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*Literary Druid* aims to bring down Academic Research to promote research support for the academicians and scholars in the field of English Language and literature. Research through this medium is motivating in all aspects of main and inter-disciplines by consequent projects and e-publication. Making Internationalization of the research works in the globalized world aid the scholarly community to develop scholarly profile in research through the quality of publications. The audacity and vision of academic research on internet could foster green printing and open access nature in research. All of these motivate best distribution of research that produces positive outcomes for the development of the world.

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Research ought to be active to create a major boundary in the academic world. It must enrich the neo-theoretical frame that facilitates re-evaluation and enhancement of existing practices and thoughts. Eventually, this will effect in a primary discovery and lean-to the knowledge acquired. Research is to establish, confirm facts, reiterate previous works ant to solve issues. An active endeavor to endow rational approach to these types for educational reformations through academic research has become the focal intention of the journal. Now, we feel very proud to bring January, Volume 4, Issue 1, 2022 contributed by the Academicians and research Scholars of the literary field.

**M.Vinoth Kumar & S. Kulandhaivel**  
**Editors'-in-Chief**

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## A Comparative Study of Fairy Tales by Charles Perrault, Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen along with their On-Screen Adaptations through a Feminist Perspective

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### Abstract

*The Research Paper entitled “A Comparative Study of Fairy Tales by Charles Perrault, Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen along with their On-Screen Adaptations through a Feminist Perspective” deals with the detailed study of adaptive works and it analyses the changes incorporated in it with respect to the feminist perspective. It specifically focuses on the adaptive works and the changes undergone with the current socio-political situation. The works in question are produced by Walt Disney to include the balance towards a particular audience. The movies are namely ‘Tangled’, ‘Maleficent’, ‘Cinderella’ and ‘Frozen’. This paper looks to aim at these popular Disney movies adapted from famous writers like Hans Christian Anderson, Brother Grimm’s and Charles Perrault. The evolution of the adaptive work by enumerating both the pros and cons would bring forth the holistic view of how an adaptation should not be viewed as a merely copied version as it adds value to the original source material as well. The feminist study will help us understand the differences in the thought process of woman characters are written now and also shed light on how feminist movements has had a huge role in the present popular media.*

**Keywords:** *Adaptation, Linda Hutcherson, Grimm Brothers, Disney movies, Cinderella, Maleficent, Frozen, Tangled, Feminism, Marxism, Fairy-tale*

Feminist understanding of a text and movie can really help us grasp the changes that were implemented while these adaptive works were being recreated. Before we delve into the feminist understanding of movies it is important to look at its need and why such an understanding holds prominence in the way we look at art. It is clearly evident that our society from the beginning has been bifurcated based upon the gender of the individual. This bifurcation led to an oppression initiated by those at the top of power structure i.e. male gender. The patriarchal oppression led to a creation of marginalised gender that needed upliftment and that is when the need for feminism came into existence. The entire sociology was engulfed with male theorist such a situation led to the need for women’s voice and which is why the earliest form of resistance against this was through a continuous focus on the issue of women who were pushed to the corners and an underlying emphasis on representation of



women writers and women characters. The domain of feminism isn't particularly fixed and thus incorporate newer idea and newer understanding that is brought forth through new experience faced by women around the globe. It is very important to have a fair bit of knowledge about the waves of feminism which began with the need for political equality and is filled with incidents of suffrage movements. The political representation was followed by the second wave of feminism that urges for social and economic equality between genders. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar dealt with the social situation of women authors and experience while reading a literary text in their seminal work 'The Mad Woman in the Attic'. An important observation was the belief that most of female artist were metaphorically entrapped in what they termed as patriarchal poetry. Thus the need was to redefine the existing tests and it could only be achieved through reading/ analysing the already existing patriarchal ideologies and questioning such a biased portrayal that does a disservice to the entire gender.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century was marred by hurtful opinion about the women folk in general aiming particularly those who dare to question these biased power hierarchies. Another important work that hold prominence with respect to feminist phase was Virginia Woolf's 'Shakespeare's sister' where she brings forward the real reason for the lack of credible female unforce in literary arena. Moreover, fairy tale uses a way to assert feminine identity was first employed in one of the section of 'The Mad Woman in the Attic' titled 'The queen's Looking Glass' they analyse the story of the "Snow White" and start by describing the evil queen, looking through her window pricking her fingers and thus bleeding in the process. The blood is used to depict her loss of virginity. The tale is totally subverted when the queen is transformed into an evil witch. They do-away with the concept of a 'step-mother' to depict the different ways in which her husband's patriarchal voice of judgment act as an initiation point for this women and also the evaluation of her self-worth. Unlike the original folktale which stressed on the nasty characteristic of evil mother, this rendition question the existence of a highly patriarchal 'looking glass' that continues to remind the character that although she was fair the young Snow White was fair along with being younger.

Patriarchy is the evil personified that has formed existence through King and the mirror. They focus on the need to reclaim the power to step through this looking glass. The male dominance in the literature might have helped the male authority but with the advent of feminist approach this authority can now be questioned. While patriarchy has a knack for feeding women, dismal stories about themselves, it is important for women to shift the paradigm into their favour and usher in the era of equality. The third wave of feminism on the other hand stressed on the intersectionality of the women's experiences. One of the major criticism of the entire second wave feminism was a lack of representation of women belonging to different social and economic groups. Although it was a period of liberation in the west, the east has had dismal effect in this regard. The third wave of feminism tried to accommodate these criticisms by involving the experience of women across the globe along with the varied social perceptions. The major issue dealt during this period was claiming the





reproductive rights and other social political changes. Contemporary feminism strongly relies on the digital boom that has transpired around the world. This phase involves social media to inform women about their rights along with urging male to join this common quest for equality. The feminist literary criticism on the other hand is an offshoot's of the women's movement of 1960s and which is why it can vary due to its own adaptability. The liberal feminism in this sense refers to a way of feminism that challenges the existing inequality by taking into consideration of existing social and legal reforms. They question the unequal status be it the pay gap or the gender based discrimination. The liberal feminism has influenced women to aim at the job that was essentially categorised as male dominated. The complete social stratification requires the existence of liberal feminism for a longer period of time as it is quite evident that work is far from being done.

On the other hand, Marxist feminism on the double marginalization of women being exploited by capitalism as well as gender based discrimination. We have already understood the power structure at play in every society, thus if we look at a feminist perspective it will come to our notice that men have a total control over the work force, women end up being part of this controlled environment. Marxist feminism brought to focus 'unpaid' and 'unpraised' job of women folk that benefit men and is thus peddled as the right behaviour for any women. It also looks at the patriarchal nature of employment and the assumption that become a part of women's identity and thus hampering her credibility and a fair chance at employment. Another branch of feminism happens to be Radical feminism, it is the most volatile and aggressive branch that reflects all the changes as an example of token gestures. It tries to deconstruct the presence of patriarchal ideologies in every aspect of our being. Its proactive stance has often led to negative approach to the entire realm of feminism. The concept of female separation advocates for the lack of contact with males and other such extreme ideas. The aim however is to put the needs of women at higher pedestal.

Elaine Showalter's Gynocriticism was a specialised form of criticism which particularly focussed on women's writing aiming to create a framework of writing through the perspective of female. This could be achieved through analysing of multiple texts and thus creating a historical study of women's writing. It aimed to replace the male models of writing by bringing into mainstream female authorship, themes as well as ideologies. It questions and countered the ideas of literary paternity and pseudo-scientific belief by looking at the relationship of literature and author by using theories of physiology and psychology that deals with the varied interest. It also questioned the difference in the language used by men and women. There is a general tendency of viewing the body of a woman as a territory. Such an unhealthy gender dynamic is evident when people often tend to use the body of women to get back at others. Furthermore, the capitalistic understanding has pushed the idea that a women need to be fairer, shorter and less wealthy than men so as to maintain the superstructure which claims that women are defined with respect to the man in their life. Feminism aims to snatch away the tools rested in the hands of patriarchy through which it looked at the world in the gendered way. However feminist criticism is also believed to be an



anarchist but the presence of multiple theoretical frameworks is due to its origin as a movement rather than a theoretical approach. Feminist literary criticism took the help of other theories like post colonialism, psychoanalysis as well as Marxism which in itself is a liberating aspect. The presence of multiple theoretical frameworks helps in widening of horizon and helps us to view the reality of life in multiple ways. We do agree that for a longest period of time the general aspect of life was based on male culture i.e. a culture that has language, belief system, concept of existence based on male centric experiences. However a rebellion of a female culture will also copy the concept of male.

Moreover, due to internalization of ideas female are taught to except the male culture as normal. Any characteristic not imbibed by women that doesn't conform to male culture is essentially termed as 'other' this part of female culture is neglected due to male culture decision to not talk about it and thus silenced, this zone was termed as 'Wild zone'. After having a brief knowledge about the feminist literary understanding, we will look into the selected adaptive texts to question and situate their position in the entire scheme of things. Adaptive works often tend to incorporate the ideas that are pedalled by capitalistic endeavours thus present a pretty picture of time it is set in; this observation can be easily brought to light through Disney's marketplace tactic and content creation mechanism. The four movies in question have been selected keeping in mind the time they were released so as to look at them through an added prism of contemporary socio-political surroundings.

Cinderella has often been criticised for the depiction of its central protagonist as the damsel in distress waiting to be rescued by the prince. Moreover, it set the ball rolling for such princesses in future including Belle from 'Beauty and the Beast' and Jasmine from 'Aladdin'. The movies followed the ideas that were pushed forth as ideal behaviour. Even the 2015 live action version heavily borrows from the animated movie. Ella's courage and kindness is depicted through her continuous hard work and optimism at the time of at most adversity. After second marriage of her father and his untimely death she is made to suffer at the hands of her step-mother and her step-sister. She acts as an unpaid slave for her step-family. Blaming her for such situation might amount to 'victim blaming'. However, it can't be brushed aside that the sympathy for Ella is aroused through the perils in her life and her innate goodness is depicted through the amount of work she does without flinching an eyelid. Unlike the animated version Ella does have a personality and is not ready to agree to Lady Tremaine's plan to rule over the kingdom as a proxy.

The focus to depict a seemingly uplifted girl is symbolised through Cinderella riding a horse and actually meeting the king even before the so called Ball. She is able to change his decision to go on hunting for pleasure. Such a representation is subdued by her continuous struggle to please people around her who are doing everything to make her more miserable. Ella's kindness is emphasised when she rejects Lady Tremaine's deal to get Anastasia and Drizela married in a good household in exchange of her marriage to the newly crowned king. Another important addition to this new work was Cinderella's monologue at the end where she rightfully introduces herself as a simple village girl and clearing any doubt of her being a



princess. This monologue is important with respect to Marxist feminism. Ella throughout her teenage was doubly marginalised by everyone for not being rich as well as being a girl. This monologue is a symbolic assertion of her individuality as a girl from the lower strata of the society and that she is ready to won her experience and not shrug under the carpet once she has reached the goal of acquiring an upward social mobility.

The character of prince is clearly worked upon. Unlike a clueless prince who couldn't even able to recognise Ella in her plain clothes, Kit in this version is not just individual motivated by the grandeur and beauty of Ella enchanted by the power of fairy godmother. His elaborate plan to organise the entire Ball was a desperate plan to meet Ella once again. Although he still uses the questionable 'shoe-fitting' trick to find his love of life. It is definitely a considerable change from the earlier version. Another important aspect that cannot be missed in these depiction is essentializing of binary opposite. It also propagates the trope of women turning against each other, not uniting in solidarity against patriarchy. The women characters in the movie can be easily classified as either pure evil like Lady Tremaine and her two daughters or angel incarnate represented through Ella and her pure mother. Even after year of progress, the characters end up as either black or white. The new version out rightly put across the theme of 'kindness brings reward' which was alluded in the early animated version. While Cinderella might not have been obtusely assertive she was still a feminist. While she might not have achieved her freedom through wars and rebellions but her liberation at a time when women would end as a trade deal is highly commendable. Tangled on the other hand is radically forthright in its feminist perspective. Unlike its original source material, she isn't merely a young girl caged in a tower.

Rapunzel aims to travel beyond the world she is thrust into; even her evil mother's manipulation doesn't affect her desire to look at the floating lights. The floating light is symbolic of her protagonist's inner desire to break free. Another important feministic stance incorporated was the dilution of the binary opposites of being good and bad. While it was far from being an idealistic portrayal, we do find a more humane characteristic representation of Rapunzel. She is brave, kind, obedient and beautiful but on the other hand is equally scheming and clumsy. Even Mother Gothel is equally if not more manipulative and self-centred but her quest to cage Rapunzel arise due to her requirement to match the standards of beauty in this so called 'fairy world'. Thus tangled is able to point out the real evil and emphasise on the fact that standard set for Women's beauty do no good for our society. The decision to change the fortune of Rapunzel's love interest from being a prince to a regular thief, Flynn Rider aka Eugene helps the storyteller to focus on protagonist self-identity and struggle to break free rather than a fairy tale romance that might have been similar to Disney's earlier damsel in distress eques movies. Her romance with Flynn is one of the subplot of her narrative. Although it is Flynn who decided to chop off her hair, audience doesn't feel that Rapunzel didn't do anything to attain her freedom. This is why I believe Tangled triumphs over Cinderella if we analysed them on a feminist point of view. According to Toril Moi, feminist is a bunch of qualities that is created by patriarchy which is opposite of



masculine quality. These qualities are necessary tools for patriarchal subjugation and which is why 'list making' creates an unwanted scenario of binary opposition. While Tangled might have failed to totally eradicate such a system of list making; it is able to incorporate certain instances of break away from essentialization. Rapunzel's use of frying pan coinciding with flings sword could be used as example for the same. Frying pan traditionally might signify domesticity reflective of Rapunzel's caged life.

However, once she is in the free world, she uses the symbol of domesticity to actually save herself from obstacle that life throws at her. Moreover, she makes a point that to become a strong individual one doesn't necessarily have to wield a sword or a knife. It also revises the idea of cooking being a passive, feminine activity and invests it with as much power as masculinity. Besides we can't ignore one of the most fascinating character, Mother Gothel's humane side. While by the end of the movie one doesn't really emphasize with her as she come across as a total monster. Rapunzel's talent in co-curricular activities actually points towards Gothel's continuous presence as an active mother. She decided to teach her adopted child all sort of activities and goes to extreme steps as to satisfy her needs. The reason for her downfall is her unhealthy obsession to be pretty also the gendered associations with ageing. Men get better with age, but women must always aspire to look as young as possible and for that we can actually blame the internalize patriarchy to a greater extent as well. Her narcissism is aggravated due to the society that she belongs to.

Flynn Rider is a wonderful addition that adds gravitas to the adaptive work. Unlike the prince who fight the evil witch to safeguard the young maiden. The movie showcases a simpleton but thief, Eugene evolve from being money minded and self-centred to a sacrificing figure. He believes it is his good looks that will help him longer run and such a characteristic isn't normally appreciated in patriarchy. While women characters are often able to control their emotion, it is male characters that end up crying. Tangled could thus viewed as a great example of adaptive works which is able to accommodate new-founding ideas and criticism to actually create a work that is still rooted in its source material. Maleficent, on the other hand is one of the most recent Disney production. The movie is able to incorporate the ideas of Marxist feminism and actually present how women are exploited by both capitalism and men.

The central protagonist Maleficent is depicted as a fairy rather than an evil witch as depicted in the animated version 'The Sleeping Beauty'. The adaptive work focuses on the reasons and motivations for the doing of its supposedly evil protagonist. It also makes a way to create pathos so as to make audience empathise with Maleficent. The movie is able to question the characteristics offered to women who can be either pious or wretched scheming villain. Maleficent is depicted as a young girl who protects the moors against the outside world especially the human kingdom ruled over by King Henry. This Brave young woman isn't merely a soldier for her people as she has a life beyond that as well; at a young age she falls for a peasant boy Stefan. Through this dichotomy, director Robert Stromberg is able to portray a woman character that has guts to fight an entire Kingdom and also has the trait to be



in love. The tension escalates between two kingdoms and that is when King Henry decides to find a successor for himself based on the fact that one who would be able to defeat Maleficent will be one true king. Totally blindsided by ambition and urge for upward social mobility, Stefan decides to trick and betray Maleficent.

On the pretext of giving her a ‘true love’s kiss’. He drugs her only to chop off her wings. The chopping off her wings is highly symbolic of her freedom being curtailed by male agencies. The narrative could be seen as a nod to Fran Ansley’s description of women who absorb the frustration of men in their life. Stefan is disappointed due to his social status and thus decides to make up for it by trying to fulfil the demands of those in power (i.e. King Henry) and thus reach the position of power. Thus we can say that both capitalism and patriarchy are at play but the victim is still the women and in this case poor Maleficent. She still continues to be the strongest individual in this world. The chopping off Maleficent’s wings are actually symbolic of a date rape incident as Angelina Jolie commented “we were very conscious, the writer and I, that it was a metaphor for rape”. Unlike any other Disney fairy tale this has to be one of the biggest leaps with respect to portrayal of violence against women and thus giving it an added responsibility of handling it well enough to make a point against such violence. One of the most powerful feminist stances was the fact that Maleficent denied to be a victim. She burns in the eternal fire of revenge but isn’t ready to feel bad of herself. She is doubly victimised by the betrayal that acts as an emotional turmoil along with physical pain of losing her wings. But she takes it upon herself to inflict these pains on Stefan as well. Although, the romance between Stefan and Maleficent occurs in the first quarter of the movie. It is able to critique the earlier Disney movie that follows the template of two love birds finding each other showcased through the final kiss.

The main plot of Maleficent begins after the catastrophic ‘true love kiss’. It raises serious questions against the trope of happily ever after. The theme of motherhood is put on trial throughout the narrative. While Aurora’s biological mother is absent except for the scene when Maleficent curses the young girl. The wellbeing of the child is then taken care of by a trio of fairies namely Knotgrass, Thistlewit and Flittle needlessly to say they struggle in the role of being a mother. Aurora is merely a task assigned to them by King Stefan. Through these fairies, who wish the best for the young girl, they don’t necessarily have maternal instincts which are why they try to do stuff a ‘good mother’ would do but fail miserably. On the other hand, Diaval, a raven that is transformed as a human by the power of Maleficent, is way more sympathetic and protective of the young girl. Although he is merely a slave, he tries his best to do things in the best interest of young Aurora. Even the princesses are way more connected to the shape-shifting Diaval as compared to their mothers.

Moreover, unlike the evil representation of an evil step-mother and continuous emphasis on older women’s jealousy over a young princess’s beauty, this version eradicates it. Maleficent is not threatened by Aurora’s beauty the way Lady Tremaine, Evil Queen and Ursula were threatened by Cinderella, Snowwhite and Ariel respectively. On the contrary, Maleficent is mesmerized by her joyous and inquisitive personality. Even after making



conscious efforts to hate Aurora she is constantly adoring her and in the process ends up as her fairy God-Mother. The adaptation makes a conspicuous decision to incorporate the ideas of ecofeminism in its narrative. Moors represented an idealistic situation; full of beauty of nature and enormous wealth. Although it housed wonderful creature, they were never discontent. Maleficent protected the moor as a guardian angel and thus flourished land of moors represented and voiced the idea of liberated women. The neighbour kingdom of human was filled with poison of discontentment and over ambition which act as a reason for subjugation and betrayal of Maleficent. The natural life and the dreamy world of the moors goes for a toss as Maleficent decides to anoint herself as the queen. The movie is able to strike a connection between the exploitation and degradation of Moors and oppression over Maleficent. After the curse over Aurora the gloomy nature of the world continues until Maleficent breaks her curse with one final true Love's kiss.

Once the curse is lifted and Stefan reaches the end of his life; the fairy world is able to find the nature's divinity. Thus, helping the residents of both the world have a fairly peaceful life. Another important change in the adaptation was the character of Prince Phillip. He is depicted as an infatuated individual who believes he is in love with Aurora which is why his kiss is able to lift the curse, quite different to the animated version. Its Maleficent's kiss that helps in revival. Through this change makes are able to put forth the idea that love isn't unidimensional. One of the biggest surrounding 'Sleeping Beauty' was the need for a male saviour that is eradicated in this version. Maleficent is then able to subdue Stefan with Aurora freeing her wings symbolically representatives of how maternal instincts brings, her out of revenge. Although its makes giant leaps with respect to stronger female characters Samantha Abramowitz aptly points out "Maleficent portray a safe version of feminism, one that that does not complicate the social structure from which the company benefits". While Maleficent is portrayed as an inherently good fairy giving the character a much needed backstory; however, to suit the audience it's catering towards does a dis-service by not complicating at every instance.

One of the biggest failure of Maleficent is its reluctance to do away with the binary opposition of being good and bad to justify titular character of being misunderstood they end up depicting the trio of the fairy as non-essential character present in the narrative only to add comic effect. While 'Sleeping Beauty' depicts the trio as the ultimate representation of goodness. Maleficent on the other hand subvert the narrative by ending up as a reluctant caretaker. Thus depicting that it is the attribute of motherhood that helps in associating the characteristic of being good or bad. Hence essentializing women as mothers.

Frozen has often seen most volatile discussion about it being a feminist propaganda aiming to create an anti-men sentiment. It was released in the year 2013 and was one of Disney's most ambitious project. Unlike Hans Christian Andersen's original Fairy-tale 'The Snow Queen' which depicted evil ice queen and her decision to freeze the heart of her sister. The adaptation on the other hand is a celebration of sisterhood. Jordan Peterson termed it as a "deeply propagandistic" due to the fact that Prince Hans turns out to be a power hungry



monster. However, such anti-men allegations don't necessarily count in the character of the iceman named Kristoff, who is paired opposite Anna. Although the movie subverts the narrative of Hans Kissing Anna to save her life to accommodate the power of sisterhood by making Elsa do the act of love it is very important that Kristoff is instrumental in bringing her back in time. The movie has no intention of demonizing any gender and is actually able to change the gender of the villain for the first time in all the Disney princess movies released. Unlike the scheming evil witch/woman the biggest villain of frozen is a handsome prince who wishes to usurp the entire kingdom of Arendalle.

The song 'Let it go' sung by Elsa is symbolic representation of her liberation as she chooses to break from the shekels that she was continuously holding within herself. Another important feminist stance employed by the makers is the fact that Elsa does commit a mistake of actually freezing an entire kingdom. She keeps on doing things without any intention to do so and in this process hurt the one who love her. She isn't ready to face the problem that has reached tipping point due to her. Thus, we finally get a character that dabbles between the binary opposition of being good and bad. Unlike Aurora, Elsa magical power aren't curse but is heavily implied that she was born this way and which is why researchers like David Faraci and Lynskey view the movie under the lens of queer understanding. The song 'Let it go' is often seen as a hint at Elsa's coming out and identifying with her sexuality. However even Frozen fails due to hackneyed portrayal of self-sacrificing female. The movie does a disservice to the entire feminist movement by making Anna's sacrifice for her sister thus implying that true love is equivalent to self-sacrifice and it should be desirable trait imbibed by women.

The paper situates the position of an adaptive work and the significance it holds in today's time. While Disney's desire to mint money isn't really hidden and quite similar to any international company tries to hop on with the changing tides of our socio-political scenario. However, it is quite evident that terms like betrayal of the original work, perversion and infidelity cannot be so easily aligned with a work just because it is restructured with respect to contemporary scenario. The universality of an adaptive work definitely depends on the genius of the original creator. The credit shouldn't be taken away from an individual only because the original work is revered on a pedestal. Every adaptive work in itself desire a fair chance of criticism based on how it has evolved and introduced newer ideas to give a new lease of life to original work. Brother Grimm, Charles Perrault and Hans Christian Anderson has been aptly credited with a lot of accolades due to the universal appeal of the fairy-folk tale created by them that continues to enchant older and younger audience alike. And even after numerous years, we continue to dissect these literary works in the fields of language, societal and gender studies with an underlying enthusiasm. But while doing so we often look over the numerous authors and artists who showcased their belief in the stories and characters thus giving them a totally new outlook by adding new themes, characterization, subplots and trying to meet the needs of a modern audience. The Sleeping Beauty by Charles Perrault



deals with the theme of loneliness which is aggravated leading into a climax where the fight boils down the power of love.

While Maleficent on the surface level might be termed as a tale which again deals with the similar themes of love and loneliness, the difference lies in the fact that it also tries to question the reason due to which character behave in a certain way. The notions of love and loneliness in the stories are mired in the social structure of their time, which is what adaptations revise according to contemporary society. Thus, we can say that while an adaptive work is rooted in the original work it is highly addictive and even raises much question against the social structure which can be studied through Marxist and feminist study of these works individually. Moreover, it is also important to put forth the shortcoming of these 'murkier question' raised. While Maleficent back story helps us sympathize with her, the portrayal of evil Mother Gothel also helps in preservation of the troublesome gender binary and the concept of being good and bad. The continuous characterization is definitely not helping in the world that is trying hard against essentialization of these ideas. But it is important to understand that even here the problem doesn't lie in the adaptation but those working with the idea of creating adaptation in such ways and that is when capitalisation comes into existence. Thus adaptation shouldn't be equated to coping either.

The rich commentary depicted in the movies like Cinderella and Frozen with respect to feminism and an urge for upward social mobility also discarded the popular claim of equating adaptation as an agent of oversimplification. Even the movies catering towards the younger audience is richly equipped with the ideas of ecofeminism along with stressing on the psyche of the antagonist which definitely is quite different from oversimplification when the original text is merely a war between the forces of evil and goodness. This leads another important facet of adaptation i.e. the mellowing of horrific incident which is evidently pointed out in the earlier chapters. It is ensuring that the major chunk of the audience in these adaptations are often children and thus an age appropriate narration helps the maker from negating the possibility of pushing away their audience from whom these works are created over the span of time.

The constant readjustment helps us to be more receptive of the changes that might occurs in the path of evolution along with being mindful of the past that is behind us. This is how we should understand the philosophy behind the art of adaptation. And this idea can be best understood by looking at discourse provided by Aristotle in defence of literature. Where he agrees to literature being an imaginative rendition of the real world created by god, and adaptation could thus be viewed as an imaginative rendition of the original work which is a part of literature and in itself an imagination rendition of the real world. Thus blurring the ultimate understanding of what is real and copy.

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## Caste and Gender in Meena Kandasamy's *The Gypsy Goddess*

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### Abstract

*Meena Kandasamy's first novel, The Gypsy Goddess, is an experimental novel that takes inspiration from the Kilvenmani massacre to depict the struggle, plight, and injustice meted on a group of Dalit agricultural labourers. The novel through its radical postmodern structure tries to confront the dynamics of caste and gender in Indian society. This paper argues that the novel beginning from the title itself gives a pivotal position to women and Dalit women in particular. It attempts to discuss the problems, struggles, and spirit of Dalit women in the novel which are specific to Dalit women and which are marginalized by mainstream feminist movements. This paper believes that though the novel fundamentally opposes the nexus between the state and upper caste landlords and bats for communism, it also complicates the relationship between class struggle and caste questions in India. Therefore, this paper by analyzing The Gypsy Goddess wants to emphasize the necessity of discussion regarding the workings of caste and gender among Indians and Dalits in particular.*

**Keywords:** Meena Kandasamy, Postmodern Fiction, Caste, Dalit Feminism, Class Struggle.

### Introduction

Meena Kandasamy's debut novel, *The Gypsy Goddess*, published in 2014 occupies a unique position in the stream of Dalit literature. Beginning from autobiographical narratives, Dalit literature has produced a diverse range of literary texts employing various kinds of genres and modes such as poetry, songs, fiction, autobiography, magic realism, hypertexts, historical novels, graphic novels, etc. Within Dalit literature, Dalit women's writings occupy a unique position by accounting for the limitations of male Dalit literature and mainstream feminist movements thereby presenting a unique sense of consciousness and identity. As Geetha notes, "Since the problems of Dalit women are subsumed under the mainstream male Dalit movement and the upper-caste feminist movement, Dalit women have endeavored to create a distinct space for themselves by mobilizing a Dalit feminist movement" (5). *The Gypsy Goddess* narrates the events preceding and succeeding the horrific Kilvenmani massacre of 1968 where upper-caste landlords conspired to burn down the Dalit streets of Pallars, Paraiyars, and Chakkiliyars. This novel tries to deal with not just Dalit consciousness



but also Dalit feminist consciousness and to accomplish this, the novel resorts to postmodern techniques of narration. In this light, we argue that this novel should be seen as a unique addition to the diverse stream of Dalit literature.

### **Depiction of Dalit Women in *Gypsy Goddess***

Though the novel's principal concerns revolve around feudalism, relationship between caste and class, and more significantly, the traumatic events of the massacre, the novel still couldn't escape from being structurally contiguous with the voices and concerns of women (here Dalit women). Regarding the title, the author shares a legend centered around gypsy women known as "Kuruvars":

On one night, many many nights ago, seven gypsy women, carrying their babies, strayed and lost their way whilst walking back to their camp. When they came home the next day, the seven women were murdered along with their babies. Their collective pleading did not help. Some *versions* go on to add that there were seventeen women. Every *version* agrees that all of them had children with them. Some *versions* say these women and their children were forced to drink poison. Some versions say that these women were locked in a tiny hut and *burnt to death* along with their children. Some gruesome *versions* say that these women were ordered to run and they had their heads chopped off with flying discs and their children died of fright at seeing their mothers' beheaded torsos run. (Kandasamy 34-35; Our Emphasis)

The above passage indicates a foreshadowing effect wherein, the women and children of Kilvenmani also meet a similar kind of death at the later part of the novel. Just like the legend of gypsy women, the truth of the Kilvenmani massacre was also distorted/ buried/ suppressed by the "versions" orchestrated by police and landlords—"Framing a flimsy case, the police prepare the ground for the landlords to have sufficient escape routes" (146); "However, the Special Additional First-Class Magistrate was not very pleased with our [people of Kilvenmani] versions" (151). The legend could represent the tragic helplessness of the Kilvenmani women and children who had to stay in their houses during the massacre while their men were trying to free their fellow men that were under the landlord's captivity. This rings a bell with what K. Geetha rightly observes, "in any communal clash the worst-affected are Dalit women" (5).

The author also speaks to the reader regarding the selection of the title and gives a postmodern justification for the title—"I have a great title. I have a great story. They don't belong to each other" (Kandasamy 33). Owing to the postmodern features such as undecidability and multiple possibilities, it would be wrong to infer that the title categorically represents a particular perspective. However, we could argue that this irrelevance between the title and story is equivalent to the irrelevance between the truth of the Kilvenmani massacre and the verdict of the court which acquitted all the perpetrators. This could suggest that the form of the novel is complicit with its content. As pointed out by Dolores Herrero,

To give just one obvious example, the survivors of the massacre tell their own trauma stories to the court and the commission or, rather, they strive to work through their



traumatic blockage in order to desperately try to articulate the unspeakable into a partially comprehensible narrative, but most of them fail, and these official institutions are not pleased with their versions. (8)

Similarly, we also see the women's contiguous position in the novel when the author presents us her deliberations on how she should begin the story. She narrates us how she initially thought of writing small fragmented paragraphs but later decided not to. However, she puts the small paragraphs within the novel. In these paragraphs, she traces the biography of the "old woman" (Maayi). This biography is replete with the hardships of Dalit women and their subjugation by the upper-castes:

...during the great famine, she [Maayi's grandmother] lost her husband and her three little sons. She managed to stay alive eating handfuls of mud. . . . The death, due to septic shock, resulted from the use of an agricultural sickle to cut her [Maayi's mother] umbilical cord. . . . Dragged from her [Maayi] grandmother's home at the outskirts of the town, the fourteen-year-old girl heard nothing but her own screams through the night; the landlord-rapists did not stop... (Kandasamy 30)

These fragmented paragraphs also talk about how Maayi's husband was "mysteriously" killed after he protested against caste discrimination (30). They also mention how the killing of Sannasi's brother—Thayyan—was distorted by the police as "arson-related accident" (30). These paragraphs end with Maayi deciding to join hands with the Communist party to avenge her husband's death (31). Through the biography of Maayi, the author highlights the fact that the struggles and oppression of Dalits would return again and again. They also suggest that as long as this caste oppression exists, Dalits have to bravely resist with resilience. This necessity of Dalit resilience seen from Dalit women's position is encapsulated in the statement—"life is circular"—written by the author during her defense for adopting a non-linear narrative style for the novel.

The indomitable fighting spirit and resolve of Kilvenmani's Dalit women are brought from the contiguity to the foreground when the author discusses the manifold ways through which these women protest, struggle and seek justice particularly regarding women-specific problems such as equal wages, breaks during work-time to take care of infants, etc (53). Along with gender-specific problems, they also fight for their whole community's problems. Hence, it becomes imperative to recognize the author's attempt to demand emancipation from the Dalit women's subjective position. This is reflected when the author writes, "Most of the time, they fight for everybody" (53), which acknowledges the argument—"since they [Dalit women] know what it would take to change [the world and in] identifying the central relations of power and privilege that sustain it and make the world what it is" (Mohanty 213). This idea of reclaiming centrality for Dalit women continues further in the novel in different contexts. The Dalits of Kilvenmani assemble to sort out their dilemma of whether to stick with the Communist Party or not. Instead of "typical" village meetings, the author indicates that, "this time the men did not do most of the talking" (Kandasamy 77). This explicit emphasis of contrariness simultaneously serves two purposes: acknowledging the patriarchy



within Dalits and giving voice to Dalit women to assert their rights. This combined with the accounting of caste atrocities against women perfectly goes in line with the widely accepted states of *intersectionality* (of caste, class, and gender) and *double patriarchy* (by upper-caste men and Dalit men) experienced by Dalit women. The village meeting ends with the women convincing the men to stand by the Communist Party as it helped in protecting the honor of Dalit women (77).

The significance of Dalit women is made to sustain even after the the horrific massacre takes place. The author describes the diverse range of post-traumatic responses of Kilvenmani's people. Men like Muni "drown their sorrows with drink" (128); Karuppaiah couldn't control his tormenting thoughts and takes "away the only life he had" (133); Nandan was fuming with rage that could "vanish" (137). The responses and reactions of women hold our attention. The horror of the massacre gets reflected through the hallucinations and psychological illness exhibited by the women like Letchumi, Armugam's daughter, Packiam, etc (127, 129, 134). Though Maayi—the old woman—states that, "everyone in Kilvenmani carried the ghosts of their dead", the reactions of women, in particular, maintain their distinctness (127). Men were trying either to forget the horrific massacre or to settle scores with anger. But women were trying not to let go of the memories of the dead by clinging onto the traumatic experience so as to preserve their story for the posterity. Maayi also says that those men who were physically hurt at least had pain to "prevent them [men] from disappearing to other worlds" (133). Though both women and men were trying to preserve their anger and not give in to madness, the author maintained a difference in representing the reactions of women so that women's consciousness gets its due space.

Even more interesting is the role of Thangamma. She resists being a victim and instead, she lives to take care of the village and share her story of brave fight against the assault during the massacre by Kerosene Govinda—one of the landlords. The author writes, "Thangamma had to survive for the sake of the village... She never cried so they [journalists] listened to her and asked her more questions with the hope that she would start weeping and they could go back with a story of how strong women crumbled. She never cried in front of them" (132). The most crucial women character in the novel is Maayi. After the massacre, she takes up the job of healing the village from the trauma and shows utmost resilience when she says, "Even if all of us are going to die, we will die in Kilvenmani itself" (140). Hence, it is more than clear that Dalit women are paramount both in the form as well as in the content of the novel.

### **Caste versus Class**

Communism in India throughout history played more than a significant role in fighting for the emancipation of laborers, workers, tribals, and other downtrodden classes. However, Dalitism often shared a chequered relationship with Communism. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in his quintessential work—*Annihilation of Caste*—brings out the ground reality responsible for the chasm between Communism and Dalitism:



The assurance of a Socialist leading the revolution that he does not believe in Caste, I am sure will not suffice. The assurance must be the assurance proceeding from a much deeper foundation—namely, the mental attitude of the compatriots towards one another in their spirit of personal equality and fraternity. Can it be said that the proletariat of India, poor as it is, recognises no distinctions except that of the rich and the poor? Can it be said that the poor in India recognize no such distinctions of caste or creed, high or low? If the fact is that they do, what unity of front can be expected from such a proletariat in its action against the rich? How can there be a revolution if the proletariat cannot present a united front? (16)

Nevertheless, either Dalit literature or Dalit activism did not abandon interpreting the Indian society through the Marxist framework. Sharankumar Limbale identifies the fundamental features common to Dalitism and Marxism—humanity, revolt against exploitation, and human liberation (75). However, the way communist parties worked in India time and again revealed their failure in eradicating the caste blockade and in creating a strong united working class. The wholesale import of class analysis for applying to the Indian context is fraught with sociological problems.

In this novel, the main struggle is between the landlords—represented by Gopalakrishna Naidu—and the agricultural laborers of Kilvenmani and the other villages of East Tanjore (or Nagapattinam). The relationship between them is obviously feudal. The Communist Party inevitably takes up the fight of the laborers and engages in an intense ideological battle with the landlords. However, the class relations alone shouldn't seem to us as obvious but also the caste relations—landlords belong to a few “upper” castes and laborers belong to many “lower” castes. Though the novel privileges class struggle, the shortcomings and failures of Communism in dealing with the caste problem are not ignored. While explaining how Communism entered into East Tanjore, she writes, “twentieth-century Marxists would turn feudal, almost fascist, and seek to silence everybody who spoke of caste in place of class” (Kandasamy 25). The author doesn't want to reduce the Dalits' struggle in India into a homogenous narrative of class struggle. Rather she wants the reader to recognize the reluctance of caste to get subsumed under the monolith blanket of class:

After such class-based classification, the reader will encounter many intermediary castes: Vellalar, Naidu or Naicker, Agamudaiyar, Mudaliar, Chettiar, Reddiyar, Konar, Kallar, Vanniyar, Nadar. She will be plagued by the plight of the untouchable castes: Pallar, Paraiyar, Chakkiliyar. The reader will be lost in such an alphabet soup. She will learn that life in these parts operates along lines of caste, and not just along structured feudal relations governing the modes of production. (49-50)

Nevertheless, the Kilvenmani Dalits stood by the Party because “they [party] were fighting for the rights of the workers and the tillers and the toilers... movement [communist] would fight and uproot centuries of caste and feudalism” (79). The Party acted as a source of strength to stand against the atrocities of landlords and police brutality. But the Communists themselves are conscious about their shortcomings: “the caste mentality that divides the



working classes, the slackness of their party's high command... (55). The novel's first chapter begins with a petition written by the landlord and the architect of the Kilvenmani massacre—Gopalakrishna Naidu—representing the ideologies of feudalism and casteism. Similarly, communists also write a pamphlet presenting their demands for higher wages, land redistribution, and justice regarding caste atrocities. In this pamphlet, communists acknowledge that “‘untouchable’ castes, who form the majority of the working-class peasantry...” (65). This acknowledgment if considered as the criticism against communist parties of India, it becomes inevitable to accept that the “cadre” of these parties is composed of Dalits but their leaders come from the “upper” castes (Ilaiah 61). The novel clearly states that “the red salute could only unite up to a certain point. Fault-lines began to appear along the issue of untouchability. People started choosing convenient options that kept their caste codes intact” (Kandasamy 82). The leakage of feudalistic casteism into the communist parties is revealed when the author writes, “The party demanded loyalty: the feudal origins of this important trait were conveniently forgotten” (82). The author also states that the Party was not cautious enough when the Dalits of Kilvenmani were complaining about the open threats issued by Gopalakrishna Naidu (82). Instead, the Party inclined more towards the parliamentary power politics (83).

We argue that these failures of communist parties are symbolically represented during various instances of the novel. For instance, while addressing the Dalits, Gopalakrishna Naidu uses the phrase “Harijan agricultural labourers” (88). This indicates the need for eradicating caste before class. As long as laborers are divided by caste, the working class cannot give a united fight against predatory capitalism. Similarly, the background of the massacre actually begins with Perumal Naidu—one of the landlords' men—deliberately assaulting Muniyan—the village headman. Perumal Naidu “threw caste slurs” on Muniyan before he hit Muniyan with a log of firewood (109). This act of Perumal Naidu points to the fact that the hierarchy fundamental to the caste system gives a pretext for the oppressors to crush down any kind of resistance put forth by the oppressed. That's why the problem of caste needs to be resolved before the issue of class struggle emerges. Finally, it could be argued that the way the courts asked for a “single story” instead of multiple accounts of the massacre resonates with Communism's eagerness to eclipse the caste specificity and present a monolith class. To clearly understand the specificity of caste we could turn to Anupama Rao. She argues that:

The engagement with the idea of proletarian emancipation was critical, but it was also not sufficient. Labor was political because the identity of labor derived from its antagonism to capital. Thinking stigma through labor appeared to be productive and useful. Yet to fully transform caste into class would ignore caste's history as (Hindu) violence. Like religion (and Hinduism), labor, too, was ultimately only a partial force in accounting for Dalit dispossession. (55)

The tendency to undermine casteism is reflected through the propaganda of the Communist Party in the novel. The author writes, “Some days it was about caste, but only at the edges, at





the wing tips, so that it could be brushed off before we would all launch into flight” (Kandasamy 142). This explains the eagerness of the Party in creating a universal proletariat without first eradicating the stigma of caste. As Anupama Rao writes,

Rather than deriving a model of emancipation through labor as Marx proposed, Ambedkar turned to the universality of rights. The response to Dalits’ dilemma did not call for politicizing labor as such via the general strike. Rather, it required, as a first step, the dissolution of stigma through the inclusion of Dalits in capitalist social life. (54)

The politics behind this stigmatization of caste is best explained when Kandasamy writes,

Banned by holy books from using a plough and believing that all manual labour was disgusting and degrading and fit only for the lower castes, the Brahmins would sublet their land. Because what was deemed fit for the Brahmin was deemed fit for everyone who wanted to feel superior and everyone who wanted to dominate, the landowning Naidus and the landowning Mudaliars and the landowning OtherCastes started to avoid all manual labour, too. We [Dalits] were told that this aversion to manual labour was a defining feature of ruling-class behaviour. We were told that Marx had written about this. We were told that because we worked with our hands, we were the working class. We were also told that because we worked, and because they hated work, they hated us. (142)

Hence, this novel instead of retelling the Kilvenmani massacre entirely through a Marxist class framework reflected the unaddressed gaps between class and caste. By this, the novel suggested that the Kilvenmani massacre was as much about caste as it was about class. Therefore the Dalits of Kilvenamni rightly observed that the Communist Party is both a “matter of pride” and a “matter of limit” (Kandasamy 56).

### **Conclusion**

To sum up, *The Gypsy Goddess* represented the consciousness of Dalit women as well as addressed the caste-class relationship, and through this, it could be argued that the real emancipation of Dalits necessitates indispensable engagement with Dalit women subjectivity and Caste specificity. Meena Kandasamy, through her radical style of narration, retold the Kilvenmani massacre by incorporating Nagapattinam’s history which she begins from the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Portuguese arrival and takes the readers to the 1980s of Tamil Nadu. Within this long history, she mentions German Protestant missionaries who visited Nagapattinam, Mao and Ho Chi Min during the burgeoning of Communism in East Tanjore, Gandhi (although she is skeptical about his approach to caste), Periyar Ramaswamy, Anna Durai, Karunanidhi, etc. All these historical figures in one way or the other influenced the people of Nagapattinam. But she did not mention Dr. B. R. Ambedkar even in a vague way. Ambedkar did not have a specific role in the Nagapattinam’s history. Still, he is the principal architect of Dalit Consciousness. However, this novel or Meena Kandasmy are not complicit with the “systemic elision of Ambedkar” (Christopher 74). Though Ambedkar is absent, the novel still represented Dalit consciousness by depicting Dalits as protesting against caste discrimination,



fighting for their self-respect, and more significantly seeking a complete revolution. Thus this novel agrees with B. Krishnappa, a Dalit critic from Karnataka, who views Dalit literature as signifying protest and clamouring for revolution (109). Therefore, *The Gypsy Goddess* for representing the Dalits' struggle through metafictional and postmodern shrewdness should be considered as a significant work within the diverse stream of Dalit literature.

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## Essentialized Ethnicity - A Tool of Anti-Assimilationist Politics? A Probe into the Veracity of Cultural Hybridity through the Exploration of Hanif Kureishi's 'The Buddha of Suburbia' and M.G.Vassanji's 'The Gunny Sack'

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### Abstract

*Those embroiled in favour of Multiculturalism often face a sharp critique: Isn't Multiculturalism under constructed categories like cultural diversity and integrity, a fiction that cleverly masks socio-eco-pol inequalities faced by migrants with a history of Colonization? This paper explores immigrant experience in rapidly changing multi-ethnic societies with two specific texts under the radar: Hanif Kureishi's 'The Buddha of Suburbia' (1990) and M.G. Vassanji's 'The Gunny Sack' (1989). It attempts to designate 'Buddha' and the 'Gunny sack' as signifiers (sites/spaces) of cultural hybridity and heterogeneity that can counter/refute any fetishized idea of a pure and monolithic cultural identity. The paper challenges the clichéd opposition between Nativism and Assimilation that is often played out through the trope of a generational feud in diasporic societies. It also raises an unsettling focus on Sexism, underpinning hybrid societies; and evaluates Double Colonization and Gender issues that are often side-tracked in the context of such immigrant experience.*

**Keywords:** Hanif Kureishi, M.G. Vassanji, Multiculturalism, Heterogeneity, Sexism.

### Introduction

The contemporary debate between Nation and Post-Nation as viable political spaces, has often drawn flak from both sides of the divide; some voicing concerns over the parochial nature of Nationalism to instead promulgate a more fluid entity like Post-Nation, while other critics sticking to the traditional concept of sovereign Nation States as autonomous units. Though an old, feudalistic world order of empires/monarchies is now 'a thing of the past'; present day Post-Colonies operating as autonomous Nation States have often indulged in aggressive radicalisation of their subjects in a Nationalistic fervour to create pockets of exclusivity, where the 'Other' is often perceived as the enemy 'within', marginalised by either birth, ethnicity and/or race. Interior Colonialities have been justifiably contested by the likes of Homi Bhabha, Bruce Robbins or PhengChea in favour of more transcultural and cosmopolitan subjecthood. Assuming that cultures are not insular entities, in a multicultural setting, one is bound to experience a latent hierarchy of cultures; a dominant variety exercising a prevalence over the dominated ones; something often perceived as Culture Wars.



Homi Bhabha has often emphasised on the pivotal role minority cultures play in challenging existing cultural hegemonies and how these peripheral discourses can subvert the grand myths of Nations. Drawing up on the contemporary post-modernist debates on the constructed/fragmented nature of subjectivity, the present concern is indeed on the positionality of a social subject. It is undoubtedly true that a social subject is a site of a variety of differences and divergences.

Dennis Dworkin, while talking about Paul Gilroy's critique of post 1950's multiracial British society engulfed in a narcissistic melancholia about a 'lost Englishness', validates Gilroy's argument that late 20 th century British Racism was founded on discourses of cultural difference which was central to new right-wing ideology and equally infiltrated left-wing perspectives in the Cultural Studies tradition. Dworkin reiterates Gilroy's emphasis on a specific historicity of British society, a turn of the century pessimism that indulged in an acute nostalgia for the loss of Empire and the changing English landscape caused by an accelerated migration from the ex-colonies of the Empire (Dworkin 522). It is this specific temporal space that Hanif Kureishi explores in 'The Buddha of Suburbia', a semi-autobiographical, bildungsroman about a bisexual, mixed race youth adapting to a culturally voluptuous and virulently racist English society. Born to a Pakistani father and English mother, Kureishi, in an interview to Gulf News (2017), while recalling his growing up in the changing Britain of his youth, articulates his utter dismay at the overwhelming racism that is breeding in contemporary Britain:

Not just disappointed: angry at the lack of acknowledgement of the role post-colonial immigrant countries have played, 'That Britain's wealth came out of the empire, and we all came here, to Bradford, to the NHS, to the transport system, and how the commonwealth and the ex-empire created the wealth of this country. And I feel very bitter about the hatred that is directed against us on a racial basis, when in fact we have served this country'....The country he thought of as a place of tolerance has now, he fears, provided a space for an 'utterly misconceived and misplaced and vile' form of racism, the demonization of the Other, the positioning of Muslims as 'backward, misogynist, racist and anti-gay' the like of which he says we haven't seen since the 1930's. (Clark)

'The Buddha of Suburbia' which depicts the escapades of Karim in 1970s Britain, is rife with political and economic discontent of a hybrid population of social aspirants living in the suburbs and fringes of London, waiting to explore a brave new world devoid of racism and exploitation. The novel ends symbolically around 1979 with the results of UK's General Elections, the defeat of Labour Government of James Callaghan, ousted by Conservative Party leader Margaret Thatcher who becomes the next Prime Minister of Britain. In 'The Buddha of Suburbia', the protagonist's father Haroon internalizes a specific cultural definition of 'Indian-ness' as 'pure' and 'unadulterated', any deviation from which deemed as culturally 'Un-Indian'. Emigrating into Britain in the 1950s with friend Anwar, Haroon marries a white woman but eventually abandons her after meeting Eva, with whom he starts seducing a



segment of English high society (upper middle class) with the ideas of Eastern philosophy. His gig as a Buddhist, is a magnificent conning of Eastern mysticism, the performance of which lures unsuspecting Westerners to believe that a Muslim can act the 'ways of the Buddha'.

Thus, Haroon devises a stratagem; 'Buddha' is rediscovered as a cultural document, a trope for identity construction to assert his cultural difference/uniqueness to combat the temptations of assimilation. 'Buddha' serves as a cultural referent - a site of cross-pollination of cultures, hybrid identities and a confluence of diverse philosophies, almost a microcosm of the multi-ethnic British society that the story has as its backdrop. In a parallel frame of reference, M.G. Vassanji's 'The Gunny Sack' recounts the 'stream of consciousness' like trajectory of narrator-protagonist SalimJuma (nicknamed Kala) who born and bred in Africa eventually migrates to Canada and receives a 'gunny sack' as a gift from his great aunt JiBai. The Gunny Sack is not just an extended metaphor for the collective memory of displaced people, but alternately a cultural signifier of heterogeneous diasporic experiences and an intersectional site of diverse histories and myths of both Asians, Africans and Europeans. A deep-seated sexism is also evident, embedded in both these texts; as most nationalistic cultures are androcentric, any over determinism of essentialized identities are exclusively male.

The female characters in the examined texts are petty stereotypes, trapped either as distraught observers in their assigned roles in Patriarchy or objectified as sex mannequins. Engaging with cultural products that are off-shoots of hybrid, motley societies, is a daunting task for any cultural critic. As Cornel West points out; "Distinctive features of the new cultural politics of difference are to trash the monolithic and homogeneous in the name of diversity, multiplicity and heterogeneity; to reject the abstract, general and universal in light of the concrete, specific and particular; and to historicize, contextualize, and pluralize by highlighting the contingent, provisional, variable, tentative, shifting and changing" (West 257).

The Paraphernalia of Culture: 'Racial Cross-Dressing' and 'Masquerading' as Performative Plays to Re-Define a Post-Colonial Space? Exploring the Challenge of Hybridity in a Pluralistic Society in 'The Buddha of Suburbia':

My name is Karim Amir, and I am an Englishman born and bred, almost. I am often considered to be a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories. But I don't care - English I am (though not proud of it), from the South London suburbs and going somewhere. Perhaps it is the old mixture of continents and blood, of here and there, of belonging and not, that makes me restless and easily bored. (Kureishi 3)

Rachel Foss traces the historical trajectory of this coming-of-age narrative:

The action unfolds against the backdrop of the social and political currents of 1970's Britain...The novel chronicles the tail end of the hippie era, and moves through the social upheavals of the 1970's with the rage of punk to the pervasive materialism of



the 1980's, signified by the demise of the left and the 1979 General Election which heralded the era of Thatcherism, where culture and identity itself become commodities to be bought and sold like any other (Foss).

The complex narrative which is abundantly sprinkled with the performances of different characters living double lives in the fashion of a stage production (Haroon as Buddha, Mum playing a dutiful but betrayed wife, Eva a pretentious social climber, Jamila a confounded teenager); is also a bizarre mix of striking juxtapositions: Eastern mysticism/Western materialism, Tradition/Modernity, Nativism/Assimilation, High/Low Culture and more fundamentally as the structural pattern suggests; the suburbs and the city. Karim's quest for a pure and unadulterated environment, free of racism and regressive mind-sets, unified identity and homogeneous culture never prospers, and much to his abhorrence, he discovers a multi-layered society where the suburbs and the city do not operate as binaries but as integral parts of the same entity. When a flummoxed Karim finally frequented the echelons of high London society during his stint in theatre, he encountered (with bitter disappointment) the same racial stereotypes that he had experienced as a suburbanite, drawing on which theatre directors Shadwell and Pyke, to satisfy their oriental fantasy (in the novel), insisted on Karim playing only native characters speaking Indianized English for complete authentication. So, if, "the Suburbs are an incubator for politicisation and social radicalism", on the other hand, "the sophistication of the London elite is punctured by the exposure of a crude racial prejudice" (Foss).

Therefore, "Far from being homogeneous, the suburbs embody subtle gradations of social status, affluence and cultural sophistication" (Foss). The multicultural English society that our wronged hero Karim finds himself hobnobbing with, is fundamentally a disquieting hotchpotch of culturally hybrid races. Thus, this cultural heterogeneity, visible in a pattern of conflation in the 1970's English society and its mixed character of politics and sexual identity defined a post-immigrant and multi-racial new age Englishness. Strikingly, hybridity did not just encapsulate Karim's mixed ethnicity, but also his turn-of-the-century sexual preferences, he was a bisexual by choice who seemed to revel in his sexual promiscuity;

It was unusual, I knew, the way I wanted to sleep with boys as well as girls...I felt it would be heart-breaking to have to choose one or the other, like having to decide between the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. (Kureishi 55)

Devising a comparative case study of the Canadian and American societies, Ceri Peach outlines the polarity that Assimilation and Multiculturalism signifies; "The ultimate aim of policies of assimilation is that minorities should become diffused throughout the structure of the charter population until their socio-economic profiles become indistinguishable" (Peach 3). In other words, the melting pot model for an assimilationist society is more prone to stagnate into a homogeneous one where heterogeneous cultures are expected to merge/melt into a unified whole; a common accusation thrown by proponents of Multiculturalism. To chime with this ideological vantage point of cultural confluence, Haroon (father of protagonist Karim, in the novel), recalibrates his cultural identity with spell binding



paraphernalia; as introduced by Eva (Haroon's white mistress), before the 'demonstration of his mystic arts'; "My good and deep friend Haroon here, he will show us the Way. The Path" (Kureishi 13).

As if the conundrum of a cultural crucible can be resolved by an integration program comprising of tacky yoga postures and Eastern philosophy! In Karim's words, as he furtively engages in voyeurism, observing Haroon and Eva's sexual act, "Oh God, oh my God. Was I conceived like this, I wondered in the Suburban night air, to the wailing of Christian curses from the mouth of a renegade Muslim masquerading as a Buddhist?" (Kureishi 16). Karim's observation is the leit motif of not just the narrative but of English society as well, with 'Buddha' functioning as a cultural signifier (Site) of melange for people of different ethnicities and classes - Haroon, a Muslim immigrant in England with an English wife and a white mistress, racially cross-dressed as a Buddhist, engaged in a pedantic mission to bring the West to conflate with the East, in a bizarre mix of diversity. However, against a backdrop of multiplicity, Haroon's desperate attempt at inventing an authentic 'Indian-ness' in the form of a cultural stereotype (Buddha) as an anti-assimilationist tool, gets miserably defeated in a flux of pluralism. As HomiBhabha puts it; "Cultures are never unitary in themselves, nor simply dualistic in the relation of Self to Other" (Bhabha 52), and that "The problem of cultural interaction emerges only at the signifiatory boundaries of cultures, where meanings and values are (mis) - read or signs are misappropriated" (Bhabha 50).

Bhabha further elucidates; "Terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively. The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of pre-given ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation" (Bhabha 3). Haroon masquerading as Buddha is transpired as a site of cultural contestation: a liminal and interstitial space that is a meeting point of multiplicities. Reconfiguring the position of women in diasporic communities is often a contentious issue, one ripple effect of essentializing cultural identities to buttress minority position in a hybrid ethos, is Ostracization of Women. Examining Asian American immigrant experience, Lisa Lowe vocalizes:

The essentializing of Asian American identity also reproduces oppositions that subsume other non-dominant terms in the same way that Asians and other groups are disenfranchised by the dominant culture: to the degree that the discourse generalizes Asian American identity as male, women are rendered invisible, or to the extent that Chinese are presumed to be exemplary of all Asians, the importance of other Asian groups are ignored. In this sense, a politics based on ethnic identity facilitates the displacement of inter community differences - between men and women, or between workers and managers - into a false opposition of 'nationalism' and 'assimilation'. We have an example of this in recent debates where Asian American feminists who





challenge Asian American sexism are cast as 'assimilation-ist', as betraying Asian American 'nationalism'. (Lowe 1037)

The sexism inherent in diasporic cultures is strongly highlighted through the generational discord played out by Anwar and Jamila (as corroborative of Haroon-Karim's feud) in 'The Buddha of Suburbia'. On the other hand, Haroon playing Pater Familias decides the fate of his English wife and his White mistress almost in the fashion of an Oriental despot, Margaret (Karim's mother called 'Mum' in the text) is abandoned for Eva who is consecrated like an exotic Sex-Goddess, fetishized as a symbol of eroticism. Anwar's setting up a match for Jamila with the obvious desire for expansion of family through procreation (quite in keeping with the Indian tradition of Patriarchy), is documented in laconic terms; "Anwar had told Jamila what he'd decided: she was to marry the Indian and he would come over, slip on his overcoat and wife and live happily ever after in her muscly arms. Then Anwar would rent a flat nearby for the newlyweds. 'Big enough for two children', he said, to a startled Jamila. He took her hand and added, 'Soon you'll be very happy'" (Kureishi 57). Though Karim's insight is thoughtful, "Even happiness, that frequent pivot of decision, was irrelevant here - Jamila's happiness, I mean. Like her I wanted to express myself physically in some way. It seemed to be all that was left to us" (Kureishi 60), Jamila's deduction is prophetic, "Families aren't sacred, especially to Indian men, who talk about nothing else and act otherwise" (Kureishi 55).

Mythical Reconstruction of Memory and Resuscitation of Native History as Cultural Ruses to Combat Acculturation in a Multicultural Ethos? Examining the Challenge of Heterogeneity for Dislocated People/s in 'The Gunny Sack':

Memory, JiBai would say, is this old sack here, this poor dear that nobody has any use for any more. Stroking the sagging brown shape with affection, she would drag it closer, to sit at her feet like a favourite child. In would plunge her hand through the gaping hole of a mouth, and she would rummage inside...Out would come from the dusty depths some knick knack of yesteryear: a bead necklace shorn of its polish; a rolled-up torn photograph; a cowrie shell; a brass incense holder; a swahili cap so softened by age that it folded neatly into a small square; a broken rosary tied up crudely to save the remaining beads; a blood-stained muslin shirt; a little book. (Vassanji Part 1, Jibai, Shehrbanoo)

M.G. Vassanji's 'The Gunny Sack' begins with the death and funeral of JiBai, and the inheritance of her gunny sack by narrator-protagonist SalimJuma as he catapults a 'stream of consciousness' trip into the past and abyss of family history. He describes the gunny sack as a "seductive companion spinning out yarns, telling tales that have no beginning or end". The gunny sack operates as an archive for cumulative memory which unravels a multi-generational saga of Asians in East Africa (Tanzania). Functioning as a narrative device, the gunny sack not only explores the Asian African migrancy but also transports myriad events of history within the same spatio temporal framework of the novel. The diasporic experience is lived through different displacements and quests, some forced and some by choice,



commencing with Dhanji Govindji's (a member of the Shamsi community) pioneering journey to Tanzania from Junapur in Gujarat. Tracing the genesis of the Shamsi community, Maryam Sikander points out, "The Shamsis were originally hindukhatris, converted to Islam by Hazrat Shamsuddin Sabzwari, a Sufi missionary often confused with his glamorous namesake. According to one legend, they were one of the 64 families of various punjabi Muslim trader castes who migrated from Sargodha in Punjab to Delhi in the 17 th century during the time of Shah Jahan.

Other scholars maintain that they migrated in the 18 th century, during the reign of Shah Alam II, when the Mughal Empire was tottering" (Sikander). One of the family histories that the gunny sack discloses is that of the unique hindu-muslim sect: the Shamsi community that Dhanji Govindji belonged to and which was torn apart by conflicts between the Shia, Sunni, Sufi and Vedanti factions over funds which eventually led to the assassination of Dhanji Govindji in Matamu, Tanzania. Dhanji's attempt at exhorting his cultural identity as an Asian (A Shamsi) to subvert absorption into the deluge of a multi-ethnic African society fails miserably as he is overpowered by his cultural distinctiveness; he ends up in a space of in-betweenness, murdered for embezzlement of the funds of his own community. The vignettes of memory forced out of the gunny sack further reveal how Dhanji Govindji had exhausted his resources for the quest to find his half African son Hussein (born of an African Slave Bibi Taratibu). Therefore, his desire to escape an accultured state, ironically pits him deeper into a cultural conflation, the racial status of his half caste son, seemed to revert the very idea of cultural purity. The gunny sack, thus, serves as an exhibit displaying the interconnectedness of different life histories and heterogeneous entities: Dhanji Govindji's life and legacy is as hybrid as is the Shamsi community, the ultimate manifestation of which is; his funeral, led by the Shamsi, Bhatia and Swahili communities. Similarly, as Salim Juma takes up the thread of narration from his mother Kulsum, there is another layer of vigorous documentation of diverse histories (including his lady love Amina's story) through the deployment of memory and its anecdotal excesses released from the mystical sack. Reviewing 'The Gunny Sack', Tarun J. Tejpal comments, "Without creative chroniclers, both great civilizations and the smaller movements of immigrants sink with scarcely a ripple, either reduced to abraded artefacts under the clinical analysis of dusty archaeologists, or to dry statistical footnotes in other people's histories" (Tejpal).

### **Conclusion**

This paper explores the inescapable double bind that diaspora imposes on immigrants: imbibing an incandescent spirit of Nationalism alive in the form of allegiance to mother country and (or?) repositioning one's cultural identity in order to integrate in the host society. Both the texts under survey abundantly testify, how in a clash of cultures, flaunting any essentialist notion of a pure, holistic culture is usually fictitious and non-existent; the symbol "Buddha" in 'The Buddha of Suburbia' and the "Gunny sack" in 'The Gunny Sack' operate as sites of cultural confluence, heterogeneity and the myriad of people (s).



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## Loss and Hope in the Pandemic Condition of *The Scarlet Plague* by Jack London

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### Abstract

*This paper discusses two phenomenal things of human beings. i.e hope and loss. Loss in life is always inevitable, so the hope. The more one has hope, the more he can postpone his loss. Time is a precious one. Hence one should not lament the loss. He should immediately react to it in a positive way. He should encourage his hopeful nature to step forward. Both the world and life have uncertainty as Covid-19 has shown the uncertainty of life. Literature is not the mere representation of society; sometimes it shows, teaches or educates people to live happily. On that stance, epidemic literature has been done great works or miracles in giving people hope during and after the pandemic time. Now the whole world suffered from Covid-19. Jack London is one of the famous writers who had written different themes. His “The Scarlet Plague” is an epidemic novel and the situations orient to the present pandemic. Nowadays, people’s hope has been scattered away but Pandemic literature can help them to motivate themselves to stand against the loss. Rather than lamenting on loss, one should develop hope to do better in the future.*

**Keywords:** Loss, Hope, Pandemic Condition, *The Scarlet Plague*, Jack London.

Jack London (1876-1916) was famously known as the forerunner of commercial fiction writer. He was the first American writer to be found under the limelight. He has earned much fortune from his writings. Thus he is not only the first commercial novelist but also the inventor of the genre that people called today as science fiction. He served as journalist and social activist. As a writer, he always inspires his readers. His choices of themes were very novel when he was writing it. The way he narrates the story attracts the audience which results in his popularity as a writer. *The Scarlet Plague* is a dystopian fiction which pictures the world after its apocalyptic state. This book was published in London magazine in 1912 and received well by the readers. The reception of this novel is getting well especially after the Covid-19. The theme of the novel *The Scarlet Plague* is just signified the post-covid situation of 2020, 2021, etc. Thus, this novel is so relatable to the today’s condition. The pandemic is so similar to the post-apocalyptic setting of this fiction and has lots of similarities in the lives of the fictional characters and the real characters.



The pandemic situation across the world during 2019-2021 has shown the immediate response towards pandemic literature. Pandemic situations often occur in the world as various vigorous virus spread. But Corona virus reaches its peak as it shuts down the world. The normal nature of the world turns topsy-turvy. People cannot come out of the house to avoid the spreading of the virus. The lives of the people become so temporary as many of them have lose their hopes. Many business men faced loss during the period. It affects both rich and poor people. It raises the question of existence among the people. Literature is one of the arts which helps the people by engaging their time and giving hope to the people. Thus, pandemic literature once again becomes famous.

Literature deals with every sort of human life. It also talks about disease and pandemic whenever people faced quarantine time. This pandemic literature is not a new one as it always registered in literature. Plague is one of the diseases which threatened the world once. Many Holy Scriptures and classic books have discussed on plague. Especially The Bible shows that plague is a kind of punishment for the people who commit sin. Exodus 9.14 (KJV) says “For I will at this time send all my plagues upon thine heart, and upon thy servants, and upon thy people; that thou mayest know that there is none like me in all the earth.” English literature is very rich with pandemic literary works. It has pandemic related works in all its periods. Besides English, pandemic literature is still available in all literatures. For instance, *The Decameron* by Giovanni Boccaccio, the Italian poet, has dealt with pandemic and quarantine. In *Decameron*, seven women and three men were made themselves to live in a villa which is outside the city. To kill time, they were shared stories among themselves. This book refers bubonic plague which is also called as Black Death that ravaged Europe during 14<sup>th</sup> century. Daniel Defoe’s *A Journey of the Plague Year* and Albert Camus’ *The Plague* also dealt with the theme of plague, pandemic, loss, hope and quarantine etc.

Hope can be defined as the perseverance to reach the desired goals and how one motivated himself to reach success. Being hopeful is necessary for every creature in this earth. For Synder, this hope has been associated with three factors. First one is that one should have the goal-oriented thoughts which may act as fuel for their life. Many people who have hope will also have loss in life if they have not the proper plan. So the second important factor is strategies to attain their goal. Many times when the plan doesn’t work which is the place where people tend to loss their goal. The third important factor is motivated mindset which helps people to take tireless effort until they reach goal.

Hope is nothing but a state of mind which is filled with optimism. A hopeful person expects positive outcome for his actions. It is a kind of anticipatory emotion where a person expects things with confidence. From the definition of Snyder, Irving and Anderson, “Hope is a positive motivational state of successful (a) agency (goal-oriented energy), (b) pathways (planning to meet goals)” (Snyder 287)

Loss is a worst state of human beings. People feel emotionally when they lose something. This feel is double the time of their joy when they achieve at something. So obviously people prefer not to loss than to win. They have aversion feeling towards loss



which makes them even doing some illegal or immoral way to avoid loss. A student can take a risk of copying in exam to avoid getting failure marks in his exam.

*The Scarlet Plague* describes how a man should face post-apocalyptic era where there is no ray of hope. The protagonist James Howard Smith is as called as Granser remaining as a role model to face loss with the pinnacle of hope. Hence hope is the basic as well as a mandatory habit of the man. This book shows how he faces both loss and hope in his life and the pandemic trauma changes the whole world. The Covid-19 has been proven that anything can happen in life. The effect of Covid-19 will be there even after many centuries. It affects people financially, physically and mentally.

*The Scarlet Plague* sets in the year 2073 when a survivor of the pandemic, the Granser shares his experience when the plague bursts out in 2013. The plague has been a terrific one to kill the people and spread contagiously. Though, this novel was published a century before, it is still relevant. Granser was traumatized by the attack of plague. He has then explained his savage grandson about the life before and during the plague. But his efforts are in vein as his grandsons couldn't believe the story he has said. The only idea Granser has during the plague time is "survival". Many times he had lost his hope but then he retrieved his hope to survive in this earth. Through the words of Granser, Jake London has shown the intensity of the plague by describing it as:

The heart began to beat faster and the heat of the body to increase. Then came the scarlet rash, spreading like wildfire over the face and body. Most persons never noticed the increase in heat and heart-beat, and the first they knew was when the scarlet rash came out. Usually, they had convulsions at the time of the appearance of the rash. But these convulsions did not last long and were not very severe. The heels became numb first, then the legs, and hips, and when the numbness reached as high as his heart he died. (London 73-74)

Those picture heavily terrified Granser when his closed ones were attacked like this from plague. London showed how positive the media worked during the scarlet plague. People from media have their own responsibility especially during these situations. In his novels, phone calls, writer and newspaper were the only media sources they had. But nowadays the graph of media has been raised much. On these days, radio, TV, print media and most significantly the social media like WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram have been spreading news. Though these social medias are mainly handled by the younger generations, old people also started to believe the news from it. Thus, the credibility of the news has become diverted.

Hope is the much needed thing during these pandemic situations but people who spread fake news or TV channels which spread low-scientific truths put people in worst situations which lead to the loss of mental health of the people. Panic spread by the media has to be stopped as it affects the hope of the people. The fear of losing life makes people as savages. Faith is the only better way to handle these situations. The result of not having hope ends in unethical behavior. People who are so civilized also act like uncivilized people.



People still have fear of lockdown so they just fill the store room with the basic things they want. But what actually happens is that they overload their store room with the things which are not necessary. Still one can find people in the grocery shop buying too much of milk which is more than sufficient. People also suffer by the shortage of necessary things to face their days because of some people's uncivilized behavior. Covid, Omicron and lockdown should be faced unanimously. Unity is mandatory one among people during the difficult situations. People indulge themselves in uncivilized activities like robbery, rape and killing. Jack London shows the uncivilized act of the people as:

In the midst of our civilization, down in our slums and labor-ghettos, we had bred a race of barbarians, of savages; and now, in the time of our calamity, they turned upon us like the wild beasts they were and destroyed us. And they destroyed themselves as well. (London 105 – 106)

During the pandemic situations not only the brutality is witnessed but the humanity also. Whenever a calamity happens people grouped together to save themselves and to save other. This humanity has been witnessed throughout the world. Though the calamities like earthquake, Tsunami, storm and virus bring unpleasant things to the world, it also helps to view the humanity in people. During the pandemic situation one can observe that the front-line workers sacrifice their life for the people. It is also shown in the novel as:

The sanitary committee was called upon to act, and it responded nobly. Two men were required to go out and remove the corpses, and this meant the probable sacrifice of their own lives, for, having performed the task, they were not to be permitted to re-enter building. One of the professors, who was a bachelor, and one of the undergraduates volunteered. They bade good-bye to us and went forth. They were heroes. They gave up their lives that four hundred others might live. (London 116-117)

Granser does not want to lose his hope. He is in a situation when he finds that he is the only human being alive. He has built the hope and wandered in search of people. He finds people and starts to live with them. He has created a community in which he has all relations. Yet he has nostalgia towards his past when people were super-civilized. He wants that kind of change in his region so he gives many lectures to his grandson which results in vein. Still he believes that his people will change though it takes years to change. So he has saved many books in a cave which he believes give his people wisdom. Finally books become his ray of hope.

In that dry cave on Telegraph Hill, where you see me often go when the tribe is down by the sea, I have stored many books. In them is great wisdom. Also, with them, I have placed a key to the alphabet, so that one who knows picture-writing may also know print. Some day men will read again; and then, if no accident has befallen my cave, they will know that Professor James Howard Smith once lived and saved for them the knowledge of the ancients. (London 175 – 176)



Nowadays pandemic, endemic, quarantine, lock down, vaccine, and death are the words that haunting the people. These things definitely make the people afraid and make them lose their hope in life. Through the pandemic literature one has to understand that everything passes. Until then people should motivate themselves to have hope which the energy of life. Reading pandemic literature may help the people to face the situation and make them to face their life with hope. Jack London's *The Scarlet Plague* has been a wonderful piece of works which is so relevant even now. Through the Granser character London has shown how loss is inevitable in life and how one has to keep hopes to survive and live in the world. As London shown in the novel, pandemic is make people afraid and change the behavior of the human. Everyone has responsibility to save the society irrespective to race, class and gender.

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## Pandemic and Literature through Ages: A Case Study

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### Abstract

*Tracing back to the past till the present day, pandemics have affected human history in innumerable as demographically, socially, culturally, politically, financially, and biologically. The study of pandemics helps one to understand politics, socio-economic structures, and personal relationships in a broader sense. Their outbreaks span across centuries and continents. The earliest recorded pandemics such as plague raised questions about existence and human's relations to God. Yellow fever virus which originated in Africa was brought to the western hemisphere during the slave trade era, with the first epidemic reported in 1648 in the Yucatan. This Yellow Fever led to the success of the Haitian revolution. Pandemics such as cholera, too, exposed how the industrial revolution created conditions for contagion to spread among the working class and the poor. The global influenza epidemic of 1918-1920 led to an outpouring of altruism, selflessness and self sacrifice. Throughout history, there have been people who have dealt with crises that caused untold pain and suffering. In early 2020, the novel coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic spread globally from its outbreak in China, negatively affecting economies and industries on a global scale confining people across the globe within the four walls of their houses under lockdown and restricting their movements. In such crisis, literature takes us beyond statistics of global deaths and degree of spread to show how the crisis has affected the individual lives of those infected as well as to that of families, friends, neighbors and the community as a whole. There has been a sharp upswing in the popularity of literary works dealing with plagues, pandemics and other forms of biological crises. This in fact becomes a reminder that even the hardest times can prompt and illustrate the triumph of the human spirit as reflected in numerous literary works.*

**Keywords:** Pandemic Literature, Lockdown, Anxiety, Isolation, Vulnerability, Uncertainty.

As the coronavirus has spread throughout the world over the past years, pandemic-themed writings have appeared time and again in all manner of outlets, book form and magazines such as *Time*, *PBS*, *The Guardian*, *Globe and Mail* and many others alike. Literature has a vital role to play in casing our responses to the Covid-19 pandemic. To better understand the public reactions and how one might reduce racism, prejudice and antipathy in the narratives that surround the spread of this coronavirus, it is worth to introduce certain literary text for better understanding of the current scenario.



Stretching from the classics to contemporary novels, pandemic literature offers something in the way of a debatable and uncertain comfort, and an escort for what happens in the future. Likewise, certain topics such as the impact of pandemics on indigenous peoples and the effects of colonialism, for instance, have a well-developed historiography and relevant works are also referenced. It is noteworthy to mention that disease is not metaphor, symbol, or allegory; rather, it is simply something that kills the population without consideration. The effects of the pandemic evokes trauma and conveys profound loss or intense fear in diverse levels and these sentiments bear significance in the world of literature. Hence, story becomes a way of trying to impart a bit of that consideration and reflection that nature ignores.

Pandemics have, in myriad way, affected social life since the establishment of civilization. Hippocrates, a Greek physician of the Age of Pericles, who is considered one of the most outstanding figures in the history of medicine, recorded the first known pandemic in 412 BC, and numerous outbreaks were reported during the Middle Ages. The most notable epidemic was the ‘Spanish influenza’ that occurred in 1918. On a related note, J.F. Cheng and Leung assert:

Although more than 88 years have passed since that time, and memories of the disaster have become blurred, the sudden emergence of SARS and avian flu has reminded people of this painful past once more. (Cheng and Leung)

As mankind’s oldest deadly adversary, disease, has provided themes to literature since literature’s very invention. In order to clear the confusion, scientists, litterateur, poets, chroniclers and historians are trying to address local situations and at the same time possess a “desire to identify universal truths about how societies respond to contagious disease” (D. Jones). An English writer and journalist Daniel Defoe’s chronicle (Daniel Defoe) reflect that behind physical and mental suffering there also lies an anger against fate, against a divine will that witnesses and perhaps even condones all this death and human suffering. In modern times we are instrumented by our fear and the deaths. Set in 1655 and published in 1722, the novel, *A Journal of the Plague Year*, was likely based, in part, on the journals of the author’s uncle. At the time of publication there was alarm that plague in Marseilles could cross into England. Defoe’s fictional narrator traces the devastating progress of the plague through the streets of London. The novel talks about grief, sadness, death, survival, redemption, sin, hope, and faith. Defoe’s chronicler speaks of bodies piling up in mass graves, of sudden deaths and unlikely recoveries from the brink, and also blames those from elsewhere for the outbreak. A city has transformed: some of its streets suspiciously empty, some - with crosses on their doors - overwhelmingly full of the sounds and smells of human suffering. Defoe wrote about people keeping their distance when they met each other on the streets during the plagues, but also asking each other for news and stories from their respective hometowns and neighborhoods, so that they might stitch together a broader picture of the disease consumed with their blind faith:

With what blind, absurd, and ridiculous Stuff, these Oracles of the Devil pleas’d and satisfy’d the People, I really know not, but certain it is, that innumerable Attendants



crowded about their Doors every Day; [...] there was no Remedy for it, till the Plague itself put an End to it all. (Daniel Defoe)

Only through that wider view could they hope to escape death and find a safe place. (Pamuk)

An unmarried saddler, H.F is the narrator of the novel who lived in London during the plague. His *Journal* presents a multitude of anecdotes about masters of the house refusing to tell city officials of sick family members; people bribing watchmen to escape or engaging in violent altercations with them; sneaking out of houses through unwatched doors and windows; and many dead from being confined with a sick person. All of these reasons, coupled with the psychological trauma that resulted from forced confinement led to H.F.'s conclusion that this was a harmful and useless practice. He declares:

...in short, the shutting up of Houses, was in no wise to be depended upon; neither did it answer the End at all; serving more to make the People desperate, and drive them to such Extremities, as that, they would break out at all Adventures. (Defoe)

H.F. is keen to point out that the poor people of London did not rise up in rebellion as a manifestation of their fear and distress; they did not threaten city authorities or ravage nearby towns or break into the houses of the rich. He asserts:

..they rather went to the Grave by Thousands than into the Fields in Mobs by Thousands... (Defoe)

The lockdown as Defoe acknowledges had very great inconveniences in it, and some that were very tragic, was authorized by a law, it had the public good in view as the end chiefly aimed at, and all the private injuries that were done by the putting it in execution must be put to the account of the public benefit. Defoe's book emphasizes that the most prevalent way the contagion (virus) spread was via asymptomatic individuals who carried it. Much of the literature on plague and contagious diseases present the carelessness, incompetence, and selfishness of those in power as the sole instigator of the fury of masses can be compared with the current mismanagement of so many countries' governments. *A Journal of the Plague Year* tells us how in 1664, local authorities in some London neighborhoods tried to make the number of plague deaths appear lower than it was by registering other, invented diseases as the recorded cause of death.

Tracing back to early writings, such as *The Decameron* by Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375) and *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer (1343–1400), emphasized human behavior in a cynical manner:

...the fear of contagion increased vices such as avarice, greed, and corruption, which paradoxically led to infection and thus to both moral and physical death. (Riva, et al)

*The Decameron* published in English in 1886 presents a frame story centred on ten people fleeing the Black Death who gather in the countryside and as an amusement relate ten stories each. The stories are woven together by a common theme, the way of life of the refined bourgeoisie, who combined respect for conventions. The said mentioned vices were displayed by elite and sometimes common citizens in urban settings in the hoarding of



essentials from superstores and groceries which somehow resembles the situation of current lockdown due to Covid-19. Even in the current scenario, panic buying and hoarding essentials help people to believe they are in control and feel secured. Panic buying often leads to large quantities of necessities and medical supplies being purchased from vendors, and vastly limiting or even eliminating availability such that individuals and vulnerable groups, including the elderly or poor, are prevented from accessing them as they would normally do. (Emilie) However, writers like Defoe and Camus allowed their readers glimpses of scholastic and existential philosophies respectively underneath the waves of vulnerabilities, and fears, as something inherent to human nature.

To write the book *The Plague* (1947), Albert Camus engaged himself in the history of plagues. He used several source materials ranging from the Black Death in Europe in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the Italian plague of 1630, and the great plague of London of 1665 as well as plagues that ravaged cities on China's eastern seaboard during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries embedding them in his writings. Camus was not writing about one plague, as one thought it to be, rather, his was a metaphoric tale about the Nazi occupation of France. Camus' attitude is that in a world without meaning the plague provides a moral opportunity for people to find themselves in the struggle of sacrifice to work for the greater good. Like Camus's *Plague*, *Blindness* (1997) by Jose Saramago uses pandemic as an allegory of society,

Blindness was spreading, not like a sudden tide flooding everything and carrying all before it, but like an insidious infiltration of a thousand and one turbulent rivulets which, having slowly drenched the earth, suddenly submerge it completely. (Saramago)

The novel talks about the presence of morality in a damaged society, and the lack thereof, and the consequences that result from right and wrong, where life is reduced to a substantial fight for survival and people succumb to a contagious form of blindness which can transform your vision into a visual milky sea. (Penguin)

A profound cultural and ethical aspect of all major pandemics is the loss of access to personal narratives. The collective replaces the individual as protagonist, and the health of the public takes precedence over that of the individual. "There is a paradox in the multiplication of personal catastrophe throughout a society" (Belling ). The accounting of the past sufferings as narrated in different literary and historical texts in this context can produce thick memory with "subjective specificity." Prophetic traditions of pandemics including Covid-19 are deeply rooted in religious and community narratives that are turned toward the 'end times. (Peters)

One of the most widely read novels in the past decade that won the Arthur C. Clarke Award in 2015, is Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven*. The novel, a New York Times Bestseller, takes place in the Great Lakes region before and after a fictional swine flu pandemic, known as the "Georgia Flu", has devastated the world, killing most of the population. The novel states that after a swine flu pandemic wiped out most of the world's population, a group of musicians and actors travel around newly formed settlements to keep



their art alive and to come up with meaningful strategies to keep going. Mandel showcases the impact of the pandemic on all of their lives, weaving together characters perspectives from across the planet and over several decades to explore how humanity can fall apart and then, somehow, come back together.

One of the first novels about the pandemic is Margaret Atwood's novels *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and *The Year of the Flood* (2009) that considers ways in which the pandemic of her dystopian world may, to various degrees, serve as a reflection of the Covid-19 global pandemic in 2020. The setting of both novels is the same dystopian world but each presenting different ideological perspective in dealing with the pandemic. The presentation analyses the creation of Crakers as the new humanoid species, which are supposed to inhabit the earth in its post-pandemic state reflects not only political and social structures Atwood borrowed from the real-world, but also types of behavior that some political national leaders display in the present scenario. While *Oryx and Crake* addresses the issues of power, exploitation, and God; *The Year of the Flood*, with its two female characters, scrutinizes the pandemic through the lens of ecofeminism, ecology, nature, suitability and sustainability.

Lastly, an American actor and author, Max Brooks' novel, *World War Z* (2006) reflects "oral history" of a virus that originated in China and spread across the world, converting millions of people into zombies. The thrilling novel is a sweeping look at the sociopolitical response to a pandemic. Brooks described how different countries reacted to the major virus and how the Chinese government tries to cover up the virus' spread. Also the U.S. government, in the midst of an election year, is seen too slowly to react to the impending catastrophe. It is insightful to note that the actual threat is not the virus or even the zombies per se but rather in its psychological response, especially that of denial and panic.

Even though projecting hard times, they also provide comfort and solace as these stories give us the hope and aspiration for a better future. Writing about such stories also helps us to understand and appreciate the difficult situation that one overcome and how one makes the best of the worst times. Similarly under Covid-19 strain one is expected to become more articulate in his/her artistic creations focusing on themes such as individual survival, isolation, vulnerability, uncertainty, and certainly the importance of collective introspection of inequality related to pandemic deaths. Throughout history, there have been people who have dealt with crises that caused untold suffering. As cited above, literature has always been home to numerous stories narrating the trials and tribulations of diseases, pandemics, plagues and the lives of those experiencing it. Devastating epidemics have impacted the lives of many writers around the globe and have manifested in the form of stories, dramas, poems and novels, some of which remains classics till date. Some writers strived with personal losses through writing about them as a form of deliverance. These stories give readers realistic perceptions into the restrictions and changes that these circumstances brought along with it.

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## Elaine Showalter's Feminine Phase and Gender Stereotypes as Evidenced in Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight*

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### Abstract

*For centuries, people have been hearing fairy tales from their childhood. Almost every fairy-tale contains a physically 'strong' man and a 'weak' woman who always needs the help of a man and this is embedded into the minds of people about its fascination for harmful masculinity and helpless feminine gender. Years have been changing yet the manifestation of such toxicity has not been changed. One such example is Meyer's novel *Twilight* which portrays a weak human 'woman' and a strong 'manly' predator who is a Vampire. Stephenie Meyer is an American novelist who gains fame all over the world after her debut novel *Twilight*. This novel makes a strong impact and manipulates the readers' minds that the handsome look and super-hero behaviour will be the thing one needs and not a talented mind and capability. The paper attempts to throw light on the glorifying portrayal of Elaine Showalter's First phase in feminism that is "femininity" and the gender stereotypes through the writing of Meyer's "*Twilight*".*

**Keywords:** Elaine Showalter, Stephenie Meyer, Femininity, Patriarchy, Gender Stereotypes.

Fantasy literature and fairy tales are the genres people hear about and wish to live in it but cannot. In this 21st century, many revolutions are being come to change people's mentality and the entire world. Developed countries like the United States of America and the United Kingdom are being revolutionized to change other people's lives. Yet, some people still bound themselves into Victorian society and gender stereotypes. Meyer is one such novelist who does not realize she is promoting a patriarchal mindset among readers. In *Twilight*, Meyer frames such toxicity and justifies it as love and romance.

Elaine Showalter termed the history of women's writing into three phases, that is, the Feminine phase (1840-1880), the Feminist phase (1880-1920) and the Female phase (1920-). As mentioned by Showalter in her *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing*, the 'feminine' novel was acting as a vehicle to portray feebleness, ignorance, prudery, refinement, propriety, and sentimentality as female qualities. In this novel, Meyer's writing resembles the Feminine phase writers like the Brontes, George Eliot





and Jane Austen. In an interview, Stephenie Meyer told that her inspiration for the novel *Twilight* is from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. By reading that novel, she inherits the weak qualities and derives the characters Bella and the name Edward. And it also resembles a fairy tale of the French writer Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve's *Beauty and the Beast*. Here also, the main character name is Bella and she fell in love with a Beast. *United Nations Human Rights* defined Gender Stereotype as a generalized view or preconception about attributes or characteristics, or the roles that are or ought to be possessed by, or performed by, women and men. In this novel *Twilight*, Meyer depicts the female protagonist Isabella Swan with such stereotypical feminine qualities.

Isabella Swan is a 17-year-old girl who recently shifted to Forks, Washington from Phoenix, Arizona. Her mother has got married to another man. For the sake of this newly married couple, she sacrifices her happiness being at Phoenix, a sunny place to a rainy place, Forks where her biological father Charlie lives. Being a naive girl, she instantly gets attracted by the most handsome guy called Edward Cullen who is a Vampire just for his appearance. Edward is a 117-year-old vampire but looks ever seventeen. Edward was described as godlike, angelic and a male model. Here Bella frequently admires his beauty and often feel inferior by comparing herself to him or others though she was the one to whom three guys asked out.

Feeling of insecurity and low self-image is filled in the character Bella. With no self-confidence and low self-esteem, Bella is indulged in depression and suicidal thoughts. In her words:

Maybe, if I looked like a girl from Phoenix should, I could work this to my advantage. But physically, I'd never fit in anywhere. I should be tan, sporty, blond – a volleyball player, or a cheerleader. (*Twilight* 9)

She even hates herself and feels not enough for him. Moreover, she tries to make meaning out of her life after her dependency on Edward. She searches for the meaning of life in him and not in herself. Throughout the novel, one can see Edward has been controlling her and is not ready for her opinion. He forgets that she is also a human being and she also has her thoughts. He is described as a dominant man who selfishly uses a human teenage girl. She was treated more like a doll rather than a human in the hands of Edward. Bella, being an emotional character, is depicted as a cry-baby who often cries when she gets angry. It is evidenced by her words, I usually cried when I was angry, a humiliating tendency. (*Twilight* 22) Bella hates taking decisions in her life and often her life decisions were taken by others.

Meyer constructed Bella as not only mentally weak but also physically weak. Bella often faints down by the smell of blood. Even in her Biology classroom, she is about to faint down and Edward took her to the nurse. At James' attack also she has been passed out and lost her consciousness. To make her a morally good character, Meyer termed her that she never had a boyfriend nor anyone close. She has been described as a modest and clumsy woman who even could not walk with a balance and drive steadily.



Resembling the same gender stereotype that men are the ones interestedly involves in sports activities, not women, Bella does not like involving in sports activities and Gym class. It is like a puzzle that is mysterious to her. When Charlie was watching a basketball in TV, Bella thinks, There was a basketball game that he (Charlie) was excited about, though of course, I had no idea what was special about it (*Twilight* 112). And she depicts herself as a soft woman in the following line-

I had always been slender, but soft somehow, obviously not an athlete; I didn't have the necessary hand-eye coordination to play sports without humiliating myself – and harming both myself and anyone else who stood too close. (*Twilight* 9)

Bella, after meeting Edward, begins to avoid her friends and family. And her entire world revolves only around Edward. She becomes a dumb personality who loses all her rational thoughts after meeting Edward. She foolishly flirts with much a younger boy named Jacob Black only to get the details about the Cullens and eventually finds their real secret. Even after she came to know about Edward's reality as a dangerous vampire and the warnings given by Jacob and Billy, Bella never seems to bother about it. Her pathetic situation reveals through her own words, I sat like a bird locked in the eyes of a snake. (*Twilight* 232) She is very much blindly in love which is her justification for her irrational thoughts. Edward describes the temptation of his first encounter with her as,

To me, it was like you were some kind of demon, summoned straight from my hell to ruin me. The fragrance coming off your skin . . . I thought it would make me deranged that first day. In that one hour, I thought of a hundred different ways to lure you from the room with me, to get you alone. And I fought them each back, thinking of my family, what I could do to them. I had to run out, to get away before I could speak the words that would make you follow... (*Twilight* 236)

Bella plays the role of damsel in distress. Bella says, I was a novelty here, where novelties were few and far between. Possibly my crippling clumsiness was seen as endearing rather than pathetic, casting me a damsel in distress. (*Twilight* 46) She is always knocked off with some problem and Edward comes as a saviour. She loses her path and frequently ends up in the wrong direction. At first, Tyler rides his car and is about to crash down Bella accidentally. But Edward came and rescued her. Then, when she headed up to a bookstore, she lost her way and gets into trouble where some four men call her 'sugar' and followed her to abuse her. At that time, Bella walks speedily and due to fear she even thought to jump in front of a car to escape from them. However, she was rescued by Edward who comes out of nowhere at the end. Edward mocks her by saying, Only you could get into trouble in a town this small. You would have devastated their crime rate statistics for a decade, you know. (*Twilight* 150)

I was wrong about you on one other thing, as well. You're not a magnet for accidents – that's not a broad enough classification. You are a magnet for trouble. If there is anything dangerous within a ten-mile radius, it will invariably find you. (*Twilight* 151)



While the Cullens went to play Baseball along with Bella, three vampires joined them. Among them, a new vampire James could not resist the scent of Bella and wanted to kill her. To save her, the Cullens brought Bella into a hotel room where she is free from all dangers. But this trick also fails when she was foolishly brought out by James' wickedness and again Edward saved her. The entire novel is about her helplessness and Edward protecting from all her dangers.

When Bella moves on to Forks, she tells her father that she will cook for him while at her stay. Here, Meyer insists on the typical gender role of a woman to cook for a family. Even though Charlie lives alone and cooks for himself for the last 17 years, Bella believes a man could not be able to feed himself rather he should expect a woman to feed him. When she plans to go out for two days with her friends, she is afraid that how Charlie would manage everything without her. So, she wrote the instructions which will help him to cook and eat.

The female protagonist Bella does under any circumstances think about her plans and goals for the future. She simply craved an attractive wealthy, youthful man for whom she can serve domestic needs. Without any ambition, she obeys and adores the beautiful Edward, and she wants to be with him and gets married to him. This is a malicious trait which tempts the readers to lead an aimless life. Bella's wish to be a vampire seems to be her choice outwardly, but in a deeper tone, it digs out her inferiority complex and reveals her insecurity which is a gender stereotype of a woman.

Taking the romance and love out of the selected novel, everything seems bizarre. A 17-year-old teenage girl whose boyfriend is 100 years older than her is odd. Even before their love confession, every day Edward watches her sleep intruding her bedroom without even consenting her like a stalker. Meyer turned this abnormal behaviour into a normal one and projects it like romantic behaviour.

Nevertheless, this paper traces out how the poisonous traits are being disguised into an ideal courtship and the way it blinds the younger readers about the negativity and how fairy tale resonates even after the changing decades. Thus, Meyer did not adapt her writing with a new idea, indeed, the recurrence of the same patriarchal idea and femininity was brought by her to 21st-century fiction.

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## Kamala Das and the Element of Death in her Select Writings

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### Abstract

*There are many people who believe death is a starting place to obtain everlasting freedom from this chaotic world and wait for their time and a chance to leave this temporary world. Writing is a channel to communicate our inner feelings and the writers describe fictional, non-fictional, real-life incidents through their writings. A few writers have projected apprehensions and inhibitions of people about the ever-ending sleep in a piece of writing. A few writers who have experienced these feelings by themselves naturally described through the characters in their stories. Among the few women writers felt death as an only source to overcome their problems, agony, existing isolation and parting from their cherished once. Kamala Das is one writer who has experienced all these feelings in her life. Hence, the article decodes Kamala Das' use of Death in her Select writings.*

**Keywords:** Kamala Das, Death, Poems.

Death is inevitable in everyone's life but people are reluctant to accept this truth, generally human beings keep death far away from their lives. The idea of death itself brings fear in once life. Death doesn't affect the dead people it affects their family and the near ones. The term death is perceived in various concepts by different religions some feel that reaching death is nothing but getting birth again, and some others believe that it takes people near to the almighty and others deem it as an unending rest which leads into the never-ending world. Though the concepts of different religions on death vary but ultimately it separates us from our loved ones.

Kamala Das (1934-2009) is an Indian English poet who also writes in Malayalam was born in Nalapatt Kerala is popularly known as Madhavikutty and Kamala Surayya. Kamala Surayya describes about the docile sensitive inner feelings, disgruntled desires of women which lies in their heart and mind. Due to her serious illness, major part of her life was related to the medicines, hospitals, doctors and she describes all these experiences in her writings. Kamala Das in her own words about death:

“I have always regarded the hospital as a planet situated like a sandwich filling between the familiar earth and the strange domain of death. Each time I have been admitted into a hospital room I have been seized with an acute desire to be left alone.”  
(*My Story*, p. 212)



Kamala Das and the term death are closely associated with each other, from her childhood she is deprived of love and affection got neglected from her family members, she was married to a much elderly person, she tried to get love from her husband and there also she has become a silent sufferer. Kamala Das has seen death very close to her life.

Das has witnessed many deaths in Nalapatt family, her Muthassi (great grandmother) Amamma (grandmother) and her own bad health .Her serious heart problem and hospitalization. Her suicide attempts in her unsuccessful married life made her to project death very realistic in her stories. Her grandmother's unexpected death and her own bad health condition brought Kamala Das to portray death element in many writings.

Kamala Das describes the death of her beloved grandmother in her poem *My Grandmother's House*:

There is a house now far away where once  
I received love. That woman died,  
The house withdrew into silence,  
you cannot believe, darling  
Can you, that I lived in such a house and  
Was proud, and loved I who have lost  
My way and beg now at strangers' doors to  
receive love, at least in small change?"(SIC, p. 13)

Kamala Das writes about her unforgettable experiences which she shared with her grandmother during her childhood, she used to visit her grandmother's house for vacation who is the only source of love in her life. In one such visits Kamala Das asks her grandmother about death and grandmother tells that everyone should die one day or the other day. Das asks her never to die and takes oath from her which she describes in the story 'Summer Vacation'.

The story 'Summer Vacation' is about a small girl Ammu, her grandmother and her father. After her mother's death Ammu is sent to her mother's house to spend her vacation in her home town Tharavad. In the story the girl doesn't understand the death. Ammu in a general conversation talks about nyaval ( black plum) tree and its fruit to her Muthassi and she tells about her child hood friend Devu who compares Muthassi's eyes with the seeds of nyval fruit. Ammu asks her,

Where is that Devu you talked about now?"  
Oh , Devu," Muthassi reflected with a wistful smile.  
She died a long time ago  
my companions, dead and gone."  
Are they all dead?"  
Hmm." (*The Kept Women*, p, 32)

Muthassi tells Ammu that God has left her still alive at the age of sixty-nine taking all her family members. When Ammu asks her about Muthassi's death



“No one from this Tarawad has lived up to this age. My mother died when she was forty; my uncle at forty –five. And Grandmother, if I remember correctly didn’t quite reach fifty. As for Kamalam... I am sinner that is why I stay alive. I often wonder what further sufferings are in store for me before I die”.

But Muthassi, are you going to die soon?

I persisted...I won’t die. Muthassi, promise me”.

Muthassi’s eyes filled with tears once again.

But she smiled and said,

“All right, Ammu.

I promise I won’t die. Is that enough?” (TKW, pp, 34- 35).

Thus the little girl understands that death takes away the most lovable people in her life first her mother, may be her grandmother next, and she asks her grandmother never to die. Kamala Das’ fear of her grandmother’s death in her childhood was brilliantly depicted in the story through characters Ammu and Muthassi (grandmother).

Kamala Das describes her apprehensions on death in her growing up stage that is from her childhood to womanhood, for the first time her worries about her grandmothers death is shown in her story ‘Summer Vacation’ and after marriage when she fell sick with severe illness, her worries about children, husband and family are clearly exhibited through her stories like ‘Sweet Milk’, ‘The Scent of the Bird’ and a few other stories.

Kamala Das’ story ‘Sweet Milk’ describes sudden demise of a married woman leaving her husband and three small children alone. In the story an young wife suddenly dies due to heart attack the same day morning she prepares food for children, she cooks children favorite Neipayasam( Sweet milk) , she gives coffee to husband , bath to children and on the same day she dies due to heart attack . The husband unable to tell children that their mother is no more with them and children without knowing about their mother’s death they feel happy that their mother made so many dishes for them, though father doesn’t want children to eat those as the person who prepared them is dead but still he allows children to eat them as they can never get the food made by their mother.

The story begins with a man namely Achhan returning home at night after a simple cremation. In the bus he thought about a voice

“Unniye, don’t go on sleeping, covered up like that. It’s Monday.” She was calling the eldest son. She then moved to the kitchen, her white saree crumpled. Brought me a big glass of coffee. Then? What happened then? “(TKW, p. 49)

The husband who returns from office finds his young wife dead in the kitchen. Though the couple is not rich they have plans for their three small children. Unni , Balan and the young boy Rajan five years old. The husband never imagines that his wife would suddenly fall down and die. He thinks of what would happen to children if he falls ill and about the future plans they both had for their family. At home the youngest child asks father about his mother. He says she will come. He takes them to kitchen .The children sees the dishes made by mother especially the neipayasam. He says to children they have become cold



and tells he makes some hot uppumavu. “Achha, neipayasam,” Rajan exclaimed happily. He dipped a finger in it..Let them eat.”(TKW, p. 53).

Kamala Das’ story ‘The Scent of the Bird’ is also portrayed through an young house wife and a mother of school going children is troubled by death and she tries to escape but at last she becomes the victim. A young house wife sees an advertisement of textile colours and new designs .She applies for the post. The young lady reaches the address which is a seven storied building. The building is crowded with men. She did not find any single woman there. “She did not see a single woman anywhere around. Her courage was sagging by that time. She further felt that she ought not have gone there ignoring her husband’s words”.( TKW, p.23). The lady finds a sign board with the description, ‘Dying’. She thinks it is misspelt for dyeing and enters the room. “She cried out, is there nobody in?” (TKW,p.25). There comes a young man she tries to find the information of dyeing textile office and he doesn’t give any reply she becomes impatient. She moves towards the door. He says:

“Didn’t you read the sign? It says ‘ Dying”.

“So ....?”

“Yes, that’s it. Don’t you know dying? We undertake to arrange fine deaths.” (p.26)

He tells very softly to her that, during one winter season in the past a yellow colour bird has come into his room. It tried hard to escape through the window in the process it break the glass and fell down. He informs her that he killed bird with his shoes and says the death smelled like a scent of the bird.

You’re lying. How many times had you wanted to come here!.... “Who are you?” She sat up. ....Haven’t you seen me before?” No “ I’d come to you several times. Once when you are only a kid of seven. you are laid up with Jaundice,... you said, ‘ Mother, I see yellow flowers, yellow oleanders. Yellow flowers everywhere.’ Do you remember that?” She nodded... You were not aware of my love. You didn’t know that I was your guide and also that of everybody else”. “Love? Is this love?” she asked. (TKW, pp, 28-29)

She understands the man as death himself but once again she rejects his approach towards her and runs away from him, in the hurry of escaping from him she runs into an elevator which was not in condition and tries to escape from there, after getting into elevator. She finds out that elevator is not in condition.

Thus the woman gives her last breath in the lift thinking about her children and husband. Death is the most invited one in Kamala Das’ life. The loneliness, the neglected childhood and unsatisfied married life and her worst health conditions made her to invite death happily in to her life. Das says

...Another illness, she became very weak and lost energy in her- I was physically destroyed beyond resurrection... No, I will not dream of going back to a hospital’. I said to the doctor... It’s not that I am afraid of the injections and the drips and all the rest,’ I said. It is just that I have stopped fearing death...’I have been for years obsessed with the idea of death. I have to believe that life is a mere dream and that





death is the only reality. It is endless, stretching before and beyond our human existence. To slide into it will be to pick up a new significance. Life has been, despite all emotional involvements, as ineffectual as writing on moving water. We have been mere participants in someone else's dream." (*My Story*, p.213)

Das feels that from her birth she had restricted life and says that now she wants to go away from this temporary world and wish to go the permanent world of death. This thought of Kamala Das' death is particularly described in her autobiography 'My Story'.

Out of my pyre my grieving sons shall pick  
up little souvenirs of bones and some ash.  
And yet the world shall go on. Tears  
shall dry on my sons' cheeks. Their wives  
shall bring forth brilliant children. My  
descendants shall populate this earth. It  
is enough for me. It is more than enough... (*My Story*, p, 214)

Hence, Das describes death from the children's perspective, as a psychological trauma and its effect on the people who live and how the characters react to the loss of their near ones and to themselves. Kamala Das' ill health, painful experiences, impels her nearly to death bed which made her to describe death naturally through her characters in her stories.

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