

# Literature, Culture, and the Question of the Marginal in India

## *Editors*

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## **Foreword**

The study of literature and culture in India has always been inseparable from the study of inequality, difference, and historical asymmetry. Yet the question of the marginal remains persistently unsettled, demanding renewed critical attention as social formations shift and new sites of exclusion emerge. *Literature, Culture, and the Question of the Marginal in India* responds to this intellectual imperative with depth, clarity, and analytical seriousness. It offers readers not only a map of marginality as it appears in Indian literary and cultural expressions but also a compelling argument for why the marginal must remain central to scholarly inquiry.

This volume approaches marginality as a lived condition shaped by history, power, and cultural memory rather than as a static sociological label. Across its chapters, literature is treated as an active cultural practice that records silences, registers resistance, and gives form to voices often denied legitimacy in dominant narratives. The essays collectively demonstrate how literary and cultural texts become spaces where the politics of caste, gender, ethnicity, displacement, and desire are negotiated with urgency and ethical force.

A notable strength of the book lies in its careful balance between textual analysis and cultural critique. The discussion of caste and social injustice in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, along with the reading of his short stories through the lenses of yearning, memory, and moral conflict, reveals how literary realism exposes the psychological and ethical costs of structural oppression. These chapters remind readers that the marginal is not only a social position but also a deeply internalized experience, shaping subjectivity and moral imagination.

Equally significant are the chapters that engage with communities and practices frequently relegated to the periphery of mainstream discourse. The exploration of tribal identity, land, and displacement traces the enduring echoes of historical dispossession, while the analysis of women's healing practices and indigenous midwifery in Kashmir brings attention to embodied knowledge systems that persist despite political instability and cultural erasure. Such studies expand the boundaries of what is conventionally considered literary or cultural material and invite readers to reconsider the archives upon which scholarship depends.

The volume also demonstrates a keen sensitivity to questions of voice, silence, and representation. Essays on Dalit, tribal, and minority interventions in Indian literatures examine how marginalized writers and communities challenge canonical authority and reshape literary traditions from within. The chapter on reading what is not said offers a particularly incisive reflection on caste, canon formation, and the ethical limits of representation, urging critics to remain alert to absence, omission, and narrative constraint as meaningful critical sites.

Marginality in this book is not confined to rural or historically disadvantaged spaces alone. The discussion of Bengali diasporic religious and cultural practices in Hyderabad illustrates how questions of identity and belonging unfold within urban and migratory contexts. Similarly, the study of travel in Vikram Seth's *From Heaven Lake* cites movement, geography, and cultural encounter as key frameworks for understanding difference and relationality beyond national borders. These chapters add conceptual breadth and demonstrate the versatility of marginality as an interpretive category.

The volume is also attentive to contemporary discursive terrains. The examination of female infanticide and the politics of silence exposes the disturbing intersections of gender, culture, and social complicity, while the

chapter on feminist interventions across digital discursive ecologies addresses emerging forms of misogyny and resistance in online spaces. By engaging digital cultures alongside print traditions, the book affirms the continued relevance of literary and cultural analysis in an increasingly mediated public sphere.

What makes *Literature, Culture, and the Question of the Marginal in India* particularly compelling is its refusal to offer easy resolutions. Instead, it embraces complexity, contradiction, and plurality. Marginality here is shown to be dynamic and relational, shaped by context and continually renegotiated. The contributors write with intellectual discipline and critical empathy, making the volume both rigorous and ethically attentive.

This book is a valuable contribution to Indian literary studies, cultural studies, postcolonial scholarship, and interdisciplinary research more broadly. Readers will find this collection both intellectually rigorous and critically resonant. This volume will be of considerable value to scholars, researchers, and advanced students concerned with literature, culture, and the politics of marginality in India, particularly for its conceptual richness, methodological range, and sustained commitment to examining the margins not as peripheral curiosities but as crucial sites of meaning, struggle, and transformation. It serves those who seek to understand how literary and cultural forms engage with structures of power and articulate alternative ways of seeing.

**Supriya Chaudhuri**

Professor Emerita of English, Jadavpur University, Kolkata  
Former Fellow, University of Oxford

## **Editors' Note**

“Marginality in India must be understood not as a peripheral condition but as a constitutive force through which meanings, identities, and future possibilities are continually negotiated”.

The idea for *Literature, Culture, and the Question of the Marginal in India* emerged from a shared recognition that marginality, far from being a peripheral concern, occupies a decisive position in the intellectual, cultural, and ethical life of the nation. Indian society, shaped by layered histories of caste, gender, class, region, language, and belief, continually produces margins that demand renewed critical attention. This volume takes up that challenge by bringing together chapters that examine how literature and culture register, contest, and reimagine these margins across historical periods and discursive spaces.

The chapters assembled here approach marginality not as a static category but as a dynamic and contested process. Literature is read alongside cultural practices, social institutions, and emerging digital formations, revealing how narratives both reflect and reshape structures of power. The contributors engage a wide range of texts and contexts, from canonical literary works to indigenous knowledge systems, from diasporic religious practices to online feminist interventions. This breadth is intentional, underscoring the editors' conviction that the question of the marginal must be addressed through multiple lenses and methodologies.

Several chapters focus on caste, social injustice, and the limits of representation, offering sustained engagements with realism, silence, and canon formation. Others attend to tribal histories, land, displacement, and memory, tracing the enduring consequences of historical erasure and cultural loss. The volume also brings women's experiences to the forefront, examining healing practices, reproductive politics, and gendered violence, while remaining attentive to new arenas of struggle shaped by digital cultures. Travel, migration, and diasporic identity

further expand the scope of inquiry, situating Indian literary and cultural expressions within transregional and transnational frameworks.

What unites these diverse contributions is a shared commitment to ethical reading and critical responsibility. The essays resist simplifying narratives of victimhood or resistance and instead emphasize complexity, agency, and contradiction. Margins are examined as vital sites where meaning is produced, identities are negotiated, and alternative futures are imagined.

This volume is addressed to scholars, researchers, and advanced students working in Indian literature, cultural studies, postcolonial thought, and allied fields. The editors envisage the discussions initiated here as catalysts for further critical inquiry and sustained dialogue, underscoring the centrality of marginality to any rigorous understanding of literature, culture, and society in India. Conceived as a resource for scholarly engagement, the collection brings together a wide range of themes, methodological approaches, and theoretical perspectives that open up productive avenues for research. For doctoral and early-career scholars in particular, the essays offer useful frameworks for identifying research problems, developing literature reviews, and situating texts within broader cultural, historical, and political contexts. The volume thus functions not only as a site of interpretation but also as a guide for shaping research trajectories, sharpening analytical perspectives, and contributing substantively to academic debates through conference presentations and peer-reviewed publications.

**The Editors**

Dr. Jamirul Islam  
Dr. Md Sufian Ahmed  
Dr. Paromita Nandy  
Dr. Dhanavath Makla

## *Overview of the Volume*

*Literature, Culture, and the Question of the Marginal in India* is an interdisciplinary scholarly volume that examines marginality as a central and productive category in Indian literary and cultural studies. Rejecting approaches that treat the marginal as incidental or supplementary, the volume positions it as a key site through which power, representation, and social difference are articulated and contested in India.

The collection brings together original essays that conceptualize marginality as a dynamic and historically contingent process shaped by intersecting formations of caste, gender, class, region, language, and belief. Drawing on critical perspectives from literary studies, cultural studies, and postcolonial theory, the contributors engage a wide range of texts and cultural practices, including canonical literary works, Dalit and tribal writings, indigenous knowledge systems, diasporic cultural formations, travel narratives, and contemporary digital discourses. This thematic and methodological breadth reflects the volume's commitment to interdisciplinary inquiry and critical plurality.

Several chapters address caste and social injustice through close textual analysis, examining realism, silence, and canon formation to illuminate the ethical and representational limits of dominant literary traditions. Others focus on tribal histories, land, displacement, and cultural memory, tracing the long-term effects of dispossession and

historical erasure. Women's experiences constitute a major axis of the volume, with essays engaging questions of healing practices, reproductive politics, gendered violence, and feminist interventions, including those emerging within digital spaces. The volume also extends its scope through discussions of travel, migration, and diasporic identity, situating Indian literary and cultural expressions within broader transregional and transnational contexts.

What unifies the contributions is a shared commitment to ethical reading and critical responsibility. Rather than offering reductive narratives of marginalization or resistance, the essays emphasize complexity, agency, and contradiction, examining the margins as generative spaces where meanings are produced and alternative social imaginaries articulated.

Addressed to scholars, researchers, and advanced students of Indian literature, cultural studies, postcolonial studies, and allied disciplines, this volume is designed to function both as a sustained critical intervention and as a resource for advanced research and teaching. Through its conceptual rigor, methodological range, and focused engagement with the politics of marginality, *Literature, Culture, and the Question of the Marginal in India* makes a strong and timely contribution to contemporary debates in the humanities and social sciences.

***To read India through its margins is to encounter not absence, but the dense presence of power, memory, and meaning in continual negotiation.***

## *Introduction of the Book*

In India, the margin is not a silent edge but a living ground where stories remember what power forgets, where struggle speaks in many tongues, and where literature quietly unsettles the calm authority of the centre.

The question of the marginal has long occupied a central, though often contested, place in Indian literary and cultural studies. India's complex social fabric—woven from caste hierarchies, religious pluralism, linguistic diversity, gendered power relations, regional disparities, and colonial and postcolonial histories—has continually produced margins even as it celebrates multiplicity. Literature, as both a cultural archive and a site of ideological struggle, has played a crucial role in representing, interrogating, and at times silencing these margins. *Literature, Culture, and the Question of the Marginal in India* seeks to engage critically with this paradox by bringing together scholarly interventions that examine how marginal identities, voices, and experiences are articulated, negotiated, and resisted across literary texts, cultural practices, and contemporary discursive spaces.

The notion of the “marginal” in the Indian context cannot be understood as static or monolithic. Marginality is shaped by intersecting forces of caste, class, gender, tribe, religion, region, language, and historical displacement. It is also produced through cultural practices, institutional exclusions, and dominant epistemologies that determine whose stories are tellable, whose lives are grievable, and whose experiences are rendered invisible. Indian literature—across languages, regions, and genres—has

persistently grappled with these questions, offering narratives that both reproduce and challenge hegemonic structures. This volume positions itself within this critical tradition, aiming to foreground voices from the margins while simultaneously interrogating the frameworks through which marginality itself is conceptualized and represented.

One of the defining strengths of this collection lies in its interdisciplinary orientation. The essays gathered here move fluidly between literary criticism, cultural studies, social history, anthropology, gender studies, and digital media studies. Such an approach is particularly necessary in the Indian context, where literature is deeply entangled with lived cultural practices and socio-political realities. By examining texts alongside rituals, travel narratives, digital spaces, and community histories, the volume underscores that marginality is not merely a literary theme but a lived condition that shapes—and is shaped by—cultural expression.

The volume opens with a significant intervention into questions of diaspora and cultural continuity. In their chapter, “Cultural Continuity and Diasporic Identity: Bengali Religious and Cultural Practices in Hyderabad,” Dr. Paromita Nandy and Dr. P. Veerraghava examine how Bengali diasporic communities in Hyderabad negotiate identity through religious rituals, festivals, and cultural practices. Moving beyond a simplistic understanding of diaspora as dislocation, the chapter highlights how cultural memory and collective practices function as strategies of belonging and resistance. By foregrounding everyday rituals and community formations, the authors reveal how marginality in diasporic contexts is mediated through acts of cultural preservation and adaptation, complicating the binaries of centre and periphery.

Caste, arguably the most enduring and structurally entrenched form of marginalization in India, occupies a central place in this volume. Dr. Md Sufian Ahmed's chapter, "Caste, Marginalization, and Social Injustice in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*" (1935), revisits Anand's seminal novel to examine its enduring relevance in contemporary caste discourse. Through a nuanced reading of Bakha's lived experiences, the chapter foregrounds how literary realism becomes a powerful tool to expose systemic oppression, humiliation, and social exclusion. Dr. Ahmed's analysis situates *Untouchable* not merely as a reformist text but as a sustained critique of caste-based dehumanization, inviting readers to reconsider the ethical and political responsibilities of literary representation.

Questions of land, displacement, and tribal marginality form another crucial axis of this collection. In "Portrayal of Tribals, Land, Culture, and Displacement: Echoes of the Past," Dr. D. Makla examines how tribal communities are represented in literary narratives that engage with historical dispossession and cultural erosion. The chapter underscores the intimate relationship between land and identity in tribal life, revealing how displacement disrupts not only economic sustenance but also cultural memory and ecological knowledge. By reading tribal narratives against dominant developmental discourses, Dr. Makla foregrounds literature as a space of counter-memory that resists the erasure of indigenous histories.

Extending this engagement with subaltern voices, Sk. Abdullah's chapter, "Voices from the Margins: Dalit, Tribal, and Minority Interventions in Indian Literatures," offers a broad yet incisive survey of marginal literary traditions. The chapter emphasizes how Dalit, tribal, and minority writers have challenged canonical norms by producing alternative aesthetics

rooted in lived experience, oral traditions, and collective struggle. Sk. Abdullah foregrounds the political significance of these interventions, arguing that marginal literatures do not merely seek inclusion within the canon but actively redefine the terms of literary value, authorship, and representation.

The problem of representation itself is taken up critically in Md Nehajul Sk's chapter, "Reading What Is Not Said: Caste, Canon, and the Limits of Representation." This essay turns attention to silences, absences, and narrative gaps within canonical texts, interrogating how caste operates not only through overt representation but also through strategic erasure. By reading against the grain of the canon, the chapter exposes the ideological limits of liberal humanism and highlights the need for critical methodologies that attend to what remains unsaid. Md Nehajul Sk's intervention is particularly significant in prompting readers to rethink the ethics of reading and the politics of literary interpretation.

Psychological marginality and moral conflict emerge as another important thematic concern in the volume. In "Yearning and the Human Psyche: Unfulfilled Desire, Memory, and Moral Conflict in Anand's Short Stories," Dr. Kishore Kumar Gopoji explores how emotional deprivation, memory, and ethical dilemmas shape the inner lives of marginalized characters. Through a close reading of Anand's short fiction, the chapter reveals how personal suffering is often inseparable from broader social constraints. Dr. Gopoji's analysis foregrounds the affective dimensions of marginality, reminding us that social injustice leaves deep psychological imprints that literature is uniquely equipped to explore.

Gendered marginality, particularly in relation to indigenous knowledge systems, is powerfully addressed in Hilal Ahmad Tantray's chapter,

“Waren and Dais: Women’s Healing, Birth Rituals, and Indigenous Midwifery in Kashmir.” This essay foregrounds women’s experiential knowledge of healing and childbirth, situating indigenous midwifery practices within broader debates on modernity, medicalization, and cultural erasure. By centering women’s voices and embodied knowledge, the chapter challenges dominant epistemologies that marginalize traditional practices and reaffirms the cultural significance of women’s labour in sustaining community life.

Mobility, travel, and cultural encounter are examined in Tasneem Farhat Choudhury’s chapter, “Modes of Travel in Vikram Seth’s *From Heaven Lake: Travels through Sinkiang and Tibet: A Study in Cultural Geography*.” This essay reads Seth’s travel narrative as a text that negotiates cultural difference, spatial marginality, and cross-cultural understanding. By foregrounding travel as both a physical and epistemic journey, the chapter highlights how peripheral spaces are represented and reimagined within global literary circuits, complicating the relationship between observer and observed.

The politics of silence surrounding gender violence forms the focus of Nasreen Begum’s chapter, “When the Unborn Speaks: Female Infanticide and the Politics of Silence.” This powerful intervention examines how literary and cultural narratives confront—or fail to confront—the systematic erasure of the female child. By analysing silence as both a symptom of oppression and a site of resistance, the chapter exposes the cultural mechanisms that sustain gendered violence while also gesturing toward possibilities of ethical witnessing.

The volume concludes with a timely engagement with digital cultures in Dr. Sananda Sen’s chapter, “Contesting the Manosphere: Feminist

Interventions Across Digital Discursive Ecologies.” This essay extends the discussion of marginality into contemporary online spaces, examining how feminist voices challenge misogyny, exclusion, and reactionary politics within digital ecosystems. By situating digital activism within broader feminist traditions, Dr. Sen demonstrates how new media platforms function as contested sites where marginal voices can both be amplified and attacked.

Taken together, the chapters in this volume offer a rich and layered exploration of marginality in Indian literature and culture. They reveal that the marginal is not merely a position of deprivation but also a site of creativity, resistance, and alternative knowledge production. By engaging with diverse texts, contexts, and methodologies, *Literature, Culture, and the Question of the Marginal in India* seeks to contribute meaningfully to ongoing scholarly debates while remaining attentive to the ethical imperatives of representation. It is our hope that this collection will serve as a critical resource for scholars, students, and readers interested in understanding how literature continues to shape—and be shaped by—the struggles and aspirations of those at the margins of Indian society.

## **The Editors**

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**Chapter-I****Cultural Continuity and Diasporic Identity: Bengali  
Religious and Cultural Practices in Hyderabad**

By

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TelanganaDOI Number: <https://literaturechronicle.com/doi-2026-55661>**Abstract**

This paper examines the religious and cultural practices of the Bengali diaspora in Hyderabad, focusing on Kali Puja and Durga Puja as significant sites of cultural memory, identity formation, and civic engagement. Drawing on theories of diaspora and cultural memory (Hall, 1990; Vertovec, 1999), the study situates these festivals within broader discussions of transnational belonging and negotiated identities. A qualitative methodology was employed, including participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis conducted between 2019 and 2024. The research analyses how ritual performances, spatial organisation of pandals, and linguistic practices enable diasporic communities to construct and reaffirm collective belonging within a multicultural urban environment.

The findings indicate that Kali Puja and Durga Puja extend beyond religious observance to function as dynamic socio-cultural processes. These festivals reflect historical continuity with Bengal while simultaneously adapting to Hyderabad's cosmopolitan context through cultural hybridity and institutional collaboration (Bhabha, 1994). Ritual place-making of urban spaces, philanthropic initiatives, and community participation foster civic visibility and intercultural dialogue. Moreover, the festivals play a crucial role in intergenerational transmission of language, values, and collective memory, ensuring continuity amid spatial mobility and demographic change. Thus, the Bengali diaspora not only preserves distinct cultural traditions but also actively contributes to Hyderabad's pluralistic urban culture.

## **Keyword**

*(Bengali Diaspora, Hyderabad, Urban multiculturalism, Cultural Hybridity, Spatial Negotiation)*

## **Introduction**

Diaspora studies conceptualise migrant communities not merely as displaced populations but as active agents engaged in the continuous reproduction of cultural memory (Safran, 1991; Clifford, 1994). Religious festivals function as powerful mnemonic devices through which diasporic subjects reaffirm collective identity and transmit cultural values across generations. In the context of the Bengali diaspora in Hyderabad, Kali Puja and Durga Puja emerge as ritualised

sites of remembrance that enable the symbolic reconstruction of the homeland while remaining geographically distant from it.

These practices resonate with Anderson's (1983) notion of imagined communities, wherein collective identity is sustained through shared symbols, narratives, and performative acts. The replication of Kolkata-based ritual aesthetics—such as idols crafted in the Kumartuli style or temples modelled after Dakshineswar—reflects a conscious effort to maintain cultural authenticity while adapting to a new spatial and social context.

The twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad have witnessed a significant transformation in their cultural landscape with the increasing visibility of Bengali religious and socio-cultural practices, particularly Kali Puja and Durga Puja. What was once a marginal and relatively low-key observance has evolved into a large-scale, community-driven phenomenon. This transformation reflects not only demographic shifts but also the adaptive strategies of a diasporic community negotiating identity within a multilingual and multicultural urban environment.

## **Research Methodology**

### **A) Research Design:**

The study adopts a qualitative, exploratory research design to examine the religious and cultural practices of the Bengali diaspora in Hyderabad, with a particular focus on Kali Puja and Durga Puja as sites of identity construction and community negotiation. Given the symbolic, spatial, and experiential dimensions of these practices, a

qualitative approach was considered most appropriate for capturing meanings, lived experiences, and social interactions within their urban context.

#### B) Data Collection Methods:

Data were collected between 2019 and 2024 using a multi-method qualitative approach comprising the following techniques:

##### 1) Participant Observation

Non-intrusive participant observation was conducted at major Kali Puja and Durga Puja venues across Hyderabad and Secunderabad, including Ameerpet, Sainikpuri, Secunderabad, Domalguda, and selected IT corridor localities such as Miyapur and Narsingi. Observations focused on ritual practices, spatial organisation of pandals, audience composition, language use, and patterns of participation.

##### 2) Semi-Structured Interviews

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with approximately 30 respondents, including:

- Office bearers of Bengali socio-cultural organisations
- Priests and ritual specialists
- Second-, third-, and fourth-generation Bengali residents
- Young professionals employed in IT and allied sectors

#### C) Document Analysis:

Archival materials, organisational records, souvenir publications, festival brochures, media reports, and social media content produced

by Bengali associations were analysed to trace the historical evolution and institutionalisation of cultural practices.

#### D) Data Analysis:

Data were analysed using thematic analysis through an inductive coding process. Recurrent patterns were identified and grouped under key analytical categories such as cultural reproduction, spatial expansion, hybridity, linguistic adaptation, and civic engagement. Triangulation across observational, interview, and documentary data enhanced the reliability and validity of the findings.

### **Findings and Discussion**

#### a) Historical Presence of Bengalis in Hyderabad

The Bengali presence in Hyderabad can be traced back to the Nizam period, when members of the community migrated in professional capacities such as education, administration, science, and law enforcement. A notable early figure was Aghornath Chattopadhyay, who served as the first principal of Nizam's College. Over subsequent decades, Bengalis became embedded within Hyderabad's institutional framework, contributing as geologists, engineers, scientists, bankers, educators, and entrepreneurs. This historical continuity challenges the perception of Bengalis as recent migrants and situates them as long-standing participants in the city's socio-economic development.

#### b) Demographic Expansion and Generational Continuity

At present, the Bengali population in the twin cities is estimated to exceed ten lakhs, with a significant proportion comprising second-,

third-, and fourth-generation residents who identify Hyderabad as their primary home. This demographic shift has directly influenced both the scale and the nature of cultural expression within the community.

#### c) Cultural Production Beyond Religion

The Bengali experience in Hyderabad exemplifies a model of diasporic identity formation characterised by cultural retention alongside local assimilation. Community members often demonstrate multilingual competence and active participation in the city's social and political life. Hyderabad's relatively inclusive urban ethos has facilitated this process, allowing cultural difference to be expressed without social marginalisation. Bengali cultural life extends beyond religious festivals to include literature, cinema, music, and culinary practices. Initiatives such as the Hyderabad Bengali Film Festival promote regional and global cinematic exchange, while community-maintained libraries support literary engagement in the Bengali language. Culinary spaces and social media-based food communities further contribute to the everyday maintenance of cultural memory.

#### d) Urban Space and Ritual Territorialisation

From an urban sociological perspective, religious festivals function as practices of ritual territorialisation (Kong, 2001), through which communities symbolically claim and transform urban spaces. Temporary pandals, processions, and public performances reconfigure neighbourhoods into culturally marked zones, producing what Lefebvre (1991) terms lived space. In Hyderabad, the spatial dispersal of Kali Puja and Durga Puja celebrations—from traditional areas such as Secunderabad and Sainikpuri to IT-dominated suburbs like Miyapur

and Narsingi—reflects patterns of demographic mobility and occupational change within the Bengali diaspora. These spatial shifts demonstrate how cultural practices evolve in tandem with economic restructuring and residential relocation.

e) Philanthropy and Civic Engagement

A significant dimension of Bengali associational life in Hyderabad is its emphasis on social responsibility. Funds generated through festivals are frequently redirected towards philanthropic initiatives, including healthcare support, disaster relief, and welfare programmes. This practice underscores the community's integration into the civic life of the city and reflects a broader ethos of collective responsibility. Organisations such as Bangiya Sanskritik Sangha, Hyderabad Bengalee Samity, and Uttarayan function as institutional mediators between tradition and modern urban life. Drawing on Putnam's (2000) concept of social capital, these associations strengthen intra-community bonds (bonding capital) while simultaneously fostering inter-community engagement (bridging capital) through public cultural programmes and welfare initiatives.

f) Negotiating Identity in a Multicultural City

The Bengali diaspora in Hyderabad demonstrates a dynamic process of identity negotiation characterised by cultural continuity and local adaptation. Multilingual competence, occupational diversity, and civic participation enable community members to integrate into Hyderabad's multicultural social fabric while maintaining distinct cultural markers.

### g) Language, Identity, and Sociolinguistic Adaptation

Sociolinguistic theory identifies language as a critical marker of diasporic identity (Fishman, 1991). While Bengali retains its symbolic significance in ritual and cultural domains, everyday communication frequently involves Telugu, Deccani Urdu, and English. This functional multilingualism facilitates social integration while preserving the symbolic linguistic capital of Bengali during festivals, literary events, and ritual performances.

### **Limitations and Scope for Future Research**

While the study provides an in-depth qualitative account of Bengali diasporic practices in Hyderabad, it is limited by its focus on selected organisations and localities. Future research could adopt a comparative framework by examining Bengali diasporic practices in other Indian cities or employ quantitative methods to assess participation patterns and generational attitudes. Longitudinal studies may further illuminate how cultural practices evolve in response to ongoing urban transformation and migration dynamics.

### **Analytical Overview**

The study presents a conceptually robust and empirically detailed examination of the Bengali diaspora in Hyderabad, interpreting Kali Puja and Durga Puja as significant arenas for cultural remembrance, identity construction, and civic interaction. Drawing upon major contributions in diaspora scholarship (Hall, 1990; Vertovec, 1999; Safran, 1991; Clifford, 1994), the analysis portrays the Bengali community as an evolving social formation that actively reshapes and

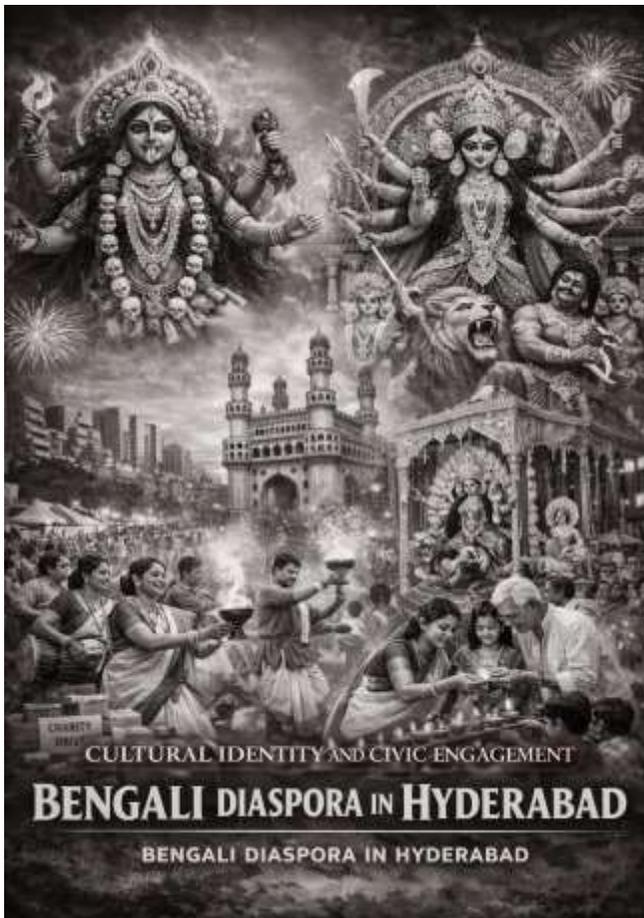
rearticulates its cultural identity within a new urban milieu. The use of Anderson's (1983) notion of imagined communities further reinforces the view that festivals operate as symbolic and performative frameworks through which collective belonging is continuously reaffirmed.

A notable strength of the research lies in its sustained qualitative design. The combination of participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentary analysis conducted over an extended period enhances analytical depth and methodological credibility. Thematic coding enables a meaningful connection between empirical observations and theoretical perspectives such as cultural hybridity (Bhabha, 1994), the production of lived space (Lefebvre, 1991), ritualised spatial appropriation (Kong, 2001), and social capital formation (Putnam, 2000).

The findings illustrate that these festivals transcend devotional practice and function as mechanisms of spatial reconfiguration, institutional organisation, linguistic continuity, and civic engagement. Temporary ritual structures reshape segments of the urban landscape, making diasporic presence publicly visible. At the same time, patterns of multilingual usage reflect adaptive integration without abandoning symbolic cultural markers.

The discussion of philanthropy and associational networks highlights the community's contribution to civic life, demonstrating how intra-group solidarity and inter-group collaboration coexist. Nevertheless, further attention to internal variations—such as gendered experiences or class-based differences—could deepen the analysis.

Overall, the study makes a meaningful contribution to diaspora and urban studies by demonstrating how religious festivals serve as dynamic sites for negotiating belonging and pluralism within contemporary metropolitan contexts.



(OpenAI, 2026)

## **Implications of the Study**

This study carries significant theoretical, sociocultural, and policy-oriented implications.

### **Theoretical Implications:**

The research advances diaspora studies by demonstrating that diasporic identity is not a fixed inheritance but an ongoing, negotiated process shaped by ritual practice, spatial adaptation, and institutional mediation. By situating Kali Puja and Durga Puja within frameworks of cultural memory, imagined communities, hybridity, and social capital, the study reinforces the idea that religious festivals function as active sites of identity production rather than mere preservations of tradition. It contributes to urban sociology by illustrating how ritual place-making reshapes public space and embeds diasporic presence within the lived geography of the city.

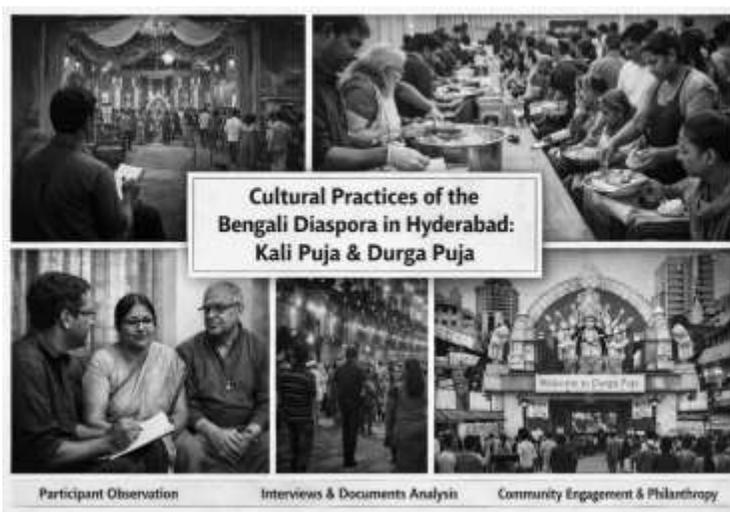
### **Sociocultural Implications:**

The findings highlight how religious festivals facilitate intergenerational continuity, enabling younger members of the diaspora to engage with language, values, and collective memory despite geographical distance from the homeland. The study also demonstrates that multilingual competence and cultural hybridity support integration without erasure of distinct identity. This suggests that multicultural urban contexts can sustain plural identities when supported by inclusive civic environments.

### **Civic and Policy Implications:**

The emphasis on philanthropy and associational life underscores the role of diaspora communities as active contributors to urban development and social welfare. Community organisations act as bridges between tradition and civic responsibility, strengthening both bonding and bridging social capital. Policymakers and urban planners may draw from these insights to foster inclusive cultural policies that recognise religious festivals as platforms for intercultural dialogue, civic participation, and social cohesion.

Overall, the study implies that diasporic religious practices are integral to the making of pluralistic urban cultures, shaping not only community identity but also the broader social fabric of metropolitan life.



(OpenAI, 2026)

## **Conclusion**

The theoretical perspectives employed in this study demonstrate that Bengali religious and cultural practices in Hyderabad are not static traditions transplanted unchanged from the homeland but dynamic, context-sensitive processes shaped by memory, space, language, and institutional mediation. Through ritual performance, cultural hybridity, and civic engagement, the Bengali diaspora contributes meaningfully to the pluralistic character of Hyderabad while continuously renegotiating its own sense of belonging.

The growth of Kali Puja and Durga Puja celebrations in Hyderabad thus represents more than a religious phenomenon; it reflects the complex processes through which diasporic communities assert cultural presence, adapt traditions, and negotiate belonging within urban multicultural contexts. Festivals serve as crucial sites of intergenerational transmission, enabling younger members—many without direct experiential ties to West Bengal—to engage meaningfully with their cultural heritage.

Importantly, community associations emerge as key mediators between tradition and civic life. Through institutional organisation, philanthropy, and public cultural programming, these bodies extend the relevance of religious festivals beyond symbolic identity affirmation to active participation in the social and moral economy of the city.

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**Chapter-II****Caste, Marginalization, and Social Injustice in Mulk Raj  
Anand's *Untouchable* (1935)**

By

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DOI Number: <https://literaturechronicle.com/doi-2026-55662>

**Abstract**

This paper focuses on the issue of caste discrimination as depicted in Mulk Raj Anand's novel *Untouchable*. Anand vividly narrates the lives of the impoverished and oppressed sections of traditional Indian society. The novel *Untouchable* (1935) highlights the social atrocities that continued to prevail in India, particularly during the colonial period. The narrative portrays the tense and troubled interactions among upper-caste Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and the untouchables who remain victims of systemic oppression.

The protagonist, Bakha, serves as a metaphor for the exploitation and marginalization endured by untouchables like him. Despite being an

exceptionally skilled worker, Bakha is repeatedly subjected to humiliation; passers-by often admire his efficiency yet remain shocked to find him engaged in the degrading task of cleaning public latrines. Bakha emerges as a life-like and powerful character who effectively conveys the pain, suffering, and helplessness of an oppressed and disadvantaged individual, condemned solely due to his caste identity. Through *Untouchable* (1935), Mulk Raj Anand presents a realistic and poignant portrayal of traditional Brahminical India, where the condition of the lower-caste population was profoundly miserable and deeply pitiable.

## **Keywords**

*(Caste Discrimination, Oppressed, Subaltern, Outcast, Humiliation)*

## **Introduction**

Mulk Raj Anand holds a distinguished place among Indian English writers whose literary careers spanned nearly four decades. He was born on December 12, 1905, in Peshawar (now in Pakistan). Anand received his education in Lahore, London, and Cambridge, and he earned a doctorate in philosophy. He was honored with several prestigious awards, including the Padma Bhushan and the Sahitya Akademi Award, and was also nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature. His notable works include *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936), *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937), *The Village* (1939), *Across the Black Waters* (1940), *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942), *Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts* (1943), *The Big Heart* (1945), *The Private Life of an Indian Prince* (1953), and *The Death of a Hero* (1963).

Anand's fiction is marked by a deep concern for the oppressed sections of society, and his characters are often drawn from the people and environments he closely observed. In 1935, Mulk Raj Anand published his debut novel *Untouchable*, which presents a powerful portrayal of the miserable existence of the underprivileged in Indian society. The novel focuses on the life of subaltern individuals who attempt to move from the margins to the center of society but ultimately fail when confronted with the harsh reality of caste discrimination. A critical analysis of *Untouchable* must therefore examine Anand's representation of subaltern life.

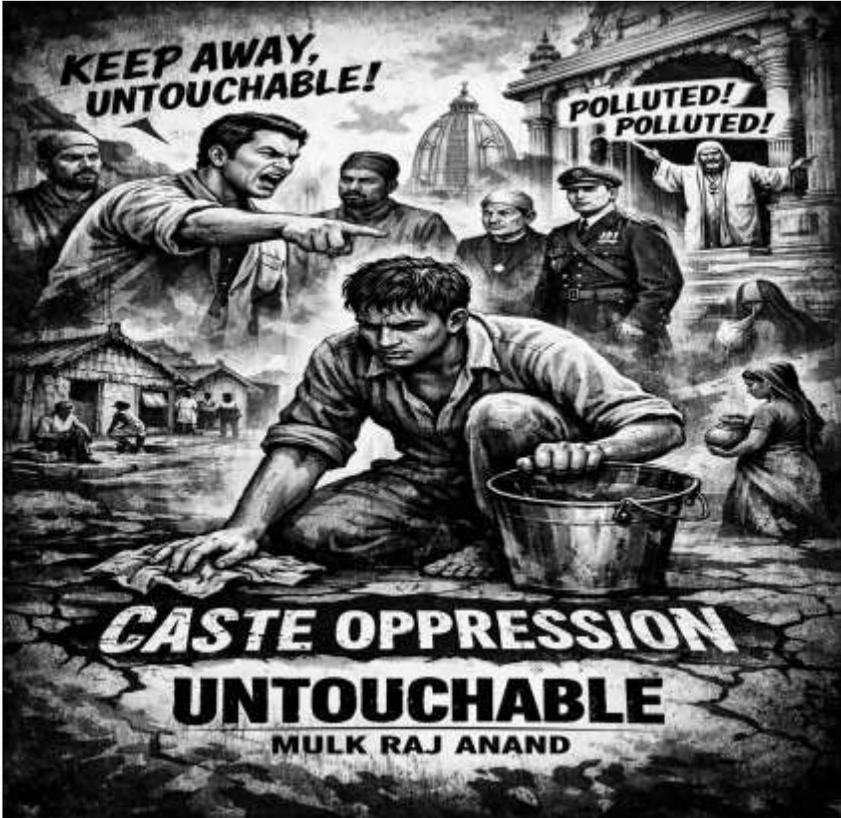
Anand vividly echoes the realities, mindset, and social position of the subalterns. Subalternity in the Indian cultural context operates through caste, class, and gender. Among these, caste-based discrimination has inflicted deep and lasting harm on Indian society. This situation persisted even during British rule. The caste system, deeply rooted in Indian history, gave rise to several social evils, of which untouchability remains one of the most inhuman and oppressive.

*Untouchable* is a powerful novel of protest in which Mulk Raj Anand exposes the social evil of caste discrimination and compels readers to confront its inhumanity. Set in pre-independence India, the novel centres on Bakha, an eighteen-year-old sweeper belonging to the untouchable caste. Through Bakha's experiences, Anand presents the misery, humiliation, and resentment of the oppressed working class while highlighting their strained relationships with upper-caste Hindus, Muslims, and Christians in colonial Indian society. The novel

provides a significant entry point for Anand's exploration of the subaltern condition in Indian English literature.

The narrative offers a heartbreaking portrayal of the suffering endured by the lower castes under both British rule and the oppressive weight of rigid Hindu-Brahminical traditions. For centuries, Indian society had been burdened by discriminatory customs based on caste and class, which crushed the free spirit of humanity and prevented social unity. These divisions weakened the moral and social fabric of the nation. Anand, deeply sensitive to this injustice, recognized how caste discrimination eroded India's strength. *Untouchable* thus becomes his anguished protest against the cruelty and prejudice inflicted by the higher castes upon Dalits and other marginalized communities. Through the novel, Anand relentlessly attacks the rigid yet decaying caste system entrenched in Indian society.

The novel is also profoundly influenced by Gandhian ideology. Anand incorporates Gandhi's vision of social reform, which emphasizes moral awakening and the abolition of caste-based hierarchies. Other characters from lower castes, like Bakha, suffer similar hardships, revealing the collective plight of the untouchables. Their colony remains inaccessible to the privileged classes, symbolizing social exclusion. The upper castes regard the sweepers as necessary yet polluted beings—movable property rather than human individuals. Ironically, those who clean society's filth are themselves considered unclean. The untouchables are forced into complete dependence on upper castes even for basic necessities such as water, exposing the depth of their exploitation.



(OpenAI, 2026)

### **Analysis of the Chapter**

Bakha stands as a powerful symbol of the oppression and exploitation faced by untouchables. The novel unfolds over a single day in his life, portraying his routine existence as a member of the scavenger caste, commonly referred to as ‘bhangis.’ Their duty is to clean streets and latrines for the upper castes, yet they are condemned to live in filthy, overcrowded huts with poor drainage and unbearable stench. Bakha silently endures constant humiliation, prejudice, and abuse, beginning

with his own father's harsh insults early in the morning. These experiences reveal the psychological and emotional toll of caste oppression.

Despite being an efficient and dedicated worker admired by passersby, Bakha has no opportunity for advancement. His birth into a low caste permanently confines him to degrading labour. His talents are suppressed before they can flourish. Though he yearns for education, social barriers prevent him from attending school, as upper-caste parents refuse to let their children associate with an untouchable's son. Fascinated by the lifestyle of the British soldiers, Bakha dreams of dignity and self-respect. However, his reality is marked by begging for food, waiting endlessly for charity, and facing punishment for accidental physical contact with upper-caste individuals. The hypocrisy of the caste system is further exposed when upper-caste men exploit untouchable women without fear of social consequences.

Through Bakha's tragic yet dignified struggle, Anand lays bare the moral bankruptcy of caste discrimination and calls for a humane, egalitarian society. *Untouchable* ultimately affirms hope—rooted in Gandhian thought—for social reform and national regeneration. Bakha continues to endure relentless humiliation throughout *Untouchable*. Driven by curiosity, he visits a nearby temple, where he is drawn toward what seems to him an unsolved mystery. As he peers through a window, a priest suddenly shouts, “Polluted! Polluted!”, interrupting him. The gathered crowd joins in, yelling angrily: “Get off the steps, you scavenger! Off with you! You have defiled our whole service!” (Anand, 53)

Bakha, the protagonist of the novel, emerges as a life-like character who powerfully conveys the agony of an oppressed, marginalized, and ill-fated human being, condemned solely because of his caste. He lives in a filthy outcast colony with his father Lakha, his sister Sohini, and his younger brother Rakha. Bakha is an eighteen-year-old boy, young and physically strong. His mother died long ago, and his father, now very old, is unable to work due to his frail and aging limbs. As a result, Bakha shoulders the responsibility of supporting the family, much like the head of a typical Indian household.

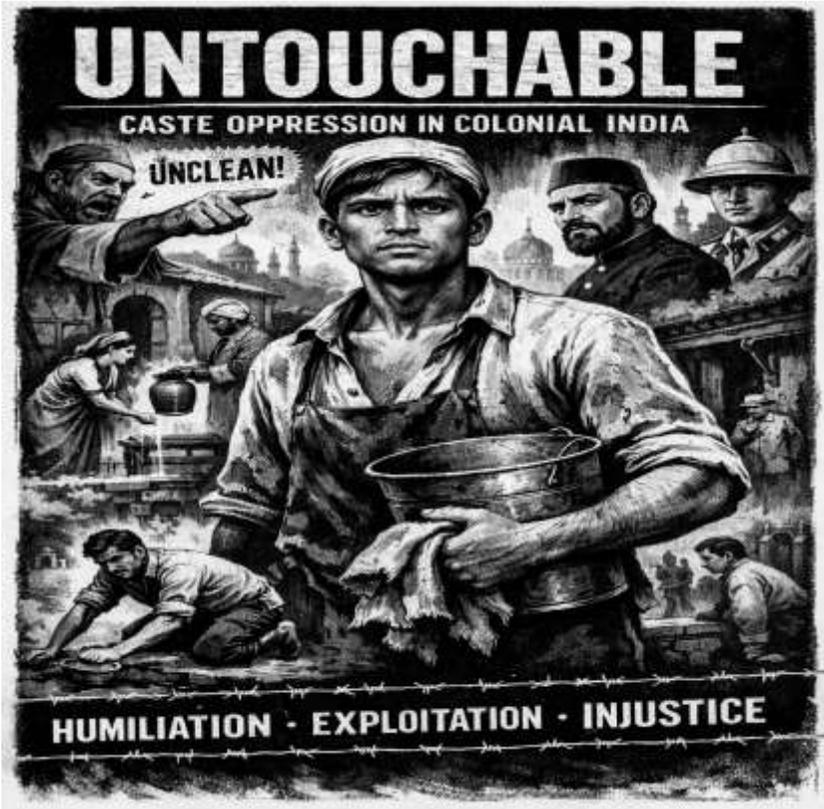
Despite his hard labor, his wages are meagre and barely sufficient to meet even basic necessities. Yet, his family remains helpless. In addition to economic deprivation, Bakha and his family must endure constant disgrace and humiliation for being outcastes, regarded as the “offspring of a lesser god.” Within the rigid framework of caste-based Hindu society, Bakha exists as a mute spectator and a perpetual object of shame.

Bakha’s sister Sohini represents the submissive and meek woman of the untouchable community. She is assigned the task of fetching water from the village well, carrying a pitcher each day. However, she is forbidden to touch the well herself and must wait for a high-caste Hindu to draw water on her behalf. The misery of the untouchables is poignantly highlighted through this dependency on higher-caste Hindus even for basic survival needs such as water. Due to their subjugation and poverty, they were denied access to private wells and forced to live amidst filth, dust, and hunger. Anand describes this condition vividly:

“The outcastes were not allowed to mount the platform surrounding the well, because if they were ever to draw water from it, the Hindus of the three upper castes would consider the water polluted.” (Anand, 14–15)

The novel is fundamentally a work of social protest, exposing the deep-rooted flaws of Indian society. It foregrounds the plight of the untouchables—referred to today as Dalits and termed *Harijans* in Gandhian discourse. Traditional Hindu society was divided into four principal castes: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. Although caste distinctions initially emerged from a division of labor, the system gradually degenerated when caste became determined solely by birth rather than occupation.

Mulk Raj Anand, firmly believing that the real India resided not in palaces and bungalows but in villages and humble huts, deliberately chose his hero from the lowest strata of society. In *Untouchable*, he presents India as it truly exists—inhabited by untouchables, carpenters, marginal farmers, destitute women, and impoverished children. Through each successive novel, Anand gives voice and agency to these social outcasts, powerfully portraying the suffering imposed by caste, class, and gender through his individual characters.



(OpenAI, 2026)

### **Implications of the Study**

The present study has significant social, literary, and academic implications. By critically examining caste, marginalization, and social injustice in *Untouchable*, this research reinforces the continued relevance of Mulk Raj Anand's work in understanding the structural roots of caste-based discrimination in Indian society. Although the novel is set in pre-independence India, the issues it foregrounds—social exclusion, humiliation, economic deprivation, and

psychological trauma—remain deeply embedded in contemporary socio-cultural realities.

From a socio-cultural perspective, the study highlights how caste operates not merely as a social classification but as a system of institutionalized inequality that regulates access to dignity, labor, education, and basic human rights. Through the character of Bakha, the research demonstrates how caste-based discrimination affects both material conditions and individual consciousness. The findings imply that legal abolition alone cannot dismantle deeply internalized social hierarchies; rather, sustained moral, educational, and structural reforms are necessary to challenge entrenched prejudices.

From a literary standpoint, this study reaffirms *Untouchable* as a foundational text in Indian English literature that foregrounds subaltern experience. Anand's portrayal of Bakha and other marginalized figures contributes to the discourse of Dalit representation and subaltern studies. The research suggests that literary texts can function as powerful tools of social documentation and ethical intervention, encouraging readers to confront systemic injustice and develop critical social awareness.

Academically, the study opens avenues for further interdisciplinary research by connecting literature with sociology, history, cultural studies, and political thought. It underscores the need for continued scholarly engagement with caste narratives through contemporary theoretical frameworks such as subaltern studies, Dalit discourse, postcolonial theory, and intersectionality. Additionally, the study can inform curriculum design in higher education by promoting inclusive

pedagogical approaches that foreground marginalized voices and encourage critical reflection on social inequalities.

Finally, this research implies that Anand's vision of a humane and egalitarian society remains unfinished. By revisiting *Untouchable*, the study calls for renewed intellectual and social commitment toward equality, dignity, and justice, reinforcing literature's enduring role in social transformation and national regeneration.

## **Conclusion**

Mulk Raj Anand makes a powerful and uncompromising statement against caste discrimination in Indian society through his novel *Untouchable*. He realistically portrays the mindset, lived experiences, and harsh realities of the subaltern classes. In the Indian socio-cultural context, subalternity operates through caste, class, and gender, with the caste system causing deep and lasting harm to society. Although untouchability was legally abolished in India, deeply ingrained social, mental, and traditional attitudes have remained largely unchanged.

The novel also highlights the persistence of class divisions, emphasizing that Indian society is not free from hierarchical structures. Anand urges society to recognize the seriousness of this pressing social issue and to take collective responsibility for change. He advocates for a Hindu society free from caste-based discrimination and inequalities determined by birth.

Through the character of Bakha, Anand presents a vivid and truthful picture of Brahminical India, where the suffering of the lower-caste

population was both pitiable and inhuman. Bakha becomes a symbol of the oppressed and exploited, through whom the novelist seeks to awaken social consciousness and moral awareness. *Untouchable* powerfully evokes the grim social realities of pre-Independence India, exposing the systematic exploitation and manipulation of marginalized communities. With remarkable realism and sensitivity, Anand succeeds in presenting a graphic and authentic portrayal of Indian society, making the novel a compelling social document of its time.

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Dr. Md Sufian Ahmed completed his Bachelor's and Master's degrees from Aligarh Muslim University and earned his Ph.D. from Nagaland University. He is currently serving as the Principal of Khairun Nessa Begum Women's College, Srigouri, Badarpur, Sribhumi, Assam (788806). With a strong academic foundation and administrative leadership, he has guided the institution toward academic growth and institutional development. Dr. Sufian has published several research papers in national and international journals and regularly participates in workshops, FDPs, webinars, and academic conferences to update his knowledge and contribute to scholarly discourse.

**Portrayal of Tribals, Land, Culture, and Displacement:  
Echoes of the Past**

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**Abstract**

The depiction of tribals, land, culture, and displacement remains a central and urgent concern in modern Indian literature. Rather than functioning as a marginal theme, it foregrounds the existential realities of indigenous communities whose identities are intricately bound to their ancestral landscapes. For tribal societies, land transcends material ownership; it embodies collective memory, sacred belief systems, ecological knowledge, and historical continuity. Displacement, therefore, signifies not merely physical relocation but a profound rupture of cultural identity and spiritual rootedness.

Mamang Dai's novel *The Black Hill* (2014) and Kamala Markandaya's novel *The Coffer Dams* (1969) compellingly explore this intimate relationship between tribe and terrain. In *The Black Hill*, Dai (2014) portrays the Adi community's deep integration with nature, demonstrating how myths, rituals, oral traditions, and environmental

consciousness are inseparable from the physical landscape. Similarly, in *The Coffin Dams*, Markandaya (1969) highlights the tensions that arise when development projects intrude upon indigenous spaces, revealing the cultural and ethical dilemmas embedded within modernization. As state-sponsored development and industrial expansion encroach upon tribal regions, they disrupt not only economic systems but also social harmony and cultural coherence. The resulting consequences include social fragmentation, erosion of language and tradition, and psychological trauma, particularly among younger generations exposed to assimilationist pressures.

Significantly, Dai's narrative does not reduce tribal communities to passive victims. Instead, it foregrounds resilience, agency, and cultural assertion (Dai, 2014). Through acts of remembrance and resistance, indigenous communities emerge as active custodians of land and heritage. Such literary representations emphasize the necessity of safeguarding indigenous rights and preserving cultural diversity, positioning literature as a powerful site of ethical engagement and socio-political critique.

### **Key words**

*(Land-Displacement, Loss of Cultural Identity, Preserving Cultural Heritage, Cultural Displacement, Tribal Identity and Socio-cultural Trauma)*

### **Introduction**

The portrayal of tribals', land, culture, and displacement is a recurring theme in Indian literature, echoing the struggles of indigenous communities across generations. Novels like Mamang Dai's *The Black*

*Hill* (2014) and Kamala Markandaya's *The Coffey Dams* (1969), like the Polavaram project, bring to the forefront the intricate relationships between tribals, their land, and their cultural practices. As Arundhati Roy notes, these narratives are not just about displacement; they're about the erasure of an entire way of life. The tribals' connection with their land is deep-rooted, often tied to their spirituality, traditions, and identity. Mahasweta Devi's works, like *Douloti the Bountiful*, highlight this bond, showcasing how land is not just a physical space but an integral part of tribal existence. The construction of Coffey Dams and other development projects often disrupts this bond, leading to cultural disintegration and psychological trauma. Writers like K. S. Singh and Ramachandra Guha have extensively documented the struggles of tribal communities, emphasizing the need to recognize and respect their rights and cultural heritage. *The Black Hill* (2014) is a poignant example of this, where Dai weaves a narrative that underscores the Adi tribe's deep connection with their land and their determination to preserve their culture. These narratives challenge to rethink development paradigms that prioritize economic growth over cultural sustainability and social justice. As Guha notes, there's a need for alternative narratives that value indigenous knowledge and promote environmental sustainability. The echoes of the past are loud and clear: displacement is not just a physical relocation; it's a cultural and emotional uprooting. By listening to these stories, we can work towards a more equitable future where development doesn't come at the cost of human suffering and cultural erasure.

*The Coffey Dams* (1969) by Kamala Markandaya Vs *The Black Hill* (2014) by Mamang Dai

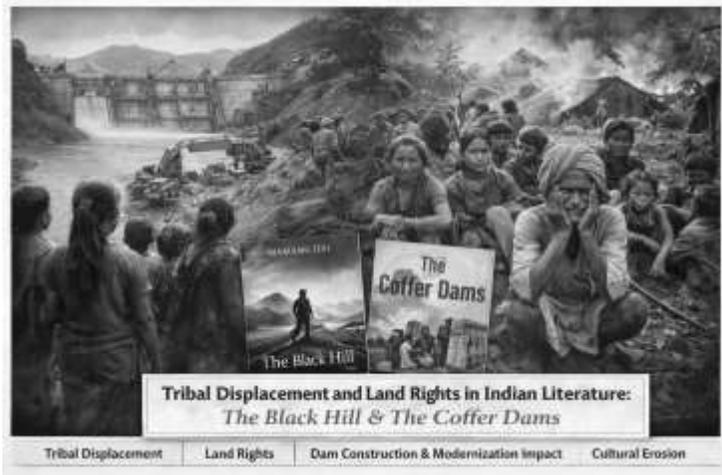
are the two novels that explore the complexities of human relationships, cultural identity, and the impact of modernization on traditional ways of life. Both novels delve into the complexities of cultural identity, particularly in the context of colonialism and post-colonialism. *The Coffey Dams* (1969) explores the tensions between British colonialism and Indian culture, while *The Black Hill* (2014) examines the intersection of indigenous traditions and modernity in Northeast India. The novels share a deep concern with the natural world and its relationship to human existence. *The Coffey Dams* (1969) features the construction of a dam in the Indian wilderness, highlighting the clash between human ambition and the natural environment. *The Black Hill* (2014), set in the hills of Arunachal Pradesh, explores the spiritual and cultural significance of the land to its indigenous inhabitants. Both novels grapple with the consequences of social change and displacement. *The Coffey Dams* (1969) portrays the displacement of local communities due to the construction of the dam, while *The Black Hill* (2014) explores the impact of modernization on traditional ways of life in the hills. These two novels also offer nuanced psychological portrayals of their characters, exploring themes of identity, belonging, and the human condition.

The main objective of this chapter is to analyze and portray how tribals were portrayed in both the novels *The Black Hill* (2014) by Mamang Dai and *The Coffey Dams* (1969) by Kamala Markandaya. The common and central points in both the novels are Britishers' establishing their mission in the tribal habitants as result, how tribals faced problems in their hands, tribals' reactions to it, how tribals were being treated by the colonizer and the consequences of the same. In

the novel *The Black Hill* (2014), the protagonist's aim is to establish Christian missionaries in the tribal territory. Gimur from Abor tribe and Khajinsha from Mishmee tribes are the two main tribal characters among the many, whereas in the *The Coffey Dams* (1969), Clinton is a protagonist whose aim is to complete the construction of *The Coffey Dams* (1969) in time. In the process of completing the Dam he is least bothered about the tribals working as coolies and their plights. In addition to it Clinton treats the tribal boy 'Bashiam' as Jungly wallah and never recognizes their role in construction of the dam and least bothered about their concern and sufferings. In *The Black Hill* (2014) Mamang Dai portrays how Father Nicolas Krick, a Jesuit priest tries to establish his mission on the Mishmee hills. In this process, he hatches many plans and makes friends with Kajinsha to execute his plan of establishing his aim on the hill.

Going into the details of both the novels there are some important concepts such as determination, challenge, obsession, love, conspiracy and relationship between major characters of the two novels are common factors and that are challenged in the two novels. In the novel *The Black Hill* Gimur and Kanjinsha come from two different tribal backgrounds and two different villages. Their family relationships, cultural background, aims, are affected by the entry of outsiders' into their lands. On the other hand, Clinton and Helen in the novel *The Coffey Dams* (1969) got united with love but how Clinton's harsh attitude towards tribal workers and Helen's soft corner towards tribals play a pivotal role in the construction of *The Coffey Dams* (1969) is to be portrayed in this chapter. The purpose of the novel *The Coffey Dams* (1969) is to complete the construction of the dam and *The Black Hill*

(2014) is to stop the white man's entry into their land forms the crust of the novel.



(OpenAI, 2026)

## Analysis of the Chapter

### Displacement of Tribals in *The Coffe Dams*

The Indian-born English author Kamla Markandaya is a literary powerhouse. The combination of her active participation in India's social life, her astute observation, critical acumen, and her feminine sensibility propelled her first novel, *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) to worldwide acclaim. Her other works include *Some Inner Fury* (1955), *A Silence of Desire* (1960), *Possession* (1963), *A Handful of Rice* (1967), *The Coffe Dams* (1969), *The Nowhere Man* (1972), *Two Virgins* (1973) and *The Golden Honeycomb* (1977). So far, she has published nine novels. Markandaya's knowledge of Indian culture and customs is just as genuine as her knowledge of the English men's

personalities. She is widely recognized as one of the most important Indian English novelists of all time. Critics of both Indian and international renown have read and praised her works with great enthusiasm. *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), the first novel by Markandaya, is a sad story told from the perspective of the novel's narrator, Rukmani. Accurately depicts the hardships endured by Indian peasants under British rule. The author takes us to the heart of a little South Indian town where nothing has changed in a thousand years. Over time, a tannery brings industry and cutting-edge technology to the community.

As the youngest of her father's four daughters, Rukmani often takes on the role of village matriarch. She weds her tenant farmer husband Nathan when she is only twelve years old. He may be financially strapped, but he certainly does not lack in regard for or devotion to his wife. Her spouse constructed the home where the couple now resides. Due to their financial situation, the family is at risk of going hungry. Also, they have to deal with the brutal whims of Mother Nature. The flood is followed by a prolonged drought, leading to disastrous destruction. Because of this, Rukmani and Nathan have had all their aspirations shattered. Things just keep getting worse for them. If he does this, he's being disloyal to her. Because they are starving, Ira, her daughter, turns to prostitution. Kuti, her youngest kid, starves to death from lack of food. Both of her sons, Arjun and Thumbi, have gone to Ceylon in quest of work. This results in the family being forcibly removed from their homestead. The couple finally gives up and decides to leave the town. Uma Parameswaran an Indo-Canadian writer says:

The narrative of the nameless farmer who stands silhouetted in the endless dusk of Indian agricultural bankruptcy, the horizon shining through the quiet trees now with scarlet gashes, now with soul-exalting splendor, constantly holding out the hope that the lowering sun would rise again after the night ever-approaching but never-engulfing, is portrayed in *Nectar in a Sieve. Some Inner Fury* (1955), her second novel, is distinct from her first. East-West conflict is introduced here for the first time by Markandaya and reappears in her subsequent novels. It's safe to say that Mirabai and her brother Kitsamy come from a privileged and sophisticated background. One of their brothers, named Govind, is adopted. Kit and Richard Marlow, a mutual acquaintance from Oxford, have travelled here from the British capital. Kit marries the conventional Premala while in India. Govind falls in love with her, despite his guarded nature. Kit supports the British Raj while Govind works to topple it by terrorist means. Both brothers have different political views. When Mira meets Roshan Merchant, a journalist, they hit it off. Mira runs across Richard while doing journalism work, and they end up back together. She goes to a remote area to aid an English missionary named Hieky in his efforts to establish a school for the local boys. In the past, Mira and Richard have gone sightseeing. Upon their return, they discover that the Quit India Movement has spread across the nation. Govind and his associates deliberately burned down the institution. A knife is used to kill Kit. Police have taken in Govind on murder charges. Govind gets acquitted and released during his trial. Both Mira and Richard had no choice but to separate from one other. Mira moves back in with her family to reminisce about the good old days.

*A Silence of Desire* (1960), is the third novel by Markandaya, and it focuses on the struggle of a married couple named Sarojini and Dandekar to reconcile their religion with modernity. A God-fearing woman annoys her devout husband. Dandekar is plagued by worry and fury as he accompanies his wife to a Swamy to have a tumor removed from her womb. The couple has been married for fifteen years. He doesn't give his loved ones the time of day. After explaining the situation to his employer Chari, Mr. Ghose was tasked with conducting an investigation into Swamy's background. The impasse is broken when Swamy suggests surgery to Sarojini. Now that Swamy has left, Dandekar is a transformed man who can finally find inner peace, but he is still plagued with remorse. When compared to the first three novels in the series, *Possession* (1963) falls short. This work uses symbolism to explore the clash between Eastern and Western worldviews. It's told by Indian author Anasuya, who travels to England to get her books published.

A young British lady who just divorced as Caroline Bell explores India; she meets Valmiki, a fourteen-year-old boy from a nearby hamlet. She eventually moves him to England, where he becomes a famous artist. Furthermore, she plans to take advantage of Valmiki's youth for her own sexual gratification. Valmiki starts to feel like a foreigner after a while. In response, she hands him a letter from his Indian Swamy buddy. He takes up painting again after reading the letter. Caroline is taken aback to learn that Valmiki is related to her housekeeper Ellie in some way. She deftly manages to break them apart. The letters purportedly from Swamy that were handed to Valmiki turn out to be forgeries, he learns later. Eventually, he breaks

up with Caroline and moves in with Annabel. Valmiki's return to India is facilitated by Anasuya's sale of one of his paintings. Indeed, Caroline will be joining us in India as well. Valmiki, however, claims that possessive women are not to be possessed, and so she rejects her. But in the end, Caroline gives Swamy hope by promising that Valmiki would come back to her.

To some extent, *A Handful of Rice* (1967), Markanday's work, may be compared to Bhabani Bhattacharya's *He Who Rides a Tiger* (1954). Ravi moves to Madras in search of better job prospects, but instead he finds himself unable to find steady work and filled with resentment. After being rejected by society, he turns to physical labor and quickly befriends the smuggler Damodar. During a night time chase with a police officer, he finds shelter in the home of a tailor named Apu. When Apu comes home, his wife binds his wrists and feet and beats him. She feels sorry for him when he admits to trespassing, so she lets him leave. There, Ravi finds himself falling for her daughter, Nalini. A change of heart and usefulness in the household follow. With Nalini at his side, he marries and sets down roots. His company thrives thanks to his efforts. He feels his salary is inadequate when compared to that of his peers. He runs across Damodar again, and this time he offers him dishonest labour. At this moment, he can't decide who is better, his wife Nalini or his buddy Damodar. He feels the tension between being truthful and being dishonest with Damodar more acutely with each encounter. His situation is becoming completely intolerable. Meningitis takes the life of his kid. The death of Nalin's kid and his subsequent silence has enraged the young guy. Once upon a time, there was a disturbance and the crowd used the opportunity to pillage a

granary. It's a stone-throwing incident. Ravi too participates and takes up a stone, but his inner knowledge is so powerful that it ultimately overcomes him. He decides to alter his behavior. Thus, Ravi's personal setbacks and struggles are the focus of this work.

*The Nowhere Man* (1972), Kamala Markandaya's next novel, is her most powerful and most mature work to date. It's basically a touching eulogy on the ongoing racism in England today. The author is in a unique position to fictionally mold an actual event. Srinivas and his wife Vasantha spend their early years in a tiny Indian town, but they are eventually compelled to flee the country because of British domination. As a result, they end up relocating to England. There, they had two sons: Laxman and Seshu. The two men, Laxman the manufacturing owner and Seshu the RAF pilot, go to Britain. Time passes, and eventually he loses his life in the German conflict. A case of TB claims the life of his wife, Vasantha. After his older son weds an English girl and moves in with her, Srinivas was left to his own devices. He takes a serious emotional hit from the loss of his wife. His company takes a hit, and he has no way to repair his reputation. When he meets Mrs. Pickering, an old widow, he decides to take her in as a housemate. She stands up for him as racial tensions begin to rise. A horrible race riot breaks out in 1965. A leader in the anti-colored movement is his neighbor Fred Fletcher. In spite of Srinivas's fifty years of residency in England, he forces Srinivas to see himself as a 'nowhere man' and an outsider. When he has a suicidal thought, Mrs. Pickering talks him out of it. Leprosy strikes him in his past. He is not anti-white, but a leper and that only makes things worse when he asks

his renters to leave. As a result of Fred's arson, Srinivas is rescued from the blaze but later dies from shock.

*Two Virgins* (1973), by Markandaya, is often regarded as the author's poorest work. There are six sections here. It's not bad in terms of theme. While Uma Parmeshwaran's 'If Two Virgins' succeeds for some readers it is because it taps the treasure house of basic human experiences, especially the ever popular one of adolescence,' in a series of well-worded, well-organized vignettes, 'If two Virgins fails' because it does not delve deeply enough into the human experiences it discusses.

The publication of her latest novel, *The Golden Honeycomb* (1977), was a significant turning point in her writing career. As a historical fiction, it spans the years from the turn of the century through 1947, when freedom was finally won. Devapur, a royal realm, is where the story takes place. There is a preface and an afterword, making the whole thing three acts. The author has therefore addressed issues of poverty and hunger, the fight for independence, the tension between tradition and modernity, and the East-West encounter. In addition to these topics, Markandaya has regularly dealt with Indian ethos in her works, demonstrating remarkable diversity within her narrow scope.

*The Coffer Dams* (1969), is a mature work by Markandaya that attempts to combine the Indian and British perspectives into a convincing story. There are a number of story points that are designed to shake the tribals' foundational beliefs and introduce them to new ways of thinking and behaving. The novelist's expertise is on display in the way she weaves the characters' interactions and the ideals they hold into the story's structure. The novel's premise reveals the infinite

complexity of an apparently simple story—the building of an Indo-British Daman project and the romance between an English lady and a disillusioned tribal crane operator. Instead of being a story about sexual promiscuity or racial discrimination, the book is a throbbing chronicle of human pain and cultural awareness set against the background of formidable elements of nature thanks to the novelist's deft handling of a clash of sensitivities and attitudes.

In each of Markandaya's works, the reader may expect to find a personal tale, a larger struggle, and a societal context. In this work, too, she employs this method of storytelling. Helen, split between two very divergent worldviews, is the protagonist here. The author addresses real-world complications that have direct bearing on the novel's central idea. Most of the time, she imagines just two or three of the characters in the story. Her perspective allows her to inquire more into people's true motivations. This plot's driving force is the desire to demonstrate the cultural tensions at play in a certain setting's ideological arena.

Kamala Markandaya's *The Coffer Dams* (1969) is about a tribe fighting for life against both human and inhuman forces, such as British technicians and fierce nature. In this process how tribals were depicted by Kamala Markandaya is the central point of discussion. About the novel, S. John Peter Joseph, Associate Professor at Saint Xavier College writes that Kamala Markandya's *The Coffer Dams* (1969) depicts the clash between a post-Colonial Indian hill tribe and a machine-based Western civilization. She takes a different approach to this topic, addressing the globe that even a tribal culture that has been impervious to change from the beginning of time would

eventually succumb to industrialization and modernity, much like cancer.

Poor indigenous people, the homeless, and the ordinary people have seen their lives ravaged by the unrelenting march of urbanization and industrialization. The story follows a British engineering business as it builds Coffey dams in the hills of Southern India in order to control the flow of a raging river. Howard Clinton, a British Chief Engineer, and Mackendrick, his business partner, begin work on a dam across the raging river. There are also a number of Indians working as engineers, technicians, and manual workers.

Kamala Markandaya writes:

Clinton, the project manager, exhibits several traits common to colonists. He has a cold, heartless, and callous disregard for the tribals and laborers. For him, the indigenous are irrelevant. Clinton says, 'the guys called them,' is what Kamala Markandaya says there are barriers between Clinton and his employees. Clinton was so disconnected from the folks who worked for him that it took some time for him to recognize that they did (CD 9). Clinton is portrayed by Margaret P. Joseph, who says of him, 'He thinks of them as archaic, but a necessary irritation if work is to be done.' In his mind, they are not real people with feelings and thoughts similar to his own. He doesn't give a hoot about them as people and has zero interest in their thoughts, feelings, or issues (Markandaya, p.p, 130-131).

After the 1950s, Kamala Markandaya appeared on the literary scene as one of India's most renowned English-language authors, having had

10 novels published. She has extensively addressed social, political, cultural, and economic issues facing modern India in her works. Her sixth novel, *The Cofferdams* (1969), depicts a tribal village near which British engineers Howard Clinton and Mackendrick intend to construct a large dam to control and channelize a turbulent river ‘that rose in the Lakes and valleys of the south Indian highlands and thundered through inaccessible gorges and jungles down to the plains with prodigious waste.

Going into details of the plot Helen, an Englishwoman newly married to a self-styled British engineer named Howard Clinton, relocates to India so that her husband may fulfil his contractual obligation to finish building a dam on a river in southern India. The destitute tribals are forced to relocate to a less desirable location when British engineers Clinton and Mackendrick, together with their families and helpers, arrive in India and occupy the tribal community. That’s why the tribesmen had it so rough during the pre-dam building periods. Construction of the dam is being done by the underprivileged tribal residents in the surrounding region. The primary crane operator is Bashiam, a member of the tribal culture and a trained mechanic. Howard Clinton, a British engineer, gave Bashiam the nickname ‘Jungly wallah’ because of his knowledge of the jungle. Though Bashiam is educated the narrator says about him:

Of them all, only Bashiam clung to the reservations. He was not like the others, a product of technical training colleges that were being urged into being up and down the country. He had been born in these hills and had followed the traditional craft of woodcutting until they began building the hydraulics

station, further up the river, uprooting his family, indeed his whole village, to do so. Bashiam had gone back out of curiosity and stayed, and was spellbound by the workings of strange powerful turbines. A discerning foreman had given him employment, and in the course of it he had learnt about electricity and machines, about building, repairing and dismantling, welding his new learning on to older, part inherited knowledge of forest, river and hill country seasons. It was his previous knowledge that inhibited him, preventing him from falling in line with the others. They made their plans, seduced by statistics: but he had seen what a cyclone could do, had cowered before the storms that swept down the hills to burst in the valley, knew that a rogue monsoon could make it at night in the most careful design. It was not easy for him to shed his misgivings, although his later training made him acknowledge that despite them planning was essential. (Markandaya, p, 18)

Though Bashiam is an educated and capable mechanic, he is nevertheless considered to be a Jungly wallah by Clinton and the Indians because of his increasing fondness with the British staff and Clinton's wife in particular. In relation to Clinton's feelings for Bashiam, the narrator makes the following observation:

Bahiam seemed to him to be riddled with fears, in thrall to spirits of forests and rain like the hill tribal man he still was at heart. Even the other Indians kept him apart, a stranger in their midst, calling him Jungly wallah as he had taken to doing. Jungly wallah: a man of the Jungle. A primitive just came

down off the trees. Englishmen and Hindu alike looked down their fine Aryans noses and covertly spurned the aborigines. (Markandaya, p, 19)

Helen, Clinton's wife, becomes close to the local tribal people during their brief stay in a region of India that is controlled by them. The tribal people's huts are more appealing to her than the elegant bungalows in which she spent her life but did not really appreciate it. She feels an inner need to connect with the indigenous people; therefore, she routinely visits their huts. Day by day, her fondness for tribals increases.

This is how the narrator describes it:

Helen got on well with the tribesmen. He had seen groups of them gathered around her in their compound, or accompanying her if she returned after sunset from her wanderings. (Markandaya, p, 21)

Helen's developing closeness with the tribals' creates tension in her marriage. She slips out into the jungle without informing her husband, following an impulse to spend time alone with the tribals. She gives no thought to what he may think of her choosing the tribals over her. Clinton despises tribal people, but his wife Helen and his coworker, an engineer named Mackendrick, feel compassion for them. His focus on the dam prevents him from seeing Helen's attraction to the indigenous people. Helen sees the natives as ideal people whereas; Clinton thinks they're backwards and barbaric. Helen passionately opposes her husband's decision to levy mass penalties on the tribesmen and provides food to prevent hunger deaths. Helen and Clinton's relationship is strained because of her affinity for indigenous people.

He attempts to get her to see that the natives don't merit her respect. Why she has become so attached to tribals is a mystery that has plagued his head. To the effect that, he is not thrilled with his wife's preference for the tribal community, he says:

What of, he asked himself in exasperation: of a tribe whose outstanding characteristic in his view was the severe retardation of its civilization? Or of the glib communication she had established with a people who presented to him only the blank opacities of their total incomprehension.  
(Markandaya, p, 31)

Helen's visit to the native settlement will allow her to better understand tribal culture. Without coming to this tribal hamlet, she would never have the great, happy experiences she has here. She realizes, after a little period of mingling with tribals, that she, and only she, really belongs in the tribal world, which offers the prospect of genuine happiness.

In the words of the narrator:

She played with children, rubbed flea powder, into the dog's jealous coats, watched the crops grow, watched men and women at work, stated herself with watchman, and most of all she marveled that such full rounded out living could go on, on so feeble and flimsy a footing. The fragile huts, that man and boy could put up in a day or a determined wind demolish in les: the primitive patches of surface-root crops of a community with one harvest in mind, rather than the recurrent cycle of growth; the haphazard clearing, overshadowed by encroaching forest: on these impermanent, flyaway

foundations, whole people build whole lives. (Markandaya, p, 39)

Helen needs the services of an interpreter so that she may communicate with the indigenous people and learn their language. With intent, she approaches Krishnan, but he refuses to assist. Then, she goes to Bashiam in the hopes that he would act as a liaison between her and his community members; unlike Krishnan, Bashiam readily accepts this role. Since Bashiam has lived among the tribes for so long, he has an unparalleled understanding of their culture and can educate Helen about their values. The narrator comments on his function as a liaison between Helen tribals.

Bashiam, the Hillman whom they called Jungly wallah, or even more disparagingly the civilized Jungly wallah. He became a linkman, providing the information she sought of a country and a people who intrigued her, whetting a curiosity with which she had always been liberally endowed. The curiosity grew with each encounter: no longer satisfied with watching, but wanting to know: entry achieved, now seeking performance. Bashiam helped to quench her desire to know, and she gave him generous credit. He firmly declined it. (Markandaya, p, 41)

Helen and Bashiam discuss a wide array of tribal issues, including Bashiam himself, throughout their talk. She inundates Bashiam with a variety of tribal-related questions. Bashiam does his best to gratify her by divulging as much information as he knows about them. He lacks answers to a few queries. The following exchange between Helen and

Bashiam demonstrates an Englishwoman's empathetic disposition towards Indian tribal members.

Helen one day said to Bashiam 'Do you know what they call you behind your back?'

'Jungly wallah' he said at once without hesitation.

Do you know what it means?

'A man of the jungle', an uncivilized man'

'What it really means' she said cruelly, 'is someone who doesn't count; someone who gets kicked around and doesn't do anything to stop it'.

He was puzzled by her vehemence, and saw no reason for it.

He said, 'do you mean me?'

Her anger began to scale up, crossed and compounded by a sense of shame. She controlled it and said, quietly, 'There used to be a village where the bungalows are... where our bungalow is a tribal village.'

A small settlement, yes,'

When they are told to go, they go.'

'Yes'

'Without protest, just got up and walked away, like animals,'

'I suppose you could put it like that.'

His calm unnerved her. (Markandaya, p, 45)

Helen gets as close to Bashiam as Clinton because she has no other option to get connected with as she has to stay there until completion of the dam. On the other hand, Clinton also tries to neglect her and she gets bored of her routine life. It is not because she has a genuine love towards tribal people. For a tribal group, an English woman's arrival

in their hamlet is cause for tremendous celebration. The villagers, both young and old, are overjoyed at the prospect that a portrayal of the British, who formerly dominated India, now lives among them, elevating their status in the eyes of those who live in the developed world. Helen's fondness for the natives stems from the same qualities that drive Clinton's hatred of them. Helen is attracted to the tribal people and their wretched lifestyle, but Clinton develops an instant distaste for them. She places tremendous value on indigenous people's ideas, practices, and ceremonies whereas Clinton dismisses them as examples of backwards thinking. Helen is laughed at by Clinton for believing the lies spread by the superstitious tribals when she assures him that snakes are always harmless.

Helen's fondness towards tribals can't be as real and genuine and it can be observed in two aspects: one she is ignored by her husband Clinton whose aim is completing the construction of the dam rather than his wife Helen. In this process he pays little attention to his family life. As she is ignored by Clinton and she gets connected with Bashiam to enjoy her time and at the same time Bashiam as an educated tribal knows how to behave politely and with love and affection he shows immense interest in her as an English woman. It is the basic qualities found among tribals. On the other hand, it is understood that she has never come across tribals and their lifestyle as they live in cosmopolitan cities. Their simple, pure lifestyle and values were attracted by Helen.

Moreover, Helen and Bashiam have a lot of similar interests and values. They have a lot in common in terms of their areas of interest. One of the most distinctive features of their temperament is their

willingness to challenge the norms of their community. Helen abandons the rest of the English, including her husband, and instead hangs out with the natives. Similar to how Bashiam chooses a career reviled by his fellow tribe members, he acts counter to the prevailing tribal mentality. Bird-trapping is another area where they find common ground. As Clinton watches Helen and Bashiam becoming closer, he decides to alter his behavior. When he learns that Bashiam has been bird-trapping in the forest, he begins to suspect that his wife's sudden interest in the hobby is a direct consequence of her relationship with Bashiam. Up until now, he had seen Bashiam as nothing more than a Jungly wallah. Nonetheless, he now sees Bashiam as a formidable adversary. The narrator states why Clinton's feelings with Bashiam have changed so dramatically: "He turned and looked at Bashiam and saw him then for the first time as a mantle man with whom Helen went: someone with whom one had to reckon" (Markandaya, p, 91).

When Bashiam was constructing the hut, he probably did not anticipate being pulled into the mud of desire one night by an English woman. According to an old proverb, 'what is fatted cannot be blotted'. When he returns to his hut one evening after a day of labor, he is surprised to discover Helen hiding in the darkness. She had travelled to this location at this time to sample the robust tastes of a huge tribesman like Bashiam. The narrator romanticizes the thought-provoking encounter between Bashiam a tribal, and Helen, an Englishwoman, by stating:

What you want with me, he said as he waited outside hesitantly, since it was the memsahib who desired. Who would use him as a blackjack on her white and gorgeous body, pull

him into her vortex to taste his abrasive tastes, and then, after savoring the unique experience, abandon him to what? What about me? He whipped himself, he asked himself. While her proximity sent warm currents throughout his body' (Markandaya, p, 140)

With the help of the tribal laborers Clinton intends to complete the construction of the dam before the arrival of monsoon. But god wills it otherwise. As the construction work nears the completion, a technical fault in the machine under operation leads to a thunderous blast that causes the death of thirty tribal laborers. As the news of this blast and its consequences spreads all around like fire, the tribals in hundreds gather at the site of the blast and feel a great shock when they see the dead bodies of their poor fellows.

Clinton's inhumane treatment of the natives reaches a pinnacle when he exhibits no emotion over the premature deaths of thirty workers. However, when he says 'the bodies can be integrated into the structure,' he shows his lack of empathy for the tribal group and instead expresses his anti-tribal mentality (p, 163). Clinton's plan to include tribe members' skeletal remains in the construction has been met with universal skepticism. Everyone agrees that the crushing machine should be dismantled and the corpses removed. That's why it's necessary to move the rock in order to bring the corpses to the surface. But who is brave enough to move the heavy rock? As is common knowledge, the equipment used to move the boulder is broken, and doing so might put the life of the operator in jeopardy. Because of this, the British engineers and technicians are hesitant to go through with the boulder removal. Bashiam, being a brave tribal

himself, steps up to the challenge when no one else is willing to do so for the sake of the deceased tribe's people. Despite Clinton's knowledge that the machine has acquired a significant malfunction and that whoever lifts the boulder in this state would surely lose their life, he permits Bashiam to do so.

Clinton, along with Bashiam and the other employees, is determined to have the building done before the onset of monsoon so that he may return to the United States without any delays. The heavy rains that come before the monsoon season ruin his intentions. He can't finish building because of the flooding caused by the rain. Clinton, who seems least concerned about the tribals' fate, ignores the engineers' repeated warnings. The unexpected torrent of rain is so severe and prolonged that the whole region is flooded, and everyone is terrified of the destruction they will face. Everyone is waiting for 'the ridges to rise clear' (p, 22), when the tribal headman has predicted the rain would cease. After expressing his forecast, the tribal headman tragically passes away. And just as he had prophesied, the rain ceases and the ridges clear a few minutes after his death. The completion of the dam building project has brought joy to the whole tribal hamlet and the British staff, since the villagers no longer have to worry about being flooded and the British engineers and technicians can return home to their families and helpers.

The tribal man Bashiam is a pivotal figure in the story. The novel's big and little events, from the first to the last, all involve him in some way. His importance in building the dam cannot be overstated. It's safe to say that the British engineers are completely satisfied with his performance as head crane operator. The elderly chief is another

resident of the tribal hamlet, and he has a small but important part to play at the novel's conclusion, acting as a conduit between the villagers and the British personnel in general, as well as the novel's heroine. He sees it as his duty as a village elder to ensure that the young tribe members maintain strong ties to their culture.

After reading Kamala Markandaya's *The Coffer Dams* (1969), one could get the impression that the representation of the tribals is very comparable to that of modern-day tribals living in rural tribal locations that stand in stark contrast to metropolitan centers. In Kamala Markandaya's *The Coffer Dams* (1969) the protagonist Helen retreats to the tribal world after finding the grandeur of modern civilization lacking. To integrate tribal people into modern society, it is important to stress the importance of education and economic development, and to encourage tribal people to make full use of the government program designed specifically for their benefit. This leaves us with just one option: cultivating a cooperative and cordial attitude towards them as a method of drawing them closer to us.

### **Love for Land and Tribal Culture in *The Black Hill***

Mamang Dai's novel, *The Black Hill* (2014), is a poignant portrayal of the Adi tribe's life, culture, and struggles in the hills of Arunachal Pradesh, India. The novel explores the intricate relationships between the Adi people, their land, and their traditions, set against the backdrop of modernization and external influences. The novel vividly depicts the Adi tribe's deep connection with their land, which is a central theme of the narrative. The hills, forests, and rivers are not just geographical locations but are imbued with spiritual significance, myths, and legends. The Adi people's relationship with their land is

one of reverence, reciprocity, and dependence. Through the character, the novel highlights the importance of preserving traditional knowledge and practices related to the land. Mamang Dai's novel provides a nuanced portrayal of Adi cultural practices, such as their rituals, festivals, and social norms. The novel explores the significance of oral traditions, myths, and legends in Adi culture, which are passed down through generations. The novel critiques the impact of modernization on Adi culture and traditions. The construction of a road, the introduction of modern education, and the influx of outsiders threaten the Adi tribe's way of life. The character of Miller, a government official, represents the external forces that seek to assimilate the Adi people into mainstream Indian culture. Through the Adi people's struggles, the novel highlights the importance of preserving cultural diversity and recognizing the rights of indigenous communities to their land and self-determination.

The novel *The Black Hill* opens with Gimur in the year 1847, in the Mebo village of the Adi region. Many neighboring tribes have gathered to discuss the British's proposed trading station in the hamlet. Gimur is introduced to Kajinsha, a leader of the Mishmi people. As they are so in love, they decide to run away together. Krick, a Jesuit priest, is getting ready to leave Paris and establish a mission in Tibet. From Assam, he would go to modern-day Arunachal Pradesh. In Kajinsha's area, Gimur makes his home. Kajinsha regularly visits the trading centers of Tibet and Burma. Auli, Kajinsha's first wife (Gimur is aware of this), her younger sister Chhomu, and Kajinsha's son Awesa are among the people she encounters on their journey to Zayul (Tibet) with Kajinsha. Buddhist Marpa is an enigmatic figure. The

Brokpas' and the Mishmi's had an understanding that the Mishmi's will keep outsiders out of Zayul, and that the Brokpas will stay out of Mishmi territory. Kajinsha wants unity among all the tribes and clans in his tribe so that they can work together to keep his region safe. The Khampti Chowsa and Kajinsha's cousin and fellow Mishmi chief Zumsha help him. Another Mishmi chief, Lamet, is broken, nevertheless. He is inspired by Marpa and has previously admitted white males into the region for financial gain.

Meanwhile, Krick finally makes it to Tibet after a long and perilous voyage. Kajinsha is also now in Tibet and is keeping a close watch on him. With Kajinsha's aid, Marpa suggests, Krick has made it to Tibet. He gives Kajinsha medicines and forces him to have sexual relations with Chhomu. Krick's brief time in Tibet is cut short when Chinese authorities expel him. He will be staying in Kajinsha region close to Tibet for the time being. After talking it out, Kajinsha and Krick become fast friends despite their divergent worldviews. As someone who has picked up on Kajinsha's affair with Chhomu, Krick can't help but feel bad for Gimur. Twins are a bad omen, and she has given birth to them.

Krick is forced to depart by Kajinsha since he was supposed to accompany the Tibetan regent when he met with the British in Assam. Gimur, still agitated, and Awesa set off towards Mebo. As a result, she will no longer have her son. Krick, who had previously spent a few days in Assam, eventually arrives in Mebo in search of an alternative route to Tibet through the Adi area. He forms a relationship with the Adi and Lendem a spiritual connection with Gimur. Later on, he is

forced to leave Mebo as well after being held responsible for starting a fire with his negative energy.

Kajinsha apologizes to Gimur and returns to pick her up. Meanwhile, Krick is again on his way to Tibet, this time accompanied by a different monk called Bourry. They went to Sommeu (Tibet) in 1954 and began setting up their shop. Once again, Kajinsha is the target of Marpa's accusations. He and Lamet devise a plan to eliminate the priest. Kajinsha is warned by Zumsha to put a stop to this, Kajinsha travels to Sommeu. Gimur has also independently arrived there. Unfortunately, they can't save Krick. Lamet gets there first, and he ends up killing Krick. To Gimur's arms he goes as he passes away. British authorities accuse Kajinsha of murder and take him into custody. Gimur, with the help of Chowsa and Lendem, tries her best but her efforts are in vain to free Kajinsha from the Assam prison of Dibrugarh. Many assaults against the British were carried out by several tribes after Kajinsha's execution.

Krick, Khajinsha, and Gimur play an important role in the novel. There are also other minor characters like Lamet, Sommeu, Chowsa, Lendem and Marpa. Gimur and Khajinsha are portrayed as saviors to their community and Krick is portrayed as a strong willed person whose ultimate goal is establishing his mission in Tibet by trying to understand the social differences among the tribals and their weakness. This reveals that when there is lack of unity among people it is certain that outsiders encroach in tribals' heartland and establish their mission. Mamang Dai, born in 1957, writes poetry, novels, and articles under her own name. She used to be a high-ranking government official, but she just left her post to focus on writing full time. She has contributed

to publications including the Sentinel, the Telegraph, and the Hindustan Times. She worked for the World Wildlife Fund in Arunachal Pradesh as the Project Officer for their Biodiversity Hotspots Conservation Programme. She has served in a number of roles for organizations including the North East Writers' Forum, the Raja Ram Mohun Roy Library Foundation, the Arunachal Pradesh Literary Society, and the Sahitya Akademi and Sangeet Natak Akademi. Dai received the Padma Shri, India's highest civilian honor, in the fields of literature and education in 2011. Famous for her works on Arunachal Pradesh, she is also a respected creative writer and cultural historian. She has written two books on the culture and cuisine of the state of Arunachal Pradesh, neither of which are well recognized outside of India (2005). Her artistic works span several genres. She has published three novels, *The Legends of Pensam* (2006), *Stupid Cupid* (2009), and *The Black Hill* (2014), which is about the colonial encounter with the Abor and Mishmee tribes over the murder of a Jesuit priest, Father Nicholas Krick, as well as two volumes of poetry, *The River Poems* (2004) and *El balsam (Songs of the River)* (2014). The mystical grandeur of Arunachal Pradesh is reflected in Mamang Dai's works, which also showcase the region's traditions, myths, beliefs, cultures, and beauty. In addition, they make an effort to fuse the oral tradition with the novel. She writes on how urbanization and modernity are eroding tribal identities and posing a danger to traditional ways of life.

*Legends of Pensam* (2006) by Mamang Dai, is a wonderful synthesis of the folklore, religious practices, historical background, and cultural practices of the Adis, an ethnic group indigenous to the Siang Valley.

Mamang Dai weaves her fiction and at the same time traces her origin, rejecting the depiction of history by the Raj and presenting discourse from the Subaltern point of view, against the historical backdrop of the assassination of Neol Williamson by the locals in 1911 and the Abor expedition of 1912.

Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam* (2006) is clearly motivated by a search for origins, since the author describes every little quirk of Siang Valley. The narrator takes a helicopter ride back to his hometown, and this is mentioned right at the beginning of the prologue. One possible interpretation of this trip is a literal return to one's own country or other place of origin. The community was so tiny that "few outsiders crossed our paths," as the narrator puts it, thus everyone there knew each other. (Dai. 2006: 4). Finding one's ancestry requires a visit to the past. The place where she was born comes back to her in vivid detail as the 'village heaved with life' that triggered the recollection. (Dai.2006: 4). 'Names and intriguing up like hidden diamonds, sparkling anew in their individual pathways and fates,' the narrator says, describing the image in her head. (Dai.2006:4). Her account of these mythical 'jewels' is compiled in her 2006 book, *The Legends of Pensam*, which is written from the author's first-person perspective. Rather than being narrated by hegemonic members who barely grasped the Adis of the Siang Valley's core. What Mamang Dai set out to do in *Legends of the Pensam* (2006) was to tell the stories of the people who lived there in the past and to provide us with a flavor of the region's culture, geography, faith, and traditions from the perspective of a local and a believer in the region's religion. In the

telling of her story, she travels through the halls of history in search of her beginnings.

*The Legends of Pensam* (2006), is a fantastic journey that reflects the author's search for her own origin and identity. An investigation of subaltern critique reveals that reconstructing history; the past of one's land, is the most important source for locating one's roots. *The Legends of Pensam* (2006) is a collection of legends pertaining to 'transition.' Mamang Dai informed us that the term Pensam might be defined as 'gardens that develop in the secret recesses of the heart.' (2006). Mamang Dai tells several Pensam stories under four titles. As the Legends progress, the between-hidden country truly takes the form of the Siang Valley, the narrator's home. Mamang Dai says that the Adi tribe exists in the prologue. The residents of the Siang Valley are the focus of the novel (Dai, 2006). Under the titles a *diary of the world*, *songs of the rhapsodist*, *daughters of the village*, and *a matter of time*, Mamang Dai relates many stories explaining the tradition, festival, geography, history, and tribal beliefs of the Adis.

In *Stupid Cupid* (2009) both Adna and Mareb are disillusioned with love. However, when Adna and Mareb initially arrived in Delhi, they were both enchanted with the city. Both of them fall in love with non-tribal Delhi males. Mamang Dai portrays them both as contemporary, liberal women who feel that religion, caste, and cultural distinctions have no bearing on romantic relationships. Both Adna and Mareb violate the cultural norms of their own homelands, which discourage intercultural marriages. In the majority of North eastern communities, it is customary to marry within a given ethnic, class, or social group, while rejecting others as inappropriate for marriage. People who marry

outside of their communities are either shunned or treated with disdain. Adna remembers her own aunt, who married a man outside of her community and was never mentioned in the family again since it was considered she had brought disgrace upon the family. Adna, like her aunt, wants to marry the person she loves, regardless of the individual's community. Mareb, on the other hand, did not want to confine herself to the four walls of her house, as did her mother. Despite her liberal beliefs, she finds herself bound and progressively shaped by conventional ways of thinking, and she accepts to marry a guy chosen by her father. But afterwards, her ex-lover, Rohit, entices and encourages her to fall in love with him again and have an affair with him. However, the guys they adore are only interested in having an affair with them in secret. The married partner of Adna never considers taking the relationship to the next level. It is implied that the male would eventually abandon her, albeit the reasons are unknown. Similar to Adna, many other women from the Northeast are fooled into love since they are not welcomed due to their ethnicity.

One of Mamang Dai's finest novels, *The Black Hill* was published in 2014 and won the Sahitya Akademi Award the succeeding year, in 2017. It was set in the state of Arunachal Pradesh in Northeast India during the years 1840 and 1850 and centered on the first recorded interactions between the British and the indigenous tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Fiction and nonfiction about the people's history are intertwined in this novel. The novel focused heavily on the Arunachal Pradesh tribes of Abor and Mishmee. When referring to the Adi people, the word Abor refers to their traditional name. The novel's protagonists, Gimur and Kajinsha, embody universal human emotions

through their experiences with love, loss, and ultimately, life. It also included Father Nicholas Krick, a French priest with a dogged determination to enter Tibet and do missionary work there.

The story of *The Black Hill* (2014) is non-chronological. The plot is presented in a linear fashion with a variety of time jumps, flashbacks, dream sequences, etc. it zooms in and out of a tale like a movie camera, following numerous people and plotlines. The tale is portrayed from a third-person perspective, giving readers complete insight into the main character and all of the other players. Both *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen are told from a third-person objective point of view. The events in the novel take place at the start of a period marked by upheaval and transformation. Dai writes in a lyrical and conversational style, therefore it's no surprise that she's a poet. Literally, it's a festival dedicated to the art of storytelling and the preservation of oral traditions.

The novel opens with the narrative of a 17-year-old girl called Gimur who lives in the Mebo hamlet of the Abor tribe. She's portrayed as a strong-willed, independent young woman who defies her family and culture in order to wed her true love. After losing her father when she was just six years old, she now lives with her mother. Her relatives in the narrative are aunt Moi and her cousin Lendem. What happens to Gimur is revealed gradually as the narrative unfolds. While that's happening, the pieces of the tales that have been connected together begin to fit together. The meaning of the word Mebo means both 'desire' and 'nostalgia' for the long ago time when brothers had lived together. (Dai, p, 27)

‘Our numbers are many,’ they said. Who can threaten us? The British may conquer the world but they will never take our land. The words of the migluns are like a fleabite. At the heart of this anger was the issue of runaway ‘slaves’ who had taken advantage of the tribes’ engagement as allies of the British during the Anglo-Burmese war. These ‘slaves’ were the offspring of men and women captured by the Abor in Tribal wars who had been absorbed into the tribe to perform domestic and agricultural services. (Dai, p, 25)

To understand the nature and power of tribals the above lines speaks about how tribals are determined to protect their own land from missionaries and British colonies. Tribals have always been exploited by the dominant groups of the people in the society and this is an example of how the British eyed tribal land to grab their land and dismantle their settlement who were living peacefully on the hill area. In this narrative, Gimur, Kajinsha, and Krick are all interconnected, and as a result, they play crucial roles in the plot. Kajinsha is a powerful figure from the Mishmee tribe. After the death of his father, he assumed leadership of his family’s clan. There were a lot of issues that Kajinsha had to deal with in the narrative. He had found the one he would spend the rest of his life with, but they were doomed from the start. Protecting his people from outsiders was only one of many duties he had to do as chief of his tribe. With its action taking place at a period of great social upheaval, the novel is packed with exciting developments. White settlers were busy setting up camp while local people were drawing boundaries around the area. Kajinsha had hoped to find calm, but the loss of his son Siengbow shattered his world.

Marpa from Somneu village was behind a conspiracy that made the surrounding clans feel unsafe, despite the fact that he had no intention of killing the French missionaries. Marpa concocted a plan in which Kajinsha would be held responsible for the murder. Lemet was the one who shot and murdered Priest Krick in 1854. Lemet is a very greedy guy who will do anything for financial gain. Marpa was ultimately successful in his schemes because of Lemet. There was a lot of atmosphere created by the tribal rivalries. As the narrative draws to a close, Kajinsha is kidnapped and sent to Debrooghur Jail, where his destiny is sealed when he accidentally kills a jail guard due to a misunderstanding. After this, Gimur and her cousin brother Lendem went to see Kajinsha in prison, where they were able to finally meet each other. However, the narrative goes on to reveal that Kajinsha and Gimur were responsible for the death of a guard. After Gimur's jailbreak, Kajinsha was presumed dead.

Contrary to popular assumption that tribal women are weak and inferior, Gimur exhibits strong and undeterred personality despite many taboos and superstitions. She says as long as there is breath in my body I will never bow down to any god and beg for mercy she told herself. (180). This is how tribal women display their bravery and strong willed attitude in the face of despair but they were portrayed in a negative manner in the majority of the non-tribal writings.

The French priest is linked to all the disasters that befall the protagonists. Krick was a guy with an unusual level of passion for his missionary work. Like Kajinsha, he had a chance to live, but his death was already predetermined. Kajinsha had attempted to warn him away from their country, but he had no luck. On his second trip to Tibet,

Priest Krick brought Augustine Bourry, a 26-year-old missionary along with him. The narrative begins after Krick's second attempt to reach Tibet in the year 1854. Now the link between the two tales is learnt. The Mishmee tribal man was executed after the deaths of the two French missionaries. Gimur played a crucial part in the novel by demonstrating unconditional devotion for his beloved. Her fate was brief and severe, but she faced it with dignity. Contrary to expectations, Mamang plays Gimur as a resolute individual from the very first scene to the very last.

After the Mishmee tribe leader (Kajinsha) dies, the novel ends, and Gimur is not mentioned again in the narrative. There was also no record of the discovery of the two priests' corpses. Two sides of the narrative of real love are shown: the greed of men and the failure to communicate that led to tragic outcomes. Due to its oral storytelling roots, this tale lacks internal coherence, yet its excellence rises to heights beyond the scope of most people's wildest dreams.

There are a number of pertinent themes that can be drawn from the novel, including the depiction of a love story and the act of genuine love. Gimur and Kajinsha, Krick's eternal devotion to the divine, is shown through their love tale. More good elements make reading enjoyable and rewarding for the readers. Each of the story's protagonists, Gimur and Krick, exemplifies 'Determination' in their own unique way. Despite this, there is open warfare between the families, highlighting the concept of 'Rivalry among tribes,' which is both distressing and all too typical in both ancient and modern societies. Sadness or sorrow is often felt when remembering how colonization led to the loss of one's cultural and political identity.

Gimur, Kajinsha, and Father Krick all hailed from various geographical areas, cultural backgrounds, and religious traditions, but fate drew them together. When their paths inevitably crossed, they made a feeble attempt to decipher each other. They were motivated by a desire to do well in many ways, such as defending their homeland against invaders, sharing the gospel, and experiencing life to the fullest. Their goals and aspirations were partially realized before tragedy struck. An excursion by troops into the steep areas interrupted the routines of the local tribal inhabitants. The Mishmee and the Abor were two of the many indigenous groups who resisted the arrival of outsiders because they valued their autonomy. Their opposition to the migluns or whites varies, however, from clan to clan. At the same time as some of the chiefs fought against their own brothers as British sepoys, for example, in the Suddya war, others, like Kajinsha's father, Kajinsha, and Zumsha, were adamantly opposed to the miglun's presence in their territory. Some chiefs and clans have tried to fight the migluns, but they have been mainly ineffective since leaders like Marpa and Lamet have colluded against their own people with the Migluns, which has stoked inter-tribal violence. The tribals believe in spirits and they have no faith in drugs as Arayars in Kerala, Krick gives an example how tribals die:

‘Krick realized that the people here had no faith in drugs and medical diagnosis. Everything that befell a man came from the spirit world and the only physician was the shaman who could intercede with spirits that caused human beings to fall ill and die. If the power of shaman was based on exorcism and unshakable faith in the unseen, he too had turned into a

foreigner shaman, the man who created belief that his touch would cure them. It is through faith that we are healed.’(Dai, p.p, 178-179).

To elaborate the above, tribals are underdeveloped due to their blind belief in spirits and exorcism. Many tribals still believe in superstitions and spirits and die. If they could come out of their faith they would definitely eradicate poverty and be on par with the mainstream. They have strong faith in taboos and spirits. They also believe in the existence of God.

Many colonialists saw missionaries and schools in mountainous regions as tools to further enslave the indigenous people there. When Father Nicholas Krick, a French priest, arrived in Mishmee territory, he was met with fierce resistance. The Mishmee had learned from history that whatever progress gained in one area always led to the miglun settling there and taking over the Mishmee’s land and other domains. Since the only way for Father Krick to enter Tibet is over the Mishmee highlands, he was unable to achieve his goal of preaching the gospel in Tibet. The tribal people, wary of his objective, repeatedly foiled him and his hopes. But it wasn’t all for nothing; he influenced and healed a few Mishmee tribespeople, and they gave him their thanks.

In addition to the colonial theme, other important components include the varied and vibrant local ecosystem, customs, cultures, beliefs, and the place of women within the home and the larger community. *The Black Hill (2014)*, like other postcolonial publications, challenges the conventional forms and methods of colonial literature. Postcolonial authors have complete sway over the tales they tell, since they develop

their own techniques and approaches to storytelling and convey their own versions of the past and present. This is done through using local idioms, metaphors, symbols, and speeches, giving their compositions a post-colonial flavor.

Tribes and clans in Northeast India have always had harmonious coexistence with their natural surroundings. A sense of ‘rootedness’ permeates the literature of Northeast India. The roots of the land that is loved and cherished, the roots of the people and the culture, all serve to illustrate this (Ngangom and Nongkynrih xii). The indigenous inhabitants of Northeast India hold land in the highest esteem. As shown with the Mishmee and Abor people of *The Black Hill* (2014), the land is more than just a surface; it is the people’s prideful home. For the natives, land is a major concern. Conflict between indigenous groups existed long before the era of European colonization, exacerbated by competition over resources including territory, fisheries, and game. It was the people’s deep attachment to the land they had called home for generations that made them so adamantly resist the migluns’ attempts to remove it from them. Indigenous lands were seen as places of logical deficiency for colonial reasons, whether they were really underutilized or vacant.

According to Plumwood, anthropocentrism is inextricably linked to colonial ideology. By imposing their own culture and infrastructure on native communities, colonists subjugate the natural world (‘Decolonizing,’ 504). As a result of colonialism, many indigenous peoples no longer believe in or practice their traditional ways of being deeply connected to the earth. Colonizers appropriated native lands for agricultural and industrial use and the development of tourist

attractions. However, the indigenous notion of land was gradually superseded by other ideas and terminology such as private property and deserialization (Featherstone 202). This resulted in the loss of land and property rights for the indigenous people. That's why discussions of geography and location feature prominently in postcolonial writing. It was a vexing problem even after colonial control ended, and it hadn't been solved throughout that time. To understand how much tribals of Mebo village value and love their land the following lines speak volumes. 'Our members are many,' 'Who can threaten us? The British may conquer the world but they will never take our land. The words of the migluns are like fleabite' (Dai, p, 25). Their strength and confidence to fight against the British is revealed in the above lines. Land is not only a place to live in and cultivate but it is a book for them to read and understand nature. They go to any extent to protect their land and save their culture.

To know how much, they love the land the following words of Kajinsha reveals the same:

Kajinsha said, 'The Tibetan lamas have books and you read your books for knowledge of God. We read the land. The land is our book. Everything here on this hill, the grass and the rocks and stones is saying something. And what falls from the sky- rain, thunder and lightning – are also the voices of spirits telling us something. It is how we learnt what is good or bitter, by living here and remembering what happens during the day and the night, every day for hundreds of years'. The time we have is what we call life. It is how I stand, hunt, sleep, and breathe. Who knows when life will end, and how death will

come- by fire, by water, a falling tree, illness or from the hand of an enemy? But whether one will live a long life, a successful life, these are not considerations. The desire is to live!' (Dai, p, 140)

This is how the majority of tribals feel and have opinions about life. They completely depend on the forest; they adore nature follow social values, respect and selflessness. They never crave for superficial happiness and they live life without harming anyone, cheating and depending on anyone. They always believe in themselves for their life.

Khajinsha also says. 'My father also told me that everything on earth and sky is connected since we are born of the same mother. It is very simple. We belong to the land. The land is a good mother. I take only what I need. Animals and trees offer themselves. We help each other survive. Tell me priest, what do you think of our land? ' (Dai, p, 141).

Kajinsha is a symbol of selflessness and stands firm for their community. His pure words reveal his true nature towards life and land. Contrary to modern man's attitudes who always want to have more and more and always accumulate property illegally and by unethical practices.

According to Crosby, the triumph of European imperialism may be traced to ecological and biological factors (7). Colonialism's ecological control has a chilling effect on indigenous people's respect for and belief in the natural world. Since, they no longer had access to the trees, woods, mountains, and other natural resources that had been fundamental to their religion and way of life. Westerners have a multifaceted conception of space that incorporates architectural,

physical, psychological, and theoretical dimensions. The indigenous way of thinking and the physical environment have been transformed by these ideas. The conquerors had a low opinion of indigenous territory and saw it as something to be ruled or controlled. For instance, indigenous people saw the land as a living entity, conquerors saw it as something that can be domesticated and improved upon. These actions altered the original and natural setting from which natives and tribal peoples drew inspiration for their myths, tales, and religious practices. The native settlements were free to make their own decisions on land use, resource management, and government. However, things changed significantly under British administration and have persisted in independent India. Over time, invaders used a variety of tactics to maintain control over indigenous populations. According to Xaxa ('Tribes and Indian,' 120), the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation Act of 1873 was enacted with the intention of drawing a boundary between the plains and the hill, the Dafla and the Abor people. This statute lacked a component of direct administration. This created a natural barrier between the hills and the plains, allowing the former to better defend their territory.

Humans are inextricably linked to the locations and landscapes that sustain them and bio regionalists work to restore this connection. In the narrative, it's not only the natives who are hostile to the migluns' incursion into their territory; the forest is, too. Due to a curve in the river system, British forces were unable to approach the settlement of Mebo by water. Even though the migluns were hampered by the rugged landscape, the indigenous people consider it a boon since it keeps outsiders out of their country.

In the meroms (communal hearths) of Mebo, the locals have been having heated discussions about how they have no intention of selling their property to the migluns. As their ancestors had done before them, they continued the practice of vigilantly guarding their territory. People in the meroms came together out of a shared passion for their homeland, giving new meaning to the adage "a fire brings people together" (Dai, p, 25).

The position of women in tribal communities is varied, since each maintained its own norms regarding the female population. Arunachal Pradesh's many tribes adhered to the patriarchal system. The father is the family's leader, but the mother manages the household's affairs. Like her husband, she supplied for her family's necessities. It is criticized that the mother or wife's mishandling of household affairs has led to hunger or poverty in the home (Nyori 209). Traditional women were less privileged than males in various aspects of social and political life, but their mistreatment by men is not condoned by society. Boehmer suggests that tribal or indigenous women are also referred to as subaltern women. They are 'doubly' or 'triply' marginalized on the basis of their gender, race, socioeconomic class, religion, caste, sexual orientation, and regional position (216). In her discussion titled 'Finding the Word,' Dai offers her perspective on traditional women in tribal cultures.

In his wanderings around the countryside Krick met men and women who were gentle and humble. They bowed their heads and moved aside to let him pass. If he tried to greet them they averted their gaze (Dai,

p, 231). Tribal women were very loyal and hardworking. It is even seen in the present day tribal women.

In rural communities, it is difficult to distinguish between men and women since they rely on one another and labor together throughout the seasons. Tribal women are women of wisdom and have keen insight. They possess lasting strength and are able to pick up the pieces of their life after failure, hardship, and so on. They understand the laws and conventions of their culture and recognize that they cannot have everything; nonetheless, they are pleased with what they have. By doing so, people do not feel restless about the items they were unable to obtain. The traditional women do not identify as contemporary feminists. Traditional women were content with what they had, however contemporary feminism is based on women's equal involvement in politics, religion, and for equal pay for equal labor. They were proficient in agricultural labor, housework, and other tasks typically handled by women. However, this does not imply that women are equal to men.

*The Black Hill* (2014), tells the story of many powerful female characters who suffered at the hands of patriarchal and colonial authorities. This showed the gloomy reality of the indigenous women whose sufferings and voices had been muted. In addition to being colonized by their own people, women were also colonized by the colonial authority. The other side recounts the tale of their valor, tenacity, and diligence. Both menfolk and the whites in authority were amazed and intimidated by their courageous and independent choices. Since the novel is set in tribal communities, traditional roles and expectations of women are interwoven into the plot.

Gimur did everything that young girls in the village were expected to do, in fact she was better than most at household chores, but, as her mother always said, she was uncontrollable and daring, more like a boy, whistling and climbing trees and getting into scrapes. At the time this story begins Gimur was seventeen-year-old. (Dai, p, 2)

Gimur is the only lady whose life illustrates a great deal. Her name is derived from the month in which she was born. Gimur was a hard worker who excelled at domestic tasks, but she also acted like a boy by whistling and climbing trees, causing her to sustain injuries. While the males oversaw and protected their lands from the miglun, the women managed the houses and performed fieldwork. After Gimur met Kajinsha, she established a bond with him and was prepared to leave her community to live with Kajinsha. She concealed her affair from her mother, but was unable to do so in front of Lendem, his cousin, who reprimanded her since Kajinsha was from a different village and inter-village romances were forbidden. Gimur broke societal traditions by eloping with Kajinsha when she was pregnant with Kajinsha's kid.

Gimur knew that what she had to say would not be well received. She remembered how Moi's husband had gone to look for the woman who had run away from the village with a lover so many years ago. Her uncle and relatives were respected elders but they were taciturn men who talked only of abhor pride. She knew what they would say. An Abor girl should behave according to custom. Every girl is an asset to her family and a man taking her away in marriage must

compensate her parents for depriving them of a daughter. This was the customary bride price called a-regelic. Just for a moment Gimur wondered how many heads of mithun she might have been worth. But she knew Kajinsha's gifts, even if he brought them, would be rejected. Abor villages were secure enclaves where the rules of tradition were never crossed. Inter-tribe relationships were a betrayal to the community and girls married outsiders were spurned, useless like mustard seed scattered to the winds. (Dai, p.p, 45-46).

Contrary to the mainstream opinion that tribal women are weak and inferior. Gimur exhibits outstanding valor and faces challenging tasks to protect her family and land. She also faced humiliations and hardships in the process of achieving her aim. She stands as one of the important and turning points in the novel. She may be misportrayed in other novels written by elite sections of writers. There are many such tribals who can exhibit their valor and strength in times of suppression but they were not portrayed appropriately.

The clear days of winter passed quickly and Mebo settled into an uneasy calm. Many of the visitors had left saying, 'Call us when the time comes.' They knew, just as well as the British did, that nothing could happen now during the rainy season from March till September. Everything was subservient to nature. Now it was plating time, working time. A gust of wind brought the first drops of rain and Mebo had a deserted look as men and women prepared their artik-fields, before the weather broke. (31). Gimur's mother worked day and night planting, weeding, washing, fetching, digging, her hands were

black with charcoal, wood, fire, paddy, husk, pigs, and fowl. Gimur pitied her. ( Dai, p, 35).

It is a known fact that tribals both men and women, work relentlessly in agricultural fields when the season starts. Before the start of the agricultural work they perform various Pooja's and sacrifice goats in order to appease their village deity for the smooth and seamless performance of the work. The neighboring villagers and their tribesmen also help each other in their work. This is the nature of tribal people and their mutual respect towards their clan people. 'Tell them about us,' Kajinsha had said to her that night in the jail. 'Tell them we are good. Tell them we also had something to say. But we cannot read and write, so we tell the stories. '*Stories...words...I too have word.* (Dai, p, 288)

This is how Kajinsha genuinely reveals the nature and reality of tribals to outsiders who don't understand the tribals. Change is inevitable but change for good is better than unchanged. There is no restitution there. Perhaps some stories always elude the historians. Perhaps some things are better left unexplained. What happens to their endeavor, their very presence in these mountains? In their lifetime, they couldn't convert a single soul. The south Tibet mission was abandoned, forever, it seemed, and until one day in December of 1997 the first Mismi Catholic converts were baptized in a makeshift church in Tezu, the headquarters of Lohit District.

Khajinsha strongly resists the encroachment of outsiders particularly father Krick because he feels that their unity, identity and tranquility of their life-style may get shattered once they land in their settlements. Khajinsha's character reveals so many ethics, moral values and hard

realities of life. Khajisha's approach to life is worth learning. He says nature gives the true meaning of life. Tribals in *The Black Hill* strongly believe in god. Everything is in the hands of God, he thought. Everything is already written. Build me a temple and I will dwell among you...he thought about the innocence of the human heart given by God (140). To understand their love and attachment to land and forefathers Khajinsha says 'songs of magic blood and dreams. It has been there from the time of our forefathers. I only have to recall and it is there here...' he tapped his forehead. My father also told me that everything on earth and sky is connected since we are born to the same mother. It is very simple. We belong to the land. The land is a good mother; I take only what I need. Animals and trees offer themselves. We help each other survive. Tell me, priest, what do you think of our land?' (141).

This is how tribals are deeply connected to the land and nature. There is no selfishness or any sort of self-possession; they only live for their happiness and take what nature gives. Pure love and the true meaning of life are seen among tribal life-style and self-resistance and resistance from outsiders. Gimur the wife of Khajinsha is emotionally strong and portrays how a tribal woman can face and resist all the hurdles in her personal life as well as in her community. Though tribals in *The Black Hill* strongly believe in taboos, superstitions, spirits and god they continue to resist and fight strongly for their rights and preserve their land from outside forces.

It is in this context that the following quote from Mahatma Gandhi is very insightful. 'We must approach the poor with the mindset of the poor, and so too, we must approach the tribesmen.' If tribals realise

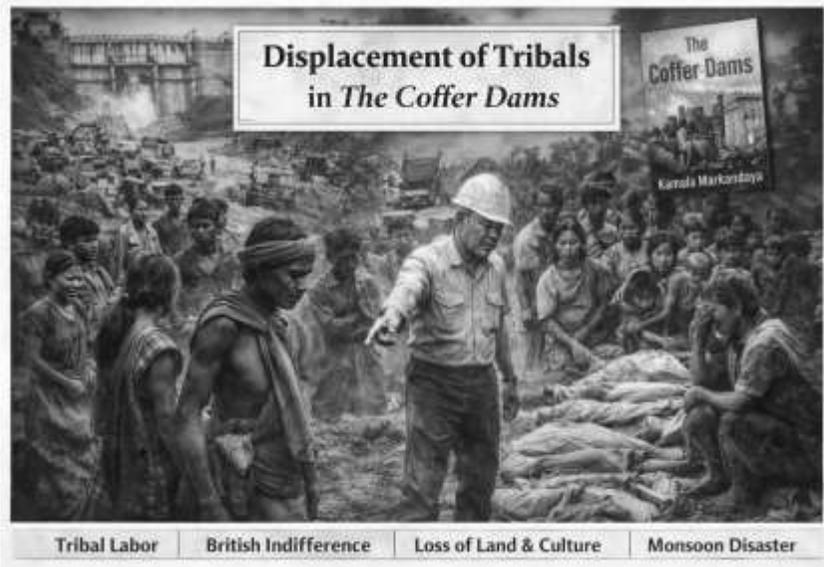
and change their mindset that they are not ‘inferior’ to or less than anyone in the society they would be on par with mainstream society. In *Coffer Dams* (1969) construction of the Dam symbolizes modernization, advancement but at the same time the inhuman attitude of the Clinton towards tribal people leads to the step motherly attitude and colonial mindset of the people who are in power.

Whereas in *The Black Hill* though tribal people portray as the saviors of their culture and identity they were cheated by their own community people and outsiders. They preserve their culture and ancestral spirit and also they have strong belief in superstitions and spirits which is a barrier for their development. Krick’s character portrays modernization who strongly desires to establish Catholic missionary in the tribal region. It also signifies death and destruction. Kajinsha and Gimur stand as strong pillars for the development of the plot. They also stand for bravery and courageous people who always want to preserve their language, values, land and culture and also protect their land.

Both the novels portray the suppression and resistance of tribals. Because of these reasons tribals are still underdeveloped and their conditions have not been improved. The violent and unexpected fury of nature which suddenly creates havoc in the lives of the people and as a result of it people from *The Coffer Dams* and *The Black Hill* suffer a lot. In addition to it, tribals in both the novels are misportrayed by outsiders. The outsiders, whether it could be Britishers or missionaries, have a common goal of accomplishing their aim. In the process of establishing their mission they are least bothered about tribals and not

shown any concerns or treated them equally. This shows the discriminatory attitude of the mainstream and outsiders.

By the end of the two novels, the aim of outsiders is known as a dominant and exploitative nature towards tribal people that created havoc in their lives. But tribal people are the most affected and losers of their native land, cultural values, traditions. Both the novels place high value on emotions, love and affection, cultural integrity, taboos, rituals, and their dreams are shattered by the outsiders who they never expected to happen.



(OpenAI, 2026)

### **Implications of the Study**

The portrayal of tribals, land, culture, and displacement in works like *The Black Hill* (2014) by Mamang Dai and *The Coffer Dams* (1969),

by Kamala Markandaya has profound implications, as noted by writers like Arundhati Roy and Mahasweta Devi, who have extensively written about the human cost of development projects. The narratives underscore how displacement isn't just physical relocation; it's a cultural and emotional uprooting, as Dai vividly captures in *The Black Hill* (2014) . Tribals are forced to leave behind their ancestral lands, sacred sites, and traditional ways of life, leading to identity crises and social disintegration. The construction of *The Cofferdams* (1969) , like the Polavaram project, exemplifies this, where thousands of tribals are displaced, their lives irrevocably altered, as highlighted by Roy in her non-fiction works. These stories also bring to the forefront the clash between traditional knowledge systems and modern development paradigms. The tribals' deep connection with nature, their sustainable practices, and rich cultural heritage are often pitted against large-scale projects, raising questions about whose development is being prioritized, as Devi's works like *Douloti the Bountiful* poignantly illustrate.

The portrayal also highlights the resilience and resistance of tribal communities. *The Black Hill* showcases the Adi tribe's determination to preserve their culture and land, mirroring real-life movements where tribals fight for their rights and against displacement, as seen in the works of writers like K. S. Singh, who documented tribal movements and struggles.

The implications of these narratives are multifaceted:

- They challenge policymakers to consider more inclusive and sustainable development models, as advocated by Roy and other writers.

- They underscore the importance of recognizing and respecting tribal rights and cultural heritage, echoing the sentiments of scholars like Ramachandra Guha.
- They bring attention to the need for alternative narratives that prioritize environmental sustainability and social justice.

Eventually, these stories serve as a reminder of the echoes of the past that continue to shape the present. They urge us to listen to the voices of indigenous communities, to value their knowledge and traditions, and to work towards a more equitable future. By doing so, we can ensure that development doesn't come at the cost of cultural erasure and human suffering.

### **Conclusion**

After a thorough study of these two novels, it is understood that both the novels have a common vision in their novels that is in *The Coffer Dams*, completing the construction of the dam signifies modernization and change in the life-style of people. It is both challenging and inviting change in the system. Whereas, in *The Black Hill* setting up a Christian missionary in the tribal hamlet which paves the way to the entry of the British. The tribe put all out efforts to stop their entry. In this process they faced so many hardships and obstacles, pathos and bathos. Though both were written by two different socially and culturally different writers, both these novels have tribals who play a key role in the novel. In *The Black Hill* Mamang Dai portrays the importance of land in tribals' life. How tribals learn everything about life through nature, and their love and affection and attitude towards life is very much appreciable but change of life-style is also equally important in life.

In *The Coffe Dams*, Kamala Markandaya portrayed tribals as savage, sluggish, uncivilized, and Jungly wallah, which is humiliating and misportrayal of the tribals. More focus was laid on the non-tribal characters such as Clinton, Helen, Mackendrick, Krishnan and they were depicted as the main characters in the novel. Except Bashiam, other characters' names were not revealed by the writer. This shows her discriminatory attitude towards tribals. Though Bashiam and other tribal characters worked to construct the dam their names are not even mentioned and nowhere in the novel were they portrayed properly and genuinely. This shows the sullen attitude of the elite and mainstream writers.

On the other hand, Mamang Dai comes from a tribal background of Arunachal Pradesh she has struggled to establish herself as writer and experienced the hegemonic nature of the elite. She depicted tribals fighting spirit and resistance genuinely in her novel *The Black Hill*. Gimur and Kajinsha as the protagonist of the novel played a crucial role in the novel. Though it is a historical novel the events and incidents in the novel are portrayed without distortion of the facts. They symbolize the true valiant nature and fighting spirit of the tribals. Though the majority of the characters are tribals, some non-tribal characters like Krick are also portrayed in a true sense in the context of the novel.

Moreover, in *The Black Hill* Mamang Dai portrayed tribal culture, their land, values, taboos, and belief system genuinely. To understand the culture of any community all these aspects play a vital role in understanding the tribals and their life-style. The true love and nature of tribals to preserve their land and culture is impeccable. The conflict

between tribal culture and the miglun, or British, has a prominent position in Dai's works. In addition to this, Dai provides a thorough description of the 'Adi' and 'Mishmee' people's beliefs, culture, myths, stories, and way of life. The novel's central theme is the transformation of the indigenous population from the pre-colonial to the post-colonial period.

Dai depicts Kajinsha as a victim of eviction. Kajinsha's hardships force him to protect his territory against any alien incursion. Kajinsha is not held guilty for the death of the French priest Krick in the novel. He is persecuted as a result of the presumed rumors propagated among the people in the hills, as well as the wrath of the other tribes. This reversal of the previously held belief reveals the author's aim to take a strong stance against the colonial depiction of the Tribes. The killing of Kajinsha demonstrates the colonizers' motive. They do not seek justice for the death of the Christian priest, but rather to subdue the Tribes' opposition to their progress into tribal territory and bring them under their rule. Dai's emphasis on the loss of the British in her words 'the white people running' suggests a postcolonial tone. Her narrative not only depicts tribal resistance against the British and their defeat, but it also reveals the ignored and forgotten annals of the tribals in Indian linear history.

Mamang Dai laments for the inaccurate interpretation of several authentic tales from the native people in western literature. She believes it is her responsibility to fight textualization and reconstruct the histories of the silent past. 'Every morning, I think all the stories of the world are connected,' she says, explaining why she chose to tell the story. There are still untold, distinct stories, a different voice

informs me at night. There are a lot of forgotten tales in the world, as well as ones that date back a hundred years or less. (Dai ix) She feels that the priest's account is likewise contrived. The evidence states that a Mishmi chief was accused of being responsible for the priest's demise. This story attempts to highlight the tribals' pitiful acts. However, they differ from what is described in the texts. Kajinsha tries to smash the British mirror: 'Tell them about us...' inform them of our positive performance. Tell them we had something to say. But we are unable to read or write. According to Dai (288), 'we tell stories'. Kajinsha's relatives massacred Lamet's family in retaliation for betraying him to the British, but they had no idea what the history books would state.

Dai's work fiercely resists British cultural colonialism. Cultural hegemony tries to improve colonial control by promoting religion and missionary schools. One social group exerts authority over another. According to philosophy and sociology, a varied society can be governed and dominated by one social class. Western countries consider themselves superior to Orientals and seek to teach them their way of life. Mamang Dai's *The Black Hill* highlights the anguish and suffering of northeast indigenous communities that have been overlooked or distorted in history and literature, perpetuating colonialism. The novel creates a fresh interpretation of tribal history including a local spirit. The work captures the essence of the Northeast tribes' traditional ethos, which is rapidly disappearing.

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Dr. Dhanavath Makla is an accomplished scholar and educator, presently serving as Associate Professor of English at Government Degree College, Hayathnagar affiliated to Osmania University, Hyderabad. He holds a Ph.D. in English Literature, has qualified UGC-NET and also previously worked as School Assistant English teacher at ZPHS, Thurpugudem Village Thungathurthy mandal, Suryapet Dist. Telangana. Dr. D. Makla has published extensively in reputed journals, presented papers in national and international conferences. He also attended national and international seminars and workshops in Telangana. He has 15 years of teaching experience and held responsibilities in various college level committees.

**Voices from the Margins: Dalit, Tribal, and Minority  
Interventions in Indian Literatures**

By

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DOI Number: <https://literaturechronicle.com/doi-2026-55664>**Abstract**

Indian literature has historically been dominated by privileged, elite, and majoritarian perspectives, resulting in the marginalisation or distortion of Dalit, Tribal (Adivasi), and religious minority voices. Consequently, the lived realities of caste oppression, cultural erasure, displacement, and communal exclusion were largely absent from the literary mainstream. This chapter examines how Dalit, Tribal, and Minority writings intervene in Indian literature to challenge entrenched hierarchies and redefine literary representation. The central research question guiding this study is: How do Dalit, Tribal, and Minority literary traditions contest dominant social narratives and contribute to a more inclusive understanding of Indian society and culture?

Methodologically, the chapter adopts a qualitative and comparative literary analysis, drawing on selected texts written in various Indian languages and English. It situates these works within their socio-historical contexts to examine themes of oppression, resistance, identity formation, and cultural assertion. Dalit literature foregrounds the brutal realities of caste discrimination while affirming self-respect and human dignity. Tribal literature articulates indigenous relationships with land, ecology, and community, simultaneously critiquing displacement, state violence, and capitalist exploitation. Minority writings explore questions of belonging, religious identity, cultural survival, and the impact of communal politics.

The chapter argues that these bodies of literature are not peripheral but central to the study of Indian literature. They disrupt canonical boundaries, challenge aesthetic hierarchies, and demand ethical and political accountability from literary discourse. By recuperating silenced histories and foregrounding subaltern experiences, Dalit, Tribal, and Minority writings contribute to the democratization of literary space. Ultimately, the chapter concludes that these interventions are essential not only for reshaping Indian literary canons but also for fostering social awareness, empathy, and justice in a deeply stratified society.

### **Keywords**

*(Dalit Literature; Tribal Writing; Minority Voices; Indian Literatures; Marginalisation; Social Justice)*

## **Introduction**

Indian literature embodies the complex plurality of the Indian subcontinent, marked by diverse languages, cultures, religions, and social structures. Despite this richness, the literary canon for much of history was shaped predominantly by upper-caste, elite, and majoritarian voices. This dominance resulted in the systematic exclusion or misrepresentation of Dalits, tribal (Adivasi) communities, and religious minorities. Their lived realities—characterised by caste oppression, cultural marginalisation, displacement, and communal vulnerability—were either silenced or filtered through stereotypes created by socially privileged writers (Guru, 2009; Rege, 2013). Consequently, literature often reinforced social hierarchies rather than questioning them.

In recent decades, however, Indian literature has witnessed a significant shift. Writers emerging from marginalised communities have begun to narrate their own experiences, thereby transforming literature into a site of resistance and self-assertion. Dalit, Tribal, and Minority literatures challenge not only social inequality but also the aesthetic norms and ideological assumptions of mainstream literary traditions. These writings do not merely seek inclusion within existing canons; rather, they interrogate the very foundations upon which such canons were constructed (Limbale, 2004). As Sharan Kumar Limbale (2004) argues, Dalit literature is rooted in lived experience and collective suffering, making it fundamentally different from literature produced from positions of social privilege.

Dalit literature, in particular, has played a crucial role in exposing the brutal realities of caste discrimination and untouchability. Autobiographical narratives such as Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* (2003) and Bama's *Karukku* (2012) foreground everyday experiences of humiliation, exclusion, and violence. Valmiki (2003) poignantly recalls being forced to eat leftover food, or *joothan*, as a child, revealing how caste oppression operates through routine practices rather than isolated acts. These personal narratives function as collective testimonies, transforming individual pain into political critique. Dalit poetry and fiction similarly articulate anger, protest, and hope, asserting dignity and humanity in a society that has historically denied both (Rege, 2013).

Tribal or Adivasi literature adds another critical dimension to marginal writing in India. Rooted in oral traditions, folklore, and indigenous worldviews, tribal narratives emphasise a deep connection between land, nature, and community. At the same time, they document the historical and ongoing exploitation of indigenous peoples through colonialism, state policies, mining, and development projects (Xaxa, 2011). Writers such as Mahasweta Devi have drawn attention to tribal struggles, but more recently, Adivasi writers themselves have begun to articulate their realities from within. Their writings challenge dominant notions of progress and development, exposing how displacement and environmental destruction threaten both cultural survival and physical existence (Narayan, 2018). Tribal literature thus redefines literature as a space where ecological concerns, cultural memory, and resistance intersect.

Minority literatures, including writings by religious and linguistic minorities, further complicate the landscape of Indian literature. These texts often engage with questions of identity, belonging, and marginal citizenship in a nation shaped by majoritarian nationalism. Muslim writers such as Saadat Hasan Manto and contemporary authors like Ismat Chughtai and Najm Hosain Syed have explored themes of communal violence, gender, and displacement, particularly in the context of Partition and its aftermath (Hasan, 2000). Minority writings also address the pressures of assimilation and the fear of cultural erasure, highlighting the fragility of pluralism in contemporary India. As Ahmad (2012) notes, such literature resists homogenising narratives of the nation and insists on the recognition of difference as a democratic value.

Collectively, Dalit, Tribal, and Minority literatures function as powerful interventions in Indian literary traditions. They challenge the assumption that literature is a neutral or purely aesthetic domain, instead revealing its deep entanglement with power, ideology, and social structures. By employing forms such as autobiography, poetry, fiction, and oral narratives, marginalised writers expand the boundaries of what counts as literature and whose experiences are considered worthy of representation (Guru, 2012). These texts foreground lived experience as a legitimate source of knowledge, thereby contesting dominant epistemologies.

This chapter argues that marginal literatures are not supplementary to mainstream Indian literature but central to understanding Indian society and culture. They recover silenced histories, question inherited

hierarchies, and imagine alternative futures grounded in equality and justice. By creating new literary spaces rooted in resistance and self-representation, Dalit, Tribal, and Minority writings contribute to the democratization of literary discourse. Ultimately, engaging seriously with these traditions enables the construction of a more inclusive, ethical, and socially responsive literary history.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The present chapter is grounded in an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that draws primarily on Dalit theory, Subaltern Studies, Postcolonial theory, and Cultural Studies, with additional insights from Critical Caste Theory and Identity politics. These interrelated frameworks enable a nuanced analysis of Dalit, Tribal, and Minority literatures as forms of cultural resistance that challenge dominant power structures within Indian society and its literary canon.

At the core of this study lies Dalit theory, which foregrounds lived experience (*anubhava*) as a legitimate and essential source of knowledge. Articulated by thinkers such as B. R. Ambedkar and later developed by scholars like Sharan Kumar Limbale (2004) and Gopal Guru (2012), Dalit theory critiques Brahmanical ideology and caste-based epistemologies that have historically excluded Dalit voices from literary and cultural production. Limbale's concept of a distinct "Dalit aesthetics" emphasizes authenticity, social commitment, and collective suffering rather than elite notions of beauty or universality. This framework is crucial for understanding Dalit literature as a

counter-discourse that exposes caste oppression while asserting dignity, self-respect, and political agency.

The chapter also draws significantly on Subaltern Studies, particularly the work of Ranajit Guha (1982) and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988), which interrogates how histories and narratives of marginalised groups are erased or mediated by elite voices. Spivak's seminal question, "Can the subaltern speak?" is especially relevant to this study, as Dalit, Tribal, and Minority writings represent moments where the subaltern not only speaks but writes back, challenging structures that once silenced them. This framework allows the chapter to examine how marginal literatures recover suppressed histories and contest dominant historiographies and literary traditions.

Postcolonial theory further informs the analysis by situating marginal literatures within the broader context of colonial and postcolonial power relations. Scholars such as Homi K. Bhabha (1994) and Frantz Fanon (1963) highlight how colonial legacies continue to shape identity, culture, and inequality in postcolonial nations like India. For Tribal and Minority literatures, postcolonial theory helps explain issues of displacement, cultural erosion, nationalism, and communalism. It also enables an exploration of hybridity, liminality, and resistance, particularly in minority writings that negotiate belonging within a majoritarian nation-state.

The framework of Cultural Studies is employed to view literature not merely as an aesthetic product but as a cultural practice embedded in relations of power (Hall, 1997). From this perspective, Dalit, Tribal, and Minority texts are read as interventions in cultural politics that

challenge hegemonic meanings and representations. Cultural Studies allows the chapter to analyse diverse literary forms—such as autobiography, oral narratives, folklore, poetry, and protest writing—as valid and politically charged modes of expression that disrupt canonical hierarchies.

Additionally, Critical Caste Theory provides an analytical lens to examine caste as a structural system comparable to race, class, and gender (Guru & Sarukkai, 2012). This framework highlights how caste operates across social, cultural, and literary domains, shaping access to representation and recognition. It also intersects with identity theory, which helps analyse how marginal writers negotiate identities shaped by oppression, resistance, and collective memory.

Together, these theoretical perspectives enable the chapter to conceptualise Dalit, Tribal, and Minority literatures as transformative forces that challenge exclusionary literary traditions. The framework supports the argument that marginal literatures are central—not peripheral—to Indian literary studies, as they democratise knowledge, reconfigure aesthetics, and foreground social justice as a critical literary concern.

## **Analysis**

### **Chapter Analysis: Marginal Literatures as Counter-Discourses in Indian Literary Traditions**

The chapter critically analyses Dalit, Tribal, and Minority literatures as transformative interventions within Indian literary traditions. Rather

than functioning as supplementary or alternative streams, these bodies of writing fundamentally interrogate the ideological, aesthetic, and political foundations of the literary canon. Through experiential narratives, culturally rooted forms, and resistant language practices, marginal literatures expose how literature has historically been complicit in sustaining caste hierarchy, cultural domination, and social exclusion. This analysis situates these literatures as counter-discourses that reconfigure representation, authorship, and the ethics of reading.

### **Dalit Literature: Speaking Against Caste Oppression**

Dalit literature emerges as one of the most radical literary movements in modern India, grounded in the lived experience of caste-based humiliation, violence, and deprivation. Unlike mainstream literary traditions that often aestheticised suffering or ignored caste altogether, Dalit writing foregrounds caste as a material and psychological reality shaping everyday life (Guru, 2009). Rooted in the emancipatory philosophy of B. R. Ambedkar, Dalit literature conceptualises writing as an act of resistance rather than artistic indulgence. Limbale (2004) explicitly argues that Dalit literature is inseparable from social struggle, asserting that “Dalit literature is that literature which artistically portrays the sorrows, tribulations, slavery, degradation, ridicule, and poverty endured by Dalits” (p. 30).

Autobiography occupies a central position in Dalit literary production, as it allows writers to convert personal memory into collective testimony. Texts such as Omprakash Valmiki’s *Joothan* (2003) and Bama’s *Karukku* (2012) document everyday practices of exclusion—segregated seating, denial of education, ritual pollution—that reveal

caste as a lived structure rather than an abstract category. Valmiki's recollection of being forced to eat leftovers from upper-caste households is not merely anecdotal; it exposes how caste oppression is normalised through routine social interactions. As Valmiki (2003) writes, "Joothan was not just food, it was a symbol of our humiliation" (p. 2). Such moments dismantle romanticised visions of village life often found in canonical Indian literature.

Dalit poetry further intensifies this critique through anger, irony, and direct address. Poets like Namdeo Dhasal and Jyoti Lanjewar reject metaphoric subtlety in favour of confrontational language that unsettles readers (Rege, 2013). This stylistic choice is not a lack of literary sophistication but a deliberate refusal of elite aesthetic norms that prioritise beauty over truth. Dalit literature thus advances an alternative literary ethics in which authenticity, political urgency, and collective memory take precedence. By reclaiming voice and agency, Dalit writers challenge the caste system's epistemic authority and demand recognition of Dalit humanity within literature and society.

### **Tribal Literature: Voice of Indigenous Communities**

Tribal or Adivasi literature offers a distinct yet interconnected critique of dominant literary and social paradigms by foregrounding indigenous relationships with land, ecology, and community. Historically, tribal communities were either romanticised as primitive or erased from literary representation altogether (Xaxa, 2011). When they did appear, their stories were mediated through non-tribal writers, reinforcing colonial and upper-caste perspectives. Contemporary tribal

literature disrupts this pattern by asserting indigenous self-representation and epistemologies.

A defining feature of tribal writing is its rootedness in oral traditions, folklore, myths, and collective memory. These narrative forms resist linear historiography and challenge Western literary conventions centred on individualism and written textuality (Narayan, 2018). Tribal texts often present land not as property but as a living entity intertwined with identity and survival. Displacement caused by mining, dams, and development projects becomes a recurring theme, revealing how state-led modernisation disproportionately marginalises indigenous communities. As Xaxa (2011) notes, development frequently operates as an extension of colonial extraction, rendering tribal lives expendable in the pursuit of national progress.

Mahasweta Devi's representations of tribal resistance brought national attention to these issues, but recent decades have seen a growing corpus of Adivasi-authored texts that speak from within the community. These writings challenge dominant narratives of progress by exposing their ecological and human costs. Tribal literature thus functions as both cultural preservation and political protest. By recording endangered languages, rituals, and ecological knowledge, it resists cultural erasure while asserting the continued relevance of indigenous worldviews.

Importantly, tribal narratives complicate the human–nature divide central to modernity. They reveal how environmental destruction is inseparable from social injustice, making tribal literature crucial to understanding India's ecological crises. In this sense, Adivasi writing

extends literary resistance beyond identity politics to encompass environmental ethics, positioning indigenous voices as essential to rethinking sustainability and justice.

### **Minority Literatures: Identity, Memory, and Belonging**

Minority literatures in India articulate the anxieties, aspirations, and vulnerabilities of communities positioned outside the cultural mainstream. These writings often emerge in contexts of communal violence, political marginalisation, and cultural stereotyping, making identity and belonging central thematic concerns. Muslim literary traditions, particularly Urdu literature, have played a significant role in documenting the trauma of Partition and its enduring psychological aftermath. Writers such as Saadat Hasan Manto expose the absurdity and brutality of communal divisions through stark realism. In stories like *Toba Tek Singh*, Manto destabilises national boundaries by highlighting the human cost of political decisions (Hasan, 2000).

Post-Partition minority writing frequently grapples with loss, displacement, and fractured identities. These themes persist in contemporary literature, where minority authors address issues of surveillance, citizenship, and everyday insecurity in a majoritarian political climate (Ahmad, 2012). English-language novels and regional texts alike interrogate the assumption of a homogeneous national identity, insisting instead on pluralism and difference. Minority literature thus resists nationalist narratives that equate belonging with conformity, asserting the right to exist without erasure.

Christian, Sikh, and linguistic minority writings further expand this discourse by highlighting region-specific histories of marginalisation. Together, these texts reveal how minority identities are shaped through negotiation rather than fixed essence. Literature becomes a space to contest stereotypes, reclaim memory, and articulate alternative visions of community. As cultural artefacts, minority writings underscore that Indian identity is inherently plural and contested rather than unified and stable.

### **Language and Literary Style from the Margins**

One of the most significant interventions of marginal literatures lies in their language and stylistic choices. Dalit, Tribal, and Minority writers frequently employ everyday speech, regional dialects, and non-standard linguistic forms to remain faithful to lived experience. This linguistic practice challenges elite literary traditions that privilege Sanskritised, formal, or Anglicised registers (Guru & Sarukkai, 2012). By refusing linguistic “purity,” marginal writers democratise literary expression and disrupt hierarchies of taste.

Orality plays a crucial role, particularly in tribal and Dalit contexts, where storytelling, songs, and collective narration precede written forms. The incorporation of oral rhythms into written texts unsettles the dominance of print culture and redefines what constitutes literary legitimacy. Translation has been instrumental in bringing these works to wider audiences, especially across linguistic and national boundaries. However, scholars caution that translation is not a neutral act; it must preserve the political urgency and cultural specificity of

the original texts (Rege, 2013). Inadequate translation risks domesticating radical voices and diluting their resistance.

Despite these challenges, translation has facilitated cross-cultural solidarities and expanded the scope of Indian literary studies. The global circulation of marginal literatures has also prompted comparative frameworks that situate caste, indigeneity, and minority identities within broader debates on race, colonialism, and subalternity.

The analysis demonstrates that Dalit, Tribal, and Minority literatures fundamentally reshape Indian literary traditions by centering voices historically excluded from representation. Through experiential narratives, alternative aesthetics, and resistant language practices, these literatures expose the entanglement of literature with power and inequality. They challenge canonical authority, recover silenced histories, and imagine more just cultural futures. Far from occupying the margins, these writings are central to any ethical and inclusive understanding of Indian literature.

# **Voices from the Margins**

Dalit, Tribal, and Minority Interventions in Indian Literatures



(OpenAI, 2026)

## **Implications of the Study**

The present study carries significant implications for literary studies, pedagogy, cultural discourse, and social awareness in the Indian context. By foregrounding Dalit, Tribal, and Minority literatures as central rather than peripheral to Indian literary traditions, the study challenges entrenched canonical assumptions and calls for a reorientation of how literature is read, taught, and evaluated.

First, the study has important implications for Indian literary historiography. Traditional literary histories have often privileged elite, upper-caste, and majoritarian voices, thereby presenting a partial and exclusionary narrative of Indian culture. By demonstrating that marginal literatures actively reshape literary forms, themes, and aesthetics, the study underscores the need to revise literary canons to include texts rooted in lived experience, resistance, and social critique. Such a reconfiguration would result in a more representative and ethically grounded literary history that reflects India's social realities rather than idealised cultural constructs.

Second, the study contributes to theoretical debates in literary criticism by affirming the validity of experiential knowledge as a critical framework. Dalit, Tribal, and Minority writings challenge purely formalist or aesthetic approaches to literature and foreground the political dimensions of literary production. The study thus supports interdisciplinary critical practices that draw on sociology, history, caste studies, postcolonial theory, and cultural studies. This approach expands the scope of literary analysis and encourages scholars to engage with questions of power, exclusion, and representation as central rather than supplementary concerns.

Third, the findings have direct implications for pedagogy and curriculum design. Incorporating marginal literatures into academic syllabi can foster critical thinking and social sensitivity among students. Exposure to narratives of caste oppression, displacement, and minority marginalisation enables learners to engage empathetically with histories that are often absent from mainstream education. The

study suggests that teaching such texts can help dismantle inherited prejudices, promote democratic values, and cultivate a more inclusive understanding of nation and identity.

Fourth, the study highlights the importance of language, translation, and accessibility. Since many marginal texts are written in regional languages, dialects, or oral forms, the study draws attention to responsible translation practices that preserve cultural specificity and political intent. This has implications for translators, publishers, and scholars, urging them to treat translation as an ethical act rather than a purely linguistic exercise. Greater institutional support for translation would also help marginal voices reach wider national and global audiences.

Finally, the study has broader social and cultural implications. By validating literature as a space of resistance and self-representation, the study reinforces the role of cultural production in promoting social awareness and justice. Dalit, Tribal, and Minority writings not only document oppression but also imagine alternative futures grounded in dignity, equality, and coexistence. Recognising and engaging with these literatures can contribute to more informed public discourse and strengthen commitments to social democracy.

In sum, the study demonstrates that marginal literatures are indispensable to understanding Indian society and culture. Their inclusion and serious engagement have the potential to transform literary studies, educational practices, and social consciousness in meaningful and lasting ways.

## Conclusion

This study has examined Dalit, Tribal, and Minority literatures as decisive and transformative interventions in Indian literary traditions. By situating these bodies of writing within their socio-historical, cultural, and political contexts, the paper has demonstrated that marginal literatures do not merely supplement the literary canon but actively interrogate and reconstitute it. The analysis establishes that Indian literature, when viewed through the lens of marginal voices, emerges not as a unified or neutral cultural domain but as a contested space shaped by unequal power relations, exclusions, and struggles over representation.

The discussion of Dalit literature highlights how experiential narratives dismantle caste-based epistemologies that have historically structured literary production. Through autobiography, poetry, and fiction, Dalit writers foreground lived experience as a critical mode of knowledge, challenging aesthetic norms that detach literature from social responsibility. Similarly, Tribal literatures disrupt dominant narratives of progress and development by articulating indigenous perspectives rooted in land, ecology, and collective memory. These texts expose the continuities between colonial extraction and postcolonial state practices, thereby expanding literary inquiry to include ecological justice and indigenous sovereignty. Minority literatures, in turn, complicate nationalist and majoritarian discourses by foregrounding questions of identity, belonging, memory, and cultural survival. Together, these traditions reveal the plurality of

Indian experience and resist homogenising representations of nation and culture.

The study also underscores the significance of language, form, and translation as sites of resistance. The use of everyday speech, oral traditions, and non-standard linguistic registers challenges elite literary hierarchies and redefines literary legitimacy. At the same time, the circulation of these texts through translation raises ethical questions about representation, mediation, and cultural specificity, reinforcing the need for responsible scholarly and editorial practices.

By integrating Dalit theory, Subaltern Studies, Postcolonial theory, Cultural Studies, and Critical Caste Theory, the paper advances an interdisciplinary framework that enables a more inclusive and ethically grounded approach to literary analysis. Such a framework is particularly relevant for contemporary literary studies, where questions of social justice, representation, and knowledge production are increasingly central.

In conclusion, the study argues that engaging seriously with Dalit, Tribal, and Minority literatures is indispensable for any rigorous understanding of Indian literatures and society. These writings recover silenced histories, challenge inherited hierarchies, and imagine alternative futures grounded in dignity, equality, and pluralism. Recognising their centrality has the potential to transform literary scholarship, pedagogy, and public discourse, aligning literary studies with broader democratic and humanistic commitments.

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### **Author's Bio**

Sk. Abdullah is a dedicated Ph.D. research scholar with academic interests spanning English Literature, Cultural Studies, and Digital Humanities. His research critically examines the intersections of digital technology, narrative form, and cultural identity in South Asian contexts, with particular emphasis on digital reading practices and contemporary literary aesthetics in India. He has contributed scholarly chapters to edited volumes and actively participates in academic initiatives, including workshops, faculty development programmes, and quiz-based scholarly engagements, reflecting his commitment to continuous learning and pedagogical innovation.

**Reading What Is Not Said: Caste, Canon, and the Limits of Representation**

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**Abstract**

From its early decades to today, Indian English fiction has been read both as a witness to social changes and as a carrier of human values. It has often been praised for creating a space of moral reflection, cultural memory and ethical imagination. Still, one of its most intractable challenges is around caste, its representation, deferment or unspoken nature. This paper takes caste not as a social theme, but as a problem of literary representation as such. It points out that caste often enters Indian English fiction by passing through silence, abstraction and partial articulation, and makes for a comfort in the narrative in spite of structural inequalities having been indeed left intact. Through close readings of selected texts, the chapter examines how caste is variously represented, deferred, or left unspoken in Indian English fiction. While these texts are an admission of caste oppression, often there is the disruptive potential in them through reconciliation and moral appeal. The last part of the paper deals with two texts, Mahasweta Devi's

*Draupadi* (1997) and Bama's *Karukku* (2000) which shows how caste is articulated in terms of violence, testimony and refusal, and also to confront literary form and readerly expectations. The paper also takes selective but important insights from Ambedkar, Spivak and Gopal Guru, to guide the close readings of the texts. By looking closely at what is left unspoken, it shows why silence and representation matter ethically, suggesting that attentive reading needs to work with narrative conditions which make caste visible, invisible or left unspoken.

### **Keywords**

*(Caste, Indian English Fiction, Silence, Representation, Narrative Comfort, Ethics of Reading)*

### **Introduction**

Indian literature in English has frequently been hailed as a space of moral reflection, cultural memory and ethical imagination. From its early decades to today, Indian English fiction has been read both as witnesses to a social change and as a carrier of human values. Still, perhaps the greatest challenge within this tradition lies less in what is represented than in what is left unsaid. In the literary canon, caste appears neither consistently nor coherently. It is occasionally named, sometimes displaced, and more often left unspoken. This paper begins by attending to that very muteness. Rather than asking why caste does not appear in some texts, it asks a more difficult question of what work does this absence do. Silence here is not considered as a failure of individual writers, or as a simple lack of awareness. Instead, it is

approached as a representational strategy that uncovers the limits of liberal humanist literary traditions in India. Many canonical texts envision social harmony, moral development or national belonging without addressing caste as a material and lived structure of inequality. In doing this they create a kind of narrative comfort in which caste is present as background and absent as a problem.

Reading what is not said therefore calls for a change of method. It has to do with paying attention to narrative atmosphere, ethical abstractions and assumptions that frame literary worlds. This perspective does not intend to question the honesty or integrity of literature. Rather, it recognises that literature, like all other forms of culture, operates in frameworks of ideology, which determines what can be said and what cannot be said. This paper argues that caste in Modern Indian writing operates in different modes of representation. In certain works, caste is left unspoken or transformed into a moral issue while in some others, it is recognized but dealt with by reformist or spiritual frameworks. Finally, in these texts, representation loses its usual form, making way for breaks, refusal, or the power of personal accounts to take its place. Tracing these shifts enables us to understand not only how caste appears in literature, but also how literature explores its own ethical limits. To build this argument, this paper takes a purposefully selective approach in choosing the works. Canonical pieces by R K Narayan and Anita Desai provide the analytical backbone and are read closely for the narrative silences and ethical abstractions. Texts by Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand are transitional figures in which caste is visible, but mediated through nationalist or humanist frameworks. Finally, writings of Mahasweta Devi and Bama

are approached as moments of rupture and refusal which challenge the very conditions of literary representation. The paper does not attempt to provide an exhaustive history of the caste in Indian literature. Instead, it reads a small but significant set of texts in order to demonstrate the operation of silence, visibility and rupture as different representational responses to caste. It thus proposes that the study of literature and caste must attend not only to what is represented, but also what is made invisible under the claims of universality, aesthetic ideals, or moral principles.

### **Theoretical Framework: A Poetics of Silence and Rupture**

This study is grounded in a critical framework that treats caste not as a social theme to be represented, but as a structural problem that tests the ethical limits of literary form. Drawing upon Ambedkar's conception of caste as a system of power rather than a moral failing, Spivak's critique of representation and epistemic violence, and Gopal Guru's analysis of humiliation as a constitutive social experience, the framework reads literature as an ideological field in which visibility, silence, and voice are actively produced. Representation is thus understood not as reflection, but as regulation: a set of narrative strategies that decide what may appear, what must be deferred, and what must remain unspeakable.

Within this perspective, Indian English fiction is analysed along a spectrum of representational positions that move from ethical abstraction to political rupture. The framework rests on four interlinked propositions. First, silence is not absence but a narrative

technique that naturalises hierarchy by converting structure into background. Secondly, mediation through morality, spirituality, and empathy transforms caste from a system into a sentiment, thereby containing its disruptive force. Thirdly, rupture marks the point at which literary form itself fractures under the pressure of violence and humiliation, exposing the limits of ethical universality. Finally, refusal designates those modes of writing in which testimony displaces aesthetics, and experience becomes theory.

Together, these propositions constitute a model of ethical reading that attends not only to what texts say, but to how they manage inequality through form, tone, and omission. The framework positions literature as a site where caste is not merely depicted, but negotiated, deferred, disciplined, or destabilised. In doing so, it offers a critical vocabulary for reading the canon against its comforts, and for recognising silence itself as a decisive act of representation.

## **Analysis of the Chapter**

### **Canonical Silence and Narrative Constraint**

The questions of silence and invisibility come into sharper focus when we turn to canonical works by authors like R K Narayan, Anita Desai, Raja Rao and others. R K Narayan holds a well established place in the canon of Indian English literature. His fictional town of Malgudi has frequently been compared for its warmth, its simplicity and clarity of values. Narayan's writing is widely viewed as non-confrontational, humane and gently ironic. It is precisely this reputation that makes Narayan's one of the most popular works, *The Guide* (1958) a

productive text for reading silence. In Narayan's fiction, caste is not actively denied, but it is never allowed to emerge as an issue. *The Guide* tells the story of Raju, a tourist guide who becomes, through a series of misunderstandings, a spiritual figure. The main transformation Raju experiences throughout the novel is from a manipulator of the world to a reluctant saint, which culminates in his fast for rain and potential death. At one level, the novel has to do with personal growth, moral ambiguity, and the conflict between appearance and reality. At another level, it is a richly textured social world that looks stable, familiar and ethically coherent. What is striking, however, is that this social world is built on the structure of hierarchy without ever calling caste a lived system of inequality. Malgudi is full of priests, traders, temple authorities, villagers and pilgrims. The social roles are also clearly demarcated but caste is not named. The absence is not a coincidence. It enables the novel to envisage social order without social conflict.

Narayan's narrative voice contributes significantly to this effect through its calm and unjudgmental tone. Characters are introduced with their flaws and their virtues intact and moral dilemmas are presented as individual rather than structural. The male protagonist, Raju's failings are not social but personal. His redemption, correspondingly, is individual. The acceptance of him by the community as a spiritual guide is neither questioned in terms of power and authority. Instead it is to be treated as a curious, but natural development. This method of telling is similar to the warning Ambedkar gave that trying to correct individual hearts without challenging the systems of power that make them so is a fundamental

error. In *Annihilation of Caste*, Ambedkar insists that ethical appeals and spiritual reform can not destroy caste because caste is not just a problem of moral conscience but it is a system of social relations (Ambedkar, 1936). Narayan's novel, though ethically sensitive, works precisely at this level of morality. It imagines goodness, suffering and redemption without questioning the social structures in which they occur. The temple in *The Guide* is one very revealing site. Temples in Indian society are heavily intertwined with caste practices such as access, authority and ritual hierarchy. In Narayan's novel however, the temple is not the space of social exclusion, but the site of spiritual continuity. The rituals are smooth, the authority is not questioned and there is no conflict. This aestheticisation of religious life enables the novel to remove the spiritual from the social inequality.

Caste thus becomes part of the background of the novel rather than the thematic concern. It exists as an organising principle even though it is never explicitly named and it is this quiet absence that gives the silence its power. By not bringing caste into the foreground, the novel offers readers to live in a world where hierarchy is natural and unproblematic. The ethical comfort of the narrative is based on this refusal. This does not mean that Narayan is unaware of social differences. Rather, his choices in the narrative are a larger liberal humanist impulse that focused on shared humanity rather than on structural critique. Characters are judged based on kindness, sincerity and moral development. Social injustice is converted to personal limitation. As a result caste as a lived experience of humiliation, exclusion and inherited inequality vanishes from sight. Former Professor and political scientist, Gopal Guru makes a distinction between abstract

suffering and live humiliation and states that caste cannot be understood without paying attention to the everyday experiences of degradation that it generates (Guru, 2009). There is suffering in *The Guide*, but no humiliation. Raju suffers inside, mentally, morally but he is never degraded due to caste. This absence reinforces the ethical universality of the novel, but at the same time it masks the social asymmetry. The ending of *The Guide* only reinforces this narrative comfort. Raju's fast is seen by the villagers as a spiritual act that may rain. When Raju tells Velan, "It is raining in the hills. I can feel it coming up under my feet, up my legs," (Narayan, 1938, p. 256) the statement carries less the certainty of rain than the comfort of faith. Whether or not the rain comes is left ambiguous. What is more important is the moral transformation of the protagonist. The faith of the community in Raju is depicted as genuine and common. There is no questioning of who gets to become a saint, to confer authority or whose bodies bear the burden of belief. Social consequences of spiritual authority are still untouched upon. From the point of view of representation, this ending points out the limits of the ethical imagination of the novel. By focusing on the redemption of the individual, it avoids the issues of social responsibility. Caste, once again, lies outside the frame of the narrative.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak cautions against speaking for the subaltern in ways that eliminate their particular history and material conditions (Spivak, 1988). In Narayan's novel, the subaltern does not even speak. Silence becomes the management of narrative. The lack of caste assures that there is no subaltern voice which would disturb the moral coherence of the story. This silence is not in any obvious

way violent. It is gentle, convincing and profoundly canonical. Of course, that is the reason why it is effective. It teaches its readers to equate good literature with moral universality and emotional balance, and equate structural inequality with extraneous to literary value. Reading *The Guide* for what it does not say therefore reveals how the Indian literary canon has often dealt with caste not through denial but ethical abstraction. Caste is never condemned or confronted. It is irrelevant to the moral universe of the narrative rather than being explicitly denied. This strategy achieves a strong sense of normalcy, but leverages the limitations of representation. Narayan's novel thus comes to play as an important starting point for this paper, not because it is uniquely silent, but because it represents an example of a dominant mode of canonical writing. By finding ethical meaning not in social structure but in individual transformation, *The Guide* gives us a vision of humanity that is comforting, coherent, and incomplete.

If R K Narayan's *The Guide* makes caste invisible by moral universality, Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* (1980) provides a more complicated representational strategy. Here, silence does not function through social normalcy but through a different kind of intense focus of interiority, memory, and emotional life. Desai's novel is concerned deeply with time, family relationships and the lingering effects of Partition. Suffering is all around in the text, but caste is nowhere to be seen as a named social reality. *Clear Light of Day* is set in Old Delhi and is focused on the Das family, and in particular on the strained relationship between two sisters, Bim and Tara. The story jumps back and forth from the past to the present and shows us emotional wounds, resentments, and moments of care which are part of family life. What

makes the novel particularly compelling is the depth and sensitivity of its psychological insight. Characters are drawn sensitivity and inner conflicts are addressed as if they were significant morally. However, this inward turn causes a particular type of abstraction. Social realities like caste, class and labour get diffused into the private sphere of feeling. The world outside the family enters the narrative, but is not introduced as a structural force; rather it is a background noise in the family narrative. Even Partition, one of the most violent social ruptures in Indian history, is remembered in terms of personal loss and not collective trauma. This focus on interior life makes Desai part of a liberal humanist tradition that values the truth of one's emotions over the analysis of society. Pain is universalised and made legible by personal relationships rather than social location. As a result, caste vanishes not because of it being denied, but because it is made irrelevant to the ethical work of the novel. The household itself becomes a closed moral universe. Servants are mentioned from time to time, but their lives are marginal to the story. They help to facilitate domestic routine and do not disrupt it. Their social positions are not interrogated, and their voices are not heard. This choice in narration reinforces a hierarchy of attention, in which certain forms of suffering are worthy of exploration, and others are outside the frame. The critique of social reform given by Ambedkar is very relevant in this perspective. Ambedkar suggests that we as a society substitute emotional sympathy for structural change. Indian society mistakes morality for social justice (Ambedkar, 1936). In the case of *Clear Light of Day*, there is an abundance of emotional sensitivity, but

nothing of the structural critique. The novel teaches the readers how to feel deeply but not how to see inequality.

The language of memory is another contribution to this abstraction. The past is brought back to give us a place of reconciliation and understanding. Bim's eventual acceptance of her family's failures is pictured as a moral victory. Forgiveness is made the highest form of ethics. She perceives the shared past and familial bonds not as confinement but as fertile ground for future relationships:

With her inner eye she saw how her own house and its particular history linked and contained her as well as her whole family with all their separate histories and experiences - not binding them within some dead and airless cell but giving them the soil in which to send down their roots, and food to make them grow and spread, reach out to new experiences and new lives, but always drawing from the same soil, the same secret darkness. That soil contained all time, past and future, in it. It was dark with time, rich with time. It was where her deepest self lived, and the deepest selves of her sister and brothers and all those who shared that time with her. (Desai, 1980, p. 182)

However, this reconciliation takes place within the family altogether and social hierarchies are left alone. Caste in this context is not a source of conflict or a subject of memory. Its lack makes it possible for the novel to envision a moral universe in which emotional resolution replaces social change. This doesn't affect Desai's literary achievement but it does reveal the limit of representation. The novel is

ethically clear because of a narrowing of social vision. What Desai's work reveals, therefore, is not silence as normality, as in Narayan, but silence as ethical perfection. Caste is quietly set aside under the weight of psychological depth and social inequality is mediated through feeling and emotion, indicating a shift in the canon from the unspoken social order toward a focus on the inner life of characters.

### **The Discomfort of Mediation Representation**

If Narayan and Desai stand for two dimensions of silence, the change towards partial visibility is marked in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938). Caste exists in this novel, given a name and recognized, but it is carefully controlled in a framework of spiritual nationalism. *Kanthapura* is the story of a South Indian village transformed by Gandhian nationalism. The freedom struggle makes a way to village life through religion, myth and collective action. Unlike *The Guide* or *Clear Light of Day*, *Kanthapura* presents a clear reference to caste divisions. Brahmins, pariah, sudras and other social groups are well specified. Untouchability is mentioned and caste discrimination is accepted as a social problem. On the surface, this looks like a more representational and visible deal with caste. However, the representational strategy employed in the novel neutralises the caste conflict by subordinating it under Gandhian ethics. Caste makes sense as a moral issue to be solved through spiritual reform, not a system of structure and power. The theme is of unity, sacrifice and national awakening. Social antagonism is mellowed down in the name of collective struggle. The village goddess, Kenchamma and the figure of Gandhi blend in the narrative imagination. Myth and politics

intertwine, and effect a sacred frame for resistance. Within this frame caste oppression is recognized but never allowed to break the moral unity of the community. Moorthy, the Gandhian leader, advocated equality and inclusion but the deeper structures of caste hierarchy are not demolished.

Ambedkar was very critical of this Gandhian way. He said that it was an emphasis on moral reform and harmony of the village which concealed the realities of caste domination and maintained Brahminical authority under the pretense of spirituality (Ambedkar, 1936). *Kanthapura* is an example of such a tension. While the novel does speak against untouchability, it does not question the village as a place of entrenched hierarchy. The narrative voice is important in this regard. The story is narrated by Achakka, an old Brahmin lady whose point of view is the moral center of the novel. Her voice is loving, communal and deeply traditional. This choice gives the novel authenticity, but it also restricts the critical reach of the novel. Caste is sifted through the consciousness of Brahmin that seeks harmony rather than confrontation. Caste thus becomes visible but manageable. It is recognised as wrong, but the criticism of it is postponed in the name of national unity. The freedom struggle offers a better moral horizon to assimilate social conflict. Resistance goes out, against colonial power, not inward, against caste hierarchy. From the point of its representational character, *Kanthapura* holds an important transition position. It does not simultaneously silence caste completely and nor does it allow it to destabilise the ethical frame of the narrative. Instead, it presents a model of reformist representation, in which visibility is not necessarily structuralized-critically.

Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, published in 1935, goes one step further to visibility. Unlike the earlier texts discussed, *Untouchable* has caste at the centre of the story. The novel deals with one day in the life of a little sweeper boy called Bakha and exposes the humiliations Bakha suffers because of his untouchability. Caste, in this novel, is named, condemned and represented in detail. At first glance, *Untouchable* is the answer to the problem of silence. The novel directly challenges the caste and also gets the reader's emotions. Anand's prose is graphic and Bakha's agony is depicted with intensity. The reader is invited to sympathise very much with the protagonist. But, the representational strategy of the novel imposes another limitation. The suffering of Bakha is individualised. Caste oppression is felt through one body, one consciousness. Structural analysis gives in to emotional identification. The reader is asked not to understand caste as a systemic force in any way but to feel for Bakha. This humanist approach is one of power and constraint. On the one hand, it makes caste visible and morally urgent; on the other, it runs the risk of including caste in the ambit of empathy. Bakha is transformed into a person of pathos instead of political agency. His plight requires pity, not system change. Of particular revelation is the ending of the novel. Solutions to caste oppression are an imagined realization brought about by external intervention such as the flush toilet or Gandhian reform. Bakha himself remains passive; torn between hope and confusion. Ambedkar's insistence that caste cannot be done away with through the process of reform is relevant in this respect alone. For Ambedkar, technological or even moral fixes are not possible against a system based on social power (Ambedkar, 1936). Gopal Guru's

contribution on humiliation further makes the stakes clearer. Caste humiliation is not only an emotional pain but a socially constructed condition to the process of identity and agency, says Guru (2009). In *Untouchable*, humiliation is well presented, but its reproduction in structure is not fully drawn. The novel shows suffering but does not politicise it. In spite of this, *Untouchable* plays an important transitional role. It shows that visibility is not enough to solve the problem of the limits of representation. Even when the naming and denouncing of caste takes place, literature will sometimes find it difficult to imagine the possibility of collective resistance or structural transformation.

### **Navigating the Road to Rupture**

The above discussion on some of the well known canonical Indian English Fictions has shown the ways in which caste is dealt with in the realm of literary representation using silence, abstraction, spirituality and empathy. Each approach represents a departure from silence, yet at the same time a certain level of containment. If caste cannot be adequately represented through such methods, we need to ask what happens when the representation itself starts to break down, and what forms of writing arise when literature refuses to provide comfort, unity and moral resolution. This shift can be seen in the work of Mahasweta Devi and Bama whose writings do not work towards managing caste but rather try to disrupt the very conditions of caste representation. It is not that silence brings clarity in their works, but rather they initiate rupture and refusal. In the short story *Draupadi* (1978) by Mahasweta Devi, representation itself starts to be fractured because the narrative

does not even try to reconcile suffering with ethical universality. Rather than softening oppression through emotional appeal, the story lays bare the constraints of language, narrative, and moral resolution.

*Draupadi* tells the story of Dopdi Mejhen, a tribal woman who is involved in armed resistance against the state. She is taken to jail, tortured and raped by the security forces. The story builds up to a moment that rejects narrative closure. Dopdi fights her oppressors not with words and pleas, but with her violated body. She rejects clothing, she rejects shame and she rejects the terms under which power expects submission. Unlike the previous texts discussed, *Draupadi* does not apologize for violence or make it psychological growth. Violence is brutal, excessive and unaddressed. The body becomes the location of the failure of representation. Language cannot encompass what has occurred and moral structures crumble under the pressure of state sanctioned brutality. This is a decisive shift. Caste, class and power are no longer mediated through ethical comfort. Instead, they are exposed in the 'epistemic violence' of representation itself (Spivak, 1988). Dopdi cannot be spoken for. Her resistance does not take the form of speech which can be assimilated into narrative coherence. It takes the form of refusal. The story's ending is crucial. When Dopdi stands naked in front of Senanayak, the officer in charge, she turns the logic of power on its head. Her body with its marks of violence becomes unreadable in the dominant discourse. The shame no longer belongs to her. The authority of the state is momentarily unsettled, not through reform or appeals to empathy, but through sheer exposure. This moment stands apart from the strategies of Anand or Rao. There is no appeal to humanist sympathy, no spiritual consolation, and no promise

of reform. Instead, *Draupadi* argues that certain kinds of suffering are unredeemable on existing ethical principles. Representation here does not heal, it wounds. From the caste and marginality standpoint, this rupture is important. The tribal body in Dopdi is not abstracted and individualised into moral symbolism. It is still political, material and undeniably potent. The story makes readers confront the violence that underwrites the power of States and social order. Mahasweta Devi's writing thus becomes a point where literature ceases to deal with caste and marginality but enables them to destabilise the representation itself. The reader is left disturbed, ethically implicated and without closure. This discomfort is not an inadequacy of the text. It is its political force.

While *Draupadi* is a rupture, Bama's *Karukku*, first published in Tamil in 1992, is a profound refusal of silence and mediation as well as aesthetic distance. *Karukku* does not seek to gain entry into the canon on its terms. It puts into question the very assumptions that canonical value is constructed upon. Written in the form of an autobiographical narrative, *Karukku* is a story about Bama's own life as a Dalit Christian woman growing up in Tamil Nadu. The text documents the humiliations and exclusions and internalised violence of caste as it is played out in everyday life. Unlike previous writings, *Karukku* does not metaphorically or morally translate the suffering. It mentions caste explicitly and often. Language plays an important role here. Bama writes in a direct, conversational style that is resistant to literary ornamentation. There is movement between memory, reflection, and testimony throughout the text. This way of writing rejects the division between lived experience and literary form. The narrative here is not

written for aesthetic enjoyment. It is shaped by urgency. Gopal Guru argues that the humiliation of caste is not incidental but constitutive to Dalit subjectivity in a caste society (Guru, 2009). *Karukku* makes this visible. Humiliation is not only in the acts of violence, but in gestures, institutional practices, and religious spaces of everyday life. What makes the difference between *Karukku* and *Untouchable* is agency. Bama does not invite pity. She asserts voice. The story is not looking for validation from upper caste people. Instead, it speaks from the inside out of Dalit experience, speaking to the issues of internalised oppression and external domination.

Religion, which is the spiritual shelter in *Kanthapura* and the abstraction of morality in *The Guide*, becomes the place of betrayal in *Karukku*. The Church reproduces the caste hierarchies instead of dismantling them. This exposure disrupts reformist discourses that assume the inherently liberatory nature of spirituality. From a representational perspective *Karukku* rejects the ethics of containment. It does not convert suffering into forgiveness and reconciliation. Anger remains present. Memory remains unresolved. The text requires not emotional sympathy, but structural change. Spivak's caution to speak for the subaltern is partially answered here. *Karukku* is not spoken for. It speaks. And in doing this, redefines what constitutes literature. Testimony becomes theory. And experience turns into critique.

### **Implications of the Study**

The present study carries implications that extend beyond the specific corpus of Indian English fiction it examines, touching upon questions of canon formation, ethical reading practices, and the responsibilities

of literary criticism in a caste-stratified society. First, it unsettles the long-standing assumption that the moral universality of literature is itself an ethical achievement. By demonstrating how silence, abstraction, and reformist mediation often function as narrative comforts, the study suggests that ethical coherence in canonical writing may be secured at the cost of social opacity. This invites a reconsideration of how “human values” have been historically defined in Indian literary discourse, and whose experiences have been rendered peripheral in the process.

Secondly, the study implies a methodological shift in literary analysis. Reading caste not only as a theme but as a problem of representation foregrounds the necessity of attending to narrative atmosphere, tonal choices, focalisation, and omissions as sites of ideological work. Such an approach moves criticism away from a binary of presence and absence, towards a more precise account of how visibility is produced, deferred, or neutralised. In this sense, the study contributes to a mode of reading that treats silence not as an interpretative gap to be filled, but as an active structuring force that shapes ethical meaning.

Thirdly, the trajectory traced from canonical abstraction to rupture and refusal has consequences for how the Indian literary canon itself is to be re-evaluated. The study does not propose a simple replacement of one set of texts with another. Rather, it implies that canonical value must be rethought in relation to representational risk. Texts such as *Draupadi* and *Karukku* show that literary significance may lie not in harmony, closure, or aesthetic balance, but in the capacity to disturb inherited forms, to strain language, and to refuse reconciliation where

reconciliation itself becomes complicit. This has implications for pedagogy and curriculum design, where questions of form, voice, and ethical disturbance must be treated as central rather than supplementary.

Fourthly, the study bears directly on debates about empathy and moral identification in literature. By showing the limits of humanist sympathy in texts like *Untouchable*, it implies that emotional response, while necessary, is insufficient as an ethical ground. Without a sustained attention to structure, empathy risks reproducing the very hierarchies it seeks to contest. This has wider implications for how suffering is represented and consumed in literary cultures, and how readers are positioned in relation to marginalized lives.

Finally, the study suggests that the ethics of reading is inseparable from the politics of representation. To read what is not said is not merely a technical exercise; it is an ethical demand placed upon criticism itself. Such a practice compels readers and scholars to interrogate their own comfort, to question the universality they inherit, and to recognise the ways in which literary form participates in the maintenance or disruption of social hierarchies. In this sense, the study implies that literature cannot be treated as a neutral witness to caste, nor criticism as a detached observer. Both are implicated in the ongoing negotiation between visibility and erasure, between ethical imagination and social structure.

## **Conclusion**

When read together, the texts that have been discussed in this paper

reveal a trajectory of representation. In *The Guide*, Narayan makes caste invisible by moral universality. Desai's *Clear Light of Day* abstracts social inequality into psychological exploration. Rao's *Kanthapura* recognises caste but it is subsumed in spiritual nationalism. Anand's *Untouchable* reveals caste by way of empathy, yet has it within individual suffering. Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi* breaks representation by means of violence and Bama's *Karukku* refuses mediation completely. This is not linear progress. It is a series of negotiations with the restriction of representation. Each text approaches caste in a different way shaped by the historical moment, ideological commitments and aesthetic choices. What comes out of that, however, is not so much a single solution, but rather a growing awareness of the ethical constraints of literature. Ambedkar's insistence on caste as a structural system and not a moral flaw goes against literary traditions that prioritise harmony, empathy or spirituality. Literature that fails to take into account this structure runs the risk of replicating inequality even when attempting to humanise suffering (Ambedkar, 1936). At the same time, this paper is not attempting to say that silence or abstraction are acts of bad faith. Rather, it implies that these strategies are a reflection on the comfort zones of the canon. Reading what is not said enables us to grasp the way in which literature is involved in the creation of social imagination, often by limiting the scope of visibility.

Thus, caste in modern Indian writing can not be understood on simple lines of presence or absence. Instead, it needs to be read with the representational strategies that determine what literature can and cannot say. Silence, abstraction, reformist visibility, rupture, and

refusal are not an aesthetic choice. They are ethical positions. An ethical practice is therefore reading what is not said. It urges readers to pay attention to narrative comfort, to interrogate universality, and to acknowledge whose experiences are made unimportant in the name of literary merit. Such reading does not detract from literature. It deepens it. As Indian literary studies continue to broaden their canon and their methods, it is a mode of reading that is becoming of urgent necessity. The act of representing is inseparable from attention to social structures and an acknowledgment of ethical stakes. Literature may not dismantle caste on its own, but it can refuse to present it as natural or inevitable. It can unsettle comfort and reveal its limits. In these moments of disruption, silence often becomes the most powerful voice.

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**Yearning and the Human Psyche: Unfulfilled Desire,  
Memory, and Moral Conflict in Anand's Short Stories**

By

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DOI Number: <https://literaturechronicle.com/doi-2026-55666>**Abstract**

Human desire, particularly when left unfulfilled, occupies a complex psychological space where longing, memory, and moral consciousness converge, shaping both individual identity and ethical judgment (Freud, 1923/1961; Maslow, 1943). This chapter, 'Yearning and the Human Psyche: Unfulfilled Desire, Memory, and Moral Conflict in Anand's Short Stories' explores how deprivation and unresolved yearning operate within the inner lives of characters in Mulk Raj Anand's short stories *The Tamarind Tree* (1966), *The Silver Bangles* (1934), and *The Thief* (1934). The study is guided by the central research question: how do unfulfilled desires influence psychological conflict, moral decision-making, and identity formation in Anand's short fiction?

Methodologically, the chapter adopts a qualitative textual approach, employing close reading and thematic analysis informed by literary psychology and social realism. Drawing on psychoanalytic conceptions of desire and lack (Freud, 1923/1961) alongside motivational theory concerning unmet human needs (Maslow, 1943), the analysis examines the intersection of desire with memory, class, and ethical consciousness. In *The Tamarind Tree*, nostalgic longing reveals how memory sustains desire and shapes identity through loss (Anand, 1966). *The Silver Bangles* foregrounds deprivation and self-worth, demonstrating how socio-economic constraints restrict aspiration and transform material longing into a quest for dignity (Anand, 1934). Similarly, *The Thief* portrays desire as a catalyst for moral conflict, where survival-driven choices generate guilt and ethical tension rather than fulfilment (Anand, 1934).

The findings suggest that unfulfilled desire functions not merely as absence but as a dynamic psychological force that actively constructs internal conflict, moral awareness, and emotional vulnerability. By foregrounding longing as an interpretive lens, this chapter contributes to broader discussions on desire, ethics, and social inequality in Indian English literature.

## **Keywords**

*(Unfulfilled Desire, Psychological Conflict, Memory and Nostalgia, Socioeconomic Deprivation, Moral Dilemma, Literary Psychology)*

## Introduction

The essence of human existence is influenced equally by presence and absence, and among these absences, unfulfilled desire emerges as one of the most decisive psychological forces shaping emotion, identity, and moral reasoning (Phillips, 1993; Žižek, 2006). Desire, as both lack and longing, is foundational to human subjectivity and functions as a persistent drive toward meaning, recognition, and belonging (Levinas, 1969). When such desires remain unrealized, they generate emotional turbulence that profoundly alters perception and behavior (Illouz, 2007). This chapter examines the psychological repercussions of unmet aspirations through three short stories by Mulk Raj Anand—*The Tamarind Tree* (1966), *The Silver Bangles* (1934), and *The Thief* (1934). Though structurally simple, these narratives offer complex psychological portraits of yearning shaped by memory, deprivation, and ethical conflict (Mukherjee, 2002).

In *The Tamarind Tree*, longing manifests through memory and nostalgia, as the narrator mourns the loss of both a physical symbol and the emotional security it embodied. He recalls how “the old tamarind tree stood like a guardian over our childhood games” (Anand, 1966), revealing how desire often crystallizes around symbolic objects. In *The Silver Bangles*, Radha’s yearning is rooted in deprivation, where the bangles symbolize dignity and self-worth rather than ornamentation: “She had never owned anything so bright, so beautiful, so utterly her own” (Anand, 1934a). Meanwhile, *The Thief* explores desire as an ethical dilemma, as Bhiku’s hunger compels him toward morally troubling choices: “He knew it was wrong, yet his

stomach cried louder than his conscience” (Anand, 1934b). Collectively, these narratives demonstrate how unfulfilled desire operates not merely as private emotion but as a structural force shaped by memory, inequality, and moral struggle (Eagleton, 2007).

### **Unfulfilled Desire and the Memory of Loss: *The Tamarind Tree***

Unfulfilled desire often becomes most acute during moments of return, when the past confronts the irrevocability of change (Boym, 2001). In *The Tamarind Tree*, the narrator’s return to his childhood village reveals an emotional rupture caused by the disappearance of the tree that once anchored his identity. He laments, “The place where the tree had stood seemed suddenly empty, as if something vital had been torn away” (Anand, 1966). The tree functions as what Bachelard (1994) describes as a “topography of memory,” a site where emotional experience and spatial attachment converge.

The narrator’s longing is not for the tree itself but for the irretrievable emotional state it represents. Psychological theorists argue that nostalgia often reflects a desire for existential continuity rather than literal restoration (Sedikides et al., 2008). The narrator’s grief thus signifies a deeper confrontation with impermanence, as “the loss of the tree marked the end of a world that could never be recovered” (Anand, 1966). This loss destabilizes identity, reinforcing Ricoeur’s (1992) claim that memory is central to narrative selfhood. The unmet desire to reclaim the past underscores the human struggle to reconcile memory with temporal change.

### **Desire, Deprivation, and the Illusion of Possession: *The Silver Bangles***

In *The Silver Bangles*, unfulfilled desire emerges from chronic deprivation, revealing how poverty reshapes emotional needs and aspirations (Narayan, 2004). Radha's longing for the bangles reflects a yearning for dignity and visibility in a world that marginalizes her existence. She observes them with awe, thinking "how wonderful it must be to feel their cool weight upon her wrists" (Anand, 1934a). This desire is intensified by scarcity, as deprivation magnifies the symbolic value of objects (Bauman, 2007).

When Radha briefly possesses the bangles, fulfilment proves fleeting. Anand writes, "Her joy trembled with fear, for she knew happiness like this could not last" (1934a). This moment illustrates the psychological paradox of possession: fulfilment often generates anxiety rather than peace for those accustomed to loss (Fromm, 1956). The bangles become a metaphor for illusory satisfaction, reinforcing the idea that material acquisition cannot compensate for emotional neglect (Sayer, 2005).

### **Unfulfilled Desires and Moral Conflict: *The Thief***

In *The Thief*, desire is inseparable from moral struggle. Bhiku's hunger transforms ordinary objects into symbols of survival, as "the tiffin box seemed to glow before him like a promise of life" (Anand, 1934b). His hesitation before stealing reflects an ethical conflict intensified—not erased—by deprivation. Scholars argue that poverty complicates moral agency without nullifying it (Margalit, 1996).

After stealing the tiffin, Bhiku is consumed by guilt: “His hands shook, and shame burned hotter than hunger” (Anand, 1934b). This reaction confirms that desire satisfied through unethical means often deepens psychological distress (Taylor, 1989). Bhiku’s dream of becoming a teacher further intensifies this conflict, symbolizing what Appadurai (2004) calls the “capacity to aspire.” His unmet aspirations thus function both as a source of hope and a reminder of the chasm between his reality and his ideals.

### **Analysis of the Psychological Landscape of Unfulfilled Desires Across the Three Stories**

Unfulfilled desire functions as a central psychological force in literature, shaping moral judgment, emotional response, and identity formation. In the selected short stories by Mulk Raj Anand—*The Thief* (1934), *The Silver Bangles* (1934), and *The Tamarind Tree* (1966)—desire emerges not as a superficial craving but as a deeply embedded psychological condition shaped by poverty, memory, and ethical conflict. Drawing on psychological, moral, and socio-cultural theory, this analysis demonstrates how unmet aspirations generate guilt, nostalgia, and emotional fracture, revealing desire as a powerful determinant of human behavior under conditions of deprivation and loss.

#### **Unfulfilled Desire and Moral Conflict in *The Thief***

In *The Thief*, unfulfilled desire is inseparable from moral anxiety. Bhiku’s hunger-driven longing arises from systemic deprivation rather

than criminal intent. Anand describes Bhiku as a boy who “had known hunger too long to argue with it” (Anand, 1934b), emphasizing the compulsive force of unmet physiological need. This aligns with Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs, which posits that survival imperatives override higher ethical reasoning without eliminating moral awareness.

The tiffin box Bhiku steals is psychologically charged, symbolizing stability and care. Anand notes that “the box lay there, silent and tempting, like a promise of warmth” (Anand, 1934b). Literary psychology suggests that such objects operate as emotional surrogates for absent security (Bennett & Royle, 2016). Bhiku’s desire is therefore not for food alone, but for the dignity and nurturance denied to him.

Crucially, fulfilment does not relieve suffering. Instead, “his heart beat wildly, and shame flooded him before he had even touched the food” (Anand, 1934b). This immediate guilt reflects Freud’s (1923/1961) concept of the superego, wherein moral conscience persists despite deprivation. Bhiku’s dream of becoming a teacher intensifies this conflict, revealing desire’s paradoxical nature: it sustains hope while deepening self-reproach. Thus, *The Thief* portrays unfulfilled desire as both a survival impulse and a moral burden.

### **Desire, Deprivation, and Emotional Fragility in *The Silver Bangles***

In *The Silver Bangles*, unfulfilled desire is rooted in poverty and emotional invisibility. Radha’s yearning for bangles is not decorative but existential. Anand observes that “she watched the bangles with

aching eyes, knowing they belonged to a world not meant for her” (Anand, 1934a). This illustrates how deprivation shapes aspiration itself, confirming Bourdieu’s (1984) claim that social class constrains not only resources but imagined possibilities.

The bangles symbolize dignity and recognition. When Radha finally possesses them, the joy is transient: “for a moment she felt rich, then afraid, as though happiness were something she must return” (Anand, 1934a). This moment exemplifies hedonic fragility—when fulfillment intensifies anxiety rather than contentment (Kahneman et al., 1999). Psychological research on deprivation indicates that individuals accustomed to scarcity often experience fulfillment as unstable and undeserved (Fromm, 1956).

Radha’s loss of the bangles devastates her not because of material absence but because it erases a fleeting sense of worth. Her longing exposes the illusion of possession: objects cannot compensate for emotional neglect. Thus, *The Silver Bangles* presents desire as both a source of hope and a catalyst for deeper emotional pain, revealing the psychological cost of structural inequality.

### **Memory, Loss, and Nostalgic Desire in *The Tamarind Tree***

Unlike the other narratives, *The Tamarind Tree* states unfulfilled desire within memory rather than material deprivation. The narrator’s longing is directed toward a vanished past. He reflects that “the tree had gone, and with it something that could never return” (Anand, 1966). This loss exemplifies reflective nostalgia, where desire is aimed at emotional states rather than recoverable realities (Boym, 2001).

The tamarind tree functions as a mnemonic anchor. Anand writes, “under its shade we had felt safe, as though the world could not touch us” (1966). Memory theorists argue that such sites preserve emotional continuity and identity (Assmann, 2011). The tree’s absence thus destabilizes the narrator’s sense of self, forcing confrontation with temporal rupture.

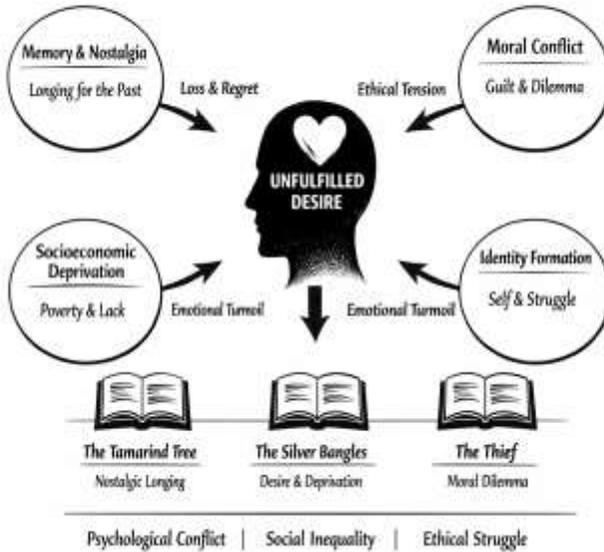
The desire to reclaim the past proves futile, yet persistent. This illustrates Ricoeur’s (1992) notion that identity is narratively sustained through memory, even when the past is irretrievable. In this story, unfulfilled desire becomes an existential condition, underscoring the impossibility of restoring lost time.

### **Desire, Ethics, and Social Inequality**

Across all three stories, desire reshapes moral judgment and reveals class-based injustice. Whether it is Bhiku’s hunger, Radha’s longing for beauty, or the narrator’s nostalgic grief, desire exposes structural deprivation rather than individual weakness. Moral psychology confirms that ethical reasoning is situational and emotionally mediated (Haidt, 2001). The persistence of guilt across narratives demonstrates that deprivation complicates morality without erasing conscience.

Ultimately, desire functions as a lens through which social inequality becomes emotionally legible. As Marx and Engels (1970) argue, material conditions shape consciousness itself. Anand’s narratives reveal that unfulfilled desires are not personal failures but psychological responses to systemic absence.

### Exploring Unfulfilled Desire in Anand's Short Stories



(OpenAI, 2026)

### Implications of the Study

This study carries significant implications for literary criticism, psychological inquiry, and socio-ethical discourse, particularly within the field of Indian English literature. By foregrounding unfulfilled desire as a central analytical lens, the research demonstrates that longing is not merely a thematic concern but a dynamic psychological and ethical force that shapes identity, moral reasoning, and emotional experience. This reconceptualization invites scholars to move beyond surface-level interpretations of desire as absence and instead recognize it as an active, constitutive element of human subjectivity.

From a literary-critical perspective, the study reinforces the relevance of interdisciplinary approaches, particularly literary psychology and social realism, in interpreting texts that engage with marginality and deprivation. Anand's short stories, often read primarily as social critiques, emerge here as profound psychological narratives that illuminate the inner lives of the marginalized. This suggests that Indian English fiction, especially realist writing, can productively be reread through psychological and ethical frameworks to uncover nuanced representations of interior conflict, moral dissonance, and emotional vulnerability.

In terms of psychological implications, the analysis underscores how unmet needs—whether emotional, material, or existential—shape moral consciousness without erasing ethical awareness. The persistence of guilt, nostalgia, and self-reflection in the characters challenges deterministic assumptions that deprivation nullifies morality. Instead, the study supports psychological models that view moral reasoning as context-sensitive and emotionally mediated, thereby contributing to broader discussions in moral psychology and trauma studies.

The study also holds socio-ethical implications, particularly in its exposure of how structural inequality shapes desire itself. By illustrating that aspirations are socially conditioned, the research highlights the ethical responsibility of social systems in producing emotional suffering. Desire becomes a diagnostic tool through which injustice, exclusion, and deprivation are rendered emotionally visible,

urging readers and scholars alike to reconsider simplistic judgments about poverty, crime, and moral failure.

Finally, the study has pedagogical and research implications. It offers a framework for teaching short fiction that integrates psychology, ethics, and social theory, enabling students to engage empathetically with literary characters while developing critical awareness of systemic injustice. For future research, the study opens avenues for comparative analyses across cultures, genres, and historical periods, encouraging scholars to examine unfulfilled desire as a universal yet socially inflected dimension of the human condition.

In sum, this research affirms that unfulfilled desire is not a passive void but a powerful force that shapes human thought, action, and morality—making it an indispensable concept for understanding both literature and life.

## Conclusion

Unfulfilled desire, as revealed through Anand's short stories, operates as a profound and pervasive force within the human psyche, shaping thought, emotion, and action in ways that transcend mere absence (Freud, 1923/1961; Žižek, 2006). In *The Tamarind Tree* (1966), *The Silver Bangles* (1934a), and *The Thief* (1934b), desire emerges not simply as a lack of objects or opportunities but as a dynamic current that structures identity, informs moral judgment, and mediates human experience (Anand, 1934a; Anand, 1934b; Anand, 1966). The

characters' awareness of what they lack—whether emotional security, dignity, or sustenance—perpetually shapes how they perceive themselves and interact with the world (Phillips, 1993). In this sense, unfulfilled desire functions as both an existential and psychological driver, leaving enduring imprints on the mind that oscillate between melancholy, longing, and ethical tension (Illouz, 2007).

Memory is central to this process. Nostalgia, as portrayed in *The Tamarind Tree*, anchors longing in emotionally formative experiences, transforming absence into a persistent psychological presence (Boym, 2001; Ricoeur, 1992). The tamarind tree, for example, is more than a physical object—it embodies security, innocence, and identity, revealing how unfulfilled desire entwines with recollection to sustain emotional continuity (Anand, 1966; Assmann, 2011). Likewise, in *The Silver Bangles*, Radha's yearning for material possession reflects deeper deprivation and social marginalization, demonstrating that desire is socially conditioned and often intensified by inequality (Bourdieu, 1984; Sen, 1981). Material fulfilment, as Anand shows, rarely satisfies the emotional or existential void; the transient joy of ownership is swiftly tempered by fear, anxiety, or awareness of continued deprivation (Anand, 1934a; Fromm, 1956).

Ethical complexity further underscores the psychological weight of desire. In *The Thief*, Bhiku's moral conflict illustrates how deprivation complicates ethical reasoning, generating guilt and shame even as survival necessitates morally troubling choices (Maslow, 1943; Haidt, 2001). Desire, therefore, functions as both a motivator and an ethical test, catalyzing action while simultaneously provoking self-reflection

and moral tension (Nussbaum, 2001). Across all three narratives, Anand reveals that unfulfilled desire is inseparable from broader social, economic, and cultural structures, reflecting inequality and shaping the characters' emotional and moral landscapes (Eagleton, 2007).

In conclusion, unfulfilled desire in Anand's stories is not a passive condition but an active force that illuminates human vulnerability, resilience, and ethical complexity. By exploring the interplay of memory, deprivation, and morality, these narratives provide profound insights into the psychological and socio-ethical dimensions of longing, demonstrating that desire—fulfilled or denied—remains central to the human experience.

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**Waren and Dais: Women's Healing, Birth Rituals, and  
Indigenous Midwifery in Kashmir**

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**Abstract**

Midwifery is an ancient profession that continues to be practiced almost exclusively by women. This study contends that the history of midwifery in Kashmir cannot be comprehended just through bio-medical narratives but must be reconstructed through the oral, embodied, and material archives that underpin women's healing practices. The occupations of *waren* in Kashmir and *dais* in Jammu illustrate two divergent yet interrelated histories of reproductive care influenced by caste, purity, and gendered labour. Although *waren* maintained a measure of local authority through apprenticeship, ritual practice, and sensory knowledge, *dais* were socially marginalized and consistently regarded as unskilled, a view further perpetuated by colonial medical discourse that pathologized indigenous midwives to rationalize missionary and state intervention. The study challenges

preconceived notions about authorship and professionalism in medical history and shows how midwifery expertise circulated outside of textual archives by highlighting oral traditions, tactile skill, birthing spaces like the *hammam*, and the material culture of herbs and tools. It also contends that, despite systemic exclusion, childbirth operated as a contested sphere in which women wielded authority. Thus, reexamining *waren* and *dais* reveals the political, social, and ecological entanglements that influence women's health in Kashmir and shows how reproductive care evolved into a site of negotiation between bio-medical modernity and indigenous epistemologies.

## **Keywords**

*(Waren, Indigenous Midwifery, Health, Oral Traditions, Kashmir, Dogra)*

## **Introduction**

Birth is more than just a biological phenomenon; it is profoundly political, socially located, and historically textured. (Squire 2009, 1–33) In Kashmir's contested territory, marked by protracted conflict, shifting sovereignties, and persistent inequalities, the experience of childbirth is molded not only by medical infrastructures, but also by broader socio-political disparities. This study investigates how childbirth and midwifery are integrated in Kashmir's marginality politics, reflecting power struggles, identity issues, and access to care. It focuses on the lived experiences of women, traditional birth attendants, and medical practitioners to investigate how birth practices

and politics reflect greater issues about state authority, community norms, and structural exclusion.

Midwives are health professionals who are known all over the world for their specialization in caring for women who are in labor. They play an important part in the health of both mothers and babies. Midwives are trained to help women who are in labor and are very important in ensuring that women have healthy vaginal births. They also care for pregnant women, support them and their families, give them advice, and help low-risk pregnant women have healthy births and stay healthy during their pregnancy. No matter what, although midwifery is a separate career, it can be hard to get recognized in some countries as a part of its official duties. Not clear policies and a lack of regulatory frameworks make the job of the midwife unclear in many countries. This makes it hard for the public to understand what the midwife does. (El-Ardat et al. 2025)

In Kashmir, reproductive health and midwifery reflect broader fault lines of gender, class, religion, and colonial and postcolonial governance legacies. Traditional midwives, who typically work outside of formal biomedical systems, have played vital roles in community health, particularly in rural regions; yet, their knowledge systems have been delegitimized by contemporary medicine's professionalizing logic. (Lawrence, 1928, 233-242) The subsequent debates about authority in childbirth underscore the politics of expertise: whose knowledge is valued, whose bodies are prioritized, and how institutions control or marginalize women's reproductive autonomy. Furthermore, increased militarization and surveillance in

the region have exacerbated existing imbalances by limiting mobility, weakening healthcare infrastructures, and heightening vulnerabilities related to pregnancy and delivery.

Within these overlapping spheres of power and opposition, our research places midwifery practices. It poses the following question: How do healthcare practices and governmental regulations in Kashmir regulate the birthing process? In the face of competing healthcare systems, how do women find their way? In a politically unstable area, what does midwifery teach us about belonging and not belonging? The research reveals how marginalization, belongingness, and the right to health are reflected in the everyday politics of birth in Kashmir by following these interconnections.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored in an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that draws primarily on Foucauldian theories of power, knowledge, discipline, and biopolitics, while also engaging feminist scholarship on care work, subaltern studies, and medical anthropology. Together, these approaches enable a critical examination of midwifery in Kashmir as a historically contingent practice shaped by colonial intervention, postcolonial governance, gendered labor hierarchies, and local epistemologies.

At its core, the study employs Michel Foucault's concept of power/knowledge to understand how medical authority is produced, legitimized, and enforced. Colonial and later postcolonial medical

regimes in Kashmir did not merely introduce new forms of healthcare but actively constructed regimes of truth that defined what counted as legitimate medical knowledge. Indigenous midwifery, grounded in oral transmission, embodied expertise, ritual practice, and ecological familiarity, was rendered inferior through biomedical discourse. In Foucauldian terms, the knowledge of *warens* and *dais* constitutes subjugated knowledge, forms of expertise that were widely practiced and socially embedded but systematically disqualified by institutional medicine and colonial science.

The concept of disciplinary power further illuminates how traditional midwives were pathologized within colonial medical narratives. By framing *dais* and *warens* as ignorant, unhygienic, and dangerous, colonial authorities justified interventions into women's reproductive lives through surveillance, regulation, and institutionalization. The birthing body became a site of governance, where norms of cleanliness, professionalism, and medical rationality were imposed. This disciplinary gaze separated childbirth from its social and cultural contexts, reconstituting it as a clinical event subject to state oversight.

The study also draws on the notion of biopolitics to analyze how childbirth emerged as a crucial site for managing populations. Through maternity hospitals, missionary medicine, and later welfare programs, both colonial and postcolonial states sought to regulate reproduction, maternal health, and infant survival. In Kashmir's conflict-affected context, biopolitical control intersected with militarization, mobility restrictions, and infrastructural fragility, intensifying women's vulnerability during pregnancy and childbirth. Midwifery thus

becomes a lens through which the uneven reach of the state and the limits of biomedical governance are revealed.

Feminist theories of care and gendered labor further inform the analysis by situating midwifery within broader structures of social reproduction. Midwifery in Kashmir was predominantly performed by women from marginalized social backgrounds and was often hereditary rather than formally certified. Although indispensable to community survival, this labor remained undervalued and stigmatized due to its association with bodily fluids, impurity, and pain. Feminist scholarship helps expose how reproductive labor is rendered invisible even as it sustains social life, and how women's authority in childbirth coexists with their social marginalization.

Medical anthropology and subaltern studies contribute to understanding childbirth as a culturally embedded practice rather than a purely biological event. By foregrounding oral histories, sensory knowledge, ritual practices, birthing spaces such as the hammam, and the material culture of herbs and tools, the study challenges archive-centered historiography. It treats embodied practices and community memory as legitimate historical sources, thereby expanding the epistemological boundaries of medical history.

Finally, the framework recognizes agency not only in overt resistance but also in everyday negotiation. Women's continued reliance on traditional midwives alongside biomedical services reflects pragmatic choices shaped by trust, accessibility, cultural comfort, and political constraints. This form of negotiated agency complicates binary

narratives of domination and resistance and highlights how care practices persist within, rather than outside, structures of power.

## **Analysis of the Chapter**

### **Women's Work for Women: Medical Missionaries and Gendered Care**

The history of women medical missionaries in Kashmir cannot be understood in isolation from broader transformations in gender relations, medical authority, and colonial governance in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Women's participation in missionary medicine marked a significant departure from earlier evangelical models that confined women to domestic or auxiliary roles. Over time, missionary women emerged as autonomous medical actors, reshaping both the internal dynamics of missionary households and the external landscape of colonial healthcare. In Kashmir, this transformation intersected with existing indigenous systems of reproductive care, producing complex encounters between missionary medicine, traditional midwifery, and state power. From the early phases of Christian medical missions, women accompanied male missionaries primarily as wives, assisting informally in clinical work, education, and evangelism. Their labor, though indispensable, was rarely recognized as independent or professional. As Dana Robert has demonstrated in her seminal work on American women missionaries, until the mid-nineteenth century women were largely accepted in mission fields only if they entered as spouses. Gradually, however, this arrangement began to shift. By the last quarter of the nineteenth

century, women increasingly entered mission fields as single, trained professionals—particularly as doctors and nurses. This change was encapsulated in the ideology of “women’s work for women,” which argued that only women could effectively access, treat, and evangelize other women, especially in societies structured by purdah and gender segregation. (Robert 1996, 13–40)

The rise of women’s missionary societies in Britain and the United States played a crucial role in enabling this transformation. These organizations raised funds, advocated women’s medical education, and created institutional pathways for women to work overseas. The establishment of the London School of Medicine for Women in 1874 marked a turning point in Britain, while similar developments in the United States ensured that American women were among the earliest female medical missionaries in India. Dr. Clara Swain’s arrival in India in 1869 as the first female medical missionary exemplified these shifts. By the late nineteenth century, women doctors were no longer peripheral figures but central to missionary strategies, particularly in the domain of women’s healthcare. (Hardiman 2008, 138–40)

Within this broader context, the entry of women medical missionaries into Kashmir assumed particular significance. Kashmir presented unique challenges: geographic isolation, political sensitivity under Dogra rule, conservative gender norms, and deeply entrenched indigenous healing practices. Early male missionaries such as Dr. William Elmslie had long emphasized the need for women doctors to reach Kashmiri women, whom male practitioners could not attend due to norms of modesty and seclusion. It was only decades after Elmslie’s

death that this aspiration materialized with the arrival of Dr. Fanny Butler in 1888. Dr. Butler's career illustrates both the opportunities and constraints faced by women medical missionaries in Kashmir. Trained at the London School of Medicine for Women and sponsored by the CMS Zenana Missionary Society, she arrived in Srinagar after years of dispensary work in central India. Her appointment reflected the growing recognition within missionary circles that women's medical labor was not merely supportive but essential. Establishing a dispensary and later a hospital in Srinagar, Butler catered primarily to women patients—wives of artisans, laborers, boatmen, and villagers—who had previously lacked access to biomedical care. (Gracey, 1898, 137-40)

Language and cultural barriers posed significant challenges. Unlike some missionaries who relied on interpreters, Butler insisted on mastering Kashmiri before fully commencing her work, recognizing that medical intimacy required linguistic and cultural competence. Her practice extended beyond clinical treatment to encompass health education and religious instruction, reflecting the inseparability of medicine and evangelism in missionary ideology. Yet, her work was constrained by chronic staff shortages, limited resources, and resistance from the Dogra administration, which imposed restrictions on missionary mobility and public preaching. Over time, persistent negotiation and support from British officials enabled the establishment of more permanent medical facilities in central Srinagar. (Tonge 1939, 38)

Women's medical missions in Kashmir also relied on transnational networks of patronage and philanthropy. Isabella Bird's support for the establishment of the John Bishop Memorial Hospital illustrates how missionary medicine was sustained through imperial circuits of funding and moral legitimacy. Hospitals and dispensaries became not only sites of healing but also spaces of religious instruction, moral reform, and surveillance. Missionary women doctors, nurses, and evangelists used these spaces to disseminate Christian ideas, often reading scripture to patients during treatment sessions. (Tonge 1939, 43)

At the same time, missionary women produced powerful narratives about Kashmiri society that framed their medical work as a civilizing mission. Figures such as Irene Petrie, who arrived in Kashmir in the 1890s, described the region in starkly contrasting terms: picturesque landscapes juxtaposed against what they perceived as insanitary living conditions and moral stagnation. Kashmiri women, in particular, were depicted as oppressed, apathetic, and resigned to patriarchal control. (Stock 1899, 84) Such representations echoed broader colonial discourses that equated hygiene with civilization and framed Indian women's bodies as sites requiring rescue through Western medicine and Christian morality.

While missionary women often expressed genuine concern for the suffering of Kashmiri women, their interpretations were shaped by racialized and gendered assumptions. Practices of seclusion, joint family living, and ritual observances surrounding childbirth were interpreted as signs of backwardness rather than as culturally

embedded systems of care. Missionary frustration with women's limited autonomy frequently overlooked the structural constraints imposed by patriarchy, poverty, and political authority. As in other colonial contexts, women's conversion to Christianity remained rare unless sanctioned by male family members, underscoring the limits of women's medical missions as instruments of religious change. (Stock 1899, 123-27)

Kinhead's words point to a perceptible shift in the British medical profession's view of midwifery in the late nineteenth century. (Kinhead, 1878, 870-71) Historically, childbirth in Kashmir, as in much of South Asia, was integrated within community-based care systems managed by traditional midwives. Known locally as *warens* in the Kashmir Valley and *dais* in Jammu, these women were essential figures within rural and semi-urban communities. They supervised pregnancies, oversaw labour, delivered postnatal care, and assisted women through the physical and emotional changes associated with delivery. Despite their essential role, however, midwives held a profoundly ambivalent social standing. They were esteemed for their experiential knowledge, yet they faced stigma because of their association with blood, bodily fluids, suffering, and death elements culturally regarded as impure. This contradiction marginalized midwives from social legitimacy while concurrently positioning them at the core of reproductive life.

In colonial India, medicalisation of childbirth has been historically perceived as an attempt to 'sanitise' the *zenana* (secluded quarters of a respectable household inhabited by women) as the chief site of birthing practices and to replace the *dais* (traditional birth attendants)

with trained midwives and qualified female doctors. (Guh 2018, viii) Most conventional midwives were members of economically disadvantaged and socially marginalized communities. In numerous instances, midwifery was a hereditary vocation, transmitted from mother to daughter or daughter-in-law, rather than a formally obtained profession. Their knowledge was corporeal, experiential, and relational grounded in years of observation, practice, and close engagement with women's bodies. They perceived pregnancy and childbirth not as pathological conditions but as natural life processes that necessitate care, forbearance, and social support. This form of knowledge, although effective within its specific context, remained informal and was not acknowledged by governmental or medical institutions. (Das, 2015, 54-56) In Foucauldian terms, midwifery knowledge represented a form of subjugated knowledge—an indigenous, widely practiced expertise rendered opaque or illegitimate by prevailing regimes of truth.

In Kashmir, these processes occurred within particular historical and cultural contexts. Under Dogra rule, Kashmiri society remained highly conservative, especially concerning women's bodies and sexuality. Gynecological conditions and childbirth were regarded as concerns of female privacy and modesty, deemed unsuitable for male medical practitioners. Consequently, women's health was predominantly administered within female exclusive environments, supervised by elderly women and experienced midwives. The *waren* served as a specialist in childbirth, diagnosing pregnancies, overseeing antenatal care, and assisting with deliveries within the household. Notably, in

contrast to certain Western contexts, neither hakims nor barber-surgeons were involved in obstetric or gynecological care in Kashmir. By the late nineteenth century, numerous *warens* were actively engaged in the Valley, emphasizing their essential role in Kashmiri social life. (Mufti 2013, 21)

Most of the villages in Kashmir are cut off from the rest of the world during the winter because of heavy snowfall, but traditional midwives are still working there. Many of these midwives are old and wise, but their years of experience giving birth have made them lifelines. Older women were just as important as younger guys when it came to carrying on the traditions of traditional healing. Many of these amazing women did important work in health care without getting any credit for it. My grandmother Shamali Begum stood out from the rest of them. She was a well-known and respected ‘*waren*,’ or midwife, who helped women give birth before gynecologists were common in towns. People would get chills just thinking about going to the ‘*haspatal*,’ which means ‘hospital.’ They thought of going there as a last option. Back then, women gave birth in their own homes with the help of midwives like my grandma. It was a community event. People didn't pay her with money, but they showed their appreciation by giving her a ‘*Batte Traem*,’ which is a plate of traditional Kashmiri Wazwan, during the baby's ‘*Aqiqah*,’ which is a religious event celebrating birth. In her time, maternal deaths were very uncommon, which is very different from today, even though there are more trained doctors and better medical facilities. In those days, normal births were common, and women rarely had current health problems like diabetes, thyroid problems, cirrhosis, cancer, or high cholesterol. People from

nearby towns also went to see older women for a variety of health problems. Hanifa Appa was one of these healers. She was famous for using '*Datur Dohu*' in a very special way to treat tooth infections. She would use a hot knife to burn *Datura Stramonium* seeds mixed with her own ghee, letting the smoke get into the patient's open mouth. It was thought that the process would loosen up dangerous germs, which would then fall into a container of water that was put below. (Hanifa, interview, 12 August 2025)

They were traditional healers who helped everyone, regardless of their social or religious background. They had a real spirit of selflessness and cared for everyone. Their amazing stories of treating people who were thought to be dying and helping them get better are still a testament to their amazing skills and strong faith. Modern medicine has come a long way and helped a lot with health problems, but these healers' work is still an important part of Kashmir's cultural and medical past. They worked hard without expecting anything in return, and their efforts continue to inspire. We should remember them with gratitude. (Fatha, interview, 17 November 2025)

Childbirth practices were distinguished through both spatial and symbolic segregation. Deliveries generally occurred in the most secluded area of the residence, frequently on floors covered with dried grass (*hur*). (Mufti 2013, 21) There exists a traditional postpartum bathing practice known as '*Louse Aab.*' Prepare the *Louse Ghassi*, a blend of herbs, shrubs, leaves, wild fruits, and roots, and is prepared by boiling the mixture in a large vessel filled with water, preferably a copper container, for a period of one to two hours. After boiling, permit

it to cool slightly, commonly referred to as *Sakboul aab*, without the addition of frigid water. During the bathing procedure, delicately cleanse the lady's body with the *Louse Ghassi* and bathe her thoroughly with its water. Furthermore, it is occasionally advised to chew bits of grass to aid in restoring the strength of teeth that may have been compromised by labor contractions. It is a ceremonial wash that women typically undergo within 7 to 40 days following childbirth. The bath is regarded as having therapeutic advantages and aids in the recuperation process following childbirth. *Louse Ghassi* is a complex blend of herbs, shrubs, leaves, wild fruits, and roots, all combined together. (Tantray, 2024, 6) These botanicals are sourced from *Bohru* shops. Once the water reaches the appropriate temperature, a selection of traditional medicinal herbs is introduced. These herbs encompass a variety of botanical species, including Lasora (*Sapistan*), Liquorice roots (*Shanger*), Prunella Vulgaris (*Kalaveuth*), Curima (*Laedri Gandri*), Saussurea iappa (*Kuth*), Adiantum Pedatum (*Gawtheer*), Macrotomia benthami (*Khazaban*), Arnebia Benthami (*Goazaban*), Calendula (*Marigold*), Jujube fruits (*Unab*), Halale, Balale, Sweet Violet (*Banafsha*), Thulbalol, Taraxacum officinale (*Handh*), Kasni (*Kasun Posh*), Rheum emodi (*Pumbachalan*), among others. They are thought to possess restorative properties and support postpartum recovery. (Hanifa, interview, 12 August 2025)

Cultural ideals of isolation and impurity meant that birthing rooms were often dim, windowless, and poorly furnished. Consumption of *hund*, a leafy vegetable thought to help recovery, and the ceremonial bath (*abb shayrun*) on the seventh day were postpartum traditions that encompassed both physical healing and ritual purification. (Mufti

2013, 21) A cultural and moral birth economy was established as a result of these activities, with care, ritual, and social control all interdependent. Midwives were in a strange place in this economy; they were both vital and stigmatized, and people trusted but also avoided them.

A major crack appeared in this structure when Western medicine and missionary involvement reached Kashmir. Traditional midwives were depicted in colonial medical discourse as hazardous, unclean, and uninformed. Colonial authorities and missionary physicians stressed that *dais* and *warens* lacked education in hygiene practices, were uninformed about germ theory, and lacked proper training. Indigenous midwifery techniques were often blamed for high rates of maternal and infant death, but larger systemic issues including poverty, hunger, bad housing, bad weather, and political indifference were mostly disregarded. The Hakim does not participate in midwifery cases; these cases are managed by seventy-four designated women who specialize in such matters. In addition to the professional Hakims, numerous 'wise women' in the villages possess extensive knowledge of the properties of herbs, and it is a noteworthy observation that almost every peasant appears to have some understanding of the medicinal qualities of plants. (Lawrence, 1928, 233) Foucault calls this technique of assigning blame selectively 'disciplinary power,' which is the act of designating some groups or individuals as abnormal in order to rationalize government oversight and intervention.

The practice of native 'dais' or midwives in all parts of India is most ignorant, unskillful and cruel. During complicated

labor these practitioners resort to useless, hurtful or violent expedients and either inflict injuries which leave behind them permanent disease, or fail to accomplish delivery. The lives of both mother and child are in such cases sacrificed. (The Indian medical gazette 1873, 100-01)

Colonial criticisms of midwifery were highly political activities, not just medical opinions. Colonial authorities legitimized their presence as agents of civilization and progress by portraying indigenous midwives as emblems of backwardness. Colonial authority worked to alter reproductive habits through the establishment of women's hospitals, missionary nursing schools, and maternity welfare programs. Standardized medical procedures supplanted relational, community-based care, and these institutions imposed new standards of cleanliness, discipline, and professional hierarchy. According to Foucault, the medical gaze became a part of childbirth. This gaze separates the female body from its social context, breaks it down into its organs and functions, and makes it understandable to those in power.

Kalpan Ram highlights the societal disruption caused by midwives' wisdom, challenging established norms by bridging the perceived gap between knowledge and the body. (Ram,2009,114) Traditional midwifery persisted in spite of these interventions. *Dais* and *warens* persisted as principal caregivers in the hilly and distant areas of Jammu and Kashmir, where hospitals remained inaccessible owing to geography, poverty, and protracted political unrest. They show how biomedical governance has its limits and how the state's influence is

uneven. Trust, accessibility, affordability, and cultural comfort were some of the factors that led women to use a combination of traditional practices and hospital visits. This kind of reasonable compromise exemplifies what could be viewed as the covert forms of agency that exist within the context of bio-political control, as opposed to the more obvious forms of resistance.

In the postcolonial period, the Indian state expanded its involvement in maternal and child health through welfare programs and public health campaigns. While these initiatives improved access to medical care in some areas, they also intensified the marginalization of traditional midwives. Government policies increasingly emphasized institutional deliveries, trained personnel, and standardized protocols. The introduction of Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) and Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs) marked a further consolidation of biomedical authority. (Ashtekar, 2008, 23-25) These health workers, trained and monitored by the state, replaced community-based midwives as the primary intermediaries between women and the healthcare system.

Consequently, the practice of midwifery in Kashmir sheds light on the dynamics of healthcare system inclusion and exclusion. In addition to physical health, socioeconomic status, location, gender norms, and political vulnerability all have a role in determining who has access to reproductive healthcare. Because of the high costs and long wait times associated with institutional care, women in rural, economically disadvantaged, or war-torn regions must rely on informal networks of support. Also, the state does not acknowledge or assist these informal

caretakers. This seeming contradiction brings to light the politics of belonging, specifically the questions of who gets to receive treatment, whose expertise is respected, and whose work goes unnoticed.

In Kashmir, larger fights for human dignity and citizenship are revealed by the mundane politics of birth. The reproductive lives of women are impacted by uncertainties and vulnerabilities in a territory characterized by militarization, monitoring, and restricted movement. In the midst of curfews, broken infrastructure, and interrupted healthcare services, pregnant women and new mothers give birth. Traditional midwives are vital in these situations because they provide continuity and stability. (Jeffrey and Jeffrey 1999, 278) Despite political and systemic violence, their work highlights how community-based care may persevere.

This study highlights the complex political nature of birthing in Kashmir by analyzing midwifery through the lenses of Foucauldian theories of power/knowledge, discipline, and bio-politics. Care and control meet at the point of birth, together with the production and contestation of marginality and the governing and resisting of bodies. Even though they are still susceptible to rejection, traditional midwives represent alternative care modalities that fight against the supremacy of biological reason.

Midwifery in Kashmir ultimately shows how subaltern wisdom is still relevant and how medical modernity has its limits. In doing so, it demands a reevaluation of reproductive justice that gives equal weight to both institutional care and culturally grounded, relational support.

The chapter highlights the importance of reproductive healthcare in comprehending issues of inclusion, exclusion, and the right to health in Kashmir by bringing attention to the mundane politics of giving birth. This chapter adds to larger discussions on gender, health, and power in areas impacted by conflict.



(OpenAI, 2026)

## Implications of the Study

This study has significant implications for the fields of medical history, gender studies, anthropology, and public health, particularly in conflict-affected and postcolonial contexts. By foregrounding the lived experiences and knowledge systems of traditional midwives, wares in the Kashmir Valley and dais in Jammu, it challenges the

dominance of biomedical and colonial frameworks that have long shaped understandings of reproductive care.

First, the study calls for a rethinking of medical historiography. It demonstrates that histories of healthcare cannot be written solely through institutional archives, official reports, or professional medical texts. Instead, oral traditions, embodied practices, ritual knowledge, and material culture constitute vital historical archives. Recognizing these alternative sources destabilizes Eurocentric and colonial notions of authorship, expertise, and professionalism, and broadens the epistemological foundations of medical history to include subaltern and gendered forms of knowledge.

Second, the findings have important theoretical implications for understanding power and knowledge. Drawing on Foucauldian concepts of biopolitics and disciplinary power, the study shows how childbirth became a key site through which colonial and postcolonial states sought to regulate women's bodies. At the same time, it reveals that midwifery functioned as a domain of negotiated authority, where women exercised agency despite systemic marginalization. This complicates binary narratives of domination and resistance by highlighting everyday, covert forms of agency embedded in care practices.

Third, the study contributes to feminist scholarship on labor and care by reframing midwifery as skilled, gendered labor rather than unscientific or residual practice. It exposes how caste, purity, and class hierarchies shaped the social positioning of midwives, rendering their labor both indispensable and stigmatized. In doing so, it underscores

the need to value reproductive labor not only as a health service but as a form of social reproduction central to community survival.

Fourth, the research has policy and public health implications, especially for regions marked by geographic isolation, conflict, and fragile healthcare infrastructures. The continued reliance on traditional midwives in remote and militarized areas of Kashmir demonstrates the limitations of exclusively institutional and hospital-centric models of maternal care. The study suggests that maternal health policies must move beyond the wholesale replacement of traditional practitioners and instead explore integrative frameworks that acknowledge local knowledge, cultural comfort, accessibility, and trust. Such an approach is particularly relevant where state healthcare delivery is uneven or disrupted.

Fifth, the study contributes to debates on reproductive justice and the right to health. It shows that access to safe childbirth in Kashmir is shaped not only by medical availability but also by political vulnerability, mobility restrictions, economic inequality, and gender norms. By situating birth within the everyday realities of militarization and surveillance, the study highlights how reproductive health becomes a marker of citizenship, belonging, and dignity in contested spaces.

Finally, the study underscores the enduring relevance of indigenous epistemologies in contemporary discussions of healthcare. The persistence of practices such as herbal baths, ritual postpartum care, and community-based birthing spaces illustrates that medical modernity has clear limits. Rather than viewing traditional midwifery

as an obstacle to progress, the study positions it as a critical resource for imagining plural, culturally grounded, and context-sensitive models of reproductive care.

In sum, this research not only enriches historical understanding of midwifery in Kashmir but also offers broader insights into how care, power, and knowledge intersect at the site of birth. It advocates for a more inclusive and equitable vision of reproductive healthcare that recognizes subaltern wisdom alongside institutional medicine and affirms women's authority over their reproductive lives.

## **Conclusion**

This study has shown that midwifery in Kashmir has long been shaped by the intersecting forces of colonial medicalization, postcolonial state policy, and entrenched social marginalization. Colonial biomedical and missionary discourses systematically delegitimized indigenous reproductive knowledge by framing wares and dais as unhygienic, unskilled, and dangerous. Through this process, childbirth was removed from its social, cultural, and ritual contexts and reconstituted as a clinical event subject to surveillance, regulation, and institutional control. These regimes of medical truth persisted into the postcolonial period, where state-led maternal health initiatives further marginalized traditional midwives by privileging standardized, hospital-based care.

Yet, the lived experiences of wares and dais complicate narratives of decline and disappearance. Despite stigma and exclusion, traditional midwives continued to provide essential reproductive care, particularly in remote, mountainous, and conflict-affected areas where

biomedical infrastructure remained uneven or inaccessible. Their endurance reveals both the limits of biomedical authority and the importance of trust, cultural familiarity, and relational care in shaping women's reproductive choices. Childbirth thus emerges as a critical site where power, knowledge, and women's autonomy are continuously negotiated.

By foregrounding oral traditions, embodied expertise, ritual practices, and material culture, this study challenges archive-centered medical historiography and repositions indigenous midwifery as a form of subaltern yet enduring knowledge. Ultimately, midwifery in Kashmir illuminates broader questions of reproductive justice, belonging, and the right to health in a contested landscape. Reimagining reproductive healthcare in the region requires not the erasure of traditional practices, but their ethical recognition alongside institutional medicine, affirming women's authority over birth and care.

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## Endnotes

*Kahzaban* (گہزبان) in Kashmiri refers to the medicinal herb *Arnebia benthamii*, commonly known as Himalayan *Arnebia* or *Gaozaban*. Native to the alpine regions of the Himalayas, this plant holds significant value in both Ayurvedic and Unani systems of medicine. Traditionally, *Kahzaban* has been used to treat a variety of ailments, particularly those affecting the heart, respiratory tract, and throat. It is known for its cooling and soothing properties and is often employed in remedies for fevers, coughs, and inflammatory conditions. The roots of the plant yield a reddish dye and contain active compounds believed to have therapeutic benefits. In Kashmiri ethnomedicine, *Kahzaban* represents the region's rich botanical heritage and the continued reliance on natural remedies, especially in rural and mountainous areas.

Deliveries took place in the patient's home, usually on the floor supported by dry grass known as *hur*. During the immediate post-delivery period, a unique leafy vegetable called *hund*, a variant species of spinach, was provided to the lady. On the seventh day of the postpartum period, known as *Sundar*, the woman underwent the *abb shayrun* ceremony, involving a warm bath for both her and the newborn baby.

*Hund*: In Kashmiri, "*Hund*" also pronounced as "*Handh*" refers to a wild leafy green, specifically a variety of dandelion. This plant is a part of traditional Kashmiri cuisine, especially valued for its nutritional and medicinal properties. The young greens of *hund* are collected from the

wild, thoroughly washed, and cooked as a vegetable, often stir-fried or prepared with spices.

*Waren:* Midwives possess expert knowledge and skills for providing care to women during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period. The midwife's role is to provide care that acknowledges the goals and choices of each individual woman and her family. A midwife assists a woman in making decisions about how to cope with labour, explains pain relief options, helps women develop a personalized birth plan that aligns with their needs and desires, discusses realistic expectations about labour and delivery, and suggests position changes and movements that facilitate the birthing process.

*Louse Aab:* In Kashmiri cultural practice, especially in traditional bathing rituals (such as herbal baths and postpartum care), *Louse Aab* refers to warm herbal water used for cleansing, healing, and relaxation, rather than plain hot water.

*Sakboul Aab:* Culturally, *sakboul aab* usually refers to water that has been boiled (often for hygiene or medicinal purposes) and then allowed to cool before drinking or use—especially during illness, winter, or for preventive health care in Kashmir.

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**Modes of Travel in Vikram Seth's *From Heaven Lake: Travels through Sinkiang and Tibet*: A Study in Cultural Geography**

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**Abstract**

This paper argues that Vikram Seth's *From Heaven Lake: Travels through Sinkiang and Tibet* (1983) employs varied modes of travel as a narrative strategy to critically examine culture, identity, and postcolonial experience in China. By tracing Seth's journey from Turfan to his final destination in Delhi, the study demonstrates how each mode of travel—walking, bus, truck, train, tractor, and air—offers a distinct perspective on the social practices and everyday lives of the Chinese people. Presented in a chronological structure, the travel narrative foregrounds Seth's encounters with diverse communities such as Hans, Uighurs, Muslims, Buddhists, officials, and shopkeepers, while consistently emphasizing the presence of the working class. The paper further contends that these encounters facilitate cultural comparisons between India and China, highlighting

shared practices and postcolonial identities shaped by history and power relations (Pratt, 1992). Additionally, the study examines Seth's observations on the lasting effects of the Cultural Revolution, particularly its impact on cultural heritage and the lives of ordinary people (Dirlik, 1996). Drawing on travel writing theory and postcolonial criticism, this paper suggests that Seth's reliance on unconventional modes of travel enables a deeper engagement with local cultures and challenges dominant representations of China. Eventually, the study positions *From Heaven Lake: Travels through Sinkiang and Tibet* as a significant postcolonial travel text that reveals the intersections of movement, culture, and political history.

### **Keywords**

*(Travel writing, Hans, Uighurs, Post-Colonial Identity, Culture, Cultural Text, China)*

### **Introduction to the Travel Text and Its Purpose**

Travel writing has long functioned as a literary space where movement intersects with culture, identity, and power. In postcolonial contexts, travel narratives often move beyond description to interrogate the historical and political conditions that shape encounters between the traveler and the travelled space. Vikram Seth's *From Heaven Lake: Travels through Sinkiang and Tibet* (1983) emerges as a significant contribution to this tradition, documenting a journey across China and Tibet at a moment marked by political transition and cultural redefinition. Rather than presenting travel as a linear act of

observation, Seth's narrative foregrounds the means of travel itself as central to understanding society.

Seth undertakes his journey using multiple modes of transportation—walking, buses, trucks, trains, tractors, and air travel—each of which structures his access to people and places differently. These modes determine the depth of interaction, the nature of observation, and the kind of knowledge produced. Walking, in particular, allows Seth to engage directly with local communities, enabling encounters that would remain inaccessible through faster or more privileged forms of movement. As scholars of travel writing argue, such moments of proximity transform travel narratives into “contact zones” where cultures meet, clash, and negotiate meaning (Pratt, 1992).

The narrative also operates within a postcolonial framework of comparison, as Seth repeatedly negotiates the concepts of “home” and “nation.” His Indian identity shapes how he perceives Chinese society, allowing for parallels between the two cultures while also acknowledging differences. These comparisons challenge rigid national boundaries and reveal shared postcolonial experiences rooted in colonial histories, political upheavals, and everyday survival. Seth's encounters with diverse communities—Hans, Uighurs, Muslims, Buddhists, officials, and shopkeepers—highlight the plurality of Chinese society, while the recurring presence of working-class individuals foregrounds voices often marginalized in official histories.

Moreover, *From Heaven Lake* records the lingering impact of the Cultural Revolution, particularly its effects on cultural institutions, religious practices, and interpersonal relationships. Seth's

observations resonate with critical accounts of the period that emphasize cultural loss, social fragmentation, and the reconfiguration of authority (Dirlik, 1996). By embedding these insights within lived experiences rather than abstract political commentary, the text offers a grounded critique of ideological transformation.

This paper, therefore, examines how modes of travel in *From Heaven Lake* function as narrative and analytical devices that shape Seth's cultural understanding. By situating the text within travel writing theory and postcolonial discourse, the study aims to demonstrate how mobility, encounter, and observation collectively construct a nuanced portrayal of Chinese society during a critical historical moment.

*From Heaven Lake: Travel through Sinkiang and Tibet* (1983) provides us with an account of what Seth has seen, as he travelled through various parts of the People's Republic of China as a student. Seth has written this book in the year 1983 to give us a glimpse of the culture of China by travelling across all the parts of China using various modes of travelling. This work accounts for a lot of experiences and documents his various encounters with the Chinese people and their lifestyle. This work is a reflection of the journal that he kept and the photographs that he took while he was travelling. He was surrounded by the working class throughout his journey. Seth uses his introduction as :

“I am an Indian, and lived in China as a student. . .

I returned home to Delhi via Tibet and Nepal” (Seth, 1983)

## **Analysis of the Chapter**

He uses India and home interchangeably, his narrative interrogates the same and layers them with multiple nuances. For Seth, nationality and the notion of familiarity are hardly coterminous. However, the case becomes problematic when the shift across national boundaries represents a shift in socio-cultural ethos. Seth's repetitive use of the word home, throughout the text in context to his experiences in varied nation-states, brings to light the dissonance between nation and home.

### **Modes of Travel and Cultural Exchange**

Every mode of travelling shows a glimpse of the culture. The mode of travelling that Seth undertook gives an exposure to the culture of every place wherever he has visited. There is a similarity between both the Chinese and the Indian communities. Both communities are fond of songs. This travel text shows many cultural relationships and exchanges and shows many comparisons. The cultural relationships and exchanges are similar, highlighting the concept of post-colonial attitude. In the post-colonial world, Indians too gaze and stare at foreigners, through this act of staring Seth tries to bring a similarity between both communities. It is by walking that Seth has witnessed a cultural link between his 'homeland' India and the 'host land' China. Here Seth has witnessed that it is music that links both the dissimilar cultures.

### **Walking as a Method of Cultural Immersion**

Every mode of travelling determines whatever Seth witnesses. The mode of travelling plays an important role in travelling. Each mode of

travelling is different from one other. With every mode, we get to know about the beauty of the place wherever the writer travels, and we even get to know about the cultures that are prevalent in that particular place. Throughout the journey, the various modes taken were the bus, walking, truck, tractor and air. Moreover, in the course of the journey the differences between the culture of 'homeland' and 'host land' is seen clearly. Travelling by bus, train, truck, tractor and air gives him just a little glimpse of the people and cultures of China. However, by walking across China he gets many instances about China, the behaviour of the local Chinese people towards foreigners, and the impact of the Cultural Revolution on the lives of the common people. It can be said that it is only through walking that Seth was able to collect information by interacting with and observing the local people. It would not have made it possible if he had travelled via private car. Because it is by walking he can connect to the people more than while travelling with the different modes.

### **Communication Barriers in a Postcolonial Context**

Seth then started walking on the streets. It is by walking on the streets he shares some vital information about his 'host land' China and the attitude and behaviour of the Chinese people towards foreigners. He narrates his experiences when he went to purchase a crude wooden pipe from a Uighur woman. He misunderstood the wooden pipe as a perfect gift for a smoking friend, however through many difficulties, he discovered that it is not meant for smoking rather it is an instrument which is used to help babies to urinate. The difficulties that the writer faced in interacting with the native people suggest the problem that

every person in the post-colonial world faces. People in the post-colonial world tend to face problems while interacting with the native people of that place because they cannot interact and make them understand their issues.

### **Ethnic Diversity and the Othering of Foreigners**

In the course of the journey, a difference between the culture of Uighurs and Hans is seen. He has observed everything very well the differences between their type of living, even their pattern of homes differ from each other. The culture of treating foreigners as valuable pandas is additionally prevalent in China. The author gives us this instance where the officialdom treats foreigners as a panda. The officialdom feels disturbed by the contact between the Chinese and also the non-Chinese. The Chinese yell “Waigouren ! Waigouren!” or “Waibin ! Waibin” when they catch sight of the foreigners. He even mentions that there's no sense of xenophobia among the Chinese people. Within the course of the journey, a difference in the food habits of his companions is seen. This difference in food habits would not be noticed if he was not travelling by bus.

### **Walking as a Lens into Religion and Tibetan Society**

Walking as a mode of travelling provides us with a perfect glimpse of Chinese society. It truly depicts Chinese society with its positive as well as negative sides. By walking he encountered many instances of the prevalent religion in Lhasa, and he even got to know about the historical description of the famous temple in Lhasa. He discovered that a king introduced Buddhism in Tibet while conversing with a

young man. He even gets some information about the Jokhang Temple. He walks over to Norbulingka Park, Lhasa where he got to know about the Tibetan King Songtsan Gambo who built the temple in the middle of the seventh century. In the course of his journey, he gets to know about the history of Tibetan Buddhism and how the changes in spiritual leadership are shifted from one leader to another. The people earn their living by selling off religious kinds of stuff on the streets.

### **Diaspora, Alienation, and Nostalgia for Homeland**

The postcolonial writers are manifested in the trauma of alienation and exile, the issues of self and others, and the nostalgia for home. The diasporic characteristics of longing for "homeland" is seen clearly when he reaches Nepal. It is found that Seth when with all the intensity reaches Nepal by walking. He witnessed the scenic beauty of Nepal, where he talks about the landscapes that were similar to the Indian landscape like terraced fields of rice, banana trees, flame-of-the-forest and even the indigo-coloured wrapping of a matchbox that evokes his longing for home sentiments.

### **Train Journey and Cross-Cultural Interactions**

The mode of travelling shows a different view of society. It highlights various prospects. A journey by train gives us other ways to look at Chinese society. He reached Xian from Turfan by train. The writer is nostalgic because he remembers Delhi when he arrives at Xian. He has a conversation with his co-passenger about politics, art, and food. They even discuss the Sino-Indian relationship.

### **Homeland and Host Land: Continuous Comparison**

The comparison between the "homeland" and the "host land " can be seen throughout the novel. The writer compares the scenic beauty of various places that he has explored. He draws a comparison between the monuments of China with the Indian monuments. Here he compares the train service of China with the train service of India. He boards the train from Liuyuan, as it is his final destination by train. His companions are from different fields. Every journey shows various aspects of the culture of China. It is to be slight when someone refuses cigarettes from the native people.

### **Food Habits as Markers of Cultural Identity**

The food habits of Chinese people are different and vary from one particular region to another. There is a difference in food items of various communities. It is through food habits we can learn about a different culture. As the writer started his journey by truck, his friend Sui accompanied him. Sui informs him about the heavy rainfall and the condition of the road. They even discuss the available fruits, vegetables and animals in Dunhuang. They even discuss the ways of earning income in that area. They share a difference in food habits between the Han or Muslims and the rest of the people of China. They say that people all over China eat pork and dogs. However, the Han or the Muslims do not have pork or dogs.

### **Exile, Homeland, and the Figure of the Dalai Lama**

During his truck journey, he interacts with his companion. His companion asked him about the Dalai Lama when they heard that he

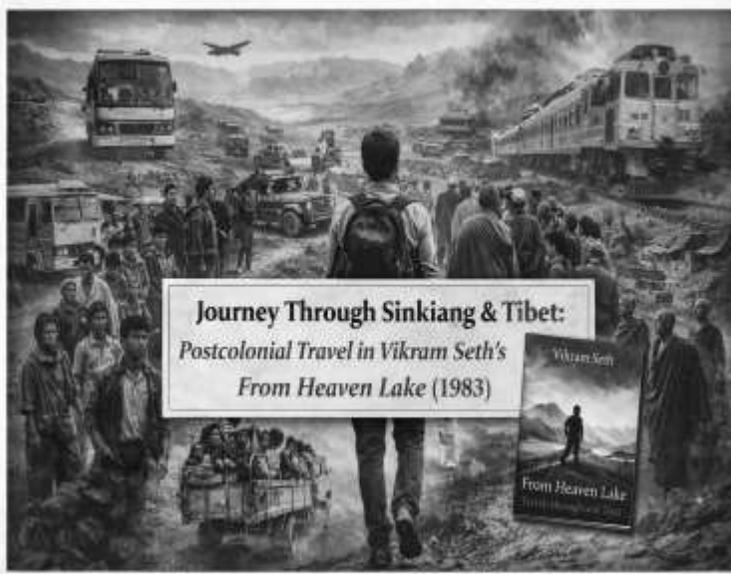
was from India. He gets information that the Dalai Lama is in exile from his own 'homeland' Tibet; he lives in his 'host land' India. The Tibetans eagerly wait for his return. One of his companions points toward his old parents, sitting on the spare tire in the back of the truck, that they are determined not to die until they have seen the Dalai Lama. They say that the Government is planning to bring him back. However, they say that the former leader may not return to his home as he will not be able to vest his secular power.

### **Completion of the Journey and Reflection on Indo-Chinese Relations**

The writer reaches Delhi by air from Kathmandu after a lot of struggle. He then thinks of the journey that he undertook. He even tells that if both India and China were amicable towards each other then half of the world would have been at peace. However, he even says that though they are a part of the same landmass they are so different in their thinking. While he was at the airport he recollected all the routes that he took to reach his final destination Delhi. He even recollects the people that he has met on his journey. He remembers all the knowledge that he has learnt from observing the people and their culture.

### **Impact of the Cultural Revolution on Chinese Society**

The Cultural Revolution hurts the people. The Cultural Revolution encouraged them to turn against their parents and teachers and everyone in the authority. All decency died during that time, cultural heritage of China, books, temples, and work of art was destroyed. People now care for only themselves.



(OpenAI, 2026)

## Implications of the Study

The present study carries significant implications for the fields of travel writing, postcolonial studies, and comparative cultural analysis. By examining Vikram Seth's *From Heaven Lake: Travels through Sinkiang and Tibet* (1983) through the lens of mobility and narrative strategy, the research redefines travel not merely as physical movement but as an epistemological framework through which culture, identity, and power relations are interpreted. It underscores how modes of transportation function as methodological tools that determine access, proximity, and depth of cultural engagement. In doing so, the study broadens the understanding of travel writing as an

analytical genre capable of producing nuanced socio-political commentary.

One key implication lies in repositioning travel writing within postcolonial discourse. The analysis demonstrates that Seth's journey destabilizes conventional binaries of East and West by presenting an Indian traveler observing China—another postcolonial nation. This shift challenges Eurocentric models of travel literature and foregrounds South–South cultural encounters. The study thus contributes to expanding the scope of postcolonial inquiry by highlighting shared historical experiences, ideological transformations, and cultural negotiations between formerly colonized societies. It encourages scholars to explore alternative trajectories of travel that move beyond colonial center–periphery frameworks.

The research also emphasizes the importance of mobility as a determinant of representation. By illustrating how walking enables intimate engagement while mechanized travel produces distanced observation, the study suggests that narrative perspective is inseparable from physical movement. This insight has broader methodological implications for literary criticism, as it invites scholars to consider how spatial dynamics and embodied experiences shape textual meaning. Travel, therefore, emerges not only as a thematic concern but also as a structural and interpretive principle.

Furthermore, the study highlights the role of everyday encounters in constructing cultural knowledge. Seth's interactions with working-class individuals, ethnic minorities, and local officials reveal the layered complexity of Chinese society beyond official narratives. This

approach foregrounds marginalized voices and everyday practices, thereby reinforcing the value of micro-historical observation in literary texts. The implication here is that travel narratives can serve as cultural archives that document lived experiences often absent from political historiography.

Another important implication concerns the conceptual tension between “home” and “nation.” The study demonstrates how Seth’s repeated invocation of home reflects diasporic consciousness and unsettles rigid national identities. This contributes to ongoing debates in postcolonial theory regarding belonging, exile, and transnational subjectivity. By examining how the traveler negotiates emotional and cultural affiliations across borders, the research deepens our understanding of identity as fluid and relational rather than territorially fixed.

The study also sheds light on the literary representation of political trauma, particularly the Cultural Revolution. By situating Seth’s observations within broader theoretical discussions of ideological transformation, the research illustrates how travel writing can document the aftereffects of political upheaval in subtle, experiential ways. This has implications for interdisciplinary scholarship, as it positions literary texts as valuable sources for cultural and historical reflection.

Finally, the research calls for a reassessment of development, nationalism, and cross-cultural understanding in contemporary global contexts. Seth’s reflections on Indo-Chinese relations and his emphasis on shared humanity suggest the possibility of dialogue

across political boundaries. The study therefore encourages future research to examine travel narratives as sites of ethical engagement, where empathy and comparison foster intercultural awareness.

In sum, this study contributes to literary scholarship by demonstrating that *From Heaven Lake* operates at the intersection of movement, culture, and political history. Its implications extend beyond the specific text, offering a framework for analyzing travel literature as a dynamic space where mobility generates critical insight into postcolonial identities and cultural transformation.

### **Conclusion: Travel Writing as Cultural Critique**

Vikram Seth's *From Heaven Lake: Travels through Sinkiang and Tibet* ultimately emerges as far more than a record of geographical movement; it becomes a profound meditation on culture, identity, and historical transition. Through varied modes of travel—walking, bus, truck, train, tractor, and air—Seth transforms mobility into a narrative and analytical tool, demonstrating how movement shapes perception, access, and understanding. Each mode of transport frames a different encounter, but it is walking in particular that allows him to engage intimately with local communities, observe everyday lives, and witness the subtle textures of Chinese society beyond official representations.

The narrative's strength lies in its sustained negotiation between "home" and "host land." By repeatedly invoking India while traversing China and Tibet, Seth unsettles rigid notions of nationality and belonging, revealing identity as fluid and relational. His encounters

with Hans, Uighurs, Muslims, Buddhists, officials, and working-class individuals foreground the plurality of Chinese society, while his reflections on food, language, religion, and music create meaningful parallels between India and China. In doing so, the text challenges binary oppositions of East and West and instead offers a South–South comparative perspective rooted in shared postcolonial histories.

Equally significant is Seth's attentive documentation of the Cultural Revolution's lingering scars—its destruction of cultural heritage, its disruption of spiritual institutions, and its impact on ordinary lives. Rather than presenting abstract political commentary, he embeds these realities within lived experiences, thereby humanizing history. His observations reveal how political upheaval reshapes memory, authority, and everyday survival, turning travel writing into a subtle yet powerful form of cultural critique.

Thus, *From Heaven Lake* stands as an important postcolonial travel text that situates movement at the heart of cultural inquiry. It demonstrates that travel writing can function as a site of ethical engagement—where comparison fosters empathy, where observation challenges dominant narratives, and where mobility becomes a means of reimagining identity and history. In tracing Seth's journey from Turfan to Delhi, we come to understand that travel is not merely a crossing of borders, but an ongoing dialogue between cultures, memories, and selves.

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Tasneem Farhat Choudhury is an accomplished educator from Assam who is currently serving as a faculty member in English at Ajmal Super 40. She holds a Master's degree in English Literature

from Tezpur University, where she nurtured strong analytical, research, and academic writing skills. Her commitment to scholarship is reflected in her published work in a reputed academic volume, demonstrating her engagement with literary studies and critical inquiry. Dedicated to inspiring students and fostering academic excellence, she continues to contribute meaningfully to the field of English education and remains passionate about promoting literature and learning within her academic community.

**When the Unborn Speaks: Female Infanticide and the  
Politics of Silence**

By

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**Abstract**

From the dawn of civilization, societies across the world have been marked by persistent gender-based discrimination, most notably reflected in the rejection of the female unborn. The chapter title, “When the Unborn Speaks: Female Infanticide and the Politics of Silence”, symbolically represents the silenced existence of countless unborn girls whose lives are judged even before birth. Patriarchal ideologies have long fostered dissatisfaction toward the birth of a female child, despite her essential role in sustaining familial and social continuity. Society’s tendency to perceive the female child as a burden rather than a blessing results in abandonment, neglect, and denial of dignity, thereby stripping her of voice and autonomy even before her entry into the world (Sen, 2001).

This silencing is closely intertwined with the lived experience of the mother, who develops an emotional and biological bond with the unborn child from the moment of conception. Mothers frequently endure psychological distress and coercion within oppressive domestic environments shaped by regressive beliefs upheld by senior family members. Such conditions reinforce gender bias within the private sphere, rendering the unborn girl voiceless within the womb itself (UNICEF, 2020). Disturbingly, these practices extend beyond economically disadvantaged groups, as gender-based discrimination is also prevalent among educated and socially privileged sections of society. This persistence underscores that the marginalization of the unwanted unborn is not merely a consequence of poverty but a manifestation of deeply entrenched cultural ideologies that necessitate sustained ethical, educational, and social reform (Kabeer, 2016).

### **Key words**

*(Infanticide, Gender Bias, Maternal Trauma, Patriarchy, Demographic Imbalance, Sex-Selective Abortion)*

### **Introduction**

In India, across diverse cultural contexts, it is common to hear blessings bestowed upon pregnant women for the birth of a “chand sa beta”, a son likened to the moon for his perceived beauty and value. Such expressions reveal deeply ingrained patriarchal attitudes that privilege male offspring while marginalizing the female child. Ironically, while the moon is idealized as flawless, it too bears imperfections, a reality often overlooked in gendered cultural

symbolism. As Virginia Woolf aptly observes, “No need to hurry, no need to sparkle, no need to be anybody but oneself” (*A Room of One’s Own*), a statement that underscores the intrinsic worth of individual existence irrespective of gender (Woolf, 1929).

The persistent imbalance in the female population raises critical questions about how societies systematically marginalize women even before birth. If the foundational roots of society, namely mothers and daughters, are undermined, the aspiration to achieve social progress becomes inherently flawed. The mother, who forms an emotional and biological connection with the child from conception, understands the unborn life long before it enters the world. Yet, society paradoxically demands the birth of sons while simultaneously depending on daughters to sustain lineage and continuity through motherhood. This contradiction reflects a broader socio-cultural crisis, wherein gender bias is normalized and perpetuated across generations, contributing to demographic imbalance and structural inequality (Sen, 2001; Guilmo, 2015). In the form of poetic lines I, the researcher, would like to reveal the voice of an unborn who says to her mother:

“Let me be born in the world

And see the radiant world through your eyes

Let me be in your laps and intensely gaze your happiness in your glamouring eyes

Let not the malicious feelings of the world effect my growth in your enclosed belly

Let me build myself in your natural constructive zone

To your surprise, I would be really beautiful and acute”  
(Begum, self composed poem, n.d)

She is the creator and sustainer of life; therefore, her existence must be protected rather than destroyed. Just as sunshine is essential for flowers to bloom, girls are vital to the continuity and humanity of society. This ethical responsibility is strongly emphasized in religious teachings. The Holy Quran explicitly condemns the killing of children due to fear of poverty, stating, “Kill not your children on a plea of want; We provide sustenance for you,” and further declares that such an act is a grave sin (Quran, 6:151). These moral injunctions highlight the sanctity of life and the collective duty to safeguard the unborn.

The mother, who perceives the presence and curiosity of the unborn child from within the womb, becomes the first witness to the child’s desire to experience the beauty of the world. Denying this life is both painful and unjust, as no individual possesses the authority to determine another’s fate. As Arundhati Roy aptly states, “There is really no such thing as the voiceless; there are only the deliberately silenced” (Roy, 2004).

This issue demands serious reflection, as gender-based discrimination significantly obstructs India’s progress toward sustainable and inclusive development goals. Empirical evidence indicates that a disproportionate number of female child deaths occur in northern Indian states such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh (Jha et al., 2016). A study published in ‘The Lancet Global Health’ reports that approximately 239,000 girls under the age of five die annually in India due to gender-based neglect and discrimination

(Jha et al., 2016). Gender equality, as emphasized by Guilmoto, extends beyond education and political representation to include care, nutrition, security, and the fundamental protection of girls' lives (Guilmoto, 2015).

### **Objectives of the Study**

- To examine and challenge the continuing practice of female infanticide, with the aim of motivating social change.
- To highlight the intrinsic value and purpose of the girl child in creating a balanced and complete society, recognizing that societal development is incomplete without women.
- To transform public perceptions regarding the education of girls, emphasizing the importance of empowering them to achieve independence and social equality.

### **Literature review**

A review of historical and literary scholarship reveals that female infanticide is an age-old practice rooted in complex and often contradictory social attitudes toward infants, women, and motherhood. Existing literature demonstrates that responsibility for infanticide cannot be attributed to individuals alone, as the practice is frequently shaped and sustained by broader social, economic, and cultural pressures. While historical records often identify unwed women as primary perpetrators, scholars emphasize that local communities,

including both men and women, have played a significant role in enabling and normalizing such practices (Harrington, 2019).

Comparative historical studies further illustrate how infanticide and selective abortion were employed as mechanisms of population regulation. In 'One Quarter of Humanity', Lee and Feng (1999) examine Chinese demographic practices between 1700 and 2000, arguing that population growth was effectively controlled through socially sanctioned practices of infanticide and abortion. Their work highlights the institutional and cultural dimensions of reproductive control rather than framing infanticide solely as an individual moral failure.

Anthropological literature from West Africa offers additional insight into culturally specific interpretations of childhood and infanticide. In certain communities, infants and toddlers are believed to be "spirit children," non-human entities thought to bring misfortune to families. Denham (2018), in 'Spirit Children', provides ethnographic accounts of families confronting life-and-death decisions within these belief systems, revealing the moral complexity surrounding such practices.

Historical literary narratives also document the marginalization of unwanted children in early modern Europe. Harrington's 'The Unwanted Child' presents a poignant portrayal of neglected and abandoned children five centuries ago, demonstrating that unwanted children were perceived as a social problem not only for families but also for governments and society at large (Harrington, 2019).

## **Analysis of the Chapter**

### **Report on Sex Ratio**

Recent policy reports reveal a persistent and troubling decline in the sex ratio in several Indian states. The NITI Aayog report highlights that Gujarat recorded a sex ratio of 907 females per 1,000 males, raising serious concerns about the unequal distribution of female births and its long-term demographic implications (NITI Aayog, 2021). Such imbalances prompt critical questions regarding social sustainability and gender justice.

Further insights are provided by studies conducted by the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA), which focus on excess female mortality under the age of five at the district level. Based on data from the 2011 Census, the study reports approximately 2.4 million excess female deaths across 29 states and union territories over a decade, largely attributed to neglect and discriminatory childbearing practices (IIASA, 2018).

### **Gender Mortality and Missing Females**

According to national estimates, the female child mortality rate in India in 2019 stood at 34.9 deaths per 1,000 live births (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner of India, 2020). Persistent practices of sex-selective abortion and post-birth discrimination have resulted in a significant demographic deficit. It is estimated that nearly 45.8 million females were missing from India's population in 2020 due

to pre- and post-natal sex selection, thereby intensifying gender inequality (UNFPA, 2020).

‘The State of World Population Report 2020’, themed *Against My Will*, emphasizes that the rise in missing females is closely linked to easy access to reproductive technologies and the global preference for smaller families. The report further notes that between 2015 and 2020, India lost an annual average of approximately 360,000 females due to excess female deaths and about 590,000 female births due to prenatal sex selection (UNFPA, 2020).

### **Trends in Infant Mortality in India (2009–2019)**

The data on infant mortality rates in India from 2009 to 2019 indicate a consistent and notable decline over the decade. In 2009, the infant mortality rate stood at 47.3 deaths per 1,000 live births. This figure gradually decreased each year, falling to 45.1 in 2010, 43.0 in 2011, and 40.9 in 2012. The downward trend continued through the following years, with rates declining to 38.8 in 2013, 36.9 in 2014, and 34.9 in 2015. By 2019, the infant mortality rate had reduced significantly to 28.3 deaths per 1,000 live births (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner of India, 2020).

This steady decline reflects improvements in maternal healthcare services, immunization coverage, nutrition, and institutional deliveries across the country. However, despite this positive trend, the persistence of gender-based discrimination remains a critical concern. The reduction in overall infant mortality does not necessarily translate into gender equality in survival, as female infants continue to face

higher risks due to neglect, unequal access to nutrition, and discriminatory care practices. Consequently, while statistical indicators show progress, underlying social practices such as sex-selective abortion and postnatal discrimination continue to contribute to demographic imbalance and social inequality. Therefore, the data highlight the need for policy interventions that not only reduce infant mortality but also address the structural and cultural factors that disadvantage the girl child.

### **Infant mortality rate from 2009-2019 in india**

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Death for 1000 live births</b>
<b>2019</b>	28.3
<b>2018</b>	29.7
<b>2017</b>	31.4
<b>2016</b>	33.1
<b>2015</b>	34.9
<b>2014</b>	36.9
<b>2013</b>	38.8
<b>2012</b>	40.9
<b>2011</b>	43
<b>2010</b>	45.1
<b>2009</b>	47.3

Between 2009 and 2019, female infant mortality in India declined substantially, from 47.3 to 28.3 deaths per 1,000 live births. Despite this progress, persistent harmful practices such as gender-based

neglect and selective abortion continue to threaten the survival of female children. These practices not only constitute serious ethical violations but also contribute to demographic imbalance, which in turn exacerbates broader social and structural issues (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner of India, 2020).

### **Socio-Economic Perspectives from Underprivileged Communities**

Field-based discussions among underprivileged communities reveal that the birth of a girl child is often met with dissatisfaction and anxiety, particularly among daily wage earners. Economic insecurity and fear of long-term financial obligations, especially related to the dowry system, contribute significantly to this response. Feminist scholar Kamala Bhasin argues that such attitudes arise from deeply rooted patriarchal and capitalist mindsets that commodify women and reinforce gender discrimination (Bhasin, 2003). For economically disadvantaged families, nurturing a child from birth to marriage without adequate state support is perceived as an overwhelming burden, further reinforcing harmful social practices.

### **Root Causes of Harmful Practices and Efforts for Elimination**

Indian leaders have historically undertaken significant efforts to eradicate social evils such as sati and untouchability, achieving progress to varying degrees (Forbes, 1996). However, female infanticide continues to persist in some regions, driven largely by lack of education, entrenched conservative ideologies, and cultural preferences for male heirs (Sen, 2001). As Bucchianeri (n.d.) observes, abortion of female fetuses can be framed as “a weapon of mass

destruction against the voiceless,” highlighting the ethical urgency of addressing these practices. Traditional patriarchal values, including son preference for property inheritance and family lineage, continue to reinforce gendered discrimination, particularly in communities with strong adherence to orthodox beliefs (Guilmoto, 2015).

Historical analyses reveal that during the British Raj, local high-caste communities often managed social practices such as female infanticide independently, while colonial administrators were largely reluctant to intervene, in part because these crimes were clandestine and difficult to prove in court (Cohn, 1987). Additional factors contributing to female mortality include the inability of families to bear the financial burden of daughters and the persistent dowry system (Danton-Hill et al., 2002). Nutritional deficiencies, particularly in micronutrients and vitamins, disproportionately affect female infants, compounding the risk of mortality (Danton-Hill et al., 2002).

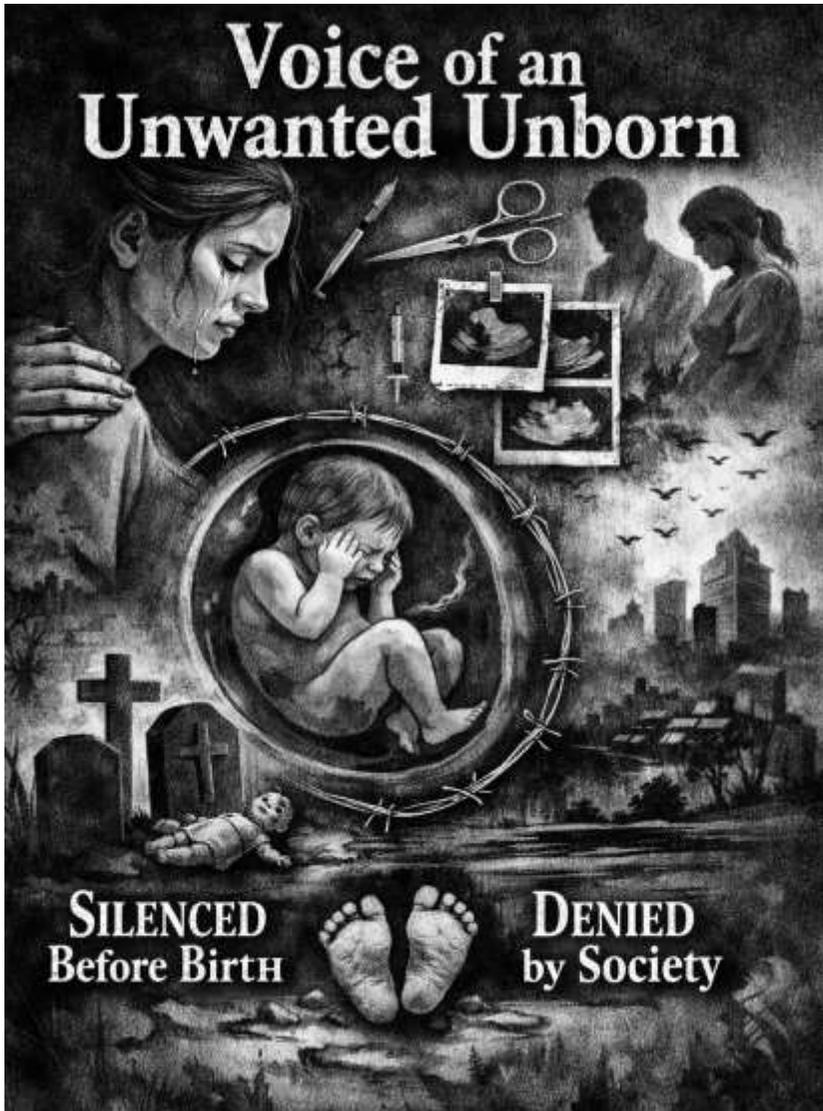
### **Holy books and scriptures**

Religious and moral teachings across major faiths emphasize the sanctity of human life. The Quran, the Bhagavad Gita, and the Bible all highlight the moral imperative to protect life and condemn the destruction of innocent beings (Quran, n.d.; Bible, n.d.; Bhagavad Gita, n.d.). This raises critical ethical questions: don't we need to ponder for a moment that a foetus is a living organism with a fundamental right to life? Can the slogans of protecting animals such as cows, oxen, or goats hold any moral weight if human fetuses are simultaneously being terminated? Is such a practice justified within the frameworks of ethics and social responsibility? Awareness campaigns

and leadership initiatives have also played a role in addressing gender-biased practices. For instance, former President Pratibha Patil implemented measures to prevent the misuse of diagnostic technologies for gender identification, while Meira Kumar, as the first female Speaker of the Lok Sabha, advocated for the empowerment of women, asserting that “women have great power hidden within them” (Patil, 2011; Kumar, 2017).

### **Self-Respect Concept**

Maya Angelou (1993) emphasizes the importance of self-respect in personal and social conduct, stating, “I respect myself and insist upon it from everybody and because I do it, I then respect everybody too” (p. 112). This principle underscores the significance of empowering women through education, enabling them to recognize their intrinsic worth and to challenge the deeply entrenched societal norms that create a melancholic and oppressive environment surrounding the birth of a female child. Beyond women, men also need to cultivate enlightened perspectives to resist pre- and misconceived opinions passed down through generations. Addressing such ingrained social injustices requires collective moral responsibility, ensuring that harmful practices and discriminatory mindsets are recognized, corrected, and ultimately eradicated from society.



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## Implications of the Study

The findings of this study underscore the urgent need to address

gender-based discrimination against the unborn, particularly female fetuses, which remains a persistent social and ethical challenge in India. Despite observable improvements in overall infant mortality and maternal healthcare over the past decade (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner of India, 2020), deeply entrenched patriarchal ideologies, cultural son preference, and socio-economic pressures continue to marginalize the female child. This persistent marginalization not only deprives girls of their fundamental right to life but also perpetuates demographic imbalances, thereby exacerbating broader social inequalities and undermining sustainable development goals (Guilmoto, 2015; UNFPA, 2020).

The study highlights that the root causes of these harmful practices are not confined to poverty or lack of resources but are deeply embedded in socio-cultural norms, orthodox beliefs, and historical practices such as dowry, son preference, and selective abortion (Bhasin, 2003; Cohn, 1987). Ethical and religious frameworks, as reflected in the Quran, the Bhagavad Gita, and the Bible, advocate for the sanctity of life and offer moral guidance against the destruction of the unborn (Quran, n.d.; Bhagavad Gita, n.d.; Bible, n.d.).

From a policy perspective, the findings call for a multipronged approach to safeguard the rights of the girl child. This includes stricter enforcement of laws prohibiting sex-selective abortion, enhanced public awareness campaigns to challenge patriarchal norms, educational initiatives to empower women and men, and targeted socio-economic support for underprivileged families. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the ethical responsibility of society to recognize the

intrinsic value of female life and to nurture a cultural climate that promotes equality, respect, and social justice (Angelou, 1993; Patil, 2011; Kumar, 2017).

Overall, the research underscores that eradicating gender-based discrimination against the unborn is not only a moral imperative but also essential for achieving demographic balance, social cohesion, and sustainable development.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this study illuminate the persistent and deeply rooted nature of gender-based discrimination in India, particularly as it manifests in the rejection and silencing of the female unborn. From historical practices to contemporary socio-cultural norms, the female child has long been devalued, despite her essential role in sustaining families, communities, and society at large. This devaluation not only infringes upon the fundamental right to life but also perpetuates demographic imbalances, ethical violations, and intergenerational cycles of inequality.

While significant improvements have been observed in overall infant mortality rates and maternal health over the past decade, gender-based neglect, selective abortion, and socio-cultural son preference continue to pose serious challenges. These practices transcend economic and educational boundaries, revealing that structural patriarchy, orthodox beliefs, and entrenched social norms, rather than mere poverty, are at the heart of the problem (Bhasin, 2003; Guilmoto, 2015; Cohn, 1987).

The ethical and moral imperatives highlighted in religious and philosophical teachings—across the Quran, the Bhagavad Gita, the Bible, and modern feminist thought—emphasize the sanctity of life and the collective responsibility to protect the voiceless (Quran, n.d.; Bhagavad Gita, n.d.; Bible, n.d.; Angelou, 1993). This study reinforces that societal transformation requires a multipronged approach: strict enforcement of legal safeguards, public awareness campaigns to challenge patriarchal ideologies, education that empowers both women and men, and socio-economic support for vulnerable families.

Eventually, addressing female infanticide and gender-based discrimination is not merely a policy or legal issue but a profound ethical challenge. Recognizing the intrinsic value of every girl child, nurturing her potential, and eradicating harmful practices are essential steps toward demographic balance, social justice, and sustainable development. The voices of the unborn, silenced for centuries, must be heard, respected, and protected—ensuring that society fulfills its moral and social responsibility to all its members.

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**Contesting the Manosphere: Feminist Interventions Across  
Digital Discursive Ecologies**

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**Abstract**

This chapter argues that the contemporary manosphere operates as a reactionary discursive formation that responds to and reshapes feminist interventions within digital publics, producing new configurations of patriarchal power that are both global and locally inflected. Rather than existing at the margins, the manosphere functions as a dense textual ecology in which narratives of grievance, nostalgia, and male victimhood circulate through platform logics that amplify affect, normalize misogyny, and render masculinist backlash culturally legible and politically potent (Ging, 2019). These formations do not simply oppose feminism; they actively rework gendered power relations by mobilizing irony, repetition, and

mediated intimacy to reassert masculine authority amid perceived social and political displacement.

Situated within contemporary digital cultures, the chapter examines the manosphere as a site of textual resistance and counter-resistance at the intersection of gender, caste, power, and discursive production. Encompassing men's rights forums, incel communities, red-pill networks, and misogynistic influencer cultures, these spaces articulate a shared affective economy of resentment and rage that reframes men as structurally oppressed subjects in response to feminist gains (Ging, 2019). Approached as a textual and affective formation rather than solely a sociological phenomenon, the manosphere generates meaning through algorithmic amplification, memes, and networked performances of masculinity.

Drawing on Debbie Ging's media-theoretical analysis alongside Indian feminist interventions by Rohini Lakshané, Kavita Krishnan, and Nivedita Menon, the chapter offers a comparative reading of feminist responses to reactionary masculinities. While Ging emphasizes platform capitalism and affective circulation, Indian feminist critiques foreground the entanglement of online misogyny with caste hierarchies, communal politics, nationalism, and state power (Krishnan, 2016; Lakshané, 2020; Menon, 2012). Placing these perspectives in dialogue, the chapter contends that resistance to the manosphere must be understood as both discursive and material, encompassing feminist critique, legal advocacy, and political intervention.

## **Keywords**

*(Affective Economies, Digital Misogyny, Digital Publics, Feminist Textual Resistance and Manosphere)*

## **Introduction**

Feminist engagements with digital misogyny demand a theoretical framework that situates discourse at the heart of power, subject formation, and knowledge production. Drawing on Michel Foucault's theorization of discourse as a constitutive force, power is understood not as something possessed or imposed from above but as something that circulates through language, norms, and everyday practices. As Foucault argues, discourse is "not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but that for which and by which there is struggle," (Foucault, 1990, 101) emphasizing its productive role in shaping social reality. From this perspective, the manosphere cannot be reduced to isolated instances of misogynistic speech; rather, it operates as a structured discursive formation that produces and legitimizes specific masculinist subjectivities. Through repetition, affective intensification, and claims to truth, manospheric discourse normalizes gender hierarchy and trains subjects to apprehend feminism as an existential threat rather than as a political critique. Within such a framework, feminist textual resistance emerges as a counter-discursive practice that seeks to unsettle these regimes of truth. Foucault's insistence that "where there is power, there is resistance" (Foucault, 1990, p.96) is crucial here, particularly because resistance is not positioned outside power but is immanent to it.

Feminist interventions, whether academic, journalistic, or cultural, do not merely rebut misogynistic claims; they disrupt the epistemic authority of the manosphere by interrogating the conditions under which its truths are produced and circulated. Feminist discourse, thus, intervenes at the level of knowledge-production itself, challenging the naturalization of gender hierarchy and the supposed inevitability of male grievance. This analysis is further informed by intersectional feminist theory, particularly the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw, who warns against treating gender as a singular or isolated axis of power. Crenshaw argues that “the problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite - that it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences” (Crenshaw, 1991, p.1242). In the Indian context, this insight is especially significant, as caste operates as a constitutive structure that shapes how gender is lived, narrated, and policed. Masculinist discourses within the manosphere often draw legitimacy from caste privilege, even as caste itself is rendered invisible through claims of universal male victimhood and abstract narratives of merit or injury. The figure of the aggrieved male subject frequently relies on the erasure of caste-based asymmetries, allowing dominant-caste masculinity to present itself as a universally oppressed position. An intersectional feminist critique, therefore, insists that misogyny cannot be analytically separated from caste hierarchies and that digital masculinism must be read as a site where caste and gender power are mutually reinforced.

Also, Sara Ahmed’s work on affect and feminist politics provides an additional lens for understanding the emotional economies of digital

misogyny. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed introduces the concept of affective economies to explain how emotions circulate, accumulate value, and align bodies toward particular objects. As she notes, “emotions do things, and they align individuals with communities-or bodily space with social space” (Ahmed, 2004, p.119). Within manospheric cultures, affects such as anger, resentment, humiliation, and entitlement circulate intensely, binding participants together through shared orientations of grievance against feminism. These affects (emotions) do not reside solely within individual subjects; rather, they move across texts, images, memes, and platform-specific affordances, repeatedly producing feminism as an object of collective hostility. Ahmed’s observation that emotions “stick” to certain figures helps explain how feminists are persistently constructed as threats to social order and masculine identity (Ahmed, 2004, p.11). Feminist resistance, within this affective framework, involves not only ideological critique but also a reorientation of feeling itself. As Ahmed argues in *Living a Feminist Life*, feminism often begins with a refusal to accommodate harm, noting that “feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexual exploitation, and sexual oppression, but it is also a way of living with the consequences of that refusal” (Ahmed, 2017, pp. 5-6). Naming injury, refusing silence, and cultivating feminist solidarities interrupt economies of rage by challenging the emotional rewards that sustain misogynistic communities. Feminist texts, therefore, function affectively as well as politically, creating alternative attachments and modes of belonging that contest the affective infrastructure of the manosphere.

Drawing on scholars such as Donna Haraway and Karen Barad, digital platforms, algorithms, and infrastructures are treated not as neutral conduits but as active participants in the production of discourse. Haraway's assertion that "we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism" (Haraway, 1991, p. 150) unsettles any clear boundary between human intention and technological mediation. Similarly, Barad's concept of 'intra-action' emphasizes that agency does not precede relations but emerges through them (Barad, 2007, p.33). From this perspective, the manosphere is co-produced through the interaction of human actors, platform architectures, algorithmic visibility, and political economies of attention. This expanded understanding of agency allows for an ecological reading of digital cultures, where power emerges from the entanglement of human desires, technological systems, and socio-political structures. Within this theoretical frame, the manosphere appears as a toxic discursive ecology sustained by unequal relations of gender, caste, and technological power. Feminist interventions, by contrast, gesture toward more ethical and accountable modes of co-existence in mediated publics, modes that foreground relationality, responsibility, and the possibility of inhabiting digital spaces otherwise.



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## Analysis of the Chapter

### The Manosphere as a Digital Textual Formation

The term manosphere refers to a heterogeneous constellation of online spaces that articulate masculinist identities through narratives of loss, entitlement, and victimhood. These digital formations, ranging from men's rights forums and incel communities to red-pill influencers, frame feminism as an oppressive force responsible for the erosion of male privilege, social status, and emotional security. Central to manospheric discourse is what Michael Kimmel identifies as 'aggrieved entitlement', a sense that men have been unjustly deprived of power they believe is rightfully theirs (Kimmel, 2013, p.9). Within this framework, power is discursively inverted: men are positioned as marginalized subjects, while women and feminists are depicted as beneficiaries of allegedly rigged social systems.

From a textual perspective, the manosphere operates through recognizable narrative tropes—decline, betrayal, and restoration. Feminism is cast as a conspiratorial project that has destabilized ‘natural’ gender relations, while the past is romanticized as a time of masculine authority and social order. As Susan Faludi observes in her analysis of backlash politics, such narratives thrive on the claim that “the enemy is feminism, which has supposedly robbed men of their rightful place” (Faludi, 1991, p.10). These stories are sustained through memes, ironic humour, pseudo-scientific claims, anecdotal evidence, and selective appropriations of evolutionary psychology, lending an appearance of rationality to deeply affective grievances. The repetition and circulation of these textual elements generate what Sara Ahmed describes as ‘affective economies’ wherein emotions such as resentment, fear, and anger accumulate value as they circulate, binding individuals into imagined communities (Ahmed, 2004, p. 119). In the manosphere, affect does not merely express belief; it actively produces it, aligning bodies toward shared objects of hate, feminism, women, and perceived liberal elites. Through this circulation, internal contradictions within manospheric ideology are obscured in favour of a coherent emotional narrative of injury and resistance. Importantly, the manosphere is not confined to fringe platforms. Its discourses increasingly seep into mainstream social media through influencers, lifestyle content, and algorithmically amplified outrage. As Angela Nagle notes, digital cultures of reaction thrive precisely because they “collapse irony, sincerity, and provocation into a single communicative register” (Nagle, 2017, p.16). The boundary between extremist and everyday misogyny thus

becomes porous, enabling reactionary ideas to circulate under the guise of self-help, humour, or free speech.

Understanding the manosphere as a textual ecology allows us to see how meaning is produced not only through explicit statements but also through affective cues, platform affordances, and modes of circulation. Following Foucault's insight that discourse is productive rather than merely reflective of power relations, the manosphere can be read as a site where gendered power is continuously renegotiated through language, affect, and repetition.

### **Affective Economies and Digital Masculinities: Debbie Ging's Intervention**

Debbie Ging's work provides a crucial framework for understanding the manosphere as a digitally mediated affective economy, one that cannot be reduced to the psychology of individual misogynists. Rather, Ging insists that the manosphere must be read in relation to the political economy of digital media, where visibility, virality, and engagement are structurally rewarded. She argues that the manosphere is not simply a collection of angry men online but a networked ecosystem that thrives on affective intensity and platform amplification (Ging, 2019, pp. 638-657). In this sense, misogyny becomes not an aberration but a profitable mode of communication within attention-driven platforms. Ging emphasizes that contemporary digital infrastructures privilege content that provokes strong emotional reactions, noting that anger, resentment and outrage are particularly compatible with the logics of algorithmic circulation. Within such attention economies, emotions function as

currency. Misogynistic narratives gain traction not despite their hostility but because of it, as emotional extremity increases visibility and engagement. The manosphere, thus, operates as what Ging describes as an ‘affective feedback loop’, where grievance is continuously intensified through likes, shares, metrics, and antagonistic commentary (Ging, 2019, pp. 638-657).

A central contribution of Ging’s analysis lies in her demonstration of how personal insecurities are translated into collective political affect. She observes that experiences of sexual rejection, economic precarity, or perceived social displacement are reframed within manospheric discourse as evidence of ‘systemic discrimination against men’ (Ging, 2019, pp.5-6). This reframing transforms private vulnerability into public resentment, enabling what Ging calls a ‘politics of victimhood’ that is both emotionally compelling and ideologically reactionary. Through irony, memes, gamified interactions, and in-group vernacular, manospheric spaces foster solidarity while simultaneously insulating themselves from critique.

Crucially, misogyny within these spaces is frequently disavowed through claims of humour or irony. Ging notes that sexism is often articulated through irony, satire, or edgy humour, allowing speakers to deny intent while reproducing deeply hostile gender norms (Ging, 2019, pp. 8-10). This strategic ambiguity makes misogyny difficult to challenge, as feminist critique is dismissed as humourless, excessive, or authoritarian. Irony, thus, functions as both a shield and a weapon, reinforcing gender hierarchies while evading accountability. Ging also highlights how digital mediation reshapes masculinity itself,

producing what she terms ‘platformed masculinities’. Masculine identity in the manosphere is performed through textual and visual cues - screenshots, follower counts, reaction videos, rage-bait posts, and performative outrage, that reward aggression, dominance, and emotional hardening. These environments function pedagogically, teaching users how to feel, how to speak, and how to position themselves in relation to women and feminism. As Ging argues, the manosphere operates as a training ground for affective and ideological alignment, socializing participants into shared narratives of grievance and gendered injustice (Ging, 2019, pp. 6-9)

Feminist critique, therefore, cannot be limited to content moderation or ideological rebuttal alone. Ging’s intervention makes clear that effective resistance must engage the affective infrastructures and platform conditions that enable misogyny to flourish. As Ging argues, without addressing the media systems that reward antagonism and emotional extremity, efforts to counter online misogyny remain partial and ultimately ineffective (Ging, 2019, pp.18-20). Her work, thus, compels feminist scholarship to attend not only to what is said in digital cultures of masculinity, but to how emotions circulate, accumulate, and acquire political force within them.

### **Feminist Interventions in the Indian Digital Context**

While Debbie Ging’s analysis illuminates the global dynamics of the manosphere, feminist interventions in India foreground the specific historical, political, and structural conditions that shape digital misogyny in the subcontinent. Indian feminists such as Rohini

Lakshané, Kavita Krishnan, and Nivedita Menon approach online masculinist backlash through an explicitly intersectional lens, emphasizing that gendered violence in digital spaces is inseparable from caste, religion, nationalism, and state power. As Nivedita Menon reminds us that gender does not operate in isolation from other axes of power; it is always already entangled with caste, class, and community (Menon, 2012, pp. 18-20).

Rohini Lakshané's work on digital rights, platform governance, and disinformation offers a critical account of how online misogyny in India is frequently weaponized as a political tool. Writing on coordinated harassment campaigns, Lakshané observes that abuse against women online is rarely spontaneous; it is often organized, targeted, and politically motivated (Lakshané 2020, pp. 6-8). Women journalists, activists, academics, and dissenting public figures are routinely subjected to sexualized threats, doxxing, and rape fantasies, frequently combined with casteist and communal slurs. These attacks function as what Lakshané describes as disciplinary mechanisms aimed at silencing voices that challenge dominant narratives (Lakshané, 2020, pp. 20-22). Crucially, Lakshané highlights the role of platform governance failures and state complicity in enabling such violence. She argues that the reluctance of platforms to act decisively against coordinated abuse, coupled with weak legal accountability, creates an ecosystem of impunity (Lakshané 2021, pp. 8-11). In this context, online misogyny cannot be understood merely as hate speech; it operates as a technology of intimidation, regulating who is permitted to speak in the digital public sphere.

Kavita Krishnan situates online misogyny within the broader ideological project of Hindu nationalism, arguing that attacks on feminists are deeply connected to anxieties surrounding social transformation. She notes that feminism is perceived as a threat because it questions not only patriarchy but also caste hierarchies and the sanctity of the Hindu family (Krishnan, 2016, pp. 3-6). In digital spaces, this anxiety manifests through coordinated trolling, sexualized vilification, and accusations of being ‘anti-national’ or ‘Westernized’. The figure of the feminist, thus, becomes a ‘symbolic enemy’ against whom nationalist masculinity is mobilized. Krishnan further argues that misogynistic digital cultures cannot be separated from authoritarian politics, observing that gendered abuse is central to how right-wing movements consolidate power, both online and offline (Krishnan 2018, pp. 12-15). In this sense, the manosphere in India frequently overlaps with ‘right-wing digital ecosystems’, where misogyny, casteism, and communal hatred circulate together. The boundary between gendered hate and political extremism becomes increasingly blurred, as attacks on women serve simultaneously to police gender norms and suppress political dissent.

Nivedita Menon’s feminist political thought offers a broader structural framing of this backlash. Menon insists that resistance to feminism is not simply cultural or moral but fundamentally ‘political’, rooted in struggles over authority, resources, and recognition. As she argues, backlash emerges precisely at moments when existing hierarchies feel themselves to be under threat (Menon, 2012, pp. 3-7). From this perspective, online misogyny is symptomatic of a deeper crisis of legitimacy, as feminist, anti-caste, and democratic movements

challenge entrenched forms of social power. Seen through Menon's lens, digital misogyny operates as a reactionary response to structural change, rather than an expression of individual resentment alone. Online abuse becomes a means of reasserting authority in a context where traditional markers of dominance, patriarchal control, caste privilege, and nationalist certainties, are increasingly contested. Feminist interventions in the Indian digital context, thus, reveal that misogyny is not an accidental byproduct of social media but a political strategy, embedded within broader struggles over gender, caste, and the meaning of democracy itself.

### **Caste, Gender, and the Digital Public Sphere**

A critical distinction between Euro-American analyses of the manosphere and feminist interventions in the Indian context lies in the centrality of caste as a structuring force of digital misogyny. In India, gendered online violence cannot be adequately understood without attending to caste hierarchies that regulate bodies, speech, sexuality, and access to public space. The manosphere's rhetoric of male dispossession frequently draws, implicitly if not explicitly, on upper-caste assumptions of entitlement, honour, and social dominance, even as caste itself is disavowed or rendered invisible. Indian feminist scholars have repeatedly demonstrated that claims of gender-neutral or universal male victimhood function to obscure historically sedimented caste privilege. Narratives that portray men as oppressed by feminism rely on a strategic erasure of caste, class, and religious power, producing what may be described as a 'caste-blind masculinity'. This discursive manoeuvre enables dominant-caste male

subjects to position themselves as aggrieved minorities while continuing to benefit from entrenched social hierarchies. Such claims of dispossession, thus, operate less as diagnoses of inequality than as reassertions of normative authority.

Digital platforms intensify these dynamics through affordances such as anonymity, virality, and coordinated harassment. Dalit, Bahujan, and Adivasi women, as well as Muslim women, are disproportionately targeted by forms of online violence that combine sexualized threats with casteist and communal abuse. These attacks function as mechanisms of social regulation, disciplining marginalized subjects who claim visibility, voice, or authority in digital public spheres. In this context, misogyny is inseparable from caste violence; it works to police not only gender norms but also the boundaries of social belonging. Feminist textual resistance in the Indian digital context, therefore, entails more than countering misogynistic speech. It requires exposing the casteist logics that underpin ostensibly gendered attacks and situating digital abuse within longer histories of social exclusion and humiliation. By foregrounding caste, Indian feminists challenge the universalization of the category ‘man’ that underlies much manospheric discourse. They insist that masculinity in India is always already caste-marked and that digital misogyny frequently operates as a means of reasserting dominant-caste power in moments of social flux.

Reading the manosphere through caste, thus, reveals it as a reactionary formation, invested in preserving hierarchical social orders under the rhetorical cover of free speech, meritocracy, or men’s rights. This

sharpened caste analysis also reframes feminist resistance as a struggle over the terms of digital citizenship itself. Questions of who is allowed to speak, to dissent, and to inhabit public platforms without fear emerge as deeply political. Feminist interventions that center caste make visible the material consequences of digital discourse - silencing, exclusion, and violence, thereby linking textual resistance to broader projects of social justice and democratic transformation.



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### **Implications of the Study**

This study has several significant implications for feminist scholarship, digital media studies, and contemporary literary discourse. First, by conceptualizing the manosphere as a digital textual ecology rather than a collection of isolated misogynistic actors, the chapter shifts analytical focus from individual pathology to structural,

discursive, and affective conditions. This reframing underscores the necessity of reading digital misogyny as a culturally productive force—one that generates meaning, subjectivities, and political alignments through repetition, affective circulation, and platform affordances. Such an approach extends Foucauldian insights on discourse and power into the terrain of algorithmically mediated publics, offering a model for analyzing other reactionary digital formations.

Second, the study demonstrates the indispensability of intersectional analysis, particularly the centrality of caste in understanding digital masculinity in the Indian context. By foregrounding how claims of male victimhood rely on the erasure of caste privilege, the chapter challenges universalized accounts of the manosphere and cautions against Eurocentric frameworks that overlook locally specific structures of domination. This has implications for global feminist theory, suggesting that transnational analyses of digital misogyny must remain attentive to historically situated hierarchies of caste, religion, and nationalism.

Third, the study advances feminist resistance as a multi-layered practice—discursive, affective, structural, and legal. It implies that effective interventions cannot be limited to counter-speech or content moderation alone but must engage platform governance, state accountability, and the affective economies that sustain misogynistic communities. Feminist textual resistance, as articulated here, becomes a mode of political praxis that links representation to material consequences such as silencing, intimidation, and exclusion.

Finally, by situating digital cultures within the scope of modern literary discourse, the study expands the field's methodological horizons. It affirms that memes, online narratives, and platformed performances of masculinity are critical texts through which contemporary struggles over gender, power, and democracy are negotiated. In doing so, the chapter positions feminism not merely as critique but as an ongoing project of reimagining more ethical, inclusive, and accountable digital publics.

## **Conclusion**

The manosphere operates within a digital ecology shaped by algorithmic amplification, platform monetization, and uneven regimes of governance. These conditions produce a communicative environment in which reactionary discourses flourish, sustained by logics of visibility, outrage, and polarization. Feminist resistance to the manosphere may, therefore, be read as an attempt to reconfigure discursive ecologies themselves - to cultivate spaces in which counter-narratives, ethics of care, and relational modes of engagement can take form. Activist interventions, counter-speech, legal challenges, and feminist pedagogical practices collectively intervene in the infrastructural conditions that determine how texts circulate, gain legitimacy, and exercise power. This ecological framing also foregrounds the materiality of digital discourse. Online misogyny is not merely symbolic or representational; it produces concrete effects in the form of threats of violence, psychological injury, professional silencing, and physical vulnerability. Feminist textual resistance insists on the continuity between discourse and material reality,

rejecting any tendency to dismiss online abuse as immaterial, ephemeral, or inconsequential.

Across contexts, feminist resistance to the manosphere assumes multiple, intersecting forms. Symbolic interventions contest misogynistic narratives through critique, parody, and practices of re-signification. Structural interventions engage questions of platform accountability, legal regimes, and state responsibility in regulating gendered harm. Affective interventions work to interrupt economies of rage and resentment by cultivating solidarity, care, and modes of collective action that refuse masculinist scripts of antagonism. Crucially, feminist resistance is not oriented toward rebutting isolated statements or individual actors. Rather, it seeks to unsettle the discursive logics through which masculinist power is reproduced and naturalized. By exposing internal contradictions, naming structural conditions, and amplifying marginalized voices, feminist critique reconstitutes the manosphere, from a site that claims unchallenged authority into a contested and politically accountable terrain.

The manosphere constitutes a critical site in which contemporary struggles over gender, power, and meaning are actively negotiated. Read as a digital textual ecology, it illuminates the ways misogyny is produced, circulated, and legitimated through the interplay of narrative forms, affective economies, and platform infrastructures. Feminist interventions, whether articulated through media theory, political activism, or intersectional critique, thus, emerge as indispensable modes of textual resistance, contesting reactionary masculinities and working toward the reconfiguration of more just and accountable

discursive environments. By bringing global and local feminist perspectives into dialogue, this paper underscores the necessity of context-sensitive analyses that remain attentive to transnational circulations of power. In extending the scope of modern literary discourse to encompass digital textuality, the study affirms feminism not merely as a politics of representation, but as a critical practice that confronts the material and symbolic power relations shaping our shared discursive worlds.

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### **Author’s Bio**

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