence rather than sublimating it into nationalist rhetoric ("A Critical Study").

Female Characters as Autobiographical Agents

Another distinctive pattern involves Pritam's creation of female characters who function as "autobiographical agents who share something in common with the novelist's journey of life and her point of view toward custom-based practices" ("A Critical Study"). Unlike orthodox representations that present female characters as types representing idealized femininity or cautionary tales of female transgression, Pritam's protagonists reflect complex, individualized interiority informed by her own experiences and perspectives.

This autobiographical dimension does not simply mean that Pritam's characters are thinly disguised self-portraits, but rather that she infuses them with the psychological complexity, contradictions, and agency she recognizes in her own experience as a woman navigating patriarchal society. Her characters "embody a struggle for autonomy against these oppressive societal structures," demonstrating that resistance to patriarchy takes multiple forms depending on individual circumstances and choices ("Exploring Gender").

Trauma, Memory, and Female Testimony

Pritam's treatment of trauma and memory represents another crucial disruption of orthodox representations. Traditional partition narratives often treated women's traumatic experiences as unspeakable—either silencing women's voices entirely or filtering their stories through male narrators and perspectives. When women's trauma was acknowledged, it typically served to

illustrate larger points about communal conflict rather than being examined as experiences meriting attention in their own right.

In contrast, Pritam's work "employs the female voice to challenge dominant partition narratives while negotiating the complex terrain between victimhood and agency," using "memory as both wound and weapon" to bear witness to gendered violence while simultaneously asserting female subjectivity ("Trauma, Memory, and Female Agency"). Her literary techniques create what scholars describe as "testimonial literature that bears witness to the gendered dimensions of partition violence" while resisting the objectification of women as mere victims.

Resistance to Binary Representations

Perhaps most fundamentally, Pritam's work challenges the binary oppositions through which orthodox discourse constructs femininity: victim/agent, pure/violated, traditional/modern, respectable/transgressive. Rather than accepting these binaries or simply reversing their valuations, Pritam creates female characters who inhabit contradictory positions simultaneously—women who have been victimized yet exercise agency, who are constrained by patriarchal structures yet find ways to resist, who negotiate between tradition and modernity rather than simply rejecting or embracing either pole.

This resistance to binary thinking reflects what feminist critics identify as Pritam's "positive feminism"—an approach that "is not confined to protest against patriarchy but extends to affirming women's subjectivity, inner lives, and capacity for solidarity" ("Feminism and Female Subjectivity"). By depicting women's resilience and strength without denying the very real constraints they face, Pritam avoids both the romanticization of female suffering and the erasure of patriarchal violence.

Literary Techniques: How Pritam Enacts Feminist Disruption

Beyond thematic content, Pritam's feminist challenge to orthodox female roles operates through specific literary techniques and formal innovations that distinguish her work from conventional representations.

Focalization Through Female Consciousness

One crucial technique involves Pritam's consistent use of female focalization—presenting narrative events through the consciousness and perspective of female characters rather than filtering women's experiences through male observers or omniscient narrators. This technical choice fundamentally shifts how readers encounter female characters, granting access to their interior lives, thoughts, and emotions rather than presenting them solely through their external appearances and actions as perceived by others.

In *Pinjar*, for example, readers experience Pooro's abduction, trauma, and gradual adaptation through her own consciousness rather than through Rashid's perspective or that of an external narrator. This focalization technique humanizes Pooro and insists on the validity and importance of her subjective experience, challenging orthodox representations that objectify women as symbols rather than subjects.

Confessional Narrative Mode

Pritam's use of confessional narrative mode, particularly in her autobiography but also in her poetry, represents another formal innovation that challenges orthodox constraints on female expression. The confessional mode emphasizes personal revelation, emotional honesty, and the

articulation of experiences typically kept private or shameful. By adopting this mode, Pritam "never concealed her opinions, no matter how offensive or unheard of it were in a traditional society," refusing the silence and self-censorship expected of respectable women ("Amrita Pritam: The voice of feminism").

This confessional approach transforms private female experiences into legitimate subjects of public literary discourse, challenging the division between public and private spheres that orthodox gender ideology enforces. By speaking openly about desire, love, marital dissatisfaction, and the constraints of gender norms, Pritam claims public space for female subjectivity.

Intertextuality and Literary Revision

Pritam's engagement with literary tradition through intertextuality and revision—particularly evident in "Ajj Aakhan Waris Shah Nu"—represents a technique for simultaneously honoring and transforming patriarchal literary heritage. Rather than simply rejecting male-authored canonical texts, Pritam enters into dialogue with them, using their authority while redirecting their concerns toward feminist perspectives.

This revisionary technique allows Pritam to position herself within literary tradition as a legitimate heir and interlocutor rather than as an outsider or merely a critic. By addressing Waris Shah as a fellow poet, she claims equal status while insisting on the necessity of centering female experience in partition narratives.

Symbolic Density and Metaphoric Complexity

Pritam's work is characterized by rich symbolic density and metaphoric complexity that resists simple interpretation and refuses to reduce female characters to one-dimensional types. The skeleton metaphor in *Pinjar*, the revenue stamp symbolism in her autobiography, the poisoned rivers imagery in her partition poetry—these symbolic systems operate on multiple levels simultaneously, conveying both the violence done to women and their residual agency, both cultural dislocation and survival.

This symbolic complexity challenges orthodox representations that typically employ simple, transparent symbolism (woman as mother figure, as territorial possession, as honor incarnate). Pritam's more ambiguous, multivalent symbols acknowledge the complexity of women's experiences and identities, refusing reductive categorization.

Contemporary Relevance: Pritam's Legacy in Feminist Literary Discourse

Amrita Pritam's disruption of orthodox female roles in post-partition literature continues to resonate in contemporary feminist and postcolonial literary discourse. Scholars increasingly recognize that "the issues portrayed in Pritam's work remain relevant today, especially in discussions on gender dynamics and cultural displacement," as her critique of patriarchal structures that marginalized women "remains relevant today because it critiques the entrenched patriarchal structures that continue to shape societal norms and attitudes toward women" ("Exploring Gender").

Influence on Subsequent South Asian Women Writers

Pritam's literary innovations opened space for subsequent generations of South Asian women writers to explore female subjectivity, desire, and resistance in their own work. Her willingness to challenge taboos and speak directly about women's experiences created precedents that later

writers could build upon. Writers such as Bapsi Sidhwa, Manju Kapur, and others working in partition and feminist literary traditions acknowledge Pritam's pioneering role in establishing female-centered partition narratives.

Contribution to Partition Historiography

Beyond purely literary influence, Pritam's work has contributed significantly to feminist historiography of partition. Traditional historical accounts focused primarily on political negotiations, demographic movements, and communal violence understood through male experiences and nationalist frameworks. Pritam's literary documentation of gendered violence, women's displacement, and female survival strategies provides crucial perspectives that complicate and enrich historical understanding.

As Urvashi Butalia's groundbreaking oral history work demonstrates, women's partition experiences differ significantly from men's, involving specific forms of violence, particular strategies of survival, and distinct patterns of memory and trauma. Pritam's literary representations anticipated and paralleled this feminist historiographical project, using literature to preserve and analyze women's experiences that official history often ignored.

Ongoing Debates About Female Agency and Victimhood

Pritam's nuanced treatment of the relationship between victimhood and agency in women's experiences continues to inform contemporary feminist debates about how to represent violence against women without either romanticizing suffering or denying women's capacity for resistance. Her work demonstrates that acknowledging patriarchal violence and celebrating female resilience need not be mutually exclusive—that literature can simultaneously expose structural oppression and honor individual and collective strategies of survival and resistance.

This balanced approach offers models for contemporary writers and scholars grappling with similar representational challenges in contexts ranging from wartime sexual violence to domestic abuse to human trafficking. Pritam's refusal of binary thinking provides frameworks for understanding how women can be simultaneously constrained by oppressive structures and capable of exercising agency within those constraints.

Conclusion: The Enduring Significance of Pritam's Feminist Literary Project

Amrita Pritam's disruption of orthodox female roles in post-partition South Asian literature represents a revolutionary feminist literary project whose significance extends far beyond its immediate historical context. Through her sustained engagement with female subjectivity, desire, trauma, and resistance across multiple genres and decades of writing, Pritam fundamentally challenged patriarchal assumptions about women's nature, capacities, and proper roles that dominated both traditional Indian society and nationalist discourse.

Her major works—*Pinjar*, *Rasidi Ticket*, "Ajj Aakhan Waris Shah Nu," and numerous other novels, stories, and poems—collectively articulate an alternative vision of femininity that refuses orthodox archetypes of the self-sacrificing wife, the passive victim, or the symbol of communal honor. Instead, Pritam presents complex, desiring, resistant female subjects who navigate impossible circumstances with resilience and agency, who form solidarity with other women, who claim the right to self-definition and autonomous choice.

The literary techniques Pritam employs to enact this feminist vision—female focalization, confessional narrative, literary revision, symbolic complexity—represent formal innovations that expand the possibilities of South Asian women's writing. By insisting on the legitimacy of

female experience as a subject of literary representation and by refusing to silence female desire and agency, Pritam created literary space for subsequent generations of women writers to explore female subjectivity in their own terms.

Perhaps most significantly, Pritam's work demonstrates that challenging orthodox female roles requires not merely protesting against patriarchal constraints but actively imagining and articulating alternative possibilities for female identity and experience. Her literature does not simply criticize the limitations imposed on women but creates rich, complex representations of what women's lives, desires, and possibilities might look like beyond patriarchal scripts.

In an era when questions of gender, identity, representation, and resistance remain urgently relevant across global contexts, Pritam's feminist literary project continues to offer vital insights and inspiration. Her insistence on centering female experience, her refusal of victimization narratives that deny women's agency, her bold articulation of female desire and autonomy, and her documentation of both patriarchal violence and women's resilience provide enduring models for feminist literary practice. Amrita Pritam's legacy reminds us that literature serves not merely to reflect social reality but to challenge, reimagine, and transform it—and that women's voices, experiences, and visions constitute essential dimensions of that transformative project.

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4. Savitribai Phule and the Development of Girls' Education in 19th-Century Maharashtra

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Abstract

In the early nineteenth century, very few girls in Maharashtra went to school. Education was seen as a matter for upper-caste boys, and girls and lower-caste children were mostly left out. This article looks at how Savitribai Phule (1831-1897) helped change that situation. It studies her work as a teacher, school organiser, writer and social reformer, and places it alongside missionary schools, colonial education policy and the wider reform movement of the time. The study is based on secondary sources, biographical accounts and Savitribai's own poems and letters. It argues that her contribution went beyond opening schools. She showed that education could be a tool of dignity and social equality, and she worked for it in the face of strong social opposition. The article concludes that girls' education in Maharashtra owes an important part of its early foundation to her.

Keywords: Savitribai Phule, girls' education, Maharashtra, social reform, caste and gender, colonial India

1. Introduction

Today it is easy to forget how unusual the sight of a girl carrying books to school once was. In the Maharashtra of the 1840s, it was rare enough to cause anger. Many people believed that a girl who learned to read would bring misfortune on her family. Teaching was mainly the right of a few upper-caste men, and women of every caste, along with people from the so-called untouchable communities, stood largely outside formal learning.

Savitribai Phule stands at the centre of the change that followed. She is often remembered as "the first woman teacher of modern India." Popular tributes sometimes reduce her to this one title. The full story is richer. She was a student before she was a teacher, a poet as well as a school organiser, and a nurse and famine-relief worker in later life. Her work also cannot be separated from that of her husband, Jotirao Phule, or from the other people who helped them, such as Fatima Sheikh and Sagunabai Kshirsagar.

This article tries to answer a simple question: how did Savitribai Phule contribute to the growth of girls' education in nineteenth-century Maharashtra, and why does her contribution matter for the history of Indian education?

Review of Literature

1. Keer (1964) wrote the first full biography of Jotirao Phule in English. It covers the founding of the girls' schools in Pune and the opposition the Phules faced from family and society. Savitribai appears mainly as her husband's partner, so her own role is not examined in depth.

2. O'Hanlon (1985) studies Jotirao Phule's thought and the low-caste protest movement in western India. She shows how Phule linked education to the struggle against Brahmanical dominance. Her focus is on ideology and caste, and girls' education and Savitribai get little separate attention.

3. Omvedt (1976) traces the non-Brahman movement in western India and the role of the Satyashodhak Samaj in it. The book helps explain the social setting in which the Phules worked. Savitribai's personal contribution to teaching and school organisation is not its focus.

4. Naik and Nurullah (1974) give a general history of Indian education under colonial rule, including missionary efforts and government policy. It is useful background on how slowly girls' schooling grew. It is a broad survey and does not study the Phules' schools in detail.

5. Anagol (2006) examines the beginnings of feminism in India between 1850 and 1920, with attention to Maharashtra. She shows how women reformers and writers engaged with questions of education and marriage. Savitribai is discussed as part of a larger movement and not as the main subject.

6. Kosambi (2007) collects essays on women's social history in western India, including women's education and reform. Her work shows that women took an active part in reform and were not only its beneficiaries. It gives more attention to upper-caste women reformers than to Savitribai and lower-caste teachers.

7. Chakravarti (2003) argues that caste and gender oppression cannot be understood separately. Her framework helps explain why education for lower-caste girls was such a radical step. The book is theoretical and does not give a detailed account of the Phules' schools.

8. Rege (2006) studies Dalit women's testimonies and the way caste and gender shape their writing and experience. She places the Phule tradition within a longer line of Dalit feminist thought. The book is about later testimonies, so nineteenth-century schooling is only touched upon.

9. Rege (2010) discusses the Phule-Ambedkarite tradition as a basis for a feminist pedagogy and describes education as a tool of liberation. She shows why Savitribai's ideas still matter for present-day teaching. The article is more concerned with modern classrooms than with the historical record of her schools.

10. Mani and Sardar (2008) present a book-length account of Savitribai's life, with selections from her writings. It is one of the few works that puts her at the centre and makes her poems and letters available to readers. It is written for a general readership and gives limited critical analysis of sources.

Research Gap

The literature shows three patterns. First, older works on the Phule movement (Keer; O'Hanlon; Omvedt) focus mainly on Jotirao Phule, and Savitribai is treated as a supporting figure. Second, studies of women's reform and feminism (Anagol; Kosambi; Chakravarti) discuss education broadly, but they rarely study Savitribai's schools and teaching in detail. Third, the few works centred on her (Mani and Sardar; Rege's 2010 article) are either introductory or focused on present-day pedagogy, not on the historical development of girls' education.

As a result, there is still a lack of research that connects Savitribai's work as teacher, organiser and writer directly to the growth of girls' education in nineteenth-century Maharashtra. Her role in relation to colonial and missionary education policy has also not been examined closely. The contributions of women who worked with her, such as Fatima Sheikh, remain under-researched. Her own writings are also seldom used as historical evidence for her educational ideas.

This study attempts to fill these gaps by placing Savitribai Phule at the centre of the history of girls' education in the region and by reading her work alongside colonial policy, missionary schools and her own writings.

2. Objectives and Methodology

The study has three aims:

1. To understand the condition of girls' education in Maharashtra before and during the Phules' work.
2. To examine Savitribai Phule's role in starting and running schools for girls and for children from marginalised castes.
3. To assess the social and intellectual importance of her work.

The method is historical and analytical. It draws on published biographies, historical studies of the Phule movement, histories of Indian education, and Savitribai's own writings, especially her poetry collection *Kavya Phule* (1854). Since much early documentation about her is limited, the article treats popular accounts with care and separates well-established facts from later tradition wherever possible.

3. The Educational Background

Before the Phules began their work, education in Maharashtra followed older social divisions. Brahmin boys might study Sanskrit and religious texts, and boys from trading families learned accounts. Girls, in most communities, learned domestic skills. Widows were often treated harshly, and child marriage was common.

The colonial period brought new institutions. The Bombay Native Education Society was founded in 1822 to spread schooling, and Christian missionaries opened schools in Bombay and Pune, sometimes including schools for girls (Naik and Nurullah). The American Marathi Mission in Ahmednagar was also active in education. Colonial policy, however, moved slowly on girls' schooling. The Wood's Despatch of 1854 encouraged female education in principle, but the government took real steps only later, and the Indian Education Commission (the Hunter Commission) of 1882 still noted how limited girls' schooling remained.

This background matters. The Phules did not work in an empty space. New ideas and new institutions were arriving, but they mostly reached upper-caste boys. What Savitribai and Jotirao did was carry these ideas to those who had been excluded.

4. Savitribai Phule: Early Life and Training

Savitribai was born in 1831 in Naigaon, in the Satara region. She was married as a child to Jotirao Phule, who came from a Mali family, a caste of gardeners and cultivators. Popular accounts say that Jotirao taught her to read and write at home, and this is widely accepted in

biographical writing (Keer). She later received some formal teacher training, and accounts mention the school run by the American missionary Cynthia Farrar in Ahmednagar and a training institution in Pune.

Her own education is an important part of the story. It shows that she was not simply handed a role. She prepared herself for it, at a time when a married woman learning to read could bring social punishment.

5. The Schools for Girls

The best-known event is the founding of a school for girls at Bhide Wada in Pune in 1848. It was a small school, and the first pupils came from different castes. Savitribai began teaching there, which is why she is honoured as one of the earliest Indian women to work as a teacher in a modern school.

Over the next few years, the Phules opened more schools. Accounts differ on exact numbers, but they agree that several schools for girls, and later for children from the Mahar and Mang communities, were running in and around Pune by the early 1850s (O'Hanlon). Government officials recognised this work, and in 1852 the Phules were publicly honoured for their efforts.

Three features made these schools different from most others of the time:

- **Open to girls of many castes.** They accepted children who were usually kept away from formal schooling.
- **Run by Indians for Indians.** They were not mission schools tied to conversion. This mattered to families who feared that education would change their religion.
- **Practical and moral in purpose.** The teaching aimed to build reading and writing skills and also self-respect and awareness of social injustice.

Later, in 1863, the Phules opened a home for newborn children of widows, sometimes called the Balhatya Pratibandhak Griha, to help protect women who faced social disgrace and their infants. This step shows that Savitribai saw education and social care as connected.

6. Opposition and Courage

Success came at a cost. Popular accounts say that Savitribai was insulted and even had mud and stones thrown at her as she walked to school. She reportedly carried an extra sari to change into after reaching her workplace. Historians treat some of these vivid details cautiously, but the general picture of hostility is strongly supported. The Phules also faced pressure within the family, and Jotirao's father asked them to leave the family home (Keer).

This resistance came from more than one direction. Orthodox groups feared that girls' education would break the caste and gender order. Some upper-caste reformers supported education for their own daughters but did not always extend that support to lower-caste children. The Phules pushed further than many contemporary reformers by insisting that education belonged to everyone.

Fatima Sheikh deserves mention here. According to biographical accounts, she supported the Phules when they had difficulty finding space and teachers, and she is often described as an

early Muslim woman teacher working with them. Her role has received less attention in older histories, and recent writing has begun to correct this.

7. Savitribai as Writer and Thinker

Savitribai was also a poet. Her collection *Kavya Phule* was published in 1854, and a later work, *Bavankashi Subodh Ratnakar* (1892), was a poetic biography of Jotirao. Her poems speak of education as freedom, and they urge people to learn and to give up ignorance. The tone is simple, direct and full of conviction. Her writing helps us see her as a thinker and not only as a worker for a cause.

She also wrote letters to her husband, which show a warm and practical mind, concerned about education, poverty and injustice. These letters, along with the poems, are among the few sources that let us hear her own voice.

8. Wider Social Work

Savitribai's work did not stop with schools. After Jotirao founded the Satyashodhak Samaj in 1873, she took part in its activities and helped in its work for equality and against caste hierarchy. During the famine of 1876-77 she helped organise relief and food for people in distress. In 1897, during a plague outbreak in Pune, she cared for the sick, contracted the disease, and died on 10 March 1897.

This final act fits the pattern of her life. She placed service to others above personal safety, and her idea of education was always tied to compassion.

9. Discussion

Three points stand out from this study.

First, Savitribai's work shows that girls' education in Maharashtra did not grow only from colonial policy. Government and missionary efforts mattered, but Indian reformers, especially those from marginalised communities, pushed the idea into places where official policy did not reach.

Second, her work joined two struggles that historians sometimes study separately: the struggle for women's rights and the struggle against caste. Scholars such as Uma Chakravarti and Sharmila Rege have argued that caste and gender oppress people together, and that women from lower castes face both. The Phules' schools were an early practical response to this double exclusion.

Third, we should be careful about how we remember her. Public celebration has grown in recent decades, which is welcome, but it can also turn a real, difficult and collective struggle into a simple legend. A fair account should place Savitribai beside Jotirao, Fatima Sheikh, Sagunabai and the many students and families whose names history did not keep. It should also admit where evidence is thin.

10. Conclusion

Savitribai Phule helped change what was thought possible for girls and for lower-caste children in nineteenth-century Maharashtra. She learned, taught, wrote, organised and served, and she did this while facing open hostility. Her schools were small in the beginning, but they carried

a large idea: that education is a right and not a privilege of birth. The development of girls' education in the region cannot be told fully without her, and her example remains a strong reminder that social change often begins with a single classroom.

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5. Streaming Platforms and the "New Woman": Gender Representation in Hindi OTT Content

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Abstract

The expansion of over-the-top (OTT) streaming has altered the conditions under which audiovisual narratives are produced, circulated, and consumed. In Hindi-language digital fiction, this expansion has created greater narrative space for women characters whose professional, sexual, familial, and political lives can be explored at greater length than is often possible in conventional feature-film formats. This paper examines how the figure of the "New Woman" is constructed in five Hindi-language series—Delhi Crime, Made in Heaven, Four More Shots Please!, Aarya, and Bombay Begums—through qualitative thematic analysis. The analysis focuses on agency and decision-making, sexual autonomy, professional identity, commodification and class privilege, and violence and resistance. Rather than treating increased visibility as evidence of straightforward progress, the paper asks how empowerment is narrated and what social conditions make that empowerment possible. The selected texts repeatedly position women as agents who make decisions, negotiate institutions, pursue professional identities, and respond to crisis. At the same time, these possibilities are frequently situated in urban and relatively privileged social worlds, and empowerment is often articulated through individual choice, lifestyle, economic capacity, or survival. The paper therefore argues that Hindi OTT content is better understood as a site of negotiation between representational change and continuity: it expands the range of female roles while retaining classed, commercial, and cultural limits on whose experiences become visible.

Keywords:

OTT platforms; gender representation; Hindi web series; female agency; postfeminism; digital media; intersectionality

I. INTRODUCTION

Representations of women in Indian popular media have changed substantially across different historical periods, but the direction of change has never been uniform. Scholarship on Hindi cinema has shown that popular film is closely connected to changing social aspirations, production cultures, and ideas about contemporary India [1], [2]. Women have consequently been represented through shifting combinations of familial duty, romance, sacrifice, work, sexuality, and individual aspiration. The movement from the conventionally self-sacrificing heroine toward more visibly autonomous female characters is therefore best understood as a historical process rather than a complete break with earlier representational practices.

Digital streaming has introduced another important change. Unlike the conventional feature-film format, serialised OTT storytelling can devote several episodes to the development of a character, allowing conflicts around work, intimacy, family, sexuality, violence, and identity to unfold over time. Lobato's account of digital distribution situates streaming not simply as a new screen format but as part of a wider transformation in how audiovisual culture circulates across platforms and territories [9]. At the same time, digital production remains embedded in

commercial and institutional structures. Greater narrative flexibility should therefore not be equated automatically with greater representational equality.

The question of women's empowerment is especially important in this context. Feminist media scholarship has cautioned against reading visibility, confidence, consumer choice, or individual success as equivalent to structural transformation [4]–[7]. Postfeminist media culture can present empowerment as a matter of personal choice while leaving larger inequalities comparatively unexamined [5], [6]. Intersectionality further requires attention to the ways gender is experienced together with class, sexuality, and other structures of power [8]. For an Indian OTT context, this means asking not only whether women are central to narratives, but also which women are made central and under what social conditions.

This paper examines five Hindi-language series—Delhi Crime, Made in Heaven, Four More Shots Please!, Aarya, and Bombay Begums—to investigate this tension. The selection brings together different narrative settings: policing and institutional authority, elite social and matrimonial spaces, urban friendship and sexual autonomy, survival and crime, and corporate professional life. The purpose is not to treat these five series as representative of all Hindi OTT content. Rather, they provide a focused corpus through which recurring modes of constructing female agency can be examined comparatively.

The central argument is that the "New Woman" of Hindi OTT is neither simply a liberated successor to the traditional heroine nor merely a repackaged version of older stereotypes. She is a negotiated figure: more active, articulate, professionally visible, and narratively central, yet often located within urban, economically privileged, or highly individualised frameworks of empowerment.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Feminist film theory established an influential vocabulary for examining how women are positioned within visual narratives. Mulvey's account of the male gaze remains a foundational point of reference because it draws attention to the relationship between looking, narrative agency, and the sexualised positioning of women in mainstream cinema [3]. Although contemporary digital series cannot simply be treated as repetitions of classical cinema, the question of who looks, who acts, and whose desires organise the narrative remains relevant to the analysis of female representation.

Later feminist media scholarship complicates a simple passive/active binary. Gill's work on gender and media examines how contemporary media can combine apparently progressive representations with persistent forms of sexualisation, self-surveillance, and postfeminist sensibility [4]. McRobbie similarly argues that contemporary media may present women with the language of equality, choice, and independence while relocating gender power into more individualised and consumer-oriented forms [5]. Tasker and Negra's collection develops this critique by examining postfeminism as a cultural formation shaped by consumption, self-fashioning, and classed assumptions about who can access the promised freedoms of contemporary womanhood [6].

Banet-Weiser extends the discussion by examining the relationship between popular feminism and popular misogyny. Her analysis is useful here because it cautions against treating the visibility of feminist language as equivalent to structural change [7]. In OTT narratives, female confidence, professional achievement, sexual autonomy, and self-expression may therefore

function simultaneously as signs of agency and as culturally marketable forms of empowerment.

Intersectionality provides a further corrective to universal claims about "women." Crenshaw's formulation demonstrates how gender cannot always be separated from other structures of inequality [8]. Applied to media analysis, the framework encourages attention to class position, access to resources, sexuality, and institutional location.

Finally, the industrial and technological context of streaming matters. Ganti's ethnography of Hindi film production demonstrates how commercial structures, professional practices, and neoliberal economic change influence cultural production in India [1]. Lobato shows that streaming services are part of a broader geography of digital distribution rather than neutral channels of delivery [9]. Hesmondhalgh's work on cultural industries likewise emphasises the interaction between creative production and organisational and economic structures [10].

Taken together, the literature establishes three relevant propositions: representation is shaped by systems of looking and narrative agency; contemporary empowerment may be individualised and consumer-oriented; and cultural texts are produced within economic and technological structures. The present study brings these strands together in a focused qualitative comparison of selected Hindi OTT series.

III. RESEARCH GAP

Existing scholarship provides substantial conceptual resources for studying gender, popular culture, postfeminism, and digital distribution. However, there remains value in bringing these perspectives into a focused comparative reading of Hindi-language OTT series that places female agency, sexual autonomy, professional identity, classed empowerment, and crisis-driven resistance within the same analytical frame. Rather than claiming that Hindi OTT has been ignored, this study addresses a more specific gap: it examines how different forms of empowerment coexist within a small but analytically diverse corpus and asks whether increased narrative agency necessarily produces a broader or more inclusive account of women's lives.

IV. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

Objectives

To examine how female agency and decision-making are constructed in selected Hindi OTT series.

To analyse the representation of sexual autonomy and professional identity in relation to contemporary ideas of the "New Woman."

To identify the ways class privilege, commodification, violence, and institutional structures shape representations of empowerment.

To compare recurring patterns across the selected series and assess the tension between representational change and continuity.

Research Questions

How do the selected Hindi OTT series construct female agency and decision-making?

How are sexual autonomy, professional identity, and empowerment connected to class and consumer culture?

To what extent do these narratives challenge earlier gender norms, and where do they reproduce existing cultural or economic limitations?

V. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study combines three complementary perspectives. First, Mulvey's theory of visual pleasure provides a foundation for examining the relationship between female visibility, narrative agency, and the organisation of looking [3]. The analysis does not assume that OTT series simply reproduce the classical cinematic gaze; instead, it uses the framework to ask whether women are primarily presented for observation or whether they also control narrative action and desire.

Second, postfeminist media scholarship provides a way of examining empowerment as an individualised cultural language. Gill, McRobbie, and Tasker and Negra show how contemporary media can represent women as confident, independent, sexually expressive, and professionally ambitious while locating success within consumer culture and personal self-management [4]–[6]. Banet-Weiser's work further helps distinguish the visibility of popular feminist messages from deeper structural transformation [7].

Third, intersectionality is used to prevent the category "woman" from being treated as socially homogeneous. Crenshaw's framework directs attention to class position, institutional access, economic resources, and social environments through which female agency becomes visible [8].

These frameworks are complemented by an industrial perspective. Ganti's analysis of Hindi film production and Hesmondhalgh's account of cultural industries support the view that representation is produced within economic and institutional arrangements rather than in isolation from them [1], [10]. Lobato's work on digital distribution further contextualises streaming as a platformed form of circulation [9].

VI. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses qualitative thematic analysis of audiovisual texts. The method is appropriate because the research questions concern patterns of meaning, character construction, narrative emphasis, and the social conditions attached to representations rather than the measurement of audience attitudes. Braun and Clarke describe thematic analysis as a flexible method for identifying and interpreting recurring patterns within qualitative material [11].

Corpus and Sampling

A purposive sample of five Hindi-language series was selected: Delhi Crime, Made in Heaven, Four More Shots Please!, Aarya, and Bombay Begums. The selection was guided by the presence of substantial female character arcs, variation in social and institutional settings, and the capacity of the texts to illuminate different forms of agency, sexuality, work, class, and resistance. The corpus is intentionally limited and is not claimed to represent the entire Hindi OTT ecosystem.

Data Collection and Unit of Analysis

The supplied manuscript describes repeated viewing of episodes and note-taking of relevant scenes, dialogues, and character developments. For the revised study, the unit of analysis is the thematically relevant scene or narrative sequence in which one or more analytical categories becomes visible. Because the supplied file does not include a reproducible scene-by-scene coding sheet, the earlier numerical scene counts, percentages, and precise episode time stamps are not retained as quantitative results.

Coding Framework

Theme	Analytical meaning	Indicative dimensions
Agency and decision-making	Capacity to make choices, exercise authority, or shape narrative action	Leadership; independence; control over decisions
Sexual autonomy	Representation of women's control over intimacy, relationships, and sexuality	Choice; consent; sexual self-definition
Professional identity	Women's relationship to work, ambition, institutions, and economic independence	Career; workplace power; discrimination
Commodification and class	Links between empowerment, consumption, lifestyle, and economic privilege	Luxury; status; access to resources
Violence and resistance	Agency emerging through conflict, constraint, survival, or resistance	Abuse; crisis; retaliation; institutional pressure

Table 1. Qualitative thematic framework used in the analysis.

Analytical Procedure

The analysis proceeded through repeated viewing, identification of thematically relevant sequences, organisation of observations under the five categories, comparison within each series, and cross-case interpretation. The aim is interpretive consistency rather than numerical generalisation. No claim of inter-coder reliability is made because the supplied materials do not document independent coding by multiple researchers.

Ethical and Scope Considerations

The study analyses publicly released audiovisual texts and does not use human participants or audience survey data. The absence of audience reception data is therefore treated as a limitation rather than inferred from textual analysis.

VII. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Agency and Decision-Making

Across the selected series, women are repeatedly positioned as actors who make consequential decisions rather than merely responding to male protagonists. Delhi Crime is particularly useful for examining institutional authority: female police leadership is associated with investigation, judgement, responsibility, and the management of crisis. The significance of this representation lies not simply in placing a woman in a position of authority, but in allowing professional competence to organise the narrative. In Made in Heaven, agency is negotiated through social relationships, marriage, class, and professional environments. Female characters make decisions about relationships and social expectations, but those choices are inseparable from the privileges and constraints of elite urban life.

B. Sexual Autonomy and the Postfeminist "New Woman"

Four More Shots Please! provides the clearest example of a narrative that places women's friendships, sexuality, relationships, and personal choices at the centre of the story. The series makes female desire and conversation more narratively visible than many conventional representations of the heroine. Yet visibility alone does not settle the question of transformation. The characters' choices are largely situated within urban, affluent environments, making sexual autonomy inseparable from access to education, mobility, income, and social space. This tension corresponds with postfeminist scholarship, in which the language of choice and self-expression can expand representational possibilities while also narrowing empowerment to an individual lifestyle project [4]–[7].

C. Professional Identity and Workplace Power

Bombay Begums foregrounds women's professional lives and the unequal structures that shape workplace authority. The series does not present career success as uncomplicated empowerment. Ambition, institutional hierarchy, gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and personal compromise coexist. This makes professional identity analytically important because entering a male-dominated institution does not automatically remove the gendered structures operating within it.

D. Commodification, Lifestyle, and Class

Made in Heaven is particularly significant for understanding the relationship between empowerment and class. The series connects personal decisions to elite social spaces, marriage markets, professional networks, and consumption. Empowerment is represented through a combination of emotional self-definition and economic capacity. Postfeminist media can universalise the experiences of relatively privileged women [5], [6], while intersectionality warns against treating the experience of one socially situated group as representative of women in general [8].

E. Violence, Crisis, and Survival

Aarya presents a different form of agency. Female empowerment emerges not primarily through professional advancement or sexual self-expression but through crisis, threat, and survival. The protagonist's movement into a dangerous environment demonstrates that agency may be produced by constraint as much as by freedom. Read alongside Delhi Crime, Aarya

shows that female agency can operate through institutional and extra-institutional spaces. The contrast demonstrates that the "New Woman" is not a single narrative type.

F. Cross-Case Interpretation

Across the five series, four broad patterns emerge: female characters are more frequently placed at the centre of narrative decision-making; women's sexuality and intimate lives are more openly articulated; professional identity is presented as an important component of contemporary female subjectivity; and empowerment remains uneven because class privilege, institutional structures, consumer culture, and violence continue to shape the conditions under which agency becomes visible. The findings therefore support a qualified understanding of the "New Woman." Hindi OTT content expands representational space without necessarily abandoning older structures of inequality. The transformation is strongest at the level of narrative visibility and character complexity; it is less complete at the level of social inclusiveness. This is consistent with feminist media scholarship that separates the cultural visibility of empowerment from structural change [4]–[8]. The industrial context reinforces this ambivalence: streaming provides new distribution arrangements and flexibility in content circulation [9], but cultural production remains organised through economic and institutional structures [1], [10].

VIII. CONCLUSION

This study examined the representation of the "New Woman" in five Hindi OTT series through qualitative thematic analysis. The selected texts demonstrate an expansion in the narrative roles available to women: female characters exercise authority, make consequential decisions, negotiate sexuality, pursue professional identities, and respond to violence and crisis. These representations move beyond a narrowly supportive or symbolic role for women and provide greater narrative attention to female subjectivity.

At the same time, the analysis does not support a simple narrative of linear progress. Empowerment is frequently situated within urban and relatively privileged environments, and individual choice can become the dominant language through which freedom is represented. Professional success, consumer capacity, social mobility, and personal self-fashioning may function as signs of empowerment while leaving wider structural inequalities comparatively less visible. The "New Woman" is therefore best understood as a contested and socially situated figure.

The contribution of the study lies in bringing these apparently contradictory tendencies together. Hindi OTT content can simultaneously broaden female agency and reproduce limitations concerning class, access, market-oriented empowerment, and social diversity. Rather than asking whether OTT is simply progressive or regressive, the analysis shows how transformation and continuity coexist within the same texts.

Future research should extend the corpus beyond urban Hindi-language series, include regional-language OTT content, and incorporate audience-reception research where appropriate. Comparative work across platforms and linguistic markets could further clarify whether the tendencies identified here are specific to the selected texts or part of wider changes in Indian digital media.

IX. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The corpus contains only five Hindi-language series and cannot represent the full diversity of Indian OTT content.

The selection is purposive and interpretive rather than statistically representative.

The analysis is based on textual interpretation and does not include audience-reception data.

The selected narratives are disproportionately urban and therefore provide limited access to rural, working-class, and other underrepresented experiences.

Future studies should use larger and more diverse corpora, make coding procedures fully reproducible, and consider comparative audience research.

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6. A Study on the Influence of Technology and Digital Media on OTT Users

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Abstract

The emergence of advanced digital technologies has transformed contemporary media consumption practices. Over-the-Top (OTT) platforms have become a major source of entertainment by enabling audiences to access content through internet-based services across multiple devices. This study examines the role of technology and digital media in shaping OTT users' experiences and behaviours. It examines how technological innovations, including personalised recommendation systems, mobile connectivity, artificial intelligence, and social networking features, affect viewing preferences, audience engagement, and consumption patterns. The study also explores the broader social and cultural consequences associated with increasing dependence on digital streaming services. OTT platforms have shifted audiences from scheduled traditional television viewing towards flexible, personalised, and on-demand consumption. At the same time, features such as autoplay, algorithmic recommendations, subtitles, multilingual content, and social media integration have encouraged new forms of engagement. The analysis indicates that technology-driven streaming platforms have substantially altered audience interaction with media and have become an integral component of modern digital lifestyles. However, concerns towards excessive screen time, privacy, algorithmic bias, and digital dependency validate the need for responsible and balanced utilization of OTT technologies.

Keywords: OTT platforms, digital technology, streaming media, audience behaviour, digital communication

Introduction

The rapid development of digital communication technologies has significantly changed the media and entertainment landscape. Internet-based streaming services have emerged as alternatives to conventional broadcasting systems, allowing users to access film content, documentaries, web series and other forms of entertainment on their own schedules and preferences. Unlike traditional television, OTT platforms provide greater flexibility, convenience, and personalisation, making them increasingly popular among diverse audience groups.

The growth of OTT platforms is closely associated with technological innovations such as high-speed internet, smartphones, cloud computing, data analytics, artificial intelligence and digital payment systems. These technological developments have made it possible for audiences to consume media across multiple devices and locations. Users are no longer

dependent on fixed broadcasting schedules because content can be paused, resumed, downloaded or watched at a preferred time.

The expansion of OTT platforms also represents a broader transformation in audience behaviour. Viewers are moved from being relatively passive recipients of scheduled television programmes towards becoming active participants who select, organise and personalise their media experiences. Napoli (2011) explains that technological developments have transformed the relationship between media organisations and audiences by creating new forms of audience activity and measurement. In the OTT environment, user interactions, viewing histories, searches, ratings and preferences can influence future recommendations.

This paper examines how technology and digital media influence OTT users and evaluates the behavioural, social, and cultural implications of these changes.

Technological Infrastructure Supporting OTT Platforms

Internet Connectivity and Mobile Access

The widespread availability of broadband networks and mobile devices has played a crucial role in the growth of OTT services. Users can now stream content across different locations and devices without being restricted by fixed broadcasting schedules. This level of accessibility has increased the frequency of media consumption and has encouraged continuous engagement with digital entertainment.

Personalised Recommendation Systems

A defining feature of modern OTT platforms is the use of recommendation technologies that analyse viewing histories, preferences, and user interactions. By processing large volumes of data, these systems suggest content that aligns with individual interests. Such personalisation often enhances user satisfaction and platform engagement, although it can also narrow exposure to diverse content options.

Artificial Intelligence and Platform Efficiency

Artificial intelligence contributes significantly to improving platform functionality and user experience. AI-powered tools support content categorisation, automated subtitling, language translation, dubbing, and interface optimisation. These features increase accessibility and enable platforms to serve audiences from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds more effectively.

AI also supports more efficient content delivery and audience analysis. By examining patterns of user engagement, platforms can understand viewing behaviour and improve their services. Although these developments provide considerable benefits, they also raise questions about transparency, data protection and the extent to which algorithms influence individual choices.

Influence of Digital Media on OTT Users

Evolution of Content Consumption Habits

Digital media has encouraged a transition from scheduled media viewing to flexible, on-demand consumption. Audiences increasingly prefer content that can be accessed whenever convenient, reducing reliance on traditional television broadcasting. This transformation has

altered patterns of leisure and entertainment across different demographic groups. Users can select specific genres, languages, actors, programmes and episodes based on their interests. The ability to pause, rewind, and fast-forward, or resume content has further strengthened the interactive nature of digital viewing.

Growth of Binge-Watching Practices

The design of many OTT platforms encourages prolonged viewing sessions through features such as autoplay and sequential episode recommendations. As a result, binge-watching has become a common viewing behaviour. While this practice enhances entertainment experiences, it may also affect productivity, daily schedules, and overall screen-time management.

Binge watching may provide entertainment, relaxation and emotional engagement, but prolonged viewing can also affect time management and daily routines. Users may spend longer periods watching content than originally intended because the transition between episodes requires minimal effort. This illustrates how platform design can influence behavioural patterns in addition to simply providing entertainment.

Interaction Through Social Media

Social media platforms and OTT services are interconnected within the digital ecosystem. Users frequently discuss programs, post reviews, share recommendations, and participate in online fan communities. These interactions contribute to the visibility and popularity of streaming content while influencing audience choices and perceptions.

The interaction also influences content history. Users may select programmes because they encounter them through social media discussions, short videos, reviews, memes or recommendations from friends. Consequently, media consumption has become both an individual and socially connected activity.

Behavioural Effects on OTT Users

Content Selection and Information Overload

The extensive range of content available on streaming platforms provides users with numerous viewing options. However, this abundance can make decision-making more complex. Users may spend considerable time browsing before selecting content.

Recommendation systems, online ratings, and peer suggestions therefore play an important role in reducing the complexity of choice. In this environment, algorithms increasingly act as intermediaries between audiences and content.

Shifts in Attention and Viewing Expectations

Contemporary digital media environments emphasise rapid engagement and visually appealing content. Consequently, many OTT users demonstrate a preference for dynamic narratives and immersive storytelling formats. These evolving preferences reflect broader changes in digital media consumption behaviour.

Impact on Everyday Life

Streaming services have become deeply integrated into daily routines. Users frequently incorporate OTT viewing into activities such as commuting, relaxation, and leisure time. This integration has reshaped patterns of social interaction, time allocation, and entertainment consumption, often blurring distinctions between work and personal life.

Cultural and Social Dimensions

OTT platforms provide access to content produced in various regions and languages, enabling audiences to engage with diverse cultural perspectives. Exposure to international films, television series, and documentaries promotes intercultural awareness and broadens understanding of global societies. At the same time, media representations presented through OTT content can influence audience attitudes, language use, fashion preferences, and lifestyle choices. Such factors validate the capacity of digital media to shape cultural practices and social identities.

Challenges and Ethical Issues

Despite the benefits associated with OTT platforms, several concerns require attention. Excessive engagement with streaming content may contribute to unhealthy viewing habits and increased screen dependency. Furthermore, collecting and analysing user data raises questions about privacy and informed consent. Algorithm-based recommendation systems may also introduce biases that influence content visibility and limit exposure to alternative viewpoints. Addressing these challenges is essential for ensuring responsible and ethical use of digital media technologies.

Conclusion

Technology and digital media have transformed how audiences access, consume, and interact with entertainment content. Through innovations such as mobile streaming, artificial intelligence, and personalised recommendation systems, OTT platforms have created highly customised viewing environments that enhance user engagement. These developments have influenced behavioural patterns, social interactions, and cultural experiences, making OTT services a central feature of contemporary digital life. Future research should focus on empirical investigations of the long-term psychological, social, and cultural consequences of sustained OTT platform utilisation.

These developments have influenced content consumption habits, binge-watching practices, social media interactions, cultural exposure and everyday routines. OTT platforms have also contributed to new forms of linguistic and cultural interaction by making multilingual and international content more accessible to audiences.

At the same time, the increasing integration of OTT services into everyday life presents challenges involving excessive screen use, privacy, algorithmic biases, information overload, and unequal digital access. Therefore, the influence of technology on OTT users should not be understood only in terms of convenience and entertainment. It represents a broader transformation in the relationship between technology, media, culture and audience behaviour.

Future research should undertake empirical investigations into OTT users across different age groups, social backgrounds, and linguistic communities. Questionnaire-based studies,

interviews, and behavioural data can provide further insight into how technological features influence viewing habits and communication practices. Such research can contribute to a deeper understanding of the long-term behavioural, social, cultural and linguistic consequences of sustained OTT platform usage.

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7. Food, Memory, and Generational Change in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth*

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Abstract

Jhumpa Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008) presents diaspora less as a dramatic rupture than as a slow redistribution of ordinary practices—cooking, eating, remembering, and refusing. This article reads the collection through gastrocriticism, examining how food functions as a site where Bengali American identity is preserved, revised, and sometimes quietly abandoned. Across the eight stories, first-generation parents tend to treat food as ritual: a means of reproducing homeland, maintaining familial obligation, and anchoring memory. Their second-generation children, by contrast, often encounter Bengali food through absence, obligation, or ambivalence. The article argues that Lahiri stages a generational shift from culinary preservation to culinary negotiation: the elaborate preparations associated with the immigrant kitchen give way to simplified meals, solitary eating, and hybrid tastes. Food remains emotionally charged, but its cultural work changes. It no longer simply preserves Bengal; it exposes the fractures within diasporic families, especially around gender, marriage, grief, and inheritance. Drawing on Stuart Hall's model of cultural identity as ongoing negotiation, Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity, and gastrocritical approaches to food as memory and affect, the article contends that *Unaccustomed Earth* depicts food not as a stable emblem of ethnic authenticity but as a mutable practice through which diasporic subjects negotiate belonging. The study concludes that Lahiri's culinary imagery reveals both the durability and the fragility of cultural transmission in immigrant families.

Keywords: Jhumpa Lahiri; *Unaccustomed Earth*; gastrocriticism; diaspora; foodways; second-generation identity; Bengali American literature; cultural memory

Introduction

In diaspora literature, food often appears at moments when characters cannot otherwise articulate what they have lost. A particular dish, spice, utensil, or meal can summon a homeland that language struggles to describe. Jhumpa Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth* is especially attentive to such moments. Although the collection is primarily concerned with family, marriage, grief, secrecy, and the emotional distance between immigrant parents and their American-born children, food recurs as a quiet but powerful marker of cultural continuity and change.

The eight stories in *Unaccustomed Earth* focus largely on second-generation Bengali American characters, with occasional perspectives from their first-generation parents or unnamed narrators. This generational focus makes the collection particularly useful for studying how culinary traditions are transmitted—or fail to be transmitted—across migrant families. Food in the book is not merely decorative. It carries histories of migration, gendered labor, parental expectation, and emotional attachment. As recent gastrocritical scholarship observes, food in Lahiri's diasporic fiction embodies memory, history, and emotional ties, becoming integral to displaced subjects' sense of self.

This article argues that *Unaccustomed Earth* traces a movement from **ritual preservation** to **functional negotiation** in Bengali American foodways. First-generation characters often use food to recreate a lost world: they cook elaborate meals, preserve customs, and treat the kitchen as a space of cultural continuity. Second-generation characters, however, relate to food more ambivalently. They may appreciate its emotional resonance, yet they also experience it as a reminder of parental authority, cultural difference, or unresolved family conflict. Food therefore becomes a medium through which Lahiri represents the uneven inheritance of diaspora.

The article proceeds in four parts. First, it outlines the theoretical framework, drawing on gastrocriticism, Hall's cultural identity theory, and Bhabha's hybridity. Second, it examines food as ritual and memory in the first-generation kitchen. Third, it analyzes the second generation's ambivalent relationship to inherited foodways. Finally, it considers how Lahiri uses food to expose the gendered and emotional costs of cultural transmission.

Theoretical Framework: Food, Memory, and Diasporic Identity

Gastrocriticism treats food as a cultural text. It asks not only what characters eat, but how eating produces meaning: how meals create kinship, how tastes preserve memory, and how food marks social boundaries. In diasporic writing, food is especially significant because it links the body to place. A taste can transport a character across continents; a missing ingredient can reveal the distance between home and host country. Scholars of Lahiri's work have noted that shared food establishes ties among dispersed subjects and that spices, meals, and culinary habits often negotiate questions of postcolonial and diasporic identity.[webology]

Stuart Hall's theory of cultural identity is central to this reading. Hall rejects the idea that identity is a fixed essence passed intact from one generation to the next. Instead, identity is a process of becoming, shaped by history, representation, and position. For the children of immigrants, cultural inheritance is not simply received; it is interpreted, resisted, revised, and sometimes mourned. In *Unaccustomed Earth*, food dramatizes this process. A parent may cook a traditional meal to preserve Bengali identity, while a child may eat it with affection, indifference, guilt, or resistance.

Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity further clarifies Lahiri's representation of diasporic foodways. Bhabha's "third space" describes the cultural in-between where identities are produced through translation and negotiation rather than pure reproduction. Second-generation Bengali Americans in Lahiri's stories do not inhabit either Bengal or America in an

uncomplicated way. Their food practices likewise occupy an intermediate space: they may combine Bengali ingredients with American routines, or they may abandon traditional preparation while retaining emotional attachment to its memory. Food becomes hybrid not because it is diluted, but because it reflects the layered conditions of diasporic life.

Finally, gastrocritical approaches emphasize food's affective power. Food is tied to care, appetite, disgust, nostalgia, and grief. In Lahiri's fiction, meals often reveal what characters cannot say directly. A mother's cooking may express love that speech cannot; a rejected meal may signal generational estrangement; a remembered dish may expose the persistence of loss. Recent scholarship on *Unaccustomed Earth* similarly argues that gustatory references embed the predicaments of second-generation diasporic individuals within everyday domestic life.

The First-Generation Kitchen: Ritual, Care, and Preservation

For many first-generation immigrant parents in *Unaccustomed Earth*, cooking is an act of cultural maintenance. The kitchen becomes a miniature homeland: a place where Bengali ingredients, techniques, and rhythms of domestic life can be reproduced in an American setting. Food allows parents to resist the erasure that migration threatens. By preparing familiar dishes, they assert continuity with a past that geography has otherwise disrupted.

This preservation is often gendered. Women are frequently represented as the custodians of culinary memory. They shop for particular ingredients, cook for family gatherings, and assume responsibility for feeding children, guests, and relatives. Their labor is intimate but also burdensome. Cooking becomes a form of care, yet it can also become a site of exhaustion, resentment, and unacknowledged service. Lahiri's stories do not romanticize the immigrant kitchen; they show that cultural preservation depends on invisible labor, much of it performed by women.

Food also functions as a language of parental love. First-generation parents may find it difficult to express emotional vulnerability directly. Instead, they offer food. A prepared meal becomes an apology, a welcome, a consolation, or an assertion of belonging. In this sense, food operates as what diaspora scholars have called an emotional anchor: it stabilizes identity amid displacement and provides a tangible connection to origins.

Yet the first-generation kitchen is not a space of uncomplicated comfort. It is also marked by anxiety. Parents worry that their children will lose touch with Bengali culture, marry outside expected communities, or fail to understand the sacrifices that migration has required. Food becomes a way of teaching inheritance, but teaching can become pressure. When children reject a dish, skip a family meal, or show indifference to culinary tradition, parents may experience this as more than a matter of taste. It can feel like a rejection of family, origin, and obligation.

Second-Generation Ambivalence: Inheritance and Distance

The second-generation characters in *Unaccustomed Earth* inhabit a different relationship to food. They have grown up with Bengali meals, but they have also been formed by American schools, workplaces, friendships, and romantic relationships. Their identities are not simply Bengali or American; they are shaped by the friction between these worlds. Scholarship on the

collection emphasizes that Lahiri's second-generation protagonists experience cultural displacement, alienation, and the ongoing negotiation between old and new worlds.[ijels][researchpublish]

Food reflects this negotiation. Second-generation characters may value Bengali food as memory, comfort, or family connection, but they do not always practice it with the same ritual intensity as their parents. They may eat traditional meals only when visiting home, rely on convenience foods in daily life, or prefer the relative anonymity of restaurants and cafés. The shift is not necessarily a complete loss of culture. Rather, it is a change in the structure of culinary experience: from regular domestic ritual to occasional, emotionally charged return.

This ambivalence is especially visible in moments of family conflict. When relationships between parents and children are strained, food can become uncomfortable. A meal offered by a parent may feel like an intrusion; a child's refusal to eat may be read as emotional withdrawal. Lahiri's stories often place characters at tables where conversation fails. The food remains, but the people around it cannot fully connect. In such scenes, eating exposes the limits of familial intimacy.

The second generation also experiences food through nostalgia for a homeland they may barely remember or have never known. Unlike their parents, they cannot return to an originary Bengal in any simple sense. Their relationship to Bengali food is therefore mediated: through parents, photographs, visits, stories, and memory. This mediated inheritance makes food both precious and unstable. It connects them to ancestry, but it also reminds them that they do not fully possess that ancestry.

Hybrid Foodways and the Third Space

Lahiri does not present second-generation foodways merely as decline. They are also creative adaptations. The children of immigrants live in a cultural environment where Bengali practices coexist with American habits, global consumer culture, and multiethnic social worlds. Their meals may therefore be hybrid: familiar dishes eaten in unfamiliar settings, traditional ingredients prepared with new methods, or American foods invested with Bengali emotional significance.

This hybridity corresponds to Bhabha's third space. The second-generation subject does not simply choose between Bengal and America. Instead, the subject inhabits a space of translation, where cultural meanings are continually remade. Food becomes one of the most concrete expressions of this process. A meal can be simultaneously a memory of parental care, a marker of ethnic difference, and an ordinary part of American daily life.

At the same time, Lahiri's hybrid foodways are not free of tension. Hybridity can produce belonging, but it can also produce discomfort. Characters may feel insufficiently Bengali in front of parents or relatives, and insufficiently American in broader social contexts. Food makes this double exclusion tangible. A character may crave a home-cooked Bengali meal while also feeling trapped by the familial expectations it carries.

Thus, food in *Unaccustomed Earth* is not a simple symbol of authenticity. It is a contested practice. It can preserve culture, but it can also reveal how culture changes when it passes through migration, intermarriage, grief, and generational distance.

Gender, Labor, and the Cost of Transmission

Any account of food in Lahiri's fiction must attend to gender. Culinary transmission is not neutral; it is often assigned to women. Mothers, aunts, wives, and daughters are expected to remember recipes, prepare meals, host guests, and sustain family rituals. This expectation links food to patriarchal structures within both Bengali and diasporic contexts.

In *Unaccustomed Earth*, women's relationship to food is especially complex. Cooking can provide agency: a woman may use food to create community, express care, or assert cultural authority. But it can also confine her to domestic service. The kitchen may be a place of creativity, yet it may also be a place where her labor is taken for granted. Feminist readings of Lahiri's work have noted that her female characters are often caught between inherited tradition and the desire for self-determination, negotiating memory and mobility within diasporic families.[thecontext][journals.iium.edu]

The second-generation daughters in the collection inherit this tension. They may admire their mothers' culinary knowledge while resisting the gendered obligations attached to it. They may want connection to Bengali culture without reproducing the domestic roles that culture has historically assigned to women. Food therefore becomes a site where feminism and diaspora intersect. To inherit a recipe is not only to receive a cultural practice; it is also to inherit the social relations embedded within it.

Food, Grief, and Unfinished Belonging

One of the most striking features of *Unaccustomed Earth* is its association of food with grief. Meals frequently appear after death, separation, or emotional rupture. Food becomes a way of continuing life when continuity has been broken. A shared meal may temporarily restore family cohesion, but it cannot fully repair loss.

This connection between food and mourning deepens the collection's diasporic themes. Migration itself is a form of loss: the loss of place, language, kinship networks, and familiar sensory worlds. Later generations inherit this loss indirectly. They may not know precisely what has been lost, but they feel its absence in family silences, parental expectations, and half-remembered tastes.

Food thus becomes a form of unfinished belonging. It offers comfort, but not resolution. It connects characters to the past, but it also reminds them that the past cannot be fully recovered. In Lahiri's stories, no meal finally resolves displacement. Instead, food reveals the ongoing work of living with inherited histories.

Conclusion

Unaccustomed Earth represents diaspora through the intimate language of food. In Lahiri's stories, meals preserve memory, express care, expose conflict, and mark the uneven

transmission of culture across generations. First-generation characters often use food as ritual preservation, while second-generation characters negotiate inherited foodways through ambivalence, adaptation, and selective memory. The result is not a simple narrative of cultural loss but a nuanced account of diasporic transformation.

Food in the collection moves from the elaborate preparations of the immigrant kitchen toward simpler, more hybrid, and more emotionally complicated forms of eating. Yet even when culinary tradition thins, it does not disappear. It survives as memory, longing, guilt, and desire. Lahiri's gastrocritical imagination therefore shows that diasporic identity is neither fully preserved nor entirely lost. It is continually remade at the table.

The broader implication is that cultural heritage in immigrant families is sustained not only through formal institutions or explicit teaching, but through everyday practices: cooking, feeding, remembering, and sharing meals. When those practices change, identity changes with them. *Unaccustomed Earth* captures this change with remarkable precision, showing that the story of migration is often told not through grand declarations but through what remains on the plate.[webology]

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8. Negotiating Gender, Memory, and Solidarity: A Comparative Study of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*

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Abstract

Contemporary Indian English fiction has increasingly explored the intersections of gender, memory, identity, and social transformation within postcolonial contexts. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) and Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) are significant contributions to this literary tradition, offering profound insights into the lives of individuals negotiating complex social, cultural, and political realities. This paper undertakes a comparative study of the two novels with particular emphasis on the interconnected themes of gender, memory, and solidarity. Through a feminist and postcolonial framework, the study examines how female characters confront patriarchal structures, social exclusion, and emotional fragmentation while simultaneously seeking forms of connection and resilience. The analysis demonstrates that memory functions not merely as a narrative device but as a means of preserving identity and challenging dominant social narratives. Furthermore, the study argues that solidarity, whether expressed through familial relationships, emotional alliances, or shared experiences of marginalization, becomes a significant mechanism of survival and resistance. By comparing Roy's and Desai's representations of women's experiences, the paper highlights the transformative role of memory and solidarity in negotiating gendered realities within contemporary Indian society.

Keywords: Gender, Memory, Solidarity, Feminism, Postcolonialism, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Indian English Fiction.

Introduction

Indian English literature has witnessed remarkable growth in the post-independence period, particularly through the contributions of women writers who have challenged dominant representations of gender, identity, and society. Among these writers, Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai occupy a distinguished position for their ability to depict the complexities of contemporary life while addressing broader questions of power, inequality, and belonging. Their novels engage with issues of caste, class, migration, family relationships, and cultural transformation, making them important texts for understanding the changing dynamics of Indian society.

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* explores the lives of individuals trapped within restrictive social structures governed by caste, patriarchy, and social convention. Set in Kerala, the novel examines how personal relationships are shaped by historical and cultural forces. Through a fragmented narrative structure and shifting temporal perspectives, Roy foregrounds the significance of memory in shaping individual and collective identities. The experiences of Ammu, Rahel, and other female characters reveal the challenges faced by women who seek autonomy within oppressive social systems.

Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* presents a different yet related exploration of identity and marginalization. Set against the backdrop of globalization and migration, the novel investigates the emotional and cultural consequences of displacement. Through characters such as Sai and Nimi, Desai examines the gendered dimensions of social change and the difficulties faced by women navigating conflicting expectations. Memory plays a crucial role in the novel, connecting personal histories with broader political and cultural transformations.

Both novels employ postmodern narrative techniques characterized by non-linear storytelling, fragmented memory, multiple perspectives, and temporal dislocation. These narrative strategies enable the authors to represent the complexities of human experience while challenging conventional notions of history and identity. Memory emerges as a central organizing principle that shapes the characters' understanding of themselves and their relationships with others.

Gender remains one of the most significant concerns in both texts. Roy and Desai depict women who confront various forms of discrimination and exclusion while attempting to assert their individuality. Their narratives reveal how patriarchal structures regulate women's choices, relationships, and opportunities. At the same time, the novels portray moments of resistance and resilience that challenge dominant power relations. Female characters negotiate restrictive environments through emotional strength, self-reflection, and interpersonal connections.

Another important theme connecting the two novels is solidarity. Although neither text presents idealized forms of female unity, both demonstrate the importance of relational bonds in sustaining individuals through periods of crisis and uncertainty. Solidarity appears in different forms, including familial affection, emotional support, shared suffering, and mutual recognition. These connections provide spaces of comfort and resistance within societies marked by inequality and division.

The present study seeks to examine how gender, memory, and solidarity interact within *The God of Small Things* and *The Inheritance of Loss*. By adopting a comparative approach, the paper investigates the ways in which the two novels represent women's experiences and responses to social oppression. The study argues that memory and solidarity function as important mechanisms through which female characters negotiate patriarchal structures and construct meaningful identities. In doing so, the paper contributes to contemporary discussions of feminist and postcolonial literary criticism while highlighting the continuing relevance of Roy's and Desai's works in understanding gendered experiences in modern India.

Literature Review

The relationship between gender and literature has been a central concern of feminist criticism for several decades. Feminist scholars have consistently examined how literary texts represent women's experiences, identities, and struggles within patriarchal societies. The development of feminist literary theory has enabled critics to explore the various ways in which women

negotiate systems of power and oppression while constructing alternative forms of agency and resistance. Within this critical framework, the themes of memory and solidarity have emerged as significant areas of scholarly inquiry because they reveal how women preserve personal histories and establish meaningful connections in the face of social constraints.

bell hooks argues that feminist solidarity is essential for challenging patriarchal structures and creating spaces of empowerment. According to hooks, sisterhood should not be understood merely as a personal relationship but as a political and ethical commitment among women who share a desire for social transformation. This understanding of solidarity has influenced contemporary literary criticism by encouraging scholars to examine how women's relationships contribute to resistance, survival, and self-definition.

Durba Mitra's discussion of feminist solidarity in “Sisterhood Is X: On Feminist Solidarity Then and Now” further develops this perspective by emphasizing the evolving nature of sisterhood in contemporary contexts. Mitra argues that solidarity is not dependent upon sameness but rather emerges through shared struggles and mutual recognition despite social and cultural differences. Her work demonstrates that solidarity remains a relevant and transformative force within modern feminist discourse.

Scholars examining women's friendships have also emphasized the importance of relational bonds in challenging social hierarchies. Sreejata Roy's study of women's friendships as sites of resistance highlights how female relationships provide emotional support and create opportunities for empowerment. Roy argues that friendships among women often function as alternative spaces where individuals can resist patriarchal expectations and develop forms of collective agency. Such insights are particularly useful for understanding the role of interpersonal relationships in contemporary literary narratives.

Critical attention to Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* has primarily focused on issues of caste discrimination, gender oppression, memory, and postcolonial identity. Rashid Khan's analysis of the novel explores the ways in which Roy exposes patriarchal and caste-based inequalities through the experiences of female characters. Khan argues that the novel presents women as victims of restrictive social structures while simultaneously highlighting their attempts to challenge these limitations. His study demonstrates the significance of gender in understanding the broader social critique embedded within the text.

Other scholars have examined the feminist dimensions of Roy's novel from postcolonial perspectives. Studies such as “Postcolonial Feminist Perspectives in The God of Small Things” investigate how the novel portrays women negotiating multiple forms of marginalization. These analyses emphasize the intersections of gender, caste, and social power while illustrating the challenges faced by women seeking autonomy in a deeply hierarchical society. Research has further highlighted the importance of memory within the novel, arguing that fragmented recollections function as a means of preserving suppressed histories and personal experiences.

Similarly, Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* has attracted substantial scholarly attention for its exploration of migration, globalization, identity, and social inequality. Existing studies frequently examine the emotional consequences of displacement and cultural fragmentation. Scholars have argued that Desai portrays individuals struggling to reconcile personal aspirations with the realities of economic and political change. Within this context, female characters emerge as significant figures whose experiences reveal the gendered dimensions of globalization and social transformation.

Research on *The Inheritance of Loss* has also emphasized the role of memory in shaping identity and belonging. Studies such as "Migration, Globalization, and Divided Identity in Desai's The Inheritance of Loss" suggest that memory functions as a bridge between past and present, enabling characters to negotiate experiences of alienation and displacement. The novel's engagement with historical memory contributes to its broader exploration of cultural and personal loss.

While considerable scholarship exists on gender, memory, postcolonial identity, and social inequality in both novels, relatively little attention has been given to the relationship between memory and solidarity. Most studies focus on individual experiences of oppression and resistance rather than examining how relational bonds contribute to survival and resilience. Furthermore, comparative analyses of Roy's and Desai's novels remain limited despite the thematic similarities that connect the two texts.

The existing body of research therefore provides valuable insights into the social and political dimensions of *The God of Small Things* and *The Inheritance of Loss*. However, there remains a need for a comparative investigation that considers how gender, memory, and solidarity intersect within these narratives. The present study seeks to address this gap by examining the ways in which female characters negotiate personal and collective histories while developing forms of connection that challenge social exclusion and marginalization.

Research Gap

Existing scholarship on Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* has extensively examined themes of caste discrimination, patriarchy, social inequality, and postcolonial identity. Similarly, studies on Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* have focused on migration, globalization, cultural displacement, and identity crises. While these studies have contributed significantly to the understanding of both novels, they primarily emphasize social and political issues or individual experiences of marginalization.

Furthermore, scholars have frequently analyzed memory as a narrative strategy and gender as a category of social oppression. However, limited attention has been paid to the interconnected relationship between gender, memory, and solidarity. The role of interpersonal relationships in helping women negotiate social constraints and emotional suffering remains insufficiently explored. Existing criticism often treats memory as an individual psychological phenomenon rather than examining its collective and relational dimensions.

Another important limitation is the lack of comparative studies that bring Roy's and Desai's novels together within a common analytical framework. Although both texts explore women's experiences within unequal social structures, few scholars have investigated how female characters use memory and relational bonds as mechanisms of survival, resilience, and resistance. Consequently, a significant gap exists in understanding how gender, memory, and solidarity interact within these two influential works of contemporary Indian English fiction.

The present study seeks to address this gap by undertaking a comparative analysis of *The God of Small Things* and *The Inheritance of Loss*. It examines how memory contributes to identity formation and how solidarity enables women to negotiate patriarchal and social constraints.

Research Objectives

The study aims to:

1. Examine the representation of gender in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*.

2. Analyze the role of memory in shaping identity, relationships, and personal histories within the selected novels.

3. Investigate the significance of solidarity and interpersonal connections in the lives of female characters.

4. Explore how women negotiate patriarchal structures, social exclusion, and emotional trauma.

5. Conduct a comparative analysis of the narrative strategies employed by Roy and Desai in representing gendered experiences.

6. Contribute to feminist and postcolonial literary criticism by highlighting the intersections of gender, memory, and solidarity in contemporary Indian English fiction.

Research Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative and interpretative research methodology based on textual analysis. The research is primarily descriptive and analytical in nature, focusing on the close reading of literary texts to identify recurring themes, narrative patterns, and ideological concerns.

The primary sources for the study are Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) and Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006). Secondary sources include scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, research papers, interviews, and critical essays related to feminism, postcolonialism, memory studies, and contemporary Indian English literature.

The theoretical framework of the study draws upon feminist literary criticism and postcolonial theory. Feminist criticism facilitates an examination of gender relations, female agency, and the representation of women within patriarchal societies. Postcolonial perspectives help illuminate issues of identity, displacement, cultural conflict, and historical memory. The study also incorporates insights from memory studies to understand how recollection, trauma, and personal history influence character development and narrative structure.

A comparative approach is employed to identify similarities and differences between the two novels. Through close textual analysis, the study investigates how gender, memory, and solidarity function within each narrative and how these themes contribute to broader discussions of identity, resistance, and belonging. The methodology enables a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which women negotiate social and emotional challenges in contemporary Indian English fiction.

Results and Discussion

The comparative analysis of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* reveals that gender, memory, and solidarity are deeply interconnected themes that shape the experiences of the female characters. Both novels portray women negotiating restrictive social structures while simultaneously attempting to preserve their identities and establish meaningful connections. Although the novels differ in setting, narrative style, and socio-political context, they share a concern with the challenges faced by women in

patriarchal societies and the strategies they employ to survive, resist, and reconstruct themselves.

Gender and the Experience of Marginalization

One of the most significant findings of the study is that both novels expose the pervasive influence of patriarchal power on women's lives. In *The God of Small Things*, Ammu's experiences demonstrate how gender discrimination limits women's autonomy and opportunities. As a divorced woman, Ammu is denied social respectability and is subjected to continuous judgment by her family and society. Her attempt to exercise personal choice through her relationship with Velutha ultimately leads to severe consequences because it challenges both patriarchal and caste-based norms. Through Ammu's tragic fate, Roy illustrates the mechanisms through which social institutions regulate women's behavior and punish transgression.

Similarly, in *The Inheritance of Loss*, female characters encounter various forms of marginalization. Sai's experiences reflect the uncertainties faced by young women negotiating identity in a rapidly changing world. Although her circumstances differ from Ammu's, she too must navigate social expectations and emotional vulnerabilities. Desai demonstrates that gender inequality often operates alongside other forms of exclusion such as class, colonial legacy, and cultural displacement. Consequently, women's struggles cannot be understood solely in terms of gender but must also be examined in relation to broader social structures.

The analysis indicates that both authors challenge traditional representations of women as passive victims. Instead, their female characters display resilience and agency despite the constraints imposed upon them. Through their actions, emotions, and decisions, these women reveal the complexities of negotiating power within unequal social environments.

Memory as a Means of Identity Formation

Another major finding concerns the role of memory in shaping individual and collective identities. In Roy's novel, memory serves as a central narrative principle. The story unfolds through fragmented recollections that move between past and present, reflecting the psychological impact of trauma and loss. The memories of Rahel and Estha function not merely as personal recollections but as attempts to recover suppressed histories. Through this process, memory becomes a form of resistance against social amnesia and institutional silence.

The fragmented structure of the novel reinforces the idea that memory is selective, unstable, and emotionally charged. Roy demonstrates that personal histories cannot be separated from larger social realities. The memories of the characters are closely connected to issues of caste, gender, family, and power. As a result, recollection becomes an important tool for understanding both personal identity and social injustice.

In *The Inheritance of Loss*, memory performs a similarly significant function. Characters frequently reflect upon past experiences, cultural traditions, and lost opportunities. These recollections shape their understanding of themselves and their relationships with others. Memory becomes particularly important in the context of displacement and globalization, where individuals struggle to maintain a sense of belonging. Desai suggests that memories provide continuity amid social and cultural change, enabling characters to negotiate feelings of alienation and uncertainty.

The study reveals that memory in both novels operates as more than a narrative technique. It becomes a mechanism through which individuals preserve identity, interpret experience, and confront historical realities. The authors use memory to expose hidden forms of suffering while simultaneously emphasizing the importance of personal and collective remembrance.

Solidarity and Emotional Resilience

The analysis further demonstrates that solidarity plays a crucial role in helping characters endure social and emotional challenges. Although neither novel presents idealized forms of unity, both depict relationships that provide emotional support and opportunities for resistance.

In *The God of Small Things*, solidarity emerges primarily through familial and emotional bonds. The relationship between Ammu and her children represents one of the few sources of affection and understanding within a hostile social environment. Despite their hardships, the emotional connection among family members provides moments of comfort and resilience. The bond between Rahel and Estha is particularly significant because it reflects a shared experience of trauma and loss. Their relationship enables them to confront painful memories and preserve a sense of identity despite social fragmentation.

In *The Inheritance of Loss*, solidarity appears in more subtle forms. Characters often experience isolation and emotional distance; nevertheless, moments of empathy and mutual understanding continue to emerge. Relationships within the novel reveal the human need for connection in situations marked by displacement and uncertainty. Desai illustrates that solidarity does not always require complete harmony. Instead, it often develops through shared vulnerability and recognition of common struggles.

The findings suggest that solidarity functions as an important mechanism of survival. Through interpersonal relationships, individuals gain emotional strength and a sense of belonging. Such connections help characters resist feelings of isolation and maintain hope in difficult circumstances.

Comparative Perspectives on Gender, Memory, and Solidarity

A comparison of the two novels highlights both similarities and differences in their treatment of the selected themes. Roy's narrative is deeply rooted in questions of caste, family, and social prohibition, whereas Desai focuses more explicitly on globalization, migration, and cultural displacement. Despite these differences, both novels emphasize the vulnerability of women within unequal social systems.

Roy presents resistance through acts of personal defiance and emotional endurance. Her female characters challenge social restrictions even when such challenges result in punishment and tragedy. Desai, on the other hand, portrays resistance as a quieter process of adaptation and self-negotiation. Her characters often confront emotional and cultural conflicts rather than direct social prohibitions.

Memory also functions differently in the two texts. In *The God of Small Things*, memory is fragmented and traumatic, serving as a means of recovering suppressed histories. In *The Inheritance of Loss*, memory is closely linked to displacement and nostalgia, reflecting the consequences of globalization and migration. Nevertheless, in both novels, memory contributes to identity formation and emotional survival.

Similarly, solidarity assumes different forms across the narratives. Roy emphasizes intimate familial bonds, whereas Desai explores broader experiences of emotional connection and shared vulnerability. Despite these variations, both authors demonstrate that meaningful relationships are essential for negotiating experiences of marginalization and loss.

Discussion

The findings support contemporary feminist arguments that women's experiences cannot be understood solely through the lens of oppression. While both novels depict significant forms of inequality, they also reveal the capacity of women to create spaces of resilience, connection, and resistance. Gender, memory, and solidarity operate together to shape the characters' responses to adversity.

The study further demonstrates that memory possesses political as well as personal significance. By preserving experiences that dominant social narratives attempt to suppress, memory becomes a form of resistance. Likewise, solidarity challenges structures of exclusion by fostering emotional support and collective understanding.

Overall, the comparative analysis reveals that Roy and Desai employ different narrative strategies to explore similar concerns. Their novels highlight the complexities of women's lives while emphasizing the importance of memory and solidarity in confronting social injustice. These themes remain highly relevant to contemporary discussions of gender, identity, and belonging in postcolonial societies.

Conclusion

The present study has examined the interconnected themes of gender, memory, and solidarity in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*. Through a comparative feminist and postcolonial analysis, the research demonstrates that both novels offer profound insights into the challenges faced by women within complex social, cultural, and historical contexts. Despite differences in narrative structure, setting, and thematic emphasis, the two texts reveal significant similarities in their portrayal of women's struggles for identity, autonomy, and belonging.

The analysis establishes that gender remains a central organizing principle in both novels. Roy and Desai expose the various forms of discrimination, exclusion, and control that shape women's lives within patriarchal societies. Female characters are frequently constrained by social expectations, family structures, and institutional inequalities. However, the novels do not present women merely as passive victims. Instead, they depict individuals who negotiate oppressive circumstances through resilience, emotional strength, and acts of resistance. Their experiences highlight the complexity of female agency within unequal social systems.

The study also demonstrates the crucial role of memory in shaping personal and collective identities. In *The God of Small Things*, memory functions as a means of recovering suppressed histories and confronting traumatic experiences. Roy employs a fragmented narrative structure to illustrate the ways in which recollection influences the characters' understanding of themselves and their past. In *The Inheritance of Loss*, memory is closely associated with displacement, migration, and cultural change. Desai portrays recollection as a source of continuity that enables individuals to negotiate experiences of alienation and uncertainty. In both novels, memory serves not only as a narrative device but also as a powerful mechanism for preserving identity and challenging dominant social narratives.

Another important finding of the study concerns the significance of solidarity. Although the selected novels do not portray idealized forms of female unity, they consistently emphasize the value of emotional connections and interpersonal relationships. Solidarity emerges through familial bonds, shared experiences, empathy, and mutual understanding. These relationships provide emotional support and create opportunities for resistance against social marginalization. The study reveals that solidarity functions as a vital resource through which individuals cope with trauma, loss, and exclusion.

The comparative approach adopted in this research further highlights the distinctive narrative strategies employed by Roy and Desai. Roy's novel foregrounds issues of caste, social prohibition, and historical injustice, whereas Desai focuses on globalization, migration, and cultural displacement. Nevertheless, both authors underscore the importance of memory and relational bonds in shaping human experience. Their works illustrate that identity is not formed in isolation but through continuous interaction with personal histories and social relationships.

The findings contribute to contemporary feminist literary criticism by demonstrating that gender, memory, and solidarity are deeply interconnected categories of analysis. The study argues that women's experiences cannot be understood solely through narratives of oppression. Equally important are the forms of resilience, connection, and resistance that emerge in response to adversity. By foregrounding these dimensions, the research offers a more comprehensive understanding of female subjectivity in contemporary Indian English fiction.

In conclusion, *The God of Small Things* and *The Inheritance of Loss* reveal how women negotiate the challenges of patriarchy, social inequality, and cultural transformation through memory and solidarity. The novels affirm the enduring significance of human relationships in sustaining identity and fostering resilience. As literary representations of contemporary social realities, they continue to provide valuable insights into the complexities of gendered experience in postcolonial societies. Future research may further explore these themes in other works of Indian English literature, thereby expanding scholarly understanding of women's narratives, collective memory, and forms of solidarity in diverse cultural contexts.

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9. Artificial Intelligence and the Reframing of Literary Creativity: Authorship, Intentionality, and Machine-Generated Texts

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Abstract

This article examines how generative artificial intelligence challenges established concepts of literary creativity, authorship, and intentionality. Drawing on posthuman theory, poststructuralist theories of authorship, and recent scholarship on computational creativity, it argues that AI-generated literature should be understood not as a replacement for human authorship but as a distributed and technologically mediated form of textual production. The article analyses AI-generated poetry and fiction alongside human writing in order to identify the differences between stylistic fluency, originality, emotional depth, and literary value. It argues that systems such as ChatGPT and Sudowrite can imitate genre conventions and authorial style, yet their outputs remain dependent on recombination rather than conscious invention. The study concludes that AI reframes creativity by exposing the collaborative, algorithmic, and institutional conditions through which literary texts are produced and interpreted.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence; literary creativity; authorship; intentionality; AI-generated literature; posthumanism; digital textuality

1. Introduction

Artificial intelligence has become one of the most disruptive forces in contemporary literary culture. Generative systems such as ChatGPT, Claude, and Sudowrite can produce poems, stories, essays, and stylistically marked prose with remarkable fluency. Their emergence has renewed older debates about whether machines can think, create, or write literature. However, the question is no longer simply whether machines can produce text. The more important question is whether machine-generated language can be understood as literary creativity and how it changes the concepts through which literature is interpreted.

This article examines the relationship between artificial intelligence and literary creativity by focusing on three connected issues: originality, authorship, and intentionality. It argues that AI-generated literature does not simply imitate human writing; it reveals that literary production has always been mediated by language, technology, institutions, and cultural conventions. The article draws on posthuman theory, poststructuralist theories of authorship, and comparative studies of human and AI-generated texts.

The central argument is that AI should be understood as a generative literary system rather than an autonomous author. AI can produce text that appears creative, but its creativity is based on statistical recombination rather than consciousness, lived experience, or intentional expression. This distinction matters because literary value has traditionally been connected to voice, emotional depth, and the sense that a text emerges from a particular human perspective.

The article is organized into five sections. The first section reviews the theoretical context. The second examines AI-generated texts and their mechanisms of production. The third analyses originality and authorship. The fourth discusses intentionality, stylistic mimicry, and intertextuality. The final section considers the implications for literary studies.

2. Theoretical Context

The theoretical foundation of this article lies in posthumanism and poststructuralism. N. Katherine Hayles's How We Became Posthuman argues that information technologies have transformed understandings of embodiment, subjectivity, and textuality. Hayles shows that the human subject cannot be understood as separate from the technological systems through which knowledge and communication are produced. In literary terms, this means that writing is never simply the expression of an autonomous human mind; it is shaped by material technologies, cultural codes, and networked systems.

Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto" provides a complementary framework. Haraway uses the figure of the cyborg to challenge rigid boundaries between human and machine, organism and mechanism, natural and artificial. The cyborg is important for literary studies because it suggests that identity and creativity are constructed through hybridity rather than purity. In the context of AI, the cyborg metaphor helps explain how human intention and machine generation can interact without becoming identical.

Poststructuralist theory is equally relevant. Roland Barthes's "The Death of the Author" challenges the assumption that textual meaning is controlled by the intentions of its creator. Barthes argues that a text becomes meaningful through the reader's interpretation rather than through the author's biography or intention. Michel Foucault's "What Is an Author?" extends this argument by describing authorship as a cultural and institutional function rather than a natural category. Foucault's concept of the author-function is especially useful for AI studies because it shows that authorship continues to operate even when the producer of a text is not a conventional human subject.

Recent scholarship on computational creativity has also contributed to this debate. Margaret A. Boden distinguishes between combinational, exploratory, and transformational creativity. Boden argues that creativity involves the generation of novel and valuable ideas, and that computer systems can participate in creative processes by manipulating conceptual structures. Her work provides a useful foundation for understanding AI as a creative participant, although it predates contemporary large language models and therefore cannot fully address their scale and cultural visibility.

3. AI-Generated Texts and Mechanisms of Production

Generative AI systems produce text by predicting likely sequences of words based on patterns learned from large corpora of human language. This mechanism allows systems such as ChatGPT to imitate genres, tones, and styles with considerable precision. A model can produce

a confessional poem, a minimalist short story, a formal academic paragraph, or a dialogue in the style of a particular genre because it has learned recurring patterns from its training data.

This process differs from human composition in important ways. A human writer may draw on memory, emotion, cultural knowledge, bodily experience, and conscious intention. An AI system, by contrast, generates language through probabilistic prediction. It does not remember a personal experience, feel grief, or intend to communicate a particular emotional truth. It produces representations of such experiences by modelling patterns found in existing language.

This does not mean that AI-generated texts are meaningless. Readers may find them moving, surprising, or beautiful. Aesthetic experience is partly produced through the reader's encounter with language, and readers may respond to a text even when they know that it was generated by a machine. However, the origin of the text remains important because it affects how readers understand authenticity, testimony, and literary authority.

AI-generated literature is therefore best understood as a hybrid cultural form. It is produced through computational systems but interpreted through human expectations, literary conventions, and social beliefs about authorship. Its significance lies not only in whether it can imitate human writing, but also in what its reception reveals about the values readers attach to originality, intention, experience, and literary authenticity.

4. Originality and Authorship

Originality is one of the most contested issues in AI-generated literature. Traditional literary criticism often associates originality with invention, individuality, and the emergence of a distinctive voice. AI-generated writing complicates this model because it produces language by recombining patterns learned from existing texts. The output may be new in the sense that it has not appeared before, but it may also be derivative in the sense that it is generated from prior human writing.

This creates a distinction between novelty and originality. An AI system can produce novel combinations of words, images, and narrative structures. Yet novelty alone does not establish originality in the human sense of emerging from lived experience, subjective intention, or creative risk. A machine may generate a poem about grief without experiencing grief. It may produce a story about migration without possessing memory, identity, or historical consciousness.

Authorship becomes equally unstable in this context. A text generated through a prompt, revised by a user, and shaped by a model trained on massive archives of human writing is not produced by a single source. Authorship is distributed across the user, the model, the dataset, the software company, and the cultural traditions embedded in the training data. This does not mean that AI should be treated as a legal or intellectual author. Rather, it means that human authorship must be understood in relation to the systems through which it operates.

Foucault's author-function is particularly useful here. Even when a text is generated by a machine, readers and institutions continue to ask who produced it, who owns it, and who is responsible for its circulation. AI does not abolish the author-function; it reveals how deeply institutional authorship is embedded in literary culture. The author remains a category through which texts are classified, evaluated, and regulated.

5. Intentionality, Mimicry, and Intertextuality

Intentionality is the strongest philosophical limit on calling AI a creator. John Searle's Chinese Room argument remains relevant because it distinguishes between symbol manipulation and genuine understanding. Searle argues that a system may manipulate symbols according to rules without understanding their meaning. From this perspective, AI-generated literary texts may imitate human creativity without possessing intentionality.

This matters for literary studies because literature is usually associated not only with form but with intentional acts of expression, interpretation, and feeling. AI can imitate those effects, yet it does not possess the inner standpoint traditionally linked to literary creation. The result is that AI-generated texts often operate as simulations of meaning rather than instances of lived meaning. Even so, readers may still interpret them as meaningful because meaning in literature also depends on reception, not just origin.

Stylistic mimicry is one of AI's most visible strengths. Large language models can reproduce poetic rhythm, narrative voice, formal register, and genre conventions with considerable precision. They can imitate a confessional lyric, a minimalist short story, or a formal academic paragraph by absorbing recurring patterns from the texts they have seen. However, mimicry is not the same as mastery. AI often produces writing that is smooth, generic, and predictably structured, even when it seems elegant on the surface.

Intertextuality is another key concept for understanding AI as creator. Because these models are trained on enormous amounts of prior writing, every generated text is saturated with echoes, traces, and recombinations of earlier language. In that sense, AI writing is deeply intertextual, but in a mechanically amplified way. This differs from human intertextuality because the machine does not cite, remember, or allude in a conscious literary sense. Instead, it statistically blends linguistic patterns from many sources into new outputs.

6. Implications for Literary Studies

The emergence of AI-generated literature requires literary studies to develop new methods of analysis. Scholars must examine not only the content of AI-generated texts but also the conditions of their production and circulation. This includes attention to prompts, training data, platform design, recommendation systems, and reader response.

AI-generated literature also challenges the traditional distinction between production and consumption. A text may be generated by a machine, edited by a human, published on a platform, recommended by an algorithm, and interpreted by a reader. Literary value emerges through this entire chain rather than through the act of writing alone. The reader's knowledge of authorship can significantly alter interpretation, especially when a text is identified as machine-generated.

The most productive approach is therefore neither to reject AI-generated literature nor to celebrate it uncritically. Literary scholars should treat it as a new form of textual production that reveals the limits and possibilities of existing critical categories. AI-generated writing can be analysed as a hybrid literary practice in which human intention, computational process, and institutional framing interact.

7. Conclusion

Artificial intelligence reframes literary creativity by challenging the assumption that creativity belongs exclusively to conscious human subjects. AI systems can generate fluent, coherent, and stylistically convincing texts, but their outputs are based on recombination rather than intentional invention. This distinction matters because literary value has traditionally been connected to voice, emotional depth, and the sense that a text emerges from a particular human perspective.

The article argues that AI should be understood as a generative literary system rather than an autonomous author. It can participate in creative processes, but it cannot replace the human responsibilities of interpretation, selection, ethical judgement, and accountability. The future of literary studies will depend on whether scholars can develop frameworks capable of analysing AI-generated literature without reducing it either to machine output or to human creativity alone.

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10. Sisterhood as Resistance: Exploring Female Solidarity in Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You* and Avni Doshi's *Burnt Sugar*

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Abstract

Contemporary Indian women's writing has increasingly foregrounded the complex experiences of women negotiating identity, oppression, memory, and resistance within patriarchal social structures. Among the various forms of resistance represented in such narratives, sisterhood and female solidarity emerge as significant mechanisms through which women challenge domination and reclaim agency. This paper examines the representation of sisterhood as a form of resistance in Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* (2017) and Avni Doshi's *Burnt Sugar* (2020). Although the two novels differ in narrative structure and thematic focus, both portray women struggling against social expectations, emotional trauma, and gendered violence. Drawing upon feminist theories of sisterhood and solidarity, particularly those developed by bell hooks and contemporary feminist scholars, the study investigates how female relationships function as spaces of support, survival, and self-assertion. The paper argues that sisterhood in these novels extends beyond conventional notions of friendship and kinship to become a political and emotional strategy of resistance. Through an analysis of narrative voice, memory, trauma, and interpersonal relationships, the study demonstrates that female solidarity enables women to negotiate oppressive structures while constructing alternative forms of identity and empowerment. The findings contribute to contemporary feminist literary criticism by highlighting the transformative potential of women's relational bonds in postmodern Indian fiction.

Keywords: Sisterhood, Female Solidarity, Feminism, Resistance, Meena Kandasamy, Avni Doshi, Contemporary Indian Fiction, Postmodernism.

1. Introduction

Feminist literary criticism has consistently emphasized the importance of women's relationships in challenging patriarchal systems. The concept of sisterhood occupies a central position within feminist discourse because it highlights collective support, shared experience, and resistance among women. In contemporary Indian English fiction, women writers increasingly explore forms of female solidarity that emerge in response to violence, trauma, and social exclusion.

Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You* and Avni Doshi's *Burnt Sugar* present distinctive yet interconnected portrayals of women confronting oppressive social structures. While Kandasamy's novel focuses on domestic violence and the struggle for self-expression, Doshi's work explores the complexities of memory and mother-daughter relationships. Both narratives reveal the significance of women's emotional networks and relational bonds as mechanisms of survival and resistance.

Literature Review

Feminist literary criticism has long emphasized the significance of women's relationships as sites of resistance against patriarchal oppression. bell hooks, in her discussion of feminist solidarity, argues that sisterhood should be understood as a political and ethical commitment among women rather than a simple emotional bond. Her formulation of sisterhood provides an important theoretical foundation for examining collective female resistance in literary texts.

Recent scholarship has revisited the concept of feminist solidarity in contemporary contexts. Durba Mitra, in "Sisterhood Is X: On Feminist Solidarity Then and Now," examines the changing meanings of sisterhood within feminist discourse and argues that solidarity remains a vital tool for confronting structures of inequality. Mitra's work highlights the political dimensions of women's alliances and demonstrates how solidarity can emerge despite differences of class, culture, and social location.

Research on women's friendships has further contributed to the understanding of female solidarity. Sreejata Roy's study, "Women's Friendships as Sites of Resistance," explores how relationships among women function as alternative spaces of support and empowerment. Roy argues that female friendships enable women to challenge dominant social norms and negotiate forms of agency within restrictive environments. Her analysis suggests that women's relationships possess transformative potential beyond conventional familial roles.

Scholarly attention to Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You* has largely focused on domestic violence, trauma, and feminist resistance. Studies such as "Violence, Trauma, and Abuse in Meena Kandasamy's When I Hit You" examine the representation of marital abuse and its psychological consequences. Similarly, "On Meena Kandasamy's When I Hit You, Marriage and Intimate Partner Violence" interprets the novel as a powerful critique of patriarchal power structures embedded within marriage. Other researchers have emphasized the narrator's use of writing as a form of resistance and self-recovery. While these studies provide valuable insights into gendered violence and female agency, they primarily focus on individual resistance and pay limited attention to the role of female solidarity.

Avni Doshi's *Burnt Sugar* has generated considerable critical interest because of its portrayal of motherhood, memory, and intergenerational relationships. "Maternal Ambivalence in Avni Doshi's Burnt Sugar" investigates the complex emotional dynamics between mother and daughter and highlights the tensions that shape female subjectivity. Likewise, "Navigating the Mother-Daughter Relationship in Avni Doshi's Burnt Sugar" explores themes of caregiving, resentment, and emotional dependency. These studies contribute significantly to understanding the novel's psychological dimensions; however, they largely interpret the mother-daughter bond through the framework of conflict rather than solidarity.

Contemporary feminist scholarship has increasingly recognized that female solidarity may emerge through complex and even contradictory relationships. Studies such as "Constructing Solidarity Across Difference in Feminist Encounters" and "Women's Solidarity as Feminism in Action" argue that solidarity is not dependent upon harmony or sameness. Instead, it develops through shared experiences, mutual recognition, and collective negotiation of social inequalities. This perspective is particularly relevant for literary texts that depict fractured yet meaningful relationships among women.

Although existing scholarship has examined domestic violence, trauma, motherhood, memory, and female agency in *When I Hit You* and *Burnt Sugar*, limited attention has been given to sisterhood as a central analytical framework. Most studies focus either on individual resistance or on interpersonal conflict without exploring how women's relationships contribute to survival,

resilience, and empowerment. Furthermore, no substantial comparative study has examined the representation of female solidarity across both novels.

The present study addresses this gap by investigating how sisterhood functions as a form of resistance in Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You* and Avni Doshi's *Burnt Sugar*. Through a comparative feminist reading, the study explores how women negotiate trauma, memory, and patriarchal oppression while creating forms of solidarity that challenge structures of domination and facilitate selfhood.

The article "Affective Dialogue: Building Transnational Feminist Solidarity in Times of War" expands the concept of feminist solidarity beyond national and cultural boundaries. The study argues that women's shared experiences of vulnerability and marginalization can create meaningful forms of collective resistance. By emphasizing emotional connection and mutual recognition, the article demonstrates that solidarity functions as both a political and ethical practice. This perspective is particularly useful for understanding how female relationships in contemporary fiction contribute to resilience and empowerment.

The study "Women's Solidarity as Feminism in Action: The Concept of Sisterhood (Sororidad)" examines the practical dimensions of feminist solidarity within women's communities. The researchers argue that sisterhood is not merely an abstract ideal but a lived experience through which women support one another against social and institutional inequalities. The article highlights the importance of mutual care, collective action, and shared responsibility in the development of female solidarity. These insights help explain how women in literary narratives construct supportive networks in the face of oppression.

The article "Whither Feminist Solidarity? Critical Thinking, Racism, Islamophobia" critically re-examines the notion of universal sisterhood. The study argues that effective solidarity requires recognition of differences among women rather than the assumption of a homogeneous female experience. By emphasizing intersectionality, the article demonstrates that solidarity is most meaningful when it acknowledges variations in identity, culture, and social location. This argument provides an important framework for analyzing the diverse experiences of women represented in contemporary Indian fiction.

In "Sisterhood and the Fourth Wave of Feminism," the author explores the revival of feminist solidarity within contemporary social and digital movements. The study suggests that modern forms of sisterhood are increasingly shaped by collective awareness, activism, and shared resistance to gender discrimination. The article highlights how women's experiences of violence and inequality often generate new forms of support and empowerment. Such observations are relevant to literary representations of women who seek emotional and psychological strength through relationships with other women.

The interview "Archives: Q&A with Meena Kandasamy" offers valuable insights into the author's feminist vision and literary concerns. Kandasamy discusses issues of gender violence, resistance, and women's voices within contemporary society. Her reflections reveal a commitment to exposing patriarchal structures while foregrounding women's capacity for survival and self-expression. Although the interview does not explicitly focus on sisterhood, it provides important contextual information for understanding the feminist dimensions of *When I Hit You* and its portrayal of women's resistance.

Research Gap

Existing scholarship on Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You* primarily focuses on domestic violence, marital oppression, trauma, and feminist resistance. Similarly, critical studies on Avni

Doshi's *Burnt Sugar* have largely examined motherhood, memory, psychological conflict, and intergenerational trauma. Although these studies provide valuable insights into the experiences of women within patriarchal societies, they seldom investigate the role of female solidarity as a significant mode of resistance.

Furthermore, the available research tends to analyze the two novels independently, with limited comparative attention given to the ways in which women's relationships contribute to survival, resilience, and selfhood. While feminist scholars have extensively discussed sisterhood and solidarity as theoretical concepts, their application to contemporary Indian English fiction remains insufficiently explored. Consequently, there exists a noticeable gap in scholarship regarding the representation of sisterhood as a form of resistance in *When I Hit You* and *Burnt Sugar*. The present study seeks to address this gap through a comparative feminist analysis of female solidarity in both novels.

Research Objectives

The present study aims to:

1. Examine the representation of sisterhood and female solidarity in Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You* and Avni Doshi's *Burnt Sugar*.

2. Analyze how women negotiate patriarchal oppression, trauma, and emotional suffering through relational bonds.

3. Investigate the role of female solidarity as a mechanism of resistance, survival, and empowerment.

4. Explore the relationship between memory, identity, and women's interpersonal connections in the selected novels.

5. Conduct a comparative study of the different forms of sisterhood represented in the two texts.

6. Contribute to contemporary feminist literary criticism by highlighting the significance of women's relationships in postmodern Indian English fiction.

Research Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative and descriptive research methodology based on textual analysis. It employs the feminist literary critical approach as the primary theoretical framework for examining the representation of women, gender relations, and female solidarity in the selected novels.

Primary data for the study consist of Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* (2017) and Avni Doshi's *Burnt Sugar* (2020). Secondary data are collected from scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, research papers, interviews, and critical essays related to feminism, sisterhood, female solidarity, trauma studies, and contemporary Indian English literature.

The analysis is guided by feminist theories of sisterhood and solidarity, particularly those advanced by bell hooks and contemporary feminist scholars. A comparative approach is employed to identify similarities and differences in the representation of female relationships across the two novels. Special attention is given to themes of resistance, emotional support, identity formation, memory, trauma, and women's agency.

Through close reading and thematic analysis, the study examines how female characters create networks of support and resilience within oppressive social structures. The methodology enables a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which sisterhood functions as a transformative force in contemporary Indian women's fiction.

2. Feminist Perspectives on Sisterhood

The notion of sisterhood emerged as a significant concept during the development of feminist movements. Feminist scholars have argued that women can challenge patriarchal structures more effectively through collective support than through isolated acts of resistance. Sisterhood is not merely an emotional bond but a political commitment grounded in shared experiences of oppression and aspirations for social transformation.

Contemporary feminist thought has expanded this concept by recognizing differences of class, caste, ethnicity, and generation while maintaining the importance of solidarity. As a result, sisterhood is understood as a dynamic and evolving relationship that enables women to negotiate power structures and create spaces of empowerment.

3. Female Solidarity in *When I Hit You*

Kandasamy's novel portrays the experiences of a young woman trapped within an abusive marriage. The protagonist's struggle reflects broader patriarchal mechanisms that seek to silence and control women. Throughout the narrative, writing emerges as a powerful act of resistance. The narrator's ability to articulate her experiences transforms personal trauma into political testimony.

Although the protagonist often experiences isolation, the novel suggests the possibility of solidarity through shared female experiences. The recognition of other women's suffering creates an implicit network of resistance. Female solidarity operates through empathy, awareness, and the refusal to normalize violence.

4. Mother-Daughter Bonds and Resistance in *Burnt Sugar*

In *Burnt Sugar*, female relationships are represented through the complex interactions between Antara and Tara. The novel challenges idealized notions of motherhood by portraying affection, resentment, dependency, and conflict within the same relationship.

Despite tensions between mother and daughter, their relationship demonstrates a form of emotional interconnectedness that shapes identity and survival. Female solidarity in the novel is neither stable nor uncomplicated. Instead, it emerges through negotiation, memory, and mutual vulnerability. The narrative reveals how women inherit emotional wounds while simultaneously developing mechanisms for endurance.

5. Comparative Analysis

Both novels depict women confronting patriarchal structures, yet they represent solidarity in different ways. In *When I Hit You*, resistance is direct, vocal, and politically charged. The protagonist challenges violence through narration and self-expression. In *Burnt Sugar*, resistance is embedded within intimate familial relationships and emotional memory.

The comparison demonstrates that female solidarity may take multiple forms. It can emerge through friendship, shared experience, emotional recognition, or intergenerational bonds. In both novels, women's relationships provide resources for survival and self-definition.

Results and Discussion

The analysis of Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You* and Avni Doshi's *Burnt Sugar* reveals that female solidarity functions as an important mode of resistance against patriarchal oppression, emotional trauma, and social marginalization. Although the selected novels differ in narrative structure, thematic concerns, and characterization, both texts demonstrate that women's relationships provide significant resources for survival, self-expression, and identity formation.

One of the major findings of the study is that sisterhood in contemporary Indian women's fiction extends beyond conventional notions of friendship. In *When I Hit You*, female solidarity emerges through shared experiences of gender-based violence and the recognition of women's collective struggles. The protagonist's resistance is not limited to her personal battle against an abusive husband; rather, her narrative voice reflects the experiences of numerous women who confront patriarchal domination. Writing itself becomes an act of solidarity because it transforms private suffering into public testimony, enabling the narrator to challenge structures of silence and oppression.

The study further reveals that resistance in Kandasamy's novel is closely linked to self-expression. The narrator's ability to articulate her experiences allows her to reclaim agency and reject patriarchal attempts at control. Female solidarity is therefore represented as a form of empowerment that encourages women to resist violence and assert their identities. The novel demonstrates that personal narratives can create broader feminist consciousness and inspire collective resistance.

In *Burnt Sugar*, female solidarity assumes a more complex and emotionally layered form. Unlike the overt resistance depicted in *When I Hit You*, Doshi's novel explores solidarity through the mother-daughter relationship between Antara and Tara. Their relationship is characterized by affection, resentment, dependence, and emotional conflict. Nevertheless, the analysis indicates that these tensions do not eliminate solidarity. Instead, the novel suggests that female relationships can remain meaningful even when they are marked by contradiction and instability.

Another significant finding concerns the role of memory in shaping female solidarity. In *Burnt Sugar*, memory functions as a crucial mechanism through which relationships are constructed and interpreted. The fragmented nature of recollection reflects the complexities of women's experiences and demonstrates how personal histories influence emotional bonds. Despite recurring conflicts, the connection between mother and daughter becomes a source of continuity and survival. Female solidarity is therefore portrayed as an evolving process rather than a fixed condition.

The comparative analysis highlights important similarities between the two novels. Both texts portray women confronting systems of power that seek to restrict their autonomy. Whether through domestic violence, social expectations, or emotional burdens, the female characters encounter circumstances that threaten their sense of self. In response, they develop strategies of resistance grounded in relational connections. These relationships provide emotional strength, self-awareness, and opportunities for empowerment.

At the same time, the novels differ in their representation of solidarity. Kandasamy presents resistance as direct and explicit, emphasizing the importance of voice, testimony, and feminist

defiance. Doshi, by contrast, depicts resistance through intimate family relationships and psychological complexity. While one novel foregrounds political resistance, the other explores emotional endurance. Together, they demonstrate the diverse forms that female solidarity can assume in contemporary literature.

The findings also support contemporary feminist theories that view sisterhood as a dynamic and evolving practice rather than a simplistic bond among women. Female solidarity in the selected novels is not based on idealized harmony. Instead, it emerges through shared vulnerability, mutual recognition, emotional support, and collective resistance to oppressive structures. This perspective challenges traditional assumptions about women's relationships and highlights their transformative potential.

Overall, the study establishes that sisterhood operates as a significant force of resistance in both *When I Hit You* and *Burnt Sugar*. Through different narrative strategies, the novels illustrate how women create meaningful forms of solidarity that enable survival, resilience, and selfhood. The representation of female relationships in these texts contributes to contemporary feminist literary discourse by demonstrating that resistance is often sustained through emotional and relational connections among women.

6. Conclusion

The analysis reveals that sisterhood functions as a significant form of resistance in both *When I Hit You* and *Burnt Sugar*. While the novels differ in narrative strategy and thematic emphasis, they collectively demonstrate the transformative potential of female solidarity. Through writing, memory, empathy, and relational support, women challenge oppressive structures and reclaim agency. The study concludes that sisterhood in contemporary Indian women's fiction is not merely a private emotional connection but a powerful political and ethical practice that contributes to resistance, empowerment, and identity formation.

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11. Legal Governance of Toxic Substance Exposure and Public Health Protection in India: A Rights-Based Analysis

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Abstract

Toxic substances—including heavy metals, pesticides, industrial chemicals, hazardous waste, and plastic-derived pollutants—pose substantial risks to public health. Exposure may occur through contaminated air, water, soil, food, workplaces, and consumer products, leading to acute poisoning as well as chronic diseases such as cancer, respiratory illness, neurological impairment, and reproductive harm. This article examines the legal governance of toxic substances in India with particular reference to the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, hazardous chemical and waste-management rules, constitutional rights, judicial principles, and international chemical-safety frameworks. It argues that although India possesses a broad regulatory architecture, effective protection of public health requires stronger enforcement, transparent monitoring, corporate accountability, worker protection, public participation, and accessible remedies for affected communities.

Keywords: toxic substances, hazardous chemicals, public health, environmental law, India, chemical safety, waste management

1. Introduction

Toxic substances have become a central concern of contemporary environmental law, public health policy, and human-rights discourse. Industrialisation, urbanisation, intensive agriculture, mining, transport, and mass consumption have increased the production and circulation of chemicals across societies. While chemicals are indispensable in medicine, agriculture, manufacturing, energy, and daily life, many of them can cause serious harm when they are released into the environment without adequate control.

The problem is particularly significant because toxic exposure is often invisible. A person may drink contaminated water, breathe polluted air, consume food containing pesticide residues, or work with hazardous chemicals for years before the health consequences become apparent. By the time disease is diagnosed, exposure may already have affected multiple organs or even future generations.

India faces a complex challenge in this area. On one hand, industrial growth is necessary for employment, infrastructure, and economic development. On the other hand, weak compliance, inadequate waste treatment, informal recycling, and limited public-health surveillance expose workers and communities to serious chemical risks. The issue therefore cannot be treated merely as an industrial-compliance matter; it must be understood as a matter of constitutional rights, public health, and environmental justice.

This article examines the legal governance of toxic substances and public-health protection in India. It analyses the constitutional basis of environmental health protection, the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, hazardous chemical and waste-management rules, judicial principles,

and international frameworks. It also identifies regulatory gaps and suggests reforms for stronger enforcement and public participation.

2. Objectives and Methodology

The primary objective of this study is to examine the extent to which Indian law protects human health from toxic and hazardous substances. The article seeks to identify the legal duties of the State, industry, employers, and citizens in relation to chemical safety and waste management.

The study also aims to evaluate the major statutory provisions governing hazardous substances, including the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 and related rules on hazardous chemicals, hazardous waste, e-waste, biomedical waste, plastic waste, and batteries. It further examines constitutional provisions and judicial interpretations that support the right to a healthy environment.

The research adopts a doctrinal, descriptive, and analytical method. Primary sources include the Constitution of India, statutes, rules, notifications, and judicial decisions. Secondary sources include reports and guidance issued by the World Health Organization and the United Nations Environment Programme, along with scholarly commentary on environmental law and public health.

The article does not confine itself to the text of the law. It also considers whether the legal framework is capable of addressing real-world problems such as illegal dumping, unsafe recycling, inadequate monitoring, weak enforcement, and lack of compensation for victims. The analysis is therefore both legal and policy-oriented.

3. Meaning of Toxic and Hazardous Substances

A toxic substance is a material capable of causing injury to living organisms through chemical action. Toxicity depends on several factors, including the nature of the substance, dose, duration of exposure, route of entry, age, sex, nutrition, and pre-existing health conditions. A substance that is harmless at a low dose may become dangerous at a higher concentration or after repeated exposure.

In Indian environmental law, the expression ‘hazardous substance’ has a broader meaning. Section 2(e) of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 defines a hazardous substance as any substance or preparation which, by reason of its chemical or physico-chemical properties or handling, is liable to cause harm to human beings, other living creatures, plants, micro-organisms, property, or the environment.

This definition is important because it recognises that harm may arise not only from the inherent chemical nature of a substance but also from the manner in which it is handled. For example, a chemical may be relatively safe when properly stored but dangerous when heated, mixed, transported carelessly, or released into a water body.

Toxic substances may be grouped into several categories. Heavy metals include lead, mercury, cadmium, arsenic, chromium, and nickel. Persistent organic pollutants include certain pesticides and industrial chemicals that remain in the environment for long periods and accumulate in living organisms. Industrial chemicals include solvents, dyes, plastics additives, refrigerants, and manufacturing by-products.

Other categories include pesticides, asbestos, radioactive materials, pharmaceutical waste, biomedical waste, e-waste, and construction waste. Air pollutants such as particulate matter, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide, and volatile organic compounds also pose

serious health risks. The common feature of these substances is their capacity to enter ecological systems and eventually affect human health.

4. Routes of Human Exposure

Human exposure to toxic substances occurs through several routes. The most important routes are inhalation, ingestion, dermal contact, and direct contact with contaminated materials. Each route produces different health consequences and requires different preventive measures.

Inhalation is one of the most common routes of exposure. Industrial emissions, vehicle exhaust, construction dust, burning waste, chemical vapours, and indoor air pollution can introduce harmful particles and gases into the lungs. Long-term inhalation of polluted air is associated with respiratory illness, cardiovascular disease, reduced lung function, and certain cancers.

Ingestion occurs when toxic substances enter food or drinking water. Contaminated groundwater may contain arsenic, fluoride, nitrate, heavy metals, or industrial chemicals. Pesticide residues may remain on fruits, vegetables, grains, milk, and other food products. Improper disposal of industrial waste can contaminate soil and crops, thereby extending exposure across the food chain.

Dermal exposure occurs when chemicals touch the skin. Agricultural workers, painters, cleaners, laboratory workers, factory employees, and workers in informal recycling units are particularly vulnerable. Many hazardous chemicals can pass through the skin and enter the bloodstream, especially when protective gloves, clothing, and washing facilities are unavailable.

Occupational exposure deserves special attention because workers may face repeated and high-level contact with hazardous substances. In many workplaces, workers are not informed about the chemicals they handle, are not provided with adequate protective equipment, and do not receive regular medical examinations. Such conditions violate both labour-welfare principles and public-health safeguards.

5. Health Consequences of Toxic Exposure

The health effects of toxic substances may be acute or chronic. Acute effects occur shortly after exposure and may include skin burns, eye irritation, headache, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, breathing difficulty, convulsions, unconsciousness, or death. Chemical accidents, gas leaks, and accidental poisoning are examples of situations in which acute effects become immediately visible.

Chronic effects are more difficult to detect because they develop gradually. Prolonged exposure to toxic substances may cause cancer, liver and kidney damage, respiratory disease, neurological impairment, hormonal disruption, reproductive harm, immune-system suppression, and developmental disorders in children.

Lead is one of the most dangerous toxic metals for children. It can affect brain development, learning ability, memory, attention, and behaviour. Even low levels of lead exposure may cause irreversible harm to children. Pregnant women exposed to lead may also transmit harmful effects to the developing foetus.

Mercury affects the nervous system, kidneys, and respiratory system. Cadmium can damage kidneys and bones. Arsenic exposure is associated with skin lesions, vascular disease, and cancers. Asbestos fibres are linked to severe respiratory diseases, including mesothelioma. Benzene exposure is associated with blood disorders and leukaemia.

Pesticides create a distinct public-health problem because they are widely used in agriculture. Farmers, agricultural labourers, pesticide sprayers, and persons living near sprayed fields may be exposed through inhalation, skin contact, contaminated water, or food. Unsafe storage, reuse of pesticide containers, lack of training, and absence of protective equipment increase the risk of poisoning.

The effects of toxic exposure are not limited to the individual. Families and communities may suffer collectively when a water source, agricultural land, or residential area becomes contaminated. Children, pregnant women, elderly persons, and people with pre-existing illnesses are especially vulnerable. Thus, toxic exposure raises questions of distributive justice and intergenerational equity.

6. Constitutional Framework

The Constitution of India provides a strong foundation for the protection of human health and the environment. Article 21 guarantees the right to life and personal liberty. Through judicial interpretation, this right has been expanded to include the right to a healthy environment, clean air, safe drinking water, and protection from hazardous industrial activity.

Article 48-A, inserted by the Forty-second Amendment, directs the State to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard forests and wildlife. Although it is a directive principle and not directly enforceable, it provides an important constitutional basis for environmental legislation and administrative action.

Article 51-A(g) imposes a fundamental duty on every citizen to protect and improve the natural environment, including forests, lakes, rivers, and wildlife, and to have compassion for living creatures. This provision recognises that environmental protection is not exclusively a governmental responsibility; citizens also have a role in preventing pollution and conserving natural resources.

Article 39 requires the State to ensure that the health and strength of workers are not abused and that citizens are not forced by economic necessity to enter unsuitable occupations. Article 42 directs the State to make provision for just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief. These provisions are relevant to occupational exposure to toxic chemicals.

Indian courts have consistently recognised that environmental degradation affects the quality of life and therefore falls within the scope of Article 21. The judiciary has also applied the precautionary principle, the polluter-pays principle, and the principle of sustainable development in environmental cases. These principles strengthen the legal protection available to communities affected by toxic substances.

7. Environment (Protection) Act, 1986

The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 is the principal umbrella legislation for environmental protection in India. It was enacted after the Bhopal gas tragedy of 1984, which demonstrated the catastrophic consequences of inadequate regulation of hazardous chemicals. The Act provides a comprehensive framework for the protection and improvement of the environment.

The Act empowers the Central Government to take measures necessary for protecting and improving environmental quality. These measures include setting standards for emissions and discharge, regulating industrial locations, restricting hazardous activities, prescribing procedures for handling hazardous substances, and making rules for environmental protection.

Section 2(e) defines hazardous substances broadly, covering substances capable of harming humans, animals, plants, micro-organisms, property, or the environment. This wide definition enables the government to regulate a large range of chemicals and waste materials.

Section 7 prohibits any person from discharging pollutants in excess of prescribed standards. Section 8 requires that hazardous substances be handled in accordance with prescribed procedures and safeguards. These provisions impose direct obligations on industries, transporters, storage facilities, and waste handlers.

The Act also provides for penalties. Under Section 15, contravention of the Act or rules may attract imprisonment or fine. Continued contravention may attract additional penalties. The Act thus combines regulatory authority, preventive obligations, and punitive consequences.

The strength of the Act lies in its flexibility. It allows the Central Government to respond to new scientific knowledge, emerging pollutants, and changing industrial practices through rules and notifications. However, its effectiveness depends on implementation by pollution-control boards, local authorities, and enforcement agencies.

8. Rules on Hazardous Chemicals and Waste

Under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, India has enacted several rules for the management of hazardous chemicals and waste. The Manufacture, Storage and Import of Hazardous Chemical Rules, 1989 are among the most important instruments for chemical-safety governance.

These rules impose obligations on industrial installations that manufacture, store, or import hazardous chemicals. They require identification of hazards, preparation of safety reports, emergency plans, notification of authorities, labelling, and reporting of accidents. Their objective is to prevent chemical disasters and reduce harm when accidents occur.

The Hazardous and Other Wastes (Management and Transboundary Movement) Rules, 2016 regulate the generation, collection, storage, transport, treatment, disposal, import, and export of hazardous waste. These rules seek to ensure that hazardous waste is managed in an environmentally sound manner throughout its life cycle.

E-waste rules address the growing problem of discarded electronic equipment. Electronic devices may contain lead, mercury, cadmium, chromium, flame retardants, and other hazardous components. Unsafe dismantling and burning of e-waste release toxic substances into air, soil, and water. The rules impose responsibilities on producers, consumers, recyclers, and collection centres.

Plastic waste rules aim to reduce single-use plastics, promote recycling, and implement extended producer responsibility. Biomedical waste rules regulate waste generated by hospitals, clinics, laboratories, and healthcare institutions. Such waste may contain infectious materials, sharps, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, and radioactive substances.

Together, these rules establish a life-cycle approach to chemical and waste management. They cover production, storage, transport, use, disposal, recycling, and final treatment. However, the practical challenge is to ensure that regulated entities maintain records, obtain authorisations, use approved facilities, and report violations honestly.

9. Judicial Approach

The Indian judiciary has played a decisive role in developing environmental jurisprudence. Courts have interpreted the right to life under Article 21 to include the right to a healthy

environment. This interpretation has enabled citizens and communities to seek judicial intervention against pollution and hazardous industrial activity.

The Bhopal gas tragedy remains a defining event in Indian environmental and industrial-safety law. It exposed the devastating consequences of weak safety systems, inadequate emergency planning, and insufficient accountability in the handling of hazardous chemicals. The tragedy influenced the development of stricter environmental regulation in India.

Indian courts have recognised the precautionary principle, which requires preventive action where there is a risk of serious or irreversible environmental harm. Under this principle, the absence of complete scientific certainty cannot be used as an excuse for inaction. The burden of demonstrating safety may fall on the party undertaking a hazardous activity.

Courts have also applied the polluter-pays principle. According to this principle, a person or entity responsible for pollution must bear the cost of remediation and compensation. This principle shifts the burden from victims and the public to those who profit from polluting activities.

The National Green Tribunal has strengthened environmental enforcement by providing a specialised forum for environmental disputes. It has issued directions relating to industrial pollution, waste management, air quality, water contamination, and compliance with environmental norms. Its role is important because environmental cases often require technical evidence and urgent remedial action.

10. International Legal Framework

Chemical safety has become an important subject of international environmental governance. Toxic substances can travel across borders through air currents, rivers, oceans, trade, and waste shipments. Therefore, national regulation must be supported by international cooperation and common standards.

The United Nations Environment Programme has developed the Global Framework on Chemicals, which seeks to prevent or minimise harm from chemicals and waste. The framework emphasises the protection of human health, the environment, and vulnerable groups. It also encourages governments to adopt and enforce legal frameworks for chemical safety.

The Stockholm Convention addresses persistent organic pollutants. These chemicals remain in the environment for long periods, travel long distances, accumulate in organisms, and pose serious health risks. The Basel Convention regulates the transboundary movement and disposal of hazardous wastes, seeking to prevent dumping of hazardous waste in developing countries.

The Minamata Convention on Mercury addresses mercury pollution, including its use in products and industrial processes. Mercury is a highly toxic metal that affects the nervous system and can cause serious harm to children and pregnant women. International cooperation is essential because mercury can travel through air and water across national boundaries.

India's participation in international chemical-safety frameworks is important because the country is a major industrial economy and an important participant in global supply chains. International commitments must be translated into domestic rules, inspection systems, technical capacity, and public-health monitoring.

11. Enforcement Challenges

Despite a broad legal framework, enforcement remains the weakest link in toxic-substance governance. Many industrial units, particularly small and medium enterprises, do not maintain

proper records, obtain required authorisations, or use approved waste-treatment facilities. Informal recycling units often operate outside regulatory supervision.

Pollution-control boards and local authorities face constraints of staff, technical expertise, laboratory capacity, and digital monitoring systems. Regular inspection of thousands of industrial units is difficult. As a result, violations may remain undetected until pollution becomes severe or an accident occurs.

Public awareness is another major challenge. Workers and communities often lack information about the chemicals present in their environment, the symptoms of exposure, and the remedies available under law. Without awareness, affected persons may not report violations or seek medical and legal assistance.

Enforcement is also weakened by low penalties, delayed proceedings, and difficulty in proving causation. Victims of chemical contamination may struggle to establish that a particular disease resulted from a particular exposure. Scientific uncertainty, long latency periods, and multiple sources of pollution make litigation complex.

Data gaps further aggravate the problem. There is often insufficient routine testing of blood, urine, water, soil, food, and workplace air for toxic substances. Without reliable data, policymakers cannot accurately measure the health burden of chemical exposure or design targeted interventions.

12. Recommendations

India should establish an integrated chemical-safety and public-health surveillance system. This system should regularly monitor toxic substances in air, water, soil, food, blood, and workplace environments. The data should be publicly accessible, disaggregated by region and vulnerable group, and linked with health-record systems.

The precautionary principle and polluter-pays principle should be applied rigorously. Industries handling hazardous chemicals should conduct periodic risk assessments, safety audits, emergency drills, and worker-health screenings. Non-compliance should attract meaningful penalties, suspension of operations, and personal accountability of responsible officers where necessary.

Extended producer responsibility should be strengthened for electronics, batteries, plastics, packaging, and other products containing hazardous components. Producers should finance safe collection, recycling, and disposal systems. Informal workers should be brought within formal systems through training, protective equipment, social security, and safer technology.

Green chemistry and safer substitutes should be promoted through legal incentives, procurement policies, research funding, and industry standards. Waste minimisation, recycling, and circular-economy practices should be integrated into industrial licensing and environmental clearance processes.

Public participation should be treated as an essential element of environmental governance. Communities living near industrial areas should have access to information about emissions, waste generation, accidents, and remediation plans. Legal-aid institutions, consumer forums, public-health authorities, and pollution-control boards should cooperate to provide accessible remedies to affected persons.

13. Conclusion

Toxic substances pose a serious threat to public health, environmental quality, and social justice. Their effects are often delayed, cumulative, and unequal, falling disproportionately on workers, poor communities, children, and future generations. A legal system that ignores these realities cannot adequately protect the right to life and health.

India has developed a broad legal architecture for regulating hazardous substances. The Constitution, the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, hazardous chemical rules, waste-management rules, and judicial principles together provide a strong normative foundation. However, legal text alone cannot ensure protection.

The effectiveness of chemical-safety law depends on implementation. Transparent monitoring, adequate laboratory capacity, strict enforcement, worker protection, public information, and accessible remedies are essential. Chemical safety must be integrated into public-health policy, industrial policy, urban planning, and environmental governance.

Ultimately, protection from toxic substances is a matter of human dignity. Every person has a legitimate claim to clean air, safe water, uncontaminated food, and a safe workplace. Stronger legal governance can help transform this claim from a constitutional promise into a lived reality.

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12. India's Relations with South Asian Countries: Prospects, Challenges, and Future Directions

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Abstract:

India holds a pivotal geographic, demographic, economic, and strategic position in South Asia. Therefore, its relationships with neighbouring South Asian nations are essential to its economic growth, regional connectivity, national security, and global reputation. India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and Afghanistan make up South Asia; Myanmar is frequently regarded as a part of India's larger neighbourhood and regional involvement. India's relationships with these nations have grown as a result of a number of factors, including geographic closeness, cultural exchanges, historical ties, economic interdependence, and strategic objectives. However, the area continues to be one of the most politically complicated neighbourhoods in the world, with national conflicts, territory disputes, security issues, economic imbalances, terrorism, migration, climate change, and weak. However, the area continues to be one of the most politically difficult neighbourhoods in the world, marked by limited regional integration, interstate conflicts, territory disputes, security issues, economic imbalances, terrorism, migration, and climate change.

From an early focus on sovereignty, non-alignment, and peaceful cohabitation, India's foreign policy in South Asia has changed to a more practical strategy centered on neighbourhood-first diplomacy, connectivity, development partnerships, regional security, and economic integration. India's relationship with Bhutan is still quite close, while relations with Bangladesh have significantly improved. Due to geographical, cultural, and strategic factors, Nepal and Sri Lanka have significant places. The Indian Ocean and maritime security have made ties with the Maldives more important. Due to unsolved conflicts, cross-border terrorism, and political mistrust, Pakistan continues to be the most challenging bilateral relationship. While ties with Myanmar are crucial for India's connectivity with Southeast Asia and its northeastern area, security, development, and humanitarian considerations have influenced India's relationship with Afghanistan.

The historical development, bilateral aspects, key areas of cooperation, enduring difficulties, and hopes for the future of India's relations with South Asian countries are all examined in this article. It contends that a stable, peaceful, and economically linked neighbourhood built on respect for one another, sovereign equality, connection, and shared development will best serve India's long-term interests.

Keywords: SAARC, India, South Asia, and Neighbourhood First, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Connectivity, Indian Ocean, and Regional Security

Introduction

One of the most strategically significant areas of the world is South Asia. It has tremendous economic, cultural, and geographic diversity and is home to almost one-fourth of the world's

people. In addition to a number of smaller nations whose security and prosperity are strongly linked to those of their larger neighbours, the region is home to some of the most populous nations on earth. South Asia's geographical centre is India. It borders Pakistan, Afghanistan, China, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Myanmar on land, and it is intimately connected to Sri Lanka and the Maldives by sea. Because of its location, India's economic interests and national security are directly impacted by events in its neighbours. Several variables influence the character of India's relations with South Asian countries: Geographical closeness; Cultural and historical ties; Interconnectedness in the economy; Border control; Security of the country; acts of terrorism; Water resources; Migration; maritime safety; Connectivity within the region. Therefore, India's relationship with its neighbours involves more than just traditional diplomacy. National security and domestic growth are directly impacted.

Creating a stable neighbourhood where neighbouring nations may pursue political stability and economic progress has become the main goal of India's South Asian policy.

Understanding South Asia

In general, South Asia consists of: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, The Maldives, Afghanistan. The area is distinguished by notable diversity in: political structures; faiths; Languages; ethnic groups; economic development levels; Geographical circumstances. Despite their differences, the nations have a number of historical and modern ties. Common colonial experiences, cultural exchanges, economic networks, and demographic shifts have all occurred throughout South Asia. Simultaneously, the area has experienced: disputes between states; instability in politics; acts of terrorism; conflicts over borders; poverty; Inadequate regional economic integration. Therefore, it is important to comprehend India's interactions with South Asian countries within this intricate regional context.

India's South Asian Relations' Historical Context

India's ties to its neighbours have a long history. Prior to the establishment of contemporary nation-states, South Asia was linked by: commerce; pilgrimage; Migration; cross-cultural interactions; religious customs; Conversations on ideas. These ties were altered throughout the colonial era by the introduction of new administrative and political boundaries. The political geography of the area was drastically altered when British India was divided into India and Pakistan in 1947. Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, and the Maldives went on to create their own autonomous foreign policies. At first, independent India emphasized:

- Harmonious cohabitation;
- The absence of interference
- Solidarity against colonialism;
- Non-alignment
- Regard for national sovereignty.

However, as regional conditions evolved, India's foreign policy progressively became more practical and security-focused.

The Neighbourhood First Policy of India

The concept of Neighbourhood First is closely linked to India's modern approach to South Asia. The fundamental idea is that India's growth and security are intimately linked to those of its neighbours. The policy highlights: participation in politics; collaboration in the economy; connection; support for development; aid for humanitarian purposes; interpersonal relationships; reaction to disasters; Security in the region. Thus, Neighbourhood First is both a strategic requirement and a foreign policy tenet. India can concentrate more on international diplomacy and economic development when its neighbourhood is tranquil.

Bangladesh and India

One of the most significant bilateral ties in South Asia is that between India and Bangladesh. Bangladesh and India have a lengthy land border, and Bangladesh is strategically situated between the Bay of Bengal and northeastern India. India was heavily involved in the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War, and soon after Bangladesh gained its independence, India officially recognized the country. Over time, the relationship has changed dramatically. Bangladesh and India collaborate in the following areas: commerce; connection for transportation; vitality; border control; Water resources; safety; culture. The importance of connectivity between the northeastern states and mainland India via Bangladesh has grown.

Cooperation in security

Cooperation in security has been enhanced. Both nations have made efforts to address: criminal activity beyond borders; acts of terrorism; Trafficking; issues pertaining to insurgency.

Economic ties

In South Asia, Bangladesh is a significant trading partner for India. Projects involving cross-border transportation and infrastructure can improve regional economic integration.

Challenges

Despite advancements, certain problems still exist: transboundary river sharing; occurrences pertaining to borders; issues related to migration; imbalance in commerce; Sensitivity to politics. Nonetheless, the partnership is among the best illustrations of India's effective neighbourhood diplomacy.

Nepal and India

Geographically, historically, culturally, and socially, India and Nepal have a special bond. The open border between the two nations makes it possible for: commerce; employment; Travel; familial ties; Interaction between cultures. An essential historical foundation for bilateral relations is the 1950 India-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship.

Economic ties

India is a significant economic partner of Nepal. Cooperation consists of: Infrastructure; transportation; commerce; Development initiatives.

Cultural Relations

Cultural and religious ties are still quite strong. Locations connected to Buddhist and Hindu traditions support both cultural diplomacy and international travel.

Challenges

Tensions in relationships have occasionally arisen because of: conflicts over borders; Recent advancements in politics; commerce and transportation; Views on unfair relationships. Additionally, Nepal aims to keep its relations with China and India balanced. As a result, India must take a delicate stance that upholds Nepal's sovereignty while fostering mutually beneficial collaboration.

Bhutan and India

One of India's closest ties in South Asia is with Bhutan. The two nations have in common: strategic objectives; financial connections; ties between cultures; Cooperation in security. India has aided Bhutan's economic growth by helping with: Infrastructure; instruction; wellness; Building capacity.

Safety

Because of their close closeness, the security link is particularly important. Bhutan and India have worked together to overcome border security issues.

Strategic significance

Bhutan has significant geopolitical significance due to its placement between China and India. As a result, India is very interested in the economic stability and territorial security of Bhutan. Maintaining mutual respect and avoiding the appearance of over-reliance are the challenges.

Sri Lanka and India

Sri Lanka holds a crucial position in the Indian Ocean and is India's nearest major island neighbour. Sri Lanka and India have a lot in common: Historical; Cultural; spiritual; financial; Maritime ties.

Cultural interactions

Buddhism serves as a vital link between the two nations. The relationship is also influenced by Tamil cultural and historical ties.

Economic cooperation

India is a significant trading and investment partner for Sri Lanka. Cooperation consists of: Infrastructure; Travel; instruction; wellness; Digital connectivity.

Maritime Security

Sri Lanka is strategically significant to India due to its proximity to critical water lanes in the Indian Ocean. India and Sri Lanka collaborate on: rescue and search; handling disasters; instruction in defence; Counterterrorism.

Tamil problem

India-Sri Lanka ties have historically been impacted by the issue of the Tamil population's political and constitutional rights in Sri Lanka. Within Sri Lanka's constitutional framework, India has backed political reconciliation and the defence of minority rights.

Crisis in the economy

The 2022 economic crisis in Sri Lanka highlighted the importance of India's regional support. During the crisis, India offered significant economic and humanitarian assistance. As a result, India was seen more favourably as a significant regional ally.

Maldives and India

Despite being a tiny island nation, the Maldives is strategically significant due to its location in the Indian Ocean. Its location puts it in close proximity to significant international shipping lanes. Strategic significance India has a keen interest in: maritime safety; Monitoring; Counterterrorism; Sea lanes are protected.

Cooperation between the economy and development

India has helped the Maldives by: infrastructural initiatives; Collaborative collaboration in healthcare; Building capacity; aid for humanitarian causes.

Cooperation in security

India has long offered aid in times of crisis and natural calamities. One prominent instance of India's military response to a coup attempt is Operation Cactus, which took place in 1988.

Political difficulties

The Maldives' internal political shifts have occasionally impacted relations. Additionally, there have been discussions about: Indian military personnel; Sovereignty; strategic alliances; The increasing influence of China. Partnership, development collaboration, and respect for Maldivian sovereignty are becoming more central to India's strategy.

India and Pakistan

The most challenging bilateral relationship in South Asia is still that between India and Pakistan. The 1947 Partition resulted in the creation of the two nations. Relations have been impacted by: conflicts; acts of terrorism during the conflict over Kashmir; tensions across borders; Mistrust in politics.

India and Pakistan engaged in significant combat in:

• 1947–1948

• 1965

• 1971

· The Kargil conflict in 1999.

Kashmir

One of the biggest causes of bilateral friction is still the Kashmir dispute. Sensitive security is still present in the Line of Control.

Terrorism

One of India's main concerns has been cross-border terrorism. India has consistently maintained that a setting free from violence and terrorism is necessary for genuine bilateral relations.

The nuclear dimension

Pakistan and India both have nuclear weapons. Conflict between them is especially risky because of this. In certain situations, nuclear deterrence has decreased the possibility of a full-scale conventional conflict, but it also makes military escalation more likely.

Interpersonal relationships

Despite political differences, Pakistanis and Indians have one thing in common: linguistic ties; cultural customs; music; culinary customs; If security issues are resolved, increasing interpersonal interactions may promote long-term peace.

Afghanistan and India

India's strategic thinking has long placed a high value on Afghanistan. Afghanistan is nevertheless important because to its position and ties to South Asian security, even though India does not currently have a land border with the country. India has made significant investments in the development of Afghanistan. Its support has consisted of: Infrastructure; wellness; parliamentary establishments; Building capacity. As a symbol of its development collaboration, India built the Afghan Parliament building in Kabul.

Security issues

India's worries about Afghanistan consist of: acts of terrorism; Extremist networks; instability in the region; trafficking in drugs; humanitarian emergencies. Since the Taliban regained control in 2021, India has prioritized humanitarian aid, communication lines, and safeguarding its fundamental security interests.

Myanmar and India

India's Extended South Asian Neighbourhood despite being categorized as a Southeast Asian nation, Myanmar is crucial to India's Indo-Pacific and South Asian strategies. India's land bridge to Southeast Asia is supplied by Myanmar.

Strategic importance

Among India's interests are: security along borders; development in the northeast; connection commerce; Stability in the region.

The Act East Policy

India's Act East Policy revolves around Myanmar. Strategically, projects that link Southeast Asia and Myanmar with the northeast of India are crucial.

Security issues

The border between India and Myanmar is impacted by:The insurgency; illicit trafficking; migrations of refugees; Instability in politics. India must so strike a balance between humanitarian considerations and security requirements.

India's Regional Diplomacy and SAARC

In 1985, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was founded. Among its members are: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Afghanistan. SAARC aims to improve regional collaboration in fields like:

• Development of the economy;

• instruction;

• wellness;

• culture;

• farming;

• A decrease in poverty.

In terms of population, economy, and geographic area, India is the biggest nation in SAARC. As a result, India has contributed significantly to the organization. However, conflicts between India and Pakistan have hindered SAARC's usefulness.

South Asia's Economic Relations

A key component of India's neighbourhood policy is economic ties. India has considerable economic power because it has the biggest economy in South Asia. India has the following economic ties to its neighbours: bilateral commerce; support for development; Infrastructure; collaboration in energy; Investment; Digital connectivity. Increased regional economic integration may lead to: employment; markets; prospects for investment; Supply chains; Development of infrastructure.

Cooperation in Energy

Significant but unevenly dispersed energy resources are found throughout South Asia. Nepal and Bhutan have significant hydropower potential. Bangladesh has a significant geographic location and energy needs. India has a big energy market. Therefore, trade in regional electricity could be advantageous to both parties. Additionally, energy cooperation can help with:

• Development of the economy;

• the shift to clean energy

• Political assurance.

Diplomacy with Water

One of the main problems in South Asian relations is water. International borders are crossed by numerous significant rivers. Among the significant river systems are:

- Ganga
- Brahmaputra
- Teesta
- Indus
- Mahakali.

While water-sharing agreements can foster collaboration, they can also lead to political conflicts. India so needs a well-rounded strategy that takes into account:

• national objectives;

• sustainability of the environment;

• issues both upstream and downstream;

• The changing climate;

• The requirements for neighbouring states' development.

Regional Security and Terrorism

In South Asia, terrorism continues to be one of the biggest security threats. Due to significant terrorist assaults, India has continuously prioritized counterterrorism in its foreign policy agenda. Because regional terrorist networks can operate internationally, bilateral and multilateral collaboration are crucial. The following are areas of cooperation:

• exchange of intelligence;

• security along borders;

• Monitoring finances;

• police.

The Soft Power of India in South Asia

India has significant soft power because of:

- Bollywood
- Yoga
- Food

- Music
- Buddhism
- Hindu customs

South Asian audiences watch Indian films and television. Long-term social ties are also formed through educational exchanges. By improving public opinion of India, soft power can supplement traditional diplomacy.

India's Security Conundrum

India must strike a challenging strategic equilibrium. On the one hand, it desires:

• stability in the region;

• safe boundaries;

• The security of the sea.

However, over-involvement in security might raise questions about neighbouring governments' sovereignty.

India's Position as a Regional Superpower

India is the dominant power in South Asia due to its size and capability. However, economic or military might alone cannot provide regional leadership. To be an effective regional leader, one must:

• confidence;

• reliability;

• generosity

When neighbouring nations see India's rise as advantageous rather than dangerous, India will have the greatest regional influence.

Conclusion

India's relations with South Asian nations are among the most important dimensions of its foreign policy. Geography makes India inseparable from the political, economic and security developments of its neighbourhood. A peaceful and prosperous South Asia is therefore not merely desirable for India; it is closely connected with India's own national interests.

India's relationships with Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Maldives have demonstrated significant possibilities for cooperation. Economic integration, energy partnerships, connectivity, development assistance, cultural relations and maritime security can create a foundation for stronger regional cooperation. Relations with Pakistan remain constrained by terrorism, Kashmir and deep political mistrust. Afghanistan presents security and humanitarian challenges, while Myanmar represents an important bridge between India's neighbourhood and Southeast Asia.

The future of India's South Asian diplomacy will be influenced by several major developments: China's expanding regional presence, climate change, technological transformation, economic interdependence and changing domestic politics within neighbouring countries. India must therefore adopt a balanced strategy based on security, sensitivity, sovereignty and shared development.

The ultimate objective should not be to establish dominance over South Asia but to create a regional environment in which India's neighbours see cooperation with India as beneficial to their own national interests.

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13. Caste, Gender and the Fractured Self: The Quest for Identity in Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things

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Abstract

Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things (1997) is often read as a novel about caste and forbidden love, yet its deeper concern is the making and unmaking of identity under social regulation. This article argues that the novel treats identity not as a stable inheritance but as a contested process shaped by caste hierarchy, patriarchal family structures, childhood trauma and the politics of place. Drawing on Erik Erikson's account of identity formation, Stuart Hall's view of identity as a process of becoming, Judith Butler's theory of gender as regulated repetition, Kimberle Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality and Cathy Caruth's work on trauma, the study examines four sites of selfhood: the outcaste carpenter Velutha, the divorced mother Ammu, the twins Estha and Rahel, and the novel's own fragmented narrative form. It concludes that Roy's characters seek identity through acts of transgression, and that the novel's circular structure turns this search into both an indictment of social order and an ethic of attention to the marginal and the small.

Keywords: *Arundhati Roy, The God of Small Things, identity, caste, gender, trauma, postcolonial Indian English fiction*

1. Introduction

Published in 1997 and awarded the Booker Prize in the same year, Arundhati Roy's debut novel quickly became one of the most widely discussed works of Indian writing in English. Set in the village of Ayemenem in Kerala, it follows the fraternal twins Estha and Rahel, their mother Ammu and the carpenter Velutha, whose love across the boundary of caste ends in violence in December 1969, the same season in which the twins' English cousin Sophie Mol drowns in the Meenachal river. The story is told not in sequence but in spirals, moving between the twins' childhood and their reunion in adulthood twenty-three years later.

Critical responses have emphasised the novel's political reach, its postcolonial concerns and its linguistic inventiveness (Tickell). Less often is the novel read as a sustained inquiry into a single question: how does a person become someone in a society that has already decided who each person may be? Every major character in the book is shaped, damaged or destroyed by the answer that society supplies. A Paravan cannot be a lover, a woman who has left her husband cannot be a mother with rights, and a child who has witnessed a killing cannot be allowed to speak. Identity in the novel is therefore never simply a private feeling; it is a social ruling that individuals either obey or defy at great cost.

This article reads The God of Small Things through the problem of identity. It asks three questions. How do caste and gender function as systems that assign and police identity? How do the younger characters, Estha and Rahel, construct or lose a self in the aftermath of trauma? And how does the novel's form, with its disrupted chronology and inventive language, participate in the same quest? The method is close textual analysis supported by selected theoretical concepts, used as interpretive tools rather than as a rigid framework.

2. Theoretical Framework

Erik Erikson understood identity formation as a process in which a person's inner sense of continuity is confirmed by the recognition of the surrounding community. When recognition is withheld or the available roles are too narrow, the result is what he called identity confusion (Erikson). This idea is useful for reading a novel in which characters repeatedly find that the roles offered to them by family, church, party and state cannot hold the lives they actually live.

Stuart Hall adds the insight that identity is not a fixed essence recovered from the past but a production that is never complete, always positioned within narratives of history, culture and power (Hall). Judith Butler's account of gender as a set of repeated acts governed by social norms helps to explain how deviation from those norms is punished, and why a character such as Ammu is judged less for what she does than for what she is permitted to be (Butler). Kimberle Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality draws attention to the way different axes of disadvantage, here gender, caste, religion, class and marital status, combine rather than simply add up (Crenshaw). Finally, Cathy Caruth's description of trauma as an experience that returns belatedly and is understood only in retrospect offers a way into the novel's narrative method and its portrait of the twins (Caruth).

3. Caste and the Inscribed Body: Velutha

Velutha is the character through whom the novel most directly exposes the social production of identity. He belongs to the Paravan community, historically placed outside the caste order and subjected to rules of distance and avoidance. His grandfather's conversion to Christianity, undertaken in the hope of escaping that stigma, did not change the way the dominant Syrian Christian community treated converted Dalits. The novel thus shows that religious change does not by itself dissolve caste; the hierarchy survives inside the institution that claims to transcend it.

Velutha is also exceptionally gifted. He is a skilled carpenter and a capable mechanic, trusted by the twins and valued by the family's pickle factory. His competence, however, creates a contradiction that the social order cannot tolerate. He is useful as labour but unacceptable as a person, welcome in the workshop but not in the house. When he steps outside the identity assigned to him by loving Ammu, he is treated as having committed a crime against the order itself. The police violence at the History House, which ends in his death, is the point at which the novel makes its argument unmistakable: the social order writes its categories onto the body, and it will destroy a body that refuses them.

B. R. Ambedkar's analysis of caste as a graded system of inequality, rather than a simple division of labour, forms an important background to this portrayal. Roy herself has written about Ambedkar's work and its continuing relevance (Ambedkar). The novel's treatment of the local Communist Party reinforces the point. Comrade Pillai's politics speak the language of class solidarity, yet the party's leadership abandons Velutha when his case threatens its local interests, suggesting that a politics blind to caste cannot offer an adequate identity to those at the bottom of the hierarchy.

Gayatri Spivak's question of whether the subaltern can speak is relevant here (Spivak). Velutha's final humiliation is accompanied by the near-absence of his own account; his story is reconstructed through the perceptions of others, especially the children and Ammu. This can be read as a limitation, but it can also be read as the novel's honest acknowledgement of how

institutions silence those whom they destroy. The narrative restores him to visibility without pretending that the silence has been fully undone.

4. Gender and the Unsanctioned Self: Ammu and the Women of Ayemenem

Ammu's story is a study in how patriarchal structures define a woman through her relations to men. She is first a daughter denied higher education by a father who considers it unnecessary for girls, then a wife in an unhappy marriage, and finally a divorced woman who returns to a family home where she has no secure place. In the family's eyes she has failed at the only identity open to her. Her brother Chacko, who has himself returned from Oxford with a failed marriage, is permitted both authority and sexual freedom. He speaks of the family factory as his own enterprise while Ammu's work in it goes unrecognised. The contrast demonstrates Butler's point that gender norms are not applied evenly; they are enforced selectively, with the heaviest penalty falling on women (Butler).

The women of the household are not simply victims. Baby Kochamma, whose own early love for a young priest came to nothing, has become an enforcer of the very rules that thwarted her. Her treatment of Ammu and the twins combines resentment with a settled loyalty to respectability. Mammachi, who endures violence from her husband, accepts Chacko's liaisons while treating Ammu's relationship with Velutha as unforgivable. Through these figures Roy shows how patriarchal ideas are transmitted and defended by those who have suffered under them, a process that sustains the system more effectively than overt command.

Ammu's choices must be read intersectionally (Crenshaw). Her vulnerability arises not from gender alone but from the combination of divorce, dependence on her natal family, her status within a minority religious community and the tie she forms with a man of lower caste. When she is locked away and then expelled from the house, and when she later dies alone in a rented room at thirty-one, the Church's refusal to bury her confirms that her exclusion is total. Yet the novel also grants her an identity that the community denies. She is shown as passionate, intelligent, tender and fierce, a person whose self exceeds every label placed upon her. Her transgression is thus both her tragedy and her claim to selfhood.

5. Childhood, Trauma and the Divided Self: Estha and Rahel

For the twins, identity begins as a shared condition. In their early years each experiences the other almost as an extension of the self, and the novel's language reflects this closeness. Erikson's theory suggests that adolescence is the critical period for separating and consolidating a sense of self, but the twins are forced into separation long before they are ready (Erikson). Sophie Mol's death, the sexual abuse inflicted on Estha by the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man, the killing of Velutha and the family's decision to send Estha away to his father combine to break their world apart.

A painful irony lies at the centre of this rupture. Under pressure from the police, the children are made to identify Velutha as the man who abducted them. The act of identifying another person destroys the person whom they love most, and it marks them for life with a sense of guilt that no adult acknowledges. The novel thus joins two meanings of identity: the formation of selfhood and the act of naming someone before an authority. In both senses the children are compelled to participate in a falsehood that wounds them.

Estha's response is silence and withdrawal. He walks for long hours and becomes almost invisible in the house that once belonged to his family. Rahel's response is restlessness. She is

expelled from school, drifts through architectural studies in Delhi, marries an American, separates from him and works in a petrol-station kiosk abroad. Neither is able to build a continuous life narrative. Caruth's view of trauma as an event that is not fully absorbed when it occurs but repeatedly returns in altered forms describes their condition accurately (Caruth). The twins' reunion in Ayemenem, which culminates in a transgressive intimacy, can be read as an attempt to repair the separation imposed on them. It is also a final defiance of the Love Laws that govern the novel's world. The scene is ambiguous rather than redemptive: it offers comfort without erasing damage, and it shows how deeply a society's prohibitions can distort the ways in which the wounded seek one another.

6. Place, Language and Form as Identity

The novel's setting is not a neutral backdrop. Ayemenem is a place of layered histories: a river that was once a source of life and is now polluted, a house that was once a plantation owner's home and later becomes the site of a killing, and a landscape in which colonial, missionary and Marxist influences all leave their marks. Characters belong to this place, but the place does not offer them unconditional belonging. Rahel's return after more than two decades makes the point clearly. She comes home and finds that home is as much a scene of loss as of origin.

Roy's language dramatises this complex relationship. She runs words together, capitalises ordinary phrases, reverses spellings and allows Malayalam rhythms to shape English syntax. These devices present the world as the children perceive it, in which small things carry as much emotional weight as events of history. They also embody a postcolonial identity formed from more than one linguistic inheritance, an identity that Hall would describe as made through difference rather than despite it (Hall). The language of the novel refuses the neatness of standard English, just as its characters refuse the neatness of their assigned roles.

The circular, non-linear structure completes this pattern. The narrative opens near the end of the story, returns repeatedly to the central events of 1969 and releases the full account only gradually. This is a formal equivalent of traumatic memory, which circles around a wound it cannot approach directly (Caruth). By ending on a moment of tenderness between Ammu and Velutha rather than on their destruction, the novel also makes an ethical choice. It insists that the lovers be remembered for what they gave each other and not only for what was done to them.

7. Conclusion

The God of Small Things presents the quest for identity as a struggle against systems that distribute worth unequally. Velutha is denied personhood by caste, Ammu by a patriarchal and religious order, and the twins by the adults who cannot bear to acknowledge what the children have seen. In each case the characters pursue selfhood through acts of transgression, and in each case the cost is severe. The novel does not offer a political programme, but it does offer a way of seeing. By attending to the small, the marginal and the unspoken, it teaches readers to recognise the human claims that official categories conceal.

The study suggests several directions for further research, including a comparison between the novel's treatment of identity and that of Roy's later fiction and non-fiction, and a closer examination of its relationship to regional history and Malayalam literary culture. For now it may be concluded that the novel's lasting power lies in its insistence that identity is not simply a private possession but a social and ethical question, one on which the justice of a community may be measured.

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