



ISSN - 2320-3625

Journal of Women's Studies

(A Peer Reviewed Journal)

Vol. X

2021



समानो मन्त्रः समितिः समानी

CENTRE FOR WOMEN'S STUDIES

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL

Raja Rammohunpur, Dist: Darjeeling

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Editorial

We are happy to announce that the 2021 issue of *Journal of Women's Studies* is now published.

Women's Studies Journal has focused on women's concerns, gender, sexuality, caste, literature, and media since its first publication. Feminism may appear to be an area where there has been extensive research and studies and perhaps nothing more remains to be said, but on the contrary, there endure areas untouched or unexplored enough in feminist studies with new areas of emerging concerns. Feminism is crucial to understanding the sites of sex, gender, and subjectivity. A common theme in feminist studies remains the investigation of gender inequality.

The research papers presented in this issue have as their key concerns discrimination against women, men, and the non-binary, objectification (sexual), inequality, sexism, stereotyping and representations in literature which is fundamental to feminist criticism.

Feminism(s) opens up inquiries into the unequal distribution of power under the heteronormative model, under the hegemonic gender norms structured and normalized in a society that has consistently maintained the male dominance, opens up inquiries that help to disrupt the assumptions of sex and its designations into the rigid categories of sex/gender.

While feminism is an area that has engaged many researchers, Women's Studies as an academic discipline is relatively young and is looked at as an unconventional discipline as far as Indian universities are concerned, although there is NET examination in it and quite a number of Universities in India offer a full credit post-graduation course in Women's Studies.

It is important to remember that the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), funded by the government of India recognized the status of women in India as its "priority area" in the early 1970s and

ordered studies for the CSWI that would seek to improve social investigations into the status of women in India through initiative in women's studies. It is important to recognize the pioneering role of the S.N.D.T Women's University Research Unit on Women's Studies, which was founded in 1974. Another pioneering organization is IWAS. The decision to form the Indian Association of Women's Studies was announced at the 1980 National Conference on Women's Studies (Mazumdar, 1981). According to Desai et al. (1984: 5), the Indian Association of Women's Studies (IAWS) adopted objectives to break the isolation between academic and social activities by welcoming all involved in teaching, research, and action for women's development as its members in order to develop and disseminate information, organize specific action programmes, and assist institutions in developing programmes related to teaching, research, and action. It aimed at establishing a stable base for starting and supporting the advancement of Women's Studies. The decision of the authorities of NBU to introduce Post graduation in Women's Studies in University of North Bengal from 2021 has been greatly appreciated by NAAC peer team. They have recognized and appreciated the space within the academia devoted to discussions of gender inequalities (and other related inequalities) that exist in society as a significant addition to the broader spectrum of education in the area. Being multidisciplinary in approach Women's Studies allows its students to engage in critical discussion with other academic disciplines. The interdisciplinarity of Women's Studies can be understood through its collaborative programmes that incorporate gender issues and viewpoints from a wide range of disciplines. Women's Studies attempts to disseminate knowledge of gender discrimination, understand the reasons for such discrepancies and find out ways to combat the conditions of inequality in order to identify strategies to eradicate them.

The essays in this volume are multidisciplinary; they present a slew of issues that call into question some of our conventional thinking and interpretations. The essays critique the social constructivist

assessments that the politics of gender hegemony instruct and promote by using the feminist theoretical frameworks. The writings raise questions regarding the 'personal' and the 'political', investigate the matrices of men's public visibility in relation to certain prevalent codes in order to get a better understanding of the pressures that men face in societies that have strong gender norms, endeavor to explore into the realms of the human psyche, discuss women's representations in literature, research into films and the constructed 'gazes', attempt to redefine Fourth Wave feminism's inclusion and intersectionality through the Digital Platforms.

The editorial board of Women's Studies, University of North Bengal, extends its sincere thanks to the authorities of the University of North Bengal for their support and encouragement, to the members of the Advisory Committee, and the Academic Board of Women's Studies for their valuable inputs and support. We take this opportunity to thank all the contributors for their essays. We thank NBU Press team for their patience and support. The authors reserve the responsibility of answering any future queries about methodology or citations and referencing.

I express my gratitude to the entire editorial team whose commitment and perseverance has made this issue possible.

With best wishes.

Zinia Mitra
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“Where are the *tlawmngai* Zo/Mizo men?” Gendered living spaces and Masculinity codes

Anup Shekhar Chakraborty

Abstract: *In order to address the gender disparities that exist in developing societies, it is necessary to have an understanding of gendered spaces. Institutions, both formal and informal, frequently play a role in determining how a society's resources, freedoms, and privileges are distributed among its members. This research investigates the matrices of men's public visibility in relation to the *tlawmngaihna* code in order to get a better understanding of the pressures that men face in societies that have strong gender norms. The research does this by looking at the world through the lens of men and masculinities. Both the machismo of politics and the edicts of the Nexus of Patriarchy place constraints on the naturalness of men and their capacity to connect with the natural world. The conventional masculine members of the Zo and Mizo ethnic group are reimagined as exemplars of ecologically responsible perfection. Despite this, members of the community and outside observers continue to question their visibility, asking, “Where are the *tlawmngai* Zo/Mizo men?”*

Keywords: *Tlawmngaihna, Nexus of Patriarchy, Zo hnahthlak, Tuai, Masculinity codes, Gendered spaces*

I

Making Spaces Gendered

A society's distribution of freedoms, privileges, and resources is frequently shaped by formal and informal institutions. Due to the dominance of the *Nexus of Patriarchy*, women and other marginalized people are routinely pushed out of positions of power and authority. This phenomenon of women and other marginalized people being excluded from positions of political power and authority stems from the Zo political system's inherent sexism and forced subordination. This study looks at the world through the lens of men and masculinities, delving into the matrices of men's public visibility in relation to

the *tlawmngaihna* code to better understand the pressures men face in societies with strong gender norms.

Despite their noticeable absence from the realms of politics and higher positions in the churches, the public visibility of Mizo women in market places, public offices, and other “sites and spaces that matter” is interpreted by the larger audience across India as signposts of “empowerment” and social privilege (Chakraborty, 2008a; 2008b, 2009). As a result of the dominance of patriarchal institutions like Zo Churches and the *Nexus of Patriarchy*, women in Mizoram are paradoxically both visible and invisible. Language (spoken words) and symbols (dress code and colors) were and are often used as weapons to show Zo/Mizo women their spatial position and inferior status in the social hierarchy. For instance, men in the Zo/Mizo society consider ‘*puanfen*’ (skirts) to be the symbol of femininity i.e., inferior and make it a point never to wash ‘skirts’, whatever the situation be, this is true for male domestic helpers as well. Men in the Mizo society, usually try to dictate terms to their women, as to what they wear, whom to marry etc. ¹

Women in the Mizo society have been ascribed the role of an ‘out-let’ (thereby reduced to the position of the sexual organs) to creation but not the status of a procreator, for such a revered position is reserved only for the male—the vigor, the powerful *Pasaltha* (Brave Mizo Hero).

It was for this reason also that the men in the Mizo society consciously and unconsciously treated women as a sexual being whose urges need to be repressed and directed.

Politics’ machismo and the *Nexus of Patriarchy’s* edicts also put limits on men’s naturalness and their ability to connect with the natural world. Typical males of the Zo/Mizo ethnic group are transformed into paragons of eco-masculine perfection. However, members of the community as well as critics continue to question their visibility—where are the *tlawmngai* Zo/Mizo men?

¹ For instance, wearing of trousers (men’s clothing) is scorned, so is the wearing of salwar kameez (‘*Vai kawr*’, Indian dress). Likewise marrying a ‘*Vai*’ leads to social ostracization and stigmatization of the children (‘*Vai fa*’).

II

Putting Thoughts and Methods in the Forefront

It was decided to employ a hybrid methodology (Caracelli & Greene (Ed.) 1997; Tashakkori & Teddlie (Ed.) 2003; Brannen (Ed.)1992; Creswell, 2003; Malhotra & Shapiro, 1998) or a “scavenger methodology” (Halberstam, 1998, 2005; Sedgwick, 1990, 1993, 2003) to account for the muddled nature of Zo/Mizo social life. The study involved multiple personal interviews and prolonged conversations conducted in parts to suit the interviewer and interviewee’s timings and needs between 2010 and 2022. Information was gathered in bits and pieces through the decade. The ethnographic accounts of 19 Zo/Mizo informants were collected through snowball sampling. The sample comprised a range of native Zo/Mizo men (sexually ambivalent, sexually ambiguous; Top, Versatile, Bottom; Polyamorous, Single, never married, married and divorced) within 15-50 years of age. Few have migrated within regions of the northeast, and a few reside in major cities and urban centers (within India) for work or studies. The informants in this study were engaged in different professions. The names of respondents have been changed, and specific details are retained in parts not to ‘out’ the respondent but to show the sample’s complex ethnic, religious, and geographic representations. The snowball sampling method was used to collect ethnographic accounts from men who were regularly involved in environmental movements and cleanup efforts (at least three drives a year).

In contemporary times, the conceptions of “Social Welfare” promoted by the Church and its agencies, particularly the YMA (Young Mizo Association), the KTP²(Khristian Thalai Pawl), and the youth organizations, have been linked

² Pu Zaliana, (Senior Research Officer, ‘Tribal Research Institute’, Art & Culture Department, Government of Mizoram, McDonald Hill). Personal Interview. Zarkawt, Aizawl, Mizoram dated 22, 23 & 24 January 2008; Professor Thangchungnunga (Department of Economics, Mizoram University, Main Campus). Personal Interview. Tanhril, Aizawl: 24 January 2008; Professor F. Lalremsiama (Department of History, Johnson’s College). Personal Interview. Khatla, Aizawl: 26 January 2008; Professor Lalrinthanga (Department of Public Administration, Mizoram University, Chaltlang Campus). Personal Interview. Aizawl: 19 January 2008.

to the social norms of “*Tlawmngai*,” “*Huaisen*,” and “*Pasaltha*.” The Zo/Mizo persona is going through a lot of internal reflection. The idea of a progressive and enlightened Christian society is heavily encouraged alongside the nostalgia for a romanticized past filled with images of formerly valiant and honorable people who in “daily life” followed the code of “*tlawmngaihna*” in letter and spirit. A potent portrayal of the desire to establish and “belong” to an *Ideal Zo Christian State* has occasionally resulted in the church and its organizations interfering in both private and public affairs in a voyeuristic manner (Downs, 1983; Thomas, 1993; Chakraborty, 2008; 2009). The Zo code of ethics, known as “*Tlawmngaihna*,” is widely regarded “as the living principle of the Zo/Mizo civilization,” despite some hybridization over time. It continues to hold the “symbolic structure of community” together (Cohen, 1985). A conflict of interest between “archaic traditionalism/Christian ethics” and “the culture of individualism/globalized society” frequently comes from the compliance to what the *Nexus of Patriarchy* demands. The boundaries between the public and private spheres merge, and the *Nexus of Patriarchy* gains a lopsided hegemonic position.

The hybridization of the “*tlawmngaihna*” code in urban settings goes hand in hand with these numerous issues. The idea of *tlawmngaihna*, which predates Christianity, is still present but has been hybridized. Today, “*tlawmngaihna*” consists of neighborhood projects like “*Hnatlang*” (community service including cleaning drives, maintaining local roads, clearing forest fires, cleaning and maintaining drinking water sources etc.) and “*Thlan lai*” (grave digging) carried out by the YMA or KTP. The core of the code, which is currently being progressively destroyed over time, is utilized as a tool to demonstrate compliance with the *Ideal Zo Christian State-building* program’s rules. Social ridicule and, in more extreme circumstances, exclusion are used to punish people who choose not to participate in such a public exhibition of “*tlawmngaihna*.” The dynamics of Zo/Mizo economics and justice, on the other hand, are “based on the psychology of compensation” as opposed to social justice: they make every act in the Mizo society compensable in economic terms, i.e., a fine is the only remedy for any crime or misdeed (Stevenson 1943 (1986); Lehman, 1978; Awia, 1992; Chatterjee, 1995). You can make up for missing out on the *tlawmngaihna* public display by paying a forty rupee fine. The “*tlawmngaihna*” code serves as both a tool and a weapon for controlling “outsiders,” primarily the “*Vai*” (Chakraborty 2012).

III

Gender, Sexualities, Control, and Regime in the Zo World

In Mizo society, there is little literature on homosexuality. However, silence does not indicate absence. Indigenous terms for sexual orientations and body-related vernacular slurs can be found in colonial writings. J. Herbert Lorrain, a Scottish Baptist Christian Missionary who had served in Lushai Hills (now Mizoram) from 1894 and a pioneer in the creation and development of Mizo script had mentioned in his Dictionary of the Lushai Language that *tuai-pheng* (noun) refers to a man who practices sodomy, cross-dresses and has a woman like gait; a sodomite who masquerades as a woman. *Patil* (noun) means a woman who behaves and dresses like a man, a sex pervert.

Superintendent of the Lushai Hills N.E. Parry (1924-1928) wrote in his book: *A Monograph on Lushai Customs and Ceremonies* about the practice of *Mawngkawluk* (lit., sodomy) among the Zo people. All cases of sodomy during the colonial days were to be reported to the Superintendent to be dealt with by him. In the pre-colonial days the sodomized or his father had the right to kill the sodomite or have his nose and ears slit open. The father of the sodomized could shoot any *mithun* (gayal, sial/siel, se/sia drung ox; for the Zo people it was a measure of a family's wealth) in the village. The villagers would consume the meat, and the sodomite would compensate for the slaughtered mithun by paying a monetary fine. 'Sodomy, however, is rare in these hills' mentioned Parry. The penetrator was held accountable for sexual deviation and fined accordingly. The Zo society was silent on whether the act was consensual, the penetrator was ensnared into penetrating the sodomized etc. The silence seems to signal a culture of tolerance towards the *tuai* and the *Patil*.

The Colonial encounter resulted in the criminalization of homosexuality among the Zo people. In 1909, one of the Superintendents of the Lushai Hills, H.W.G Cole, issued a statute (Order No. 3 of 1909. 10) criminalizing homosexuality and cross-dressing. The order prohibited cross-dressing of the *tuai* and sought maleness in behavior. The order-imposed taxes on the *tuai* and labor services (coolie, porter). Reporting of any defiance of the order and display of sexual incoherence rested with the village chiefs. The chiefs were thus bound

to report all cases of unnatural offences that come to their notice, whether or not any complaint had been made to them. Failure to do so invited the possibility of severe punishment. What would interest the curious eyes while gleaning through the 1909 order of Cole is the ambivalence in the treatment of acts of defiance and sexual misconduct: "In future, all *tuais* (male, homosexuals) who are clearly of the male sex are to abandon wearing women's clothes and are to live as men and will pay revenue and do cooly (porter) work." The order is silent on *Patil* -a woman who behaves and cross-dresses like a man. This could presumably be associated with *Patil*'s unhesitatingly participating in communal labor, which would benefit the colonial demand for labor and investment in Raj building these borderlands.

The missionaries successfully won the confidence of the tribes of these borderlands. The Khasis were first among the tribes of the region to have converted to Christianity way back in 1812–1813. The missionary activities were initiated in the Naga Hills in the 1840s and the Zo/Mizo/Lushai Hills in 1894–1895 (Fuchs 1973). In this time frame, the Zos/Mizos were a late arrival to the Evangelical missions. However, the success rate in the Zo Hills has been the maximum in terms of mass proselytization. Awakening to a new sense of identity, political consciousness, proto-nationalism and ethnic consolidation within larger kinship groups, the tribal communities sought to differentiate themselves from the new sovereignties being asserted by rest of South Asia.

The encounters between the British and the '*Kuki-Chin-Lushai tribes*' and the expansion of territories by the Kuki, Chin-Lushais towards south and south-west from Hakka (in Myanmar) and towards eastern Mizoram from Tiddim Falam region of Burma (Myanmar) at the beginning of the 19th century and the gradual extension of the British Frontiers towards the Northeast led to the confrontation between the 'wild tribes' and the 'colonial world'. The British developed the ingenious method of protecting the frontier by establishing 'fortified posts in the hills'. Such a move would call for the import of human resources (Lewin 1912; Chakraborty, 2008). The expansion work at Aizawl and Lunglei in Mizoram, as well as the setting up of administrative machinery, required an increase in the inflow of immigrants, that is, 'the trusted Gorkhas', as mentioned by O. A. Chambers ([1899] 2005) and Col E. B. Elly ([1893] 1978). The colonial administration system required human resources such as *dak-*

runners, chowkidars, peons, cart drivers, traders, masons, etc. Since such work was unknown to the local people, it was advisable to introduce migrant labor. The migrant Gorkhas resembled the natives to an extent. Though the Gorkhas were not allowed to settle outside the allotted areas, many Lushai chiefs were eager to have them in their villages. They even entreated the Superintendent of Lushai Hills to permit the Gorkhas to reside in their villages (Shakespeare 1923; Pachau 1990, cited in Sunar *et al.* 2000).

The Queer has always been expurgated from the realms of ethnic constructions, nationalist discourses, and the like. All this geared strongly to make the 'Queer' 'Invisible', drive forward patriarchally driven images of the 'self', and inject images of 'sacred and profane' into the proselytized Zo/Mizo cosmology. Colonial encounters and the wave of proselytization threw open the process of 'Localization of the Gospel'. The assimilation and retention of the chauvinistic traditional Zo practices and the Judeo-Christian notions of original sin and sexuality went hand in hand.

In their zeal to build an *Ideal Zo Christian State*, the Churches and the *Nexus of Patriarchy* engage vociferously in controlling sexualities, especially 'homosexual' (In Mizo: (male) *Tuai*/ (female) *Patil*).³ The overarching notion of 'Sin' and sinful acts inherited from the Biblical narratives of Sodom and Gomorrah continues to regulate the social imaginaries (Castoriadis, 1987; Zizek, 1991; Anderson, 1991; Shotter, 1993; Appadurai, 1996; Taylor, 2004) and vernacular slur among the *Zo hnahthlak*. The abominable sin of sodomy (anal penetration) began to define the homosexual man (*Tuai*) as '*mawngkuahur*' (lit. Insatiable rectum).⁴

(*c.f.* Post decriminalizing Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code by the Supreme Court of India.) The churches and the *Nexus of Patriarchy* fistedly began their policing regime in the 'this worldly' (lit. *khawvel*) activities through prohibition (lit. *Thiang lo*) in the real and the digitally configured virtual spaces.

³ Zorampara (21 years, M, Versatile.; Home Town: Aizawl, Mizoram). *Personal Interview*. 12 March 2010.

⁴ Lalsangzuala (25 years, M, Versatile; Home Town: Aizawl, Mizoram). *Personal Interview*. 17 March 2010.

Cyberspace opens the possibility of disengaging the constrictions in the physical spaces and setting free the Zo queer towards a *khawvel* (lit. World) to way find survival, anonymity, and collective solidarity hinged on personal experiences of discrimination.⁵ The Northeast as a region is markedly rigidified in practices that silence the amplification of questions concerning sexualities and gender and codified homophobia and transphobia in the name of ethno-national aspirations hinged on religiosity.⁶

Zo/Mizo modern women have broken through the glass ceiling and attained the position of determining their own agency through institutional initiatives. Over time, Zo/Mizo women have challenged patriarchal hegemony by forming women's organizations such as the MHIP- '*Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl*'; MHT- '*Mizo Hmeichhe Tangrual*,' and PHP- '*Puitu Hmeichhe Pawl*,'⁷ among others, to protect Mizo interests.

The MHIP's focus has shifted between reformation, empowerment, and protection of Mizo society's weakest links. For example, immediately following the signing of the Peace Accord and the formation of the State of Mizoram, the

⁵ Zova (41 years, M, Bot.; Home Town: Aizawl, Mizoram). Personal Interview. 24 February 2014.

⁶ David. (33 years, M, Gay-Top.; Home Town: Lunglei, Mizoram). Personal Interview. 10th November 2011

⁷ MHIP was formed on 6th July, 1974 at State Social Advisory Board office. The motive behind the formation of MHIP was that, when Mizoram was accorded Union Territory status, it was necessary to form a large organization in order to carry out various development schemes. MHIP was formed with the intention to include all women in Mizoram, when it was first formed, it was named "Mizoram Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl" (United Organisation of Mizoram Women), which was later changed into "Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl" (United Organisation of Mizo Women) on 20th Aug, 1998. The change in nomenclature and the focus on 'Mizo' in place of the territorial name 'Mizoram' infused apprehension from fringe tribal communities and drove unease whether it encompassed all women irrespective of tribal divides in Mizoram or just the particular Mizo women. The MHIP continues to be the largest women's organization in Mizoram and all other women's organization such as Mizo Hmeichhe Tangrual Pawl (MHTP) (Mizo Women's Organisation), Mara Chano Py (M.CH.P) (Mara Women's Organisation) from southern Mizoram are all affiliated to the larger umbrella of the MHIP.

MHIP declared 1987 to be '*Hmeichhe Kum*' (Women's Year), with the goal of bringing about changes in the existing patriarchies. 'Recognizing the Patriarchies' stalled response in the late 1990s, the MHIP shifted its focus to 'Women's Empowerment.' The MHIP designated 1997-2001 as 'Women's Year' in Mizoram in order to raise awareness about issues such as 'the low status of women in society' and 'to review Mizo customary law.' In this regard, the MHIP had toured the state, visiting remote and interior villages holding workshops, seminars, and group discussions.

The formation of these women's organization represents the second instance of rebellion against tradition in the Zo/Mizo society and also symbolizes the emergence of women from the spatial existence of the private to the public, and the creation of an external medium for women's voices to be echoed at the public level through '*Politics of Whispering Bamboo*'. These movements organized by women for themselves mark important multi-layered processes. First, the emergence of women from the spatial existence at 'the private' to 'the public' that is the flow of women's voices from the private '*Politics of Whisperings*' to the public '*Politics of Whispering Bamboo*'.⁸ Second, it reflects the attempt of women to be part of the socio-political mechanisms functioning in the society and thereby, become stakeholders in the state-building process itself. It is an attempt by women to create a space for their own voices and protect their rights as citizens and human persons.⁹

Through these organizations, Zo/Mizo women attempt to consolidate their 'positional order in Zo/Mizo society' and resurrect themselves from the patriarchy-scripted 'common disadvantages.' These organizations have fought for women's rights at various times and to varying degrees, ranging from reforms and revisions of Customary Rights, Property Rights, and Inheritance Rights, among others. These organizations also reflect the mobilization of women's voices in the Zo/Mizo society along the lines of 'common victimhood' and 'common disadvantages.' Women in the Zo/Mizo society have provided a breathing space for marginalized voices by constructing their own spatial zones. For example, an increasing number of Zo/Mizo women are turning to modern

⁸ Chakraborty. (2008b). Op.cit.

⁹ Chakraborty. (2008b). Ibid.

sophisticated technologies to weave 'their cultures,' 'their identities,' into fabrics and handlooms. The traditional Mizo/Zo 'Puan' that women wear today is infused with cross-cultural patterns and colors. Similarly, an increasing number of rural women are becoming interested in horticulture and agriculture, and are striving for greater self-sufficiency through Self-Help Groups and organizational consolidation. Also, Zo/Mizo women have pursued higher education and entered male-dominated fields such as the bureaucracy, medical sciences, and the church. As a result, Zo/Mizo women have emerged as active participants in Mizoram's development. Though still a 'backbencher' in politics, Zo/Mizo women have discovered and carved out their spatial positions, actively challenging the traditional order of things. The emergence of women's organizations can be seen as an attempt to balance the skewed socio-politico-economic situation unique to the Zo/Mizo situation, and thus an effort towards women's empowerment through democratic mechanisms, as well as a move toward the realization of Human Development and sensitization of the patriarchy.

The mustering of empowerment through organizational initiatives of Mizo Women has come to meet its limits and dead-ends post 2006 with the compilation of *Customary Laws*.¹⁰ The *Committee on Mizo Customary Laws (CMCL)* was established in 1980, and the Mizo Customary Laws Compiling Committee was established in 1982. The *Mizo Customary Law Committee* took twenty years to complete the task and produce the most recent version of *Mizo Hnam dan*, or *Mizo Customary Laws (2006)*. The Customary Board Committee was formed with the goal of revising/reforming Mizo customary laws and bringing them up to date with current needs. Surprisingly, those assigned the task

¹⁰ N.E Parry compiled the Customary Laws in his book 'A monograph on Lushai custom and ceremonies' published in the year 1927. The authenticity of Parry's codified Lushai Customary Laws is densely contested for the reason that the colonial gaze could have injected prejudice and western ideas of jurisprudence, Christian ideas of morality, sin and punishment etc. In that sense the production of a codified 'Lushai Customary Laws' by a White person of privilege could have already transcended the notion of an "authentic", "true" interpretation of social order and customs of the Mizo society. In short, between the 'spoken word', the translation and codification in the form of a written text, much could have been affected by the colonial gaze, and missionary sanitization and the final 'filtered' product remotely distinct from the 'original'. Mizoram is the first state to have written customary laws among the states of North East India (ASC).

remained at odds on a number of issues. The 'Committee' appeared to be debating whether the committee's responsibility was to make changes and reform the laws or to compile and codify the customary laws.

IV

Why did MHIP and the Rights of the Sexually Ambivalent disagree?

Mizoram's religious authorities have taken a firm stand against homosexuality and other sexual orientations. Breaking off from its American counterpart, the Presbyterian Church in Mizoram is now officially independent. It was the latter that had allowed homosexuals to become priests. In 2011, the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram's Synod Executive Committee circulated a circular to all of the denomination's local churches, outlining the Church's stance on sexual relationships and defending it with scriptural teachings of the Bible.

I locate the Gender Turn (G.T.)¹¹ in India, more to the ripples of the NALSA judgement. The Supreme Court of India in *National Legal Services Authority vs Union of India* on 15th April 2014 passed a progressive judgement recognizing the Fundamental and Civil Rights of the Transgender person. The court ruled that transgender people should be treated as a third category of gender or as a socially and economically "backwards" class (Chakraborty in Upadhyaya Joshi, & Brassard (Ed.) 2020).

Communities in India have responded very differently to this G.T. Nevertheless, the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram opposed discrimination and requested the church members to bring the *Kawngsual* (lit., those who strayed from God's teaching) to an alignment with the norms of Zo Christian ways of life. Inclusivity and accommodating diversity sans flamboyant visibility were

¹¹ By 'gender turn (G.T.)' I mean the vocality and visibility demanded by the ambivalent sexualities across an array of urban spaces and the Public Spheres (both real and virtual) in India, from the university campuses to public transport, sites of bonding and leisure, parks, museums, art galleries, art itself, fashion, memes, cinema, the creative realms and also institutional spaces which until 2014 were neatly hemmed and barricaded for those suffering from 'gender discriminations'.

mantras to overcome stigmatizing the sexually ambivalent.¹² The Churches wanted to tame the sexually deviant individuals and make them realize their sinful ways, bringing *mualpho*, *zathlak* (collective shame, disgrace) to the *Zo hnahthlak*.¹³

However, the message of accommodating the sexually ambivalent was met with some myriad responses. The Young Mizo Association, as an active component of the *Nexus of Patriarchy*, strongly condemned the Delhi High Court verdict scrapping Section 377. The women's organization MHIP aligned itself with the YMA and on 14th September 2015, and expressed concern that the increased visibility of *tuai* (gay) and *Patil* (lesbian) in the Christian state of Mizoram would negatively affect society and the religion/church (*Vanglaini*, 15th September 2015).

The MHIP, on 22nd December 2015, called a meeting with other NGOs, which was attended by the office-bearers of Young Mizo Association (YMA), Mizo Upa Pawl (membership is for those who are 50 years and above), Mizo Zirlai Pawl and Mizo Students Union (MSU). They proclaimed that *tuai* and *Patil* (lesbians) are becoming bold and audacious in the city; therefore, they agreed on showing the sexually ambivalent their cordoned spaces in Mizo society. The *Nexus of Patriarchy* and the women's bodies, such as the MHIP, collectively invested in designs to regulate the lives of the sexually ambivalent men and women.¹⁴ The hegemony of the *Nexus of Patriarchy* displaces women and other marginalized groups from positions of power and authority. Because of inherent sexism and forced subordination, this exclusively skewed phenomenon of displacement of women and marginal from the realms of politics - power and authority - is born. The MHIP has sought state intervention in order to have the *Indian Christian Marriage Act* (1872), the *Christian Marriage Bill* (1994), the *Christian Adoption and Maintenance Bill* (1994), the *Indian Succession (Amendment) Bill* (1994), and the *Protection of Women from Domestic Violence*

¹² Peter. (27 years, M, Gay-Top.; Home Town: Saiha, Mizoram). *Personal Interview*.05 November 2012.

¹³ Ronny. (29 years, M, Gay-Top.; Home Town: Aizawl, Mizoram). Telephone Interview.22 October 2017.

¹⁴ Thara. (20 years, M, Gay-Bi-Versa.; Home Town: Aizawl, Mizoram). Personal Interview.19 December 2015.

Act (2005) implemented, among other things. The *Zoram Kohhran Hruaitu Committee* (ZKHC), a conglomeration of different churches, has strongly opposed the MHIP's demands. The *Nexus of Patriarchy* has expressed concern about these demands, claiming that they would undermine *Mizo Customary Laws* while also diluting the Zo People's local customs and ways of life. These interventions would also imply the infiltration of alien customs and ways of life into Zo/Mizo culture, which would pollute it. The State (Government of Mizoram) has evaded these demands citing that it cannot go against the *Kohhran* (Church) further affirming that the '*Kohhran* (Church) being '*thuber*' (final word)', the State (Government in Mizoram) could not uphold the proposals. Vanramchhuangi stated that "the Government feared that it would be ousted by the Churches, particularly the Synod, if it dared to bring institutional changes like 'marriage registration,' despite the fact that it felt perfectly comfortable openly undermining the Supreme Court of India's stand on 'marriage registration.'"¹⁵

An important question that has not yet been answered is: why did Mizo women and their largest collective the MHIP, despite being marginalized, not align with the sexually ambivalent and instead choose to agree with the patriarchal nexus to ban homosexuals from Mizoram? The answer could be gleaned from the Bible's influence on Zo culture. The MHIP's stance on the rights and representation of the sexually ambivalent in Mizoram is a microcosm of the difficulty of accommodating diversity in a deeply sexist society. This is an example of women conforming to, and acting in accordance with, the blueprints of gendered spaces and the normalization of gender stereotypes as outlined by patriarchy and biblical words.

V

Varieties of Zo Masculinities

The discussion in this section will complicate the degrees and variations in masculinities among the Zo people. The ethnographic accounts of Zo/Mizo men and masculinities in this study showed reluctance on the part of the sexually

¹⁵ Pi Vanramchhuangi ('Ruafelanu') (Director HRLN Mizoram, Social Activist). Personal Interview. Chaltlang, Aizawl: 28 & 29 January 2008

ambivalent about participating in the Church service and religious gatherings. However, most informants continued to call themselves Christians and *the Pathian ring* (believers). Few respondents raised critical questions that require introspection on the part of the Churches. 'The Church says the *Mawngkuahur* who are out and proud are doomed to burn in *meidil* (fire in hell) after death.' ¹⁶ What about the closeted and those who indulge in same-sex in private? What about those who conceal their sexual orientation- the ambiguous sexualities, for instance, and are publicly active in the Church? ¹⁷ Does being a believer and being *Mawngkuahur* construct a sexually ambivalent lesser sin in the eyes of the Church? ¹⁸ Can the sexually ambivalent and the heterosexuals share the same God? Or does the sexually ambivalent Zo need to invest in a gay God? ¹⁹

The prevalence of male effeminacy and "sissyphobia"—the fear or hatred of effeminate men— "fresh soft butt" (*mawng nau*) in a more comprehensive social, cultural, and political background adopts a culturally saturated and historically specific approach to queer masculinities in the Zo context. ²⁰ For instance, Ziki mentioned that as a northeasterner in Delhi, she could pass off as a Thai Ladyboy and earn more clients. Her investment in skin care, beautification and concealment of native ethnic identity earned her stable clients looking for 'fresh meat' in the highly competitive, and youth centric gay prostitution market. 'The shelf life of fresh meat (here the youthful bottom) in the queer circles was short-lived. No one wants or desires an old/aged bottom. The *Tuai* as '*mawngkuahur*' is imagined to be a youthful insatiable rectum'. ²¹ Contrary to this the fresh meat (here the male genitals) in the context of the top/ the penetrator has an extendable shelf life. "The older tops were projected as experienced partners with the right positionality. The quintessential salt and

¹⁶ Robin. (25 years, M, Gay-Top.; Home Town: Aizawl, Mizoram). Personal Interview.05 March 2010.

¹⁷ Kamlova. (47 years, M, Gay-Top.; Home Town: Kolasib, Mizoram). Personal Interview.09 February 2011.

¹⁸ Hruiah. (15 years, M, Gay-Bot.; Home Town: Aizawl, Mizoram). Personal Interview.05 May 2013.

¹⁹ Peter. Op.cit.

²⁰ Ziki. (46 years, M, Trans.; Home Town: Delhi/Aizawl, Mizoram) Personal Interview, 13 April 2020.

²¹ Lalsangzuala. Op.cit.

pepper sugar daddies.”²² The fresh meat image of young male persons explores the disjuncture between the culture of youth/being young and sexy, commodification of the male body, the queer gaze and desirability in Indian cities, and also, the Zo patriarchal attitudes. The tension between them tells us about gender roles and subjectivity in contemporary Mizo/Zo society. The *Mawng nau*, the lowest category of the *Mawngkuahur*, churns the standard of masculinities sparked by the images of the interplay between manhood and the assigned Zo male attribute of *tlawmngaihna*. For instance, Vanlalpeka mentioned that the very effeminate gays or twinks would be cornered and bullied in schools by the quintessential masculine Zo boys with *tilpawr aw* (coarse, broken voice).

These bullies would also be socially recognized active members and being *tlawmngaih* by organizations such as the YMA or the KTP.²³ These bullies would pass lewd comments on sissy boys and say that if oiled well and used passionately, in groups, the sissy boys could be impregnated.²⁴ The *mawng nau* was also stereotyped as the hungry butthole or the *mawng kham lo* (lit., untired ass/butt, or an ass that is not worn out, never satisfied). The sissyphobia inherent in the use of terms for degrees of maleness/ unmaleness and the fetishization of the body or specific parts of the male body reveals the deep-seated anxiety over the effeminate and how the younger effeminate is classed as ‘twinks’, ‘fresh meat’, ‘insatiable butthole). In either case, the effeminate male is reduced to the butt (*mawng*) and subject to stereotypes of anal intercourse.²⁵ The *Nexus of Patriarchy* and the Church bodies considered the *mawngkuahur* to be responsible for the high rates of HIV-Aids cases in Mizoram.²⁶

²² Kamlova. Op.cit.

²³ Vanlalpeka (16 years, M, Bi.; Home Town: Serchhip, Mizoram). Personal Interview. 26 September 2021.

²⁴ Hruiah. Op.cit.

²⁵ Mimi. (17 years, M, Gay-Bi, Crossdresser; Home Town: Delhi/Lunglei, Mizoram) Personal Interview, 14 August 2019.

²⁶ Robin. Op.cit.

VI

Ambivalent Masculinities: Leaving Home to find another Home

This ethnography of the ambivalent Zo/Mizo conjures ambiguities and everyday interactions that could call into question and redefine existing gender, sexual stereotypes and spatial politics leveraging visibility. The northeast of India is marked by ostensible homogeneities amidst variegated heterogeneities (Chakraborty, 2021). 'Moving out' of the region into more secure spaces becomes one of the region's lived realities. As previously stated, push and pull factors have existed in the region for several decades. However, the trend of outmigration to megacities, primarily in search of job opportunities, did not occur quickly until the advent of globalization.

'Pink Migration'²⁷ within India to the metropolitan centers provides interesting insights into the trend of leaving 'home' searching for a newer 'home'. These cities become a gateway to survival, anonymity and a collective narrative of discrimination.²⁸ The queer Zo/Mizo negotiates its space through livelihood opportunities- a Pink economy/Pink market for any acquired skills and a chance to freely express choices and desire under the garb of anonymity.²⁹ Considering three critical underlying issues in the Pink economy/Pink market: 1) Gender perspectives on the urban labor market; 2) cities' role in ensuring social inclusivity; and, 3) public policy challenges and their gender ramifications, this discussion focuses on the urban labor market with a gender lens. Given

²⁷ Pink Migration refers to the flight/ migration of the ambivalent sexualities from their traditional home settings where prejudice against a sexual minority is high to elsewhere that is marginally safer. The relationship between sexuality and the decision to migrate is a severely understudied aspect of Migration, often assumed to be exclusively driven by income gaps between origin and destination countries. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/peoplemove/pink-migration-rising-tide-lgbt-migrants> retrieved on 01/05/2021

²⁸ Robertson (28 years, M, Versa.; Hotel in Kochi; Home Town: Aizawl, Mizoram). Personal Interview. 23 April 2020.

²⁹ Pink Economy/Pink Money/Pink Market or Rainbow Capitalism refers to the targeted inclusion of the gay community that has acquired sufficient purchasing power to generate a market-focused explicitly on the LGBTQIA.

Asia's rapid urbanization, urban dystopia visibly affects gender roles, frequently conjuring newer forms of risk due to migration for employment opportunities. In the context of inclusive growth, Asia's regulated and unregulated labor markets are rooted in the need for decent work and productive employment.

The sexually ambivalent Zo/Mizo workforce from the North-eastern borderlands has to negotiate numerous structural and socio-cultural hurdles in the urban spaces.³⁰ Simon, for instance, mentioned that his stepfather sexually exploited him during his childhood in Mizoram, and also later when he moved to Manipur to live at his maternal uncle's home. He was sexually abused both at home (by his maternal uncle/guardian) and in school (by his class teacher). Simon says, "I started enjoying being sexually used, I felt desirable, sexy. Boys and men found me sexy and sought my company".³¹ Most of these men lived in larger families as *khual/awmpui* (lit., guests, household help) and engaged in unpaid household services. They were the subordinate males under a patriarch and lacked property rights. Being freeters and unsalaried/under paid, their positionality was that of subversion. In their aspiration to move out of their traditional family ties, they had to rely on sponsorships or loans for their travels without collateral from banks. This often resulted in being snared in the debt trap of high-interest rates from local moneylenders. Rural indebtedness, in this case, began before the take-off journey to find a pink sky. Few respondents also mentioned being sexually exploited by male relatives or men who hosted them in the urban spaces or at different turns of their migration network.³²

Lower levels of education, lack of work experience, and linguistic unfamiliarity limit their opportunities in Indian cities.³³ The centralized nature of most institutions compel them to fall back on support networks in urban settings, so they are forced to rely on intermediaries to fulfill the requirements

³⁰ Simon (15 years, M, Top; Home Town: Churachanpur, Manipur). Personal Interview. 12th January 2019

³¹ Simon. Ibid.

³² Lalhrualtuanga. (26 years, M, Bi; Home Town: Aizawl, Mizoram) Telephone Interview, 01 March 2022.

³³ Zoremkima (32 years, M, Top; Home Town: Shillong, Meghalaya). Telephone Interview. 27 September 2022.

and for information for a cost reduction.³⁴ Many of the Zo men could not move beyond the urban centers for work due to the limitations of language. These ethnographic accounts highlight the issues of increased 'invisibility' of migrants (Wilson, 2011) and the lack of data on them and the myriad forms of same-sex exploitations underneath.

Sexually ambivalent people have felt the guilt of being sinners and living in sin. Same-sex love and desires have been forbidden, and discussing homosexual desires is considered a sin. Being rejected, labeled a misfit, leaving 'home' in search of a newer 'home' becomes an indelible feature of the sexually ambivalent.

The sexually ambivalent's quest for 'Our Sky' manifests itself in the urban ecology to navigate liveability and sustainable urban spaces, as well as the dynamics within these spaces (Park and Burgess, 1925, Wirth, 1938, 1956). The urban spaces provide a visible queer movement's solidarity as well as avenues for community building and networking. The most visible form of solidarity are the 'Pride Parades,' which have taken center stage in India's urban spaces. In short, the sexually ambivalent are constantly looking for places to escape from their family and community.

Recent studies on cities have started to look at the city through the lens of processes and experiences within spaces and times, thereby making a case for locating individual experiences within a larger social context (Robinson, 2006; Srivastava, 2015). The growing preoccupation with understanding urban as a dynamic, processual social space (de Kooning, 2007) unraveled new forms of social interaction, hierarchies and segregation, creating its spatial regimes (de Neeve and Donner, 2006). One such interconnection was brought forth through the linkages between space and gender – 'city spaces as gendered spaces', limiting access to many sites creating new forms of gender inequality (Chakraborty in Upadhyaya Joshi, & Brassard (Ed.) 2020). The promises of the neo-liberal economic policies for a better future through newly available employment opportunities, financial independence, autonomy/freedom and

³⁴ Lalremruata. (22 years, M, Top; Home Town: Aizawl, Mizoram). Telephone Interview. 02 March 2022.

anonymity (including concealment of their sexual orientation) accelerated the migrations to cities from peripheral spaces. They heightened the emotional exasperations of the ambivalent persons.³⁵

The promises of the neo-liberal economic policies for a better future through newly available employment opportunities, financial independence, autonomy/freedom and anonymity (including concealment of their sexual orientation) accelerated the migrations to cities³⁶ from peripheral spaces.³⁷

VII

Ambivalent Masculinities: Staying back at Home

The *tlawmngaihna* code and “being Zo Christians” drives men to assume greater visibility during these cleaning drives locally referred as *Vantlang hnatlang*. Few Mizoram respondents shared their experiences with *Vantlang hnahtlang* (community service), mentioning that the overarching moral code-*tlawmngaihna*, implies that men will be in charge of community service. To meet the expectations of women and the patriarchy, men are forced to show chivalry and sacrifice their individual interests. As a result, men in the Zo/Mizo become activists and environmental healers. They do all of the physical labor and actively serve the community by digging graveyards, providing social services, maintaining drains and roads during landslides, clearing forests, and fighting

³⁵ Lalhruaitluanga. Op.cit.

³⁶ The urban spaces provide solidarity of a visible queer movement and avenues for community building and networking. The most prominent solidarity display is the ‘Pride Parades’ that have taken centre-stage across urban spaces in India. In short, the sexually ambivalent are constantly seeking spaces that provide an escape from one’s kin and region. Pink Migration refers to the flight/ migration of the ambivalent sexualities from their traditional home settings where prejudice against a sexual minority is high to elsewhere that is marginally safer. The relationship between sexuality and the decision to migrate is a severely understudied aspect of Migration, often assumed to be exclusively driven by income gaps between origin and destination countries. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/peoplemove/pink-migration-rising-tide-lgbt-migrants> retrieved on 01/05/2021

³⁷ Lalhruaitluanga. Op.cit.

jungle fires. Zo/Mizo men are transformed into the epitome of ecomasculine masculinity. However, the community and critics are constantly questioning their visibility—where are the *tlawmngai* Zo/Mizo men? In a technology-mediated world of hyper-reality and virtual reality, women and those in positions of authority, as in most other cases, hog the photo opportunity, reveling in exhibition-‘we did it’ and posing with brooms and props.³⁸

Though neoliberal enterprise finds Pink capital an appealing place to invest, it chooses to remain silent in the Northeast precisely because the Northeast as a region is markedly rigidified in practices that silence the amplification of questions about sexualities and gender, as well as codified homophobia and transphobia in the name of ethno-national aspirations based on religiosity.³⁹ For instance, Vanlalpeka mentioned that the very effeminate gays or twinks would be cornered and bullied in schools by the quintessential masculine Zo boys with *tilpawr aw* (coarse, broken voice). These bullies would also be socially recognized active members and being *tlawmngai* (lit., unconditioned service to people or community, male honor code) by organizations such as the YMA or the KTP. ⁴⁰Few other ambivalent men from Mizoram shared their experiences of being teased by women for not being *tlawmngai* enough. Even gay men were expected to follow the *tlawmngaihna* code and act like men. *The Patriarchal Nexus*, interestingly, denied any possible role for ambivalent men within churches and, by extension, in broader spheres of social and communal life.⁴¹

Some Closing Thoughts

Zo Men’s lives can be significantly influenced by gendered spaces. The rules for reproducing gender roles in and out of the ‘home’ are outlined in the *tlawmngaihna* code of chivalry. It began as a set of guidelines for how men should treat women, but it has since broadened to include all aspects of male behavior. Those who leave ‘home’ and those who live in ‘home,’ regardless of

³⁸ David. Op.cit.; Vanlalpeka. Op.cit.; Simon. Op.cit.; Zoremkima. Op.cit.

³⁹ David. Op.cit.

⁴⁰ Vanlalpeka. Op.cit.

⁴¹ Lalsangzuala. Op.cit.

how gendered the space is, are constantly “homing” themselves in their everyday situations. Those forced to leave their homes frequently engage in homing practices elsewhere, such as chiseling an identity in defense of the community in which they are now living. The “Zo Christian ways of life” and the collective ethnonational code of *tlawmgaihna* shape the nuanced practice of men’s and masculinities’ individual and collective performances among the *Zo hnahthlak* (lit., Zo people).

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Gender Roles and the Quest for Identity: A Study of Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*

Wasim Akram

Abstract:

*Women in all ages remain the object of suppression. They often neither have any voice nor an independent identity of their own. Men become the deciding factor about how a woman should behave and act. They have always been taught to be docile, submissive, and conventional to be accepted by the society. They are made to behave in a certain stereotypical way to maintain the male supremacy. They are given a position inferior to men in a hierarchical social structure, controlled and dominated by men and they merely serve as objects of this control and rule. The whole purpose of their existence revolves around serving in the family as someone's daughter, wife, sister or mother. These stereotypical gender roles assigned to them by the society keep them confined within the four walls of familial entanglement where they do not have any voice or agency. Shashi Deshpande in her novel, *That Long Silence* captures this traumatized and painful existence of women in a middle-class Indian family. The novelist portrays the ever-suffering existence and the quest for independent identity of women through the presentation of the character of Jaya who has to maintain silence throughout her married life for the fear of disrupting familial comfort and security. I, in my paper, will attempt to address this crisis raised by the author and also show how the society creates a boundary for women to delimit their capabilities and stifle their voice and agency in a constrictive social structure that does not allow women to speak.*

Keywords: *Gender, Identity, Patriarchy, Hierarchy, Stereotype, Silence*

“One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (Beauvoir, 2011, p. 330) this statement made by Simone de Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* highlights the social construction of gender stereotypes where women are given a place inferior to men in a hierarchical social structure controlled and dominated

by men. Without denying the biological differences between the sexes, Beauvoir postulated that women only become women because of the circumstances in which they are brought up and survive. In this construction of social identity humanity is identical with the male and man defines woman not in herself but in relation to him. As a result, women are reduced to the role of the 'Other'. A woman in our society is taught to be docile and submissive since her childhood in order to be accepted by the society where she will have to serve as someone's daughter, wife, sister or mother. A woman, to use Judith Butler's words, "functions as a relational term between groups of men. She does not have an identity, and neither does she exchange one identity for another." (Butler, 1999, p. 50) Women lose their individual self in the vast abyss of familial entanglement. Certain rules and regulations are set for them to keep them subjugated and suppressed. This discrimination which starts in their childhood continues till the end of their life. Shashi Deshpande in her novel *That Long Silence* captures the existence of painful and traumatized women in a middle-class Indian family. The novel revolves around Jaya, a middle class, educated, and sensitive housewife who has to maintain silence throughout her life to fit into the norms of the patriarchal society. Frustrated by the boredom and drudgery of this strict familial entanglement she finally decides to come out of her "long silence" and assert her true self in the form of writing, and thus, she tries to reclaim her long lost identity which has been suppressed for long in a constrictive and exploitative social structure that does not allow any space for women.

"The destiny that society traditionally offers women is marriage." (Beauvoir, 2011, p. 502) In a patriarchal society marriage is considered sacred through which two souls meet, but, in reality, it often turns into a trap, an institution of oppression and domination for women where they are treated as subservient to their male counterparts. Losing the freedom and individuality they are merely reduced to objects whose whole purpose is to follow orders. Jaya is one of the victims of this institution. When she was born her father named her Jaya which means victory and she was brought up to be an educated and independent woman defying all the social stereotypes assigned to a girl child. But as soon as she gets married to Mohan, her independent self is relegated almost to the verge of extinction. When she gets married to Mohan, he gives her a name, Suhasini, 'a soft, smiling, placid, motherly woman' whose meaning and purpose is completely distinct from Jaya, and whose whole purpose of existence

is to look after the family, which is, in fact, a compromise with all her wishes and aspirations. After her marriage, she is trapped in the vortex of familial affairs of taking care of her husband and children. The renaming of Jaya actually is suggestive of the social expectations from a married woman. Jaya is transformed from an independent thinking woman to a stereotypical woman who is “nervous, incompetent, needing male help and support.” (p. 76) This transformation of Jaya exposes the emptiness of conventional marriage that deprives a woman of her independent voice and identity. While reflecting on a family photo featuring herself, her husband and their children on the dinner table at their Dadar flat in which she is pictured as serving with “love and care”, Mohan, “the head of the family, smiles indulgently,” and the children are “lively and playful” (p. 4), Jaya realizes the hostilities breeding within her after seventeen years of her married life that has kept her confined within the four walls of familial entanglement. The picture perfectly depicts the roles assigned to a woman in an Indian family. Jaya finds her life boring and unendurable and wishes for a catastrophe to end this boredom. Jaya’s wish for the catastrophe reflects the mental agony she has been going through in her married life. Devoid of any emotional attachment with Mohan, both she and Mohan were just performing the roles assigned to a married couple. As Jaya points out, “Since we got married, both of us had been scrupulous about playing out our allotted roles” (p. 75), where she plays the role of a duty-bound housewife whose whole concern is to look after her husband and family. The repetitive performance of the roles assigned to her for these long years causes her great mental agony leading to her being hysterical. She gradually loses her sanity and in the state of her being hysterical she can identify herself with Kusum, a woman who had become mad under the pressure of the suppressive familial structure and had subsequently committed suicide by jumping into a well. Jaya sympathizes with Kusum for her pathetic existence but immediately realizes her own travails and sufferings which is no lesser than Kusum. She says:

... It wasn't poor Kusum at all; it was poor Jaya. In her madness, sycophantic, dependent, frightened, clinging Kusum had escaped. In her madness, she had been able to get away from the burden of pleasing others; only in her madness had she been able to be gloriously, unashamedly herself. (pp. 126-127)

Kusum's madness concedes that the only escape for women from the drudgery of familial entanglement is to lose sanity. It is only in the madness that they can be free and independent. Kusum's death by jumping into the well shows the state of despair she had been in. Jaya's gradual loss of sanity and Kusum's madness and subsequent suicide exposes the cruelty of the patriarchal social structure.

The rigid patriarchal social structure restricts the wishes and aspiration of women and their whole existence is supposed to revolve around the family's desire. As Beauvoir says in 'The Married Woman,' Man is socially autonomous and complete individual; he is regarded above all as a producer and his existence is justified by the work he provides for the group...the reproductive and domestic role to which woman is confined has not guaranteed her an equal dignity." (Beauvoir, 2011, p. 503) This confinement causes a great damage to their individual and identity. Being born and brought up with a progressive thought, Jaya is overwhelmed at the sharp distinction of gender roles at play in Mohan's conservative family. It is like a revelation to her. She says:

... the women in his family, so definite about their roles, so well trained in their duties, so skillful in the right areas, so indifferent to everything else. I had never seen so clear, so precise a pattern before, and I had been entranced by it. (p. 83)

These sharply defined gender roles are used as means of control and domination that refrain women from their independent voice and identity. Jaya, a graduate in English who could have excelled in her career, is abstained from doing any job and is confined with the household affairs where she works to be at the beck and call of everyone's want in the family. After her marriage Jaya had to concede to the gender roles assigned to an Indian housewife and socialize herself to fit into the family according to the norms. Deprived of any voice and agency, she gradually lost her individual self and had started to identify herself as Mohan's wife, Rahul and Rati's mother. The crisis of her identity is revealed when she is asked to give her bio-data from a magazine. She does not have anything to write but to talk of some familial matters. She writes: "I was born. My father died when I was fifteen. I got married to Mohan. I have two children and I did not let the third live" (p. 2). Simone de Beauvoir rightly observes in *The Second Sex* as quoted by Ahsan and Tiwari in their paper "It has been said that marriage diminishes man, which is often true, but almost always it annihilates

women.” (Ahsan & Tiwari,2018, p. 260). After her marriage to Mohan, Jaya lives under the shadow of her husband. Her individual self and identity are relegated into the dark confinement of familial affairs. A potential talent, who could have prospered as a writer, for Jaya used to write for a magazine on issues related to women, has to abandon her writing after her husband’s objection about the content of her writing. Virginia Woolf has observed that: “a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.” (Woolf, 1929, p.4) Devoid of economic independence and a separate room, meaning a space of her own, Jaya has to abide by her husband’s order and give up her writing. She is thus the epitome of all the women who are deprived of their voice in the society for being woman. The strict social norms keep the women entangled in the household affairs that stifle their voice and agency and delimit their capabilities causing dependency and nervousness. That is the reason when Mohan leaves the house for some time Jaya becomes worried about the future because by then she is domesticated to believe that a husband is like a ‘sheltering tree’ without whom a wife would become dangerously vulnerable and unprotected. Her nervousness and dependency are the norm whereas her independence and inquisitiveness are considered rebellious and unnatural.

Women are often deprived of asserting their choices and therefore grow up to abstain from expressing their disagreement and discontent within the given hierarchical social structure. It is because of this deprivation that women sometimes have to suffer immense agony throughout their whole lives in silence. Everything in a woman’s life is controlled by the man in the society. The men set the rules for them. Jaya as young girl, loved to listen to songs by Rafi and Lata but her father tried to wean her from that taste by saying: “What poor taste you have, Jaya.” (p. 3) Though he failed in his attempt to refrain Jaya from listening to songs of her choice, the restrictions and control that her father tried to put on her in her childhood leaves a psychological scar that causes her never to revolt to situations but to remain silent and conform to everything out of the fear of disrupting the status quo. This fear of disrupting the familial comfort and security leads her to become a submissive wife after her marriage, as one who always maintains silence. After her marriage when they are late for going for the movies, her husband would tell her not to hurry because they would miss only the ads at worse, adding that no one would love to watch those ads. Although Jaya was aware that she loved to watch the ads she never dared to express her choice

anxious that Mohan would echo his father and say, what a poor taste she had! She thought her disagreement with her husband might have displeased him and she might have become a bad wife and a failure as a housewife. This fear of displeasing her husband was the reason of her silent suffering throughout her married life. As N. Prabhakaran observes

Her silence is a sign of alienation and understanding rooted in every woman's soul in different forms- a silence which is often misunderstood by men as a symbol of woman's self-satisfaction. (Prabhakaran, 2018, p. 87)

In a patriarchal social setup, it is the men who get to decide what they want and how they want it and the women are supposed to follow the rules passively. This is the destiny of Jaya too. In their familial affair it is Mohan who takes the decisions and she follows them without asking questions because by then she realizes that society or the family did not allow the voice to a woman and to become an ideal wife one needed to maintain silence. She recollected the warning of her grandmother who had expressed her concern over Jaya's inquisitive nature. She had warned her that no husband would be comfortable with so many questions, as if the whole purpose of her existence was to please a husband. Jaya conforms to the societal norms and learns to remain silent without any question. Thus, when Mohan decides to take refuge at their Dadar flat fearing the repercussion because of some financial embezzlement he had committed in his engineering profession and an inquiry was ordered against him, he takes it for granted that Jaya would accompany him and so he does not feel it necessary to ask her if she wanted to go with him. Even Jaya too does not express her disagreement because by then she had socialized herself to be the silent wife. She contemplated over the fate of the mythical women like Sita, Savitri, Draupadi who had to suffer for their husbands and realizes that the tradition had not changed. She says:

I remember now that he had assumed I would accompany him, had taken for granted my acquiescence in his plans. So had I. Sita following her husband into exile, Savitri dogging Death to reclaim her husband, Draupadi stoically sharing her husband's travails.... (p.11).

Her silent suffering for becoming the ideal wife leads her to identify herself with the character of Gandhari in *Mahabharata* who had bandaged her eyes to become like her husband. Jaya too like Gandhari chooses to remain blind by not asking questions to Mohan (p. 61). The social conditioning of women deprived them of their voice and agency. When Jaya came to live with Mohan at their Dadar flat she had thought that they were like “two bullocks yoked together” which meant they would have equal roles and importance in the family, but soon she realized the difference between the two. In reality they were distinct in their identity. One of them is a man and the other is a woman where one dominates and the other is dominated, where one sets the rule and the other only passively follows. Simone de Beauvoir rightly observes as quoted by Divya Mishra in her paper: “Marriage has always been a very different thing for man and for woman. The two sexes are necessary to each other, but this necessity has never brought about a condition of reciprocity between them...” (Mishra, 2016, p. 9) Jaya’s silent acquiescence to everything for the familial comfort and security shows the vulnerability of women in a patriarchal society. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak makes a significant observation in her essay ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ that being the ‘subaltern’ the women cannot speak because “There is no space from which the sexed subaltern can speak.” (Spivak, 2010, p. 310) The constrictive social structure stifles their voice and they remain silent throughout their whole life and bear with all the agonies and sufferings silently.

In a traditional marriage the fear of losing familial comfort and security have been used as tools to suppress women from voicing their discomfort and discontent and in this process of suppression women too have played the role of unconscious accomplice with their male counterparts. Thus, their idealization of a husband as the ‘sheltering tree’ without whom the women would become ‘dangerously vulnerable and unprotected’ no matter how bad he is, actually is a perpetuation of their own suffering and subjugation. Looking after the husband is considered the most important thing in a woman’s life after marriage. Thus, when Tara curses her husband out of frustration for the unbearable mental and physical agony he has been inflicting upon her, she was refrained from that by her mother-in-law because she believes that it is because of him she still has the kumkum on her forehead and without which there is no meaning of a woman’s life. She says: “Stop that! Don’t forget, he keeps the kumkum on your forehead. What is a woman without that?” (p. 53). Jaya too domesticates herself to believe

in that dictum and prepares herself to do everything to protect this shelter. But the hollowness of the phrase is exposed when Jaya comes to realize the gulf between her and Mohan after spending seventeen years of married life with him. They have been playing the roles of a wife and a husband, where her entire being is devoted to the service of Mohan, without any emotional attachment. That's why she tells Mohan that she knows him more than he knows himself. She says: "...wasn't he my profession, my career, my means of livelihood? Not to know him was to admit that I had failed at my job." (p. 75) Thus, when Mohan was without his usual routine at their Dadar flat, it seems to Jaya as if she has lost her job, her career as a housewife has come to a jeopardy. Again, she is very careful to take care of her relationship with Mohan and is always keenly concerned to keep Mohan pleased, never to show her anger to him because he believed anger made a woman unwomanly. Jaya conceded with the idea in the fear that it could hamper her career as a housewife and the 'shelter' might get shattered. She reflects:

... A woman can never be angry; she can only be neurotic, hysterical, frustrated. There's no room for anger in my life, no room for despair either. There's only order and routine- today, I have to change the sheets; tomorrow, scrub the bathrooms; the day after, clean the fridge.... (p. 48)

In this patriarchal social setup, anger is considered 'unwomanly' while all these rules are set by men are tools of suppression and domination. It is not permissible for a woman to articulate her anger even if she is treated as non-human. Yet, after all these years of her life in complete devotion to Mohan in his service without question he complains: "You've never cared for me" (p. 124) and this makes Jaya realize the hollowness of her relationship with Mohan. The complete involvement of Jaya in looking after these trivialities took away her individual self and while she looks back into the diaries of her life she has spent, she realizes the void and emptiness of her existence. She ruminates:

The picture of a life spent on such trivialities scared me. Reading through the entries, I could feel her dwindling, the woman who had lived this life.... The biggest question facing the woman of these diaries had obviously been: what shall I make for breakfast/ lunch/ tea/ dinner? That had been the leitmotif of my life. (p. 70)

Reflecting upon her life after so many years of silent acquiescence in the service of Mohan and the family she realizes that “the life she had been living so far did not belong to her but to someone else” (Ahashan & Tiwari, 2018, p. 261) and yet she has left with nothing but emptiness and silence.

The women are ideologically domesticated to believe their suppression as natural and beneficial for them. Thus, they bear with all the humiliations and sufferings in silence without realizing that their stance helps in perpetuating the subjugation and suppression of their gender. After being married to Mohan, Jaya realizes how sharply defined a woman's role is at his house. Thus, the missing button in Mohan's shirt is considered a matter for which Jaya should be ashamed of and Jaya regretfully ponders over her silence when Sudha, a spoilt and pert girl says: “Poor Monanna, looks like he'll have to fix his own button.” (p. 84) Sudha's sarcastic remark over Jaya's inability to take proper care of her husband reflects the condition of women in a patriarchal society where women too play equal roles in perpetuating this suppression of women. After this incident, Jaya decides to pattern herself like them where she will always be apprehensive of pleasing her husband. This domestication of women to believe in their subjugation as natural makes Sujata, Jaya's cousin laughs at her own naivety when she says that why her male cousins can't clear up the tables after dinner as if she has cracked some joke, or said something unnatural and unrealistic. This laughter brings Jaya back to her own experience when she once has told Mohan to cook during her pregnancy and Mohan was completely shocked and surprised at this proposal and had smiled. This shock and laughter are the reflections of the female subjugation and suppression that have kept the women confined with the household affairs. Again, the treatment that Vimala, Mohan's sister received at her in-law's house exposes the futility of the conventional marriage. She had to go through immense mental agony for not being able to bear a child and died a pathetic and silent death, and even in the situation of utmost physical crisis when she was bed-ridden, her mother-in-law would taunt her saying:

God knows what's wrong with her. She's been lying there on her bed for over a month now.... I never heard of women going to hospitals and doctors for such a thing. As if other women don't have heavy periods! What a fuss! But these women who've never had children are like that. (p. 39)

The apathy and ignorance of Vimala's mother-in-law towards Vimala's sufferings highlights the hegemonic subjugation and suppression of womanhood.

Without any voice or agency, the women suffer all the mental and physical agony silently. Jaya reflects over the ill fate of Mohan's mother who had been suffering all through her married life without uttering a word. She had been ill treated by her husband but she did never raise her voice in protest and this silent suffering of her mother at the hands of his father shows the pathetic existence of women in this patriarchal social structure that does not allow voice to a woman. And this silent suffering of her mother appeared quite natural and is a symbol of strength to Mohan as he says: "God...she was tough. Women in those days were tough" and Jaya regretfully says:

He saw strength in the woman sitting silently in front of the fire,
but I saw despair. I saw a despair so great that it would not voice
itself. I saw struggle so bitter that silence is the only weapon.
Silence and surrender. (p. 36)

The suffering of Jaya's mother is a vivid portrayal of the status of a housewife in our society. Same was the fate with Jeeja, the maid at their Dadar flat who could not bear a child and bear with immense mental and physical torture from her husband silently. Her daughter-in-law, Tara is again a victim of this patriarchal violence at the hands of her husband, Rajaram who carries forward the legacy of torturing women. The awareness of this prolonged sufferings of women makes Jaya somewhat sadistic and she reflects upon the time when a girl child was crushed to death immediately after her birth. She ponders over this ill fate of women and says:

All those agonies...for days I had been unable to get it out of my
mind. But now I wondered whether it wasn't more merciful, that
swift ending of the agony once and for all, than this prolonging of it
for years and years. (p. 53)

Jaya's concern and apprehension over this prolonged suffering of women reflects the ever-suffering condition of women in this male dominated patriarchal society that doesn't allow women to speak or express their grievances.

Jaya had been completely devoted to her husband and children for seventeen years of their marriage. However, after her husband leaves their Dadar

apartment, she sees how hollow her life has already become. She becomes frustrated at the routine and tedium of the familial tie which has robbed her of her sense of self and independence. She had kept quiet all these years believing that she was doing that for safety and security of her family, but doing so had removed the very purpose of her existence. She has been diminished from an intelligent, self-assured lady to a fearful, inexperienced woman dependent on male assistance and support. As Kamal Das puts it:

You called me wife,
I was taught to break saccharine into your tea and
To offer at the right moment the vitamins. Cowering
Beneath your monstrous ego I ate the magic loaf and
Became a dwarf.

(The Old Playhouse)

She was reduced to being known just as Mohan's wife as a result of her extreme dependence on and total submission to him. But in the end, she makes the decision to use writing as a way to establish her Self and reclaim her long-lost identity. She had to keep a long silence in her marriage to Mohan, which makes writing challenging for her. She claims at the beginning of the book that she used to write so easily but that lately it feels like she is at a loss for words. This is due to the fact that up to this point, she has only written about traditional women, who lacked autonomous identity and lived their lives only to be mated with the right men. But, in the end she decides to write about herself by overcoming the drudgery and suffocation of familial entanglement and its nuances. She says- "Nor am I writing a story of a callous, insensitive husband and a sensitive, suffering wife. I'm writing of us. Of Mohan and me." (p. 1) She decides to assert her true self in her writing. She says: "I will have to speak, to listen, I will have to erase the silence between us." (p. 192) She is apprehensive about what she has achieved by writing and realizes that she has overcome the fear of disrupting the familial comfort and security. She says:

Well, I have achieved this. I'm not afraid any more. The panic has gone. I'm Mohan's wife, I had thought, and cut off the bits of me that refused to be Mohan's wife. Now I know that kind of fragmentation is not possible. (p. 191)

Jaya's efforts towards emancipation from a duty-bound housewife to become an independent self is seen as the only hope for all the women who have been suffering throughout their life in a repressive patriarchal social structure that does not allow them any voice or agency.

The novel, *That Long Silence* by Shashi Deshpande is a perfect reflection of the status of women in the society. The author through her painstaking efforts brings to the fore the ever sufferings of women in the patriarchal society where a woman's role revolves around the family and its trivialities delimiting her potential and contribution in the society. The author through the presentation of the character of Jaya exposes the prejudices of the existing social structure. The author ends the novel with a positive note where Jaya realizes and expresses a hope to break free from the bondage of familial entanglement:

We don't change overnight. It's possible that we may not change even over long periods of time. But we can always hope. Without that, life would be impossible. And if there is anything I know now it is this: life has always to be made possible. (p. 193)

Jaya wishes to end the cycle of dominance through her writing and emerge triumphant, where she will be treated first and foremost as a human being—not as someone's daughter, wife, sister, or mother, but live her actual self, 'Jaya'. Jaya comprehends that looking the other way won't stop this oppression, thus in order to be heard or to accomplish one's Self, one must speak up and expose the deceptions of social security around family comfort. Jaya's desire for liberation and actions in that direction serve as a beacon of hope for women looking to escape the shackles of familial entanglements.

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Voices beyond Death: The Spirits of Women in the Short Stories by Rabindranath Tagore

Sanghita Sarkar

Abstract: *Fears of ghosts and ghouls and devotion towards the unnumbered local gods and goddesses have always been an integral part of Bengali belief system. Inevitably, this has left a profound impact on Bengali literature as well. Be it the great Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore or the composer of Bengali folk narratives Dakshinaranjan Mitra – spirits and ghosts have always been an inseparable part of Bengali writers' creations. Though often reduced to the category of children's fictions, many of these Bengali ghosts' stories have crossed the boundaries of superstitions and beliefs and plunged into the opaque realm of human psychology. The current paper is an attempt to delve into this uncertain realm of human psyche with the help of three short stories by Rabindranath Tagore – 'Kankal' (The Skeleton), 'Nishithe' (In the Night), 'Monihara' (The Lost Jewel). The paper with the help of psychoanalytical feminist philosophy has attempted to explore how these ghosts' stories have gone beyond the limits of local beliefs and superstitious sensations and brought out the problematic representation of gender roles and identities in contemporary Bengali society. In order to bring out the societal fissures the current paper here tries to raise such hypothetical questions as: i) How do these short stories expose in a covert manner the subjugation of the women in contemporary Bengali society? ii) How has the woman-self obtained voice after death in these short stories? iii) How do these stories register protests by the woman-spirits against the patriarchal Bengali socio-cultural beliefs and system?*

Keywords: *Bengali Literature, ghost stories, psychology, gender discrimination, desire*

*“These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air.”
(The Tempest, Act 4, Scene 1)*

Fears of ghosts and ghouls and devotions towards the unnumbered local gods and goddess have always been an integral part of the socio-cultural fabric of geo-politically undivided Bengal which currently consists of West Bengal and Bangladesh. Such an ethno-linguistic belief inevitably has left a profound impact on the works of Bengali writers. Now there is a distinct differentiation between the beliefs in religious customs and beliefs in such superstitions as ghosts and spirits; while the issues and concerns of the first one had been considered as a matter of great importance and have been taken up by the scholars of the Bengali society, beliefs in the later one, though common have been pushed into the category of children's literature. However, such considerations have never been able to diminish the popularity of such supernatural fictions amongst the common folk of Bengal. In fact, many prominent Bengali writers like, Troilokyonath Mukhopadhyay, Rabindranath Tagore, Bibhutibhushan Bandhopadhyay, Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay and Lila Mjumder have enriched this genre by writing several memorable supernatural fictions. The current paper is a study of three such immortal supernatural fictions written by Rabindranath Tagore – 'Kankal' (The Skeleton), 'Nishithe' (In the Night), 'Monihara' (The Lost Jewel). The study attempts to delve into the depth of unfathomable human psyche illustrated in these tales in order to bring out biased gender representation in contemporary Bengali community.

Objective of the Study:

The current paper is an effort to bring out, by using the approach of Psychoanalytical Feminism, the fragmented lived-experiences of a woman's life in Bengali community. By means of analyzing the examples of characters in the above-mentioned narratives, the paper aims to explore the differential status of the man and woman in the contemporary Bengali society. The paper also aims to critically analyze the effects that this differential status had on the formation of the woman-self and actions of the woman psyche. The paper in its study tries to address following critical questions that are construed by the gender representation in these fictions:

- i. How do these short stories expose in a covert manner the subjugation of the women in contemporary Bengali society?
- ii. How has woman obtained voices after death in these short stories?

iii. How do these stories register protests by the woman-spirits against the patriarchal Bengali socio-cultural beliefs and system?

In order to obtain hypothetical solutions to the afore-mentioned questions the paper has been divided into several subsections. In the first section, the author has discussed the ideological axiom of psychoanalytical Feminism used in this paper to analyze the three fictions. The second section of the paper consists of a brief review of the earlier literatures. The third section traces the traditional originary of Bengali ghost fiction by premising them against the particular socio-political chronotope. The fourth section of the essay critically scrutinizes the concerned short stories by Rabindranath Tagore through the critical lens of Psychoanalytical Feminism. In the concluding section of the essay the author has explored the marginalized experiences and the silent voices of protests of the women of the contemporary Bengali community.

Psychoanalytic Feminism – a Study of the Woman-mind:

Psychoanalytic Feminism is a complex ontological approach that combines axioms from both Psychoanalysis and Feminism. Therefore, it is impossible to elaborate this onerous research approach within the limited confinement of this paper. However, the current study in its following section will try to introduce fundamental ideas associated with it by outlining the concepts provided by few of the high priests of this approach.

If Feminism is understood as an intellectual commitment and set of beliefs that seeks equality and justice for the women by eradicating all forms of sexism, and Psychoanalysis is comprehended as a set of ontological praxis and technical practices that deal with the opaque realm of human mind, then based on these two locales Psychoanalytic Feminism can be illustrated as a mixed approach that uses the methods of psychoanalysis to construe the theory of oppression of women by men among its other goals. This approach proffers that men have an inherent psychological compulsion to subjugate women. The theory further discloses that the root of this male compulsion and the surprising nominal female resistance against this compulsive suppression is deeply instated in the formation and function of human psyche (Psychoanalytical Feminism, 2011) To understand the originary as well as the workings of the human psyche,

psychoanalytic Feminism relies on Freud's understanding of his works on human psychology.

Apparently, complementarity between classical psychoanalysis and any form of Feminism may appear paradoxical as the classical ideologies of psychoanalysis are not really pro- women *per se*. To bridge this gap, what the later psychoanalytic feminists did was – they kept the basic concept of the Freudian unconscious and sought to understand the formation and function of human psychology using this concept according to their own benefit. They proffered that such understanding of human psychology will help us to retain a better understanding of women oppression and may ultimately offer a way out of this apparent ineluctable situation. Psychoanalytic Feminism instates that the pattern of women subjugation is in reality ingrained into the very fabric of the society which actively helps to create and nurture the system of patriarchy. Owing to its dogmatic dualism Psychoanalytic Feminism is intimately involved with both politics of societal functions and ambiguous workings of human psyche. So, this philosophical approach has often been termed as a social movement that traverse through the tangled tunnels of human and social psyche. Psychoanalytic Feminism employs different techniques of psychoanalysis to comprehend the methods by which gender, sexuality, and sexual differences is constructed and construed within a society.

Psychoanalytic Feminism strives to identify the socio-psychological pattern that valorizes the system of gender and sexuality by circumscribing it. (Gallop, 1982, xi-xv) In this context, Luce Irigaray, one major figures in the later phase of Psychoanalytic Feminism, has observed that there are three stages through which Psychoanalytic Feminism functions; the first stage attempts to deconstruct the masculine subject, the second stage puts serious attention on the possibility of female subject, and the final stage deals with the intersubjectivity in order to consider the problematic of sexual differences. (Irigary 1995,a, 96). Later theorists like Nancy Chodorow and Julia Kristeva emphasized on the pre-oedipal stage in forming the gender identity of a child. (Nayar on *Psychoanalytical Feminism*). They centered their ideas on individual subjectivity and difference by prioritizing the maternal framework as an active contrast to the fraternal framework as was premised in the Freudian model.

Literature Review:

Stories of supernatural entities and horror have always been an integral part of Indian subcontinent. Indian classics are replete with images of ghosts, monsters, demons and deities. But this genre of supernaturalism has always remained an uncharted territory in the field of Indian academia. The supernatural stories in Bengal have, similarly, received a short shrift in the field of scholastic study. There are numerous reasons that could be operating behind such negligence. The primary one being the assumption that stories of ghosts and monsters are intended for children and as such do not require much academic scrutiny. In such a context we can hardly expect to have an archive of extensive studies on female ghosts and the workings of women psyche. Therefore, it was an onerous task for the current paper to select literatures that were suitable for the present study. However, after much consideration the paper has chosen two previous works significant for the current study.

The first one chosen for the purpose is published in Bengali, *Thakur Barir Pretcharcha: Rabindranath O Ananya [Research on Spirits by the Tagores: Rabindranath and Others]* by Mahuya Dashgupta (2014). Dashgupta in her study has explored the intense curiosity and passion for the afterlife displayed by the different members of the Tagore family during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. She has dealt with some of the key concerns that are in focus in the present paper. She in her paper has addressed i) Rabindranath Tagore's fascination with ghosts and spirits. Moreover, she has also mentioned how Tagore's interest in the supernatural got reflected in his works. The present study too, is focused on the depiction of spirits in his works. ii) Dashgupta has also dealt with the issues of the interrelations of the psychological and supernatural in the works of Tagore. But Tagore is only a small portion of Dashgupta's work. In fact, she has given only partial importance to the psychological exploration of the texts by Tagore. Also, she has not dealt with the problem of gendered understanding and representation of the spirits in Tagore's works which is the key issue addressed in this study. These issues of psychological understandings that condition the interpretation of the supernatural have been analyzed in detail in the following sections of the present paper.

The second significant work that can be mentioned in relation to the current paper is *Gender and Ghosts* by Jeannie Banks Thomas (2007). Thomas

in her work has dealt with the common pattern of the ghostly '*Deviant Woman*' (that she mentions as "The Deviant Femme", Thomas, p. 81-82) which have haunted the English horror stories for centuries. Thomas in her study has focused on such supernatural legends that 'rework gender and the cultural idea associated with it'. (Thomas, 82) She has observed how these '*deviant femme*' depart from the traditional concept of the 'Angel in the House' and display emotions such as anger, violence and madness. These spirits, argues Thomas, are victims either of some tragic incidents or murder and seek vengeance or justice by drawing attention to themselves. The current study, too, scrutinizes the female spirits of Tagore as victims of male-centered socio-cultural system of Bengal; at the same time, it also analyses how contrary to the western rendition, these spirits of Tagore do not haunt a place simply to draw attention to themselves. Their haunting instead is stamped as an expression of their intense passion for life and as a protest against the entire patriarchal societal system in Bengal.

The Spirit-way – Tracing the Orinary of Bengali Ghosts' stories:

"Ghosts signify, etymologically, something that has been finished, but not gone from earth... Ghosts are, therefore, lived impressions of the deads."

(Sukumar Sen in Ghosh, p.07, trans. self)

Death was a common everyday reality of pre-independent Bengal. Frequented with diseases like malaria and cholera or being bitten by poisonous insects, snakes and wild beasts, People witnessed death closely in rural Bengal every day. So, belief in ghosts and the ghostly was an integral part of Bengali life and literature. In fact, the folk tales of Bengal is most assuredly the greatest store house of these ghosts and spirits. Rev. Lal Behari Day in his *Folk-Tales of Bengal* (1883) talks of plethora of such ghosts that haunted the everyday Bengali life. So, this genre developed independently in Bengal without requiring help beyond the oceans.

Nirmalya Kumar Ghosh in his *Pret-Puran (Mythos of Ghosts, 2014)* has observed that with the passage of time a new group of Bengali writers, especially those learned in English, started writing supernatural fictions that bore occidental influences. Pyarichand Mitra's *Avedi* (1871) shows a clear influence of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1599). Anweshan's dead father appears repeatedly in his dreams with words of wisdom and warnings. Later this *dream trend* was followed

by many other writers. So, in Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's *Bishbrikhyo* (*The Poison Tree*, 1884) Kundanandini's dead mother cautions her twice against her impending future. But this belief in the supernatural sensations was suspended in the age of reason during nineteenth century. So, the later ghost story writers followed a completely different path to generate a sense of 'willing suspension of disbelief' in the hearts of their learned readers. For instance, Troilokyanath Mukhopadhyay rejected the earlier concept of ghosts as impressions of the non-deads. It must be mentioned here that Mukhopadhyay worked as a civil servant under the British Government and he had visited many European countries during the tenure of his service. As famous scholars like Dr. Tapodhir Bhattacharjee has observed; he "seems to have collected the ingredients of literature throughout his service life ..." (Bhattacharjee, p. 37). Not surprisingly, he introduced a kind of social ghostology and observed that "as water becomes ice when frozen, darkness turns into ghosts when solidified... There is no limit to darkness...The darkness in the hearts of men is endless" (Mukhopadhyay in Ghosh, p. 10, [trans. self]). With this sociological understanding of ghosts and spirits the supernatural fictions of Bengal stepped into new grounds of psychological fictions.

During the twentieth century (after the Bengal Renaissance) three major trends were perceived in the ghost stories of Bengal. As Ghosh has observed, the first of these thoughts belonged to the people who believed in ghosts and life after death; prominent amongst them are Swami Dibyananda, Swami Avedananda, Jogendranath Gupta, Rakhal Das Sengupta, Nikhilnath Roy among others. Many of them had spiritual experiences and written books on mysteries of death or on life after death. The second group included people who enlightened by the age of reason and therefore rejected all sorts of supernatural beliefs. So, ghost stories for them were not only unscientific but were also unnecessary. The third group is perhaps most common and yet the most interesting one; it includes people who stood apart from the limits of beliefs and disbeliefs and simply chose to enjoy the thrills of supernatural fictions. These scholastic contestations on the ghosts' and ghost stories could not diminish their popularity amongst the Bengali reading community. People who live and die with so many desires simply cannot be expected to be reduced to ashes after their deaths. So, the belief in ghosts and the ghostly had always been and will always be a part of Bengali culture.

Bengalis have, like the rest of the world, categorized and theorized ghosts in order to understand them. Just like in other major cultures, they believe that ghosts can have different in nature depending upon the actions and experiences in their life before death. They can be good or bad, helpful or mischievous, but all of them share one common ground, the earthly attachment that bind them to this world even after their death. These attachments can be of different types; they can be places like buildings (popularly known in English as Haunted Houses), a water body or even a tree. They can be earthy possessions; like the skeleton in case of the young widow in 'Kankal' and jewelry in case of Monimalika in 'Monihara'. Sometimes these attachments can also relate to lingering emotions that a dead person might have had towards another person and this is exactly what happens in 'Nishithe' (In the Night), where the first wife of babu cannot forget the betrayal by her husband before her death.

Her Voices beyond Death: Tagore and His Phantom Female Protagonists

The current study critically analyses three immortal short stories by Tagore – 'Kankal' (The Skeleton), 'Nishithe' (In the Night) and 'Manihara' (The Lost Jewel) from the praxis of Psychoanalytic Feminism in order to expose the paradoxical dialectic in between the conscious and unconscious realms of woman psyche. 'Kankal' was published in 1892; three years after that 'Nishithe' was published; and 'Manihara' appeared in the last decade of the nineteenth century, in 1898. From the context of the socio-literary context of Bengal such supernatural tales were completely novel. They evidently bore the occidental influences - the sense of chilling horrors, the plunge into the opaque realm of unconscious opened up new horizons for the readers of the time.

'Kankal' (The Skeleton) tells the tale of a beautiful young widow. Married in her early childhood she got suffocated in the prison of unwanted relations – an older husband to fear, strict rules and people to obey day and night. She only heaved a sigh of relief when she got released from the shackles of this marriage after the death of her husband. Consequently, she was more than happy to return to her home as a widow two months after her marriage. She forgot that a woman is forever defined by her relations with the men in her life; so now the society recognized her as nothing more than a widow; they wrapped her in white cloth, took away all her rights over her own body by binding her in the rigid rules of patriarchy – just to let her know that for this life she had no more rights to

dream or hope. But this girl was a born rebel, and her only older unmarried brother did not have the heart to curb the little quirks that this young, innocent sister of his still had. So, she was allowed to roam freely inside the house, talk to the men from outside and that was how she met the doctor friend of her brother, Shekhar. It took no time for this young, naive girl to fall in love with this man and, from what we can decipher in due course of the story, that this attraction had been mutual. So, she dreamt of her own happy-world, wore yellow sari when alone, adorned her hair with scented jasmine. Embolden by her unparalleled beauty and youth she awaited her happy future with this man. But her intense passion turned into uncontrolled fury as she came to know that adhering conveniently to the norms of patriarchal Bengal society the man of her dreams had chosen to marry someone else. More than the pangs of separation she could not forget the pain of her humiliation. She chose not to forgive him and meekly accept her fate. On the day of his marriage, she poisoned both Shekhar and herself. The self-righteous patriarchal Bengali society was stunned by this act of rebellion. They could accept the suicide of a widow, but this damned girl even dared to kill the friend of her brother! A Hindu widow, dared to wear red sari and sindoor even in her death bed was unimaginable. In futile fury the society chose to punish her dead body. She was denied her last rights, even her only family, her older brother, chose to abandon her. But contrary to the conventional writers Tagore's ghost spirit in the story remains spirited even after her death.

'Kankal' opens as the Tagore's phantom protagonist shares her story with an unknown student of anatomy. Thirty-five years after her death, she no longer has the beauty of her youth; petals of her pink lips have long been replaced by white bony teeth, the depth of dark eyes are replaced by the void of emptiness. But as lights of days are replaced by night, she still searches for the bones guarding her heart that carried her long cherished love for her beloved. What surprises the readers is her uncompromising nature. She might have been aware of the sins of murder but she does not repent her action. Here Tagore crosses the boundary of the conscious and delves into the realm of unconscious in order to explore the psyche of the women of the time. The society that did not even accept the basic rights of women, did not even acknowledge the need to ameliorate the wrong deeds of the men, how can the helpless cry be sufficient to vent the unconscious emotions of these women? So, in the depth of death, in the middle

of the night, they come back to haunt the society which has long denied their happiness.

Tagore's next supernatural story 'Nishithe' takes this question to a further level. This embedded narrative tells the account of zamindar Dakshinacharan whose first wife had passed away after a prolonged period of illness. Indeed, he had cared for her at the beginning, but the hazards of treating a patient had turned him cold towards her. He could not even respond to the heart-warming affections of his lifelong companion, as he himself realized; "in the heart of (his) hearts (he had) got tired of nursing the helpless invalid." (Tagore, p. 97) He rather found solace in the company of Manorama, the beautiful, young daughter of his wife's doctor. Therefore, his frequent visits to the doctor's house, negligence in giving medicines to his sick wife, her convenient death due to the consumption of wrong medicine and his quick remarriage after the first wife's death – are parts of the common pattern that have been accepted and naturalised in the tales of this patriarchal society. Dakshinacharan's wife too understood that, accepted that. But even then, when Manorama visited her house for the first time, she asked her husband '*O ke? O ke?*' (Who is she? Who is she?) (Tagore, p. 99) How could Dokhinbabu answer this pithy and pungent question? How could he accept that the company of his sick wife had turned into joyless bondage for him? How could he accept that he had already replaced her? But his wife already knew, with the ability that all women possess, who Manorama was, or what she meant for her husband. She understood it too well and perhaps laughed in silence. As Dokhinbabu himself observed even after this prolonged period of illness she had this uncanny ability to laugh. And this laughter haunted Dokhinbabu even after her death. He could hear her sharp, satirical and criticizing laughter in the evening breezes of his garden, in the waves of Ganges, in the sound of the flock of flying birds.

Tagore has premised the protest of this first wife in this laughter, in her apparent harmless question which could be heard by none else but Dokhin babu. No matter how hard he tried, it made him remember of a quiet evening, a sickly woman and her wounded accusing eyes. Perhaps this loving devoted wife herself was unaware of the rebellion fuming inside her; but Tagore did understand it. He understood the pattern of patriarchal politics that ruled the everyday lives of these women confined within the four walls of their homes, the silent laws that muted

their words of protests, the rules that ignored their silent tears and pushed their hopes and desires into the unfathomable realm of the unconscious.

Manimalika the protagonist of Tagore's 'Manihara' was, however, a fresh departure from her predecessors. As a wife she had been immaculate both in her looks and actions; and as such had been pampered by her rich husband Fanibhushan. But the half-hearted efforts of Bhushan had never been able to touch the unfathomable depths of her complex mind. Away from the mercurial emotions of men she had been content to live in her lonely palace amidst the riches showered upon her by her husband. She was a woman who had not ever been afraid to forsake her husband for the things that were important and constant to her; but she did return to him in the middle of the night when the ceaseless rain and impenetrable darkness had wiped out the boundary between the earth and the sky, between life and death. That night Bhushan felt "as if he had only to cry out to be able to recover sight of those things which seemed to have been lost forever" (Tagore, p.145). He did see something that had been lost, his wife, his dear Mani. Crossing the limitless boundary of death, Mani had returned to him. She had looked at him with those same deep, vibrant eyes that had stared back at him, eighteen years ago, on the night of their marriage.

In these three stories, Tagore has subtly questioned the gender roles and stereotypes ascribed to the women by the contemporary Bengali society. Arguments can be made whether these stories register actual ghostly encounter or not. In 'Kankal' the story of the beautiful young widow could very well be a student's figment of imagination in a sleepless night; in "Nishithe" the husband was obviously too guilt ridden; in 'Manihara' Bhushan's intense longing for Mani could very well be the reason for him hallucinating about his wife. But all these stories do question the happily ever after promised to women in marriage.

The Last Words:

Patriarchy has always tried to control the ways in which a woman should think or act, live or die. When alive the women were not allowed to think of leaving their homes, and once dead they were not allowed to return. They were expected to follow this inside-outside dichotomy throughout their life and death. But Tagore has satirized the futility of such efforts through his female phantom protagonists. So Manimalika had twice crossed the boundary imposed upon her

by the rules of marriage, once when she was alive and again after her cold death. The nameless female spirit in Kankal is also a rebel; she dared to love and hate in spite of being a widow. The devoted loving wife of Dokhin babu had also laughed away the sanctity of the institution of marriage.

The current study does not make the point that all the male characters in Tagore are oppressive or violent; in fact, most are not. Dokhinbabu in 'Nishithe' suffered from extreme sense of guilt over the death of his first wife which kept him awake night after night; Fanibhushan in 'Monihara' had tried hard to win favors of his wife Moni. They are indeed not the conscious perpetrator of patriarchy. But as the sociologists have pointed out that the men in Bengali community learn early that all the social norms and conventions move around their interests, they learn that women are but expendable variables, that they need not give attention or sympathetic understanding to the rights or needs of these 'second sex'. Therefore, the problem of gender and gendered understanding of socio-cultural beliefs and practices in Bengal are not premised in the conscious oppression of and violence against the women, it is rather premised in the unconscious need that urges men to assert their superiority by subjugating the rights and needs of the women. The above three ghostly narratives of Tagore points towards this socio-psychological problem found in the everyday life of Bengali community.

The current study focuses on this unconscious essentialism that accepts, promotes and perpetuates women's exploitation in a patriarchal society. The study further observes that Tagore's narratives are exposition of this pattern which skillfully naturalizes the gendered understanding of the roles and models of women that were proselytized by the Bengali society. To nurture this unconscious compulsion Bengali culture idolized such stereotypes of women who sacrificed their own needs for others, who kept silence and uttered no words of protests, who endured everything no matter how society treated them. In its need to subjugate the women this society had pushed their very existence as human beings to the opaque realm of unconscious. But can their needs and desires, their hopes and tears be so easily silenced? So, they return, denying the meticulous cautions adopted by the society, crossing the grey path of death or memories to haunt the society. This return of the silent lives to the rebelling deads is the nexus where Tagore has premised the protests of his female phantom

protagonists. So, these narratives of Tagore are accounts of the journey of the conscious to the unknown of unconscious to find voices of protests that cross the boundary of life and death to haunt the readers across the time – to make them remember even when the stories are over that these women's stories are far from over.

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“Equality and not about Equal Rights”: Redefining Fourth-Wave Inclusion and Intersectionality through the Digital Platform *Agent of Ishq*

Mousumi Hazra

Abstract

*The definition of the historically abounding F-Word, Feminism, is continuously being shifted from one notion to another, varying in accord with class, caste, and gender across generations. Starting with the website Everyday Sexism launched by Laura Bates in 2012, Fourth wave feminism has recently witnessed a paradigmatic shift from the previous waves of feminism. Currently, as we consider the fluidity of gender construction and interact with various forms of it every day, social media or representation of women on-screen has been one of the most influential factors behind constructing our ‘already gendered’ selves. As the applications of power disseminate the idea of empowerment, equality and freedom also differ alongside. Hence, today’s feminism looks up to a lot more exposure where people can put themselves out there without adhering to any kind of censorship or asceticism. This approach has been productively exercised through the online multimedia digital platform *Agent of Ishq*, directed and introduced by the filmmaker Paromita Vohra in 2015. This research will initially be focused on the way how some mainstream Indian movies, featured to be among the ‘top 10 feminist films’, formed the idea of feminism vis-à-vis how far the feminist implication through *Agent of Ishq* addresses and adheres to the current ‘wave’ of feminism in India.*

Keywords: *film, feminism, empowerment, social media, identity*

Our job as feminists, should not be recruitment. It should not be conversion. It should be listening to the wants and needs of women that might differ from our own...it is to ask if maybe we need to pause for a moment and rethink not only our strategy but also our goals. (Crispin, 2017)

The above statement has been taken from Jessa Crispin's radical work 'Why Am I Not A Feminist', which addresses various receptions and interpretations of the F-word – Feminism. According to her, feminism, or the identity of being feminist in today's world is subject to continuous scrutiny, learning, and unlearning. As is shown in the aforementioned excerpt, it is often used in the sense of being 'recruited' and sold as a brand or a "free pass" (Crispin, 2017) which ends up undermining the political connotation of the historically enormous movement. This very identity or "badge" (Boom, 2015) enables an easy way out in comparison with the larger complexities the political term bears in hindsight. However, with the emergence of intersectionality, third-wave pluralism, and online digital manifestation, there has been a tendency to shift away from the umbrella term of universal sisterhood and a formation of groups in small alliances began. As a consequence, the very power politics is disseminated among everyone where the concept of self-empowerment and agency replaced the collective identity politics that used to be at work in the preceding waves of feminism. With fourth wave feminism and the advent of social media platforms where people subsume themselves to their private screens, the very definition of feminism is constantly facing cohorts like lifestyle feminism, hashtag feminism, choice feminism, lipstick feminism, also post-feminism being one of the most controversial stages of the movement. This research study is devoted to exploring one of such online multimedia platforms *Agent of Ishq*, directed and introduced by Paromita Vohra, the Indian feminist, and documentary filmmaker. This web project tagged with "we give sexuality a good name" (AOI, 2015) explores the other part of the self. Apart from the rigid one-size-fits-all codes, it deals with complexities, confusion, embarrassment, shame, pleasure, dilemmas, and unfiltered experience through finding a new language that is aimed to be diverse as well as inclusive. Hence, revisiting the question of justice, inclusion, and equality through some 'popular' performances uploaded and showcased on the multimedia platform *Agent of Ishq* will be the subject that this research study will explore.

"Maybe the fourth wave is online" (Solomon, 2009) stated by feminist Jessica Valenti in 2009 proved to be a convincing assertion when the fourth wave of feminism rapidly accelerated due to the widespread use of technology and social media. Significantly influenced by popular culture, this digital wave invites and stimulates various forms of (Sl)activism—giving rise to hashtag

movements (#WhyLoiter, #HappyToBleed, #MeToo), personal diaries (social media vlogs), Femvertising, 'Clicktivism' through the social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and many more. All these together redefine the concept of 'Personal is political'. However, despite being severally criticized as an exclusionary concept, such 'digital feminism' gives voice and visibility to many anonymous women out there, among which #MeToo has been a ground-breaking instance. The digital space makes them experience inclusion in the existing power structure, providing them with opportunities to express themselves (even if the expression is very minute/minor) and to speak up for themselves. Laura Bates in her online web project *Everyday Sexism* advocates such an attempt. As the project aims:

to catalogue instances of sexism experienced on a day-to-day basis. They might be serious or minor, outrageously offensive or so niggling and normalized that you don't even feel able to protest. Say as much or as little as you like, use your real name or pseudonym – it's up to you. By sharing your story you're showing the world that sexism does exist, it is faced by women every day and it is a valid problem to discuss. (Bates, 2012)

However, such unfiltered and unabashed exploration of the self as one of the dominant insights that fourth wave feminism promotes is reflected in the aforementioned web project *Agent of Ishq* and this paper will try to critically analyze the various nuances and perspectives of fourth wave feminism as captured in *Agent of Ishq*. *Agent of Ishq* started amidst the ambiance of unrest and outrage of people surrounding the 2012 Delhi gang rape followed by several chaotic responses. From hashtagging violence against such crime to bringing these issues to the forefront, genders of all kind were shown to be protesting with #WomenEmpowerment, #StopRapeCulture, and #WomenSafety. On the flip side, the notion about women and their bodies were constantly being observed under an apathetic light. Questions around their body, sexuality and desire were either addressed in terms of violence or as something ignominious. But as critically as such things unfold and open up new possibilities, there are also various modes of representations that hold women back or sound regressively empowered. Since this study centers around the ways feminism is being looked at and exercised through the performances of *Agent of Ishq*, some of the Indian

films are also named here and discussed. These are the films proudly celebrating their feminist badge of honor, but in reality, do little to add to the significance of the political term. The definition of empowerment ought not to be measured or equated with patriarchy, nor it is to create an alternative ideology in place of the dominant one. And to exemplify such insights, this study is on the way to particularly discuss some of the popular mainstream Hindi Cinemas showcasing the tendency of falling into the various shades of 'fake or faux feminism'. As Zinia Mitra in her book "Fourth Wave Feminism" points out:

For the women in power, media's focus is sometimes on women's appearance instead of on their policies which affectively undermines their abilities. The dichotomy that exists is that women must illustrate their femininity and be masculine enough to be successful...thus the countermovement strove to (re)appropriate women who were lacking in motivation to fight for their emancipation. (Mitra, 2020)

Numerous misconceptions and misinformation are being conveyed and shared across generations and even today films like *Pink*, *Mardaani*, *Bulbbul* are flooded with appreciation for being 'feminist' films, portraying the 'female gaze'. These films, though showcased to the world with their feminist tags, end up maintaining the patriarchal structure, suffering inherently from the complexity of male saviors and phallogocentric structure. As promised, this paper will begin by shedding some light onto these films to trace the current wave/waves of feminism(s) in India.

In the thought-provoking title of the film *Pink*, we are immediately made aware of the color-binary both genders are assigned to and the film intends to stir how flexible and arbitrary these things are. Released in 2016, Aniruddha Roy Chowdhury's *Pink* has drawn attention to one of the most important issues of gender and sexuality—the issue of sexual consent and how the standardized laws and dictums do not fit into individual life choices. The film promotes itself as one of the great examples of 'women empowerment' which aims to destigmatize the gender-segregated color binary—pink being the feminine color (likewise blue being the color representing masculinity) but significantly *Pink* does not implement this insight even for once. The film starts with three young women residing in south Delhi neighborhood named Meenal (Tapsee Pannu), Falak (Kirti Kulhari), and Andrea (Andrea Tairang) who, in due course of the film, gets

involved in relations which gradually lead to physical intimacies. The film gradually develops an ambiance of threats, intimidation, and sexism. Police files begin, a case of sexual harassment is reported and the media gets involved in the lives of the three women. Deepak Sehgal (played by Amitabh Bachhan) is appointed as the prosecutor's lawyer of the case and is featured almost as the 'savior'. Here, the male figure is not as much to the forefront as his convincing, masculine appearance is. His intense, mystical gaze and the way he stares at the women from the very beginning, the passive and almost insignificant character of his wife who meets demise towards the end, leave behind sufficient loopholes in such a 'feminist'- rated film. The patriarchal and misogynist traits Ranveer and his company carry have been countered and taken action against, but the film needed to loosen on the patriarchal frame which runs parallelly with the male saviorism complex. As we talk about gender parity, we also learn to unlearn things. The loophole where a feminist can question the film is that the solvation of the case comes from an agent who inhabits the world of patriarchy and clings to an age-old patriarchal form. The characters are portrayed in the light 'weaker sex' and an inherent hierarchical tone is continuously present as an undercurrent throughout the film. Deepak Sehgal with its staunch look, given most of the 'space' in the film, can be seen through looking as the first look of the film:



Figure 1: *Advertisement of Pink, 2016*

A tendency to equate women's empowerment and freedom based on a scale of masculine traits as contingent to equality has also variously been practiced in mainstream Indian movies. One such example is Rani Mukherjee starred *Mardaani* where the protagonist Shibani Shibaji Roy inherits the traits of a stereotyped masculine 'hero' which the very title indicates. From the very beginning, Shibani is portrayed in an off-feminine villainous light. The film incorporates actions and language which are supposed to be the language of empowerment in a world where no law or judicial system prevails. She engineers to murder the culprit Tahir Bhasin throughout the film by instrumentalizing a 'kidnapped' child. But Pradeep Sarkar's direction of this film raises many questions about the 'authenticity' of being a woman since it carries an old tradition that dates way back. The chaos and the aggression formed at the beginning of the film by the protagonist, construct a massive misunderstanding regarding the term equality and pass a misconception about the same. Once the film gets over, questions are asked on the depiction of an unscripted and unquestioned power structure as ultimate and authoritative. The implication is that to get included in the power structures one needs to walk over the pre-existing stereotypes of male heroes which nowhere advances the primary goals and causes of the massive, significant movement. As Jessa Crispin says:

Women who conduct themselves as ruthlessly and thoughtlessly as their male peers are not heroes, they are not role models. They may call themselves feminists, getting themselves a free pass by many, but that does not mean they should be celebrated...By fighting for your own way to inclusion, you are not improving the system, you are simply joining the ranks of those included and benefiting: you, a woman, are also the patriarchy. (Crispin, 2020)

The last one on this row of popular Hindi films, which is said to have dealt with a counter gaze—the female gaze as opposed to the dominant male gaze is a much-discussed Netflix movie *Bulbbul* (2020). Laura Mulvey in her famous essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', published in 1973 considered the prevalent existence of the "male gaze" as the dominant gaze where female bodies as objects to be looked at, focalized through the lens of the audience and character with an assumption that the whole community of viewers is male. Directed by Anvita Dutt, *Bulbbul* is a horror film with elements of a dark fantasy tale that has

widely celebrated the epitome of the female counter gaze as opposed to the male gaze. The female protagonist Bulbul (played by Tripti Dimri), is a 10 years-old child who gets married to a much older man named Thakur Masai (played by Rahul Bose) and suffers from extreme sexual torture by her husband. But later her outrage for revenge overpowers her silence and through a magical superpower, she ends up diminishing the patriarchal power structure which has been dominating women for centuries. In the end, we see the female protagonist reincarnated within the figure of Goddess Kali thriving away and burning all the devil's power from life. The film, wrapped up in a feminist message, is set in 19th century Bengal with the prototype of 'big secrets' in 'Bengali manor'—the upper-class luxurious woman on the outside leading a stifling life inside. Drawn from this, the film captures Bulbul's transformation from an innocent child-like figure to a mysterious, smirking woman, who possesses the power to control everything around her. The point where today's feminism can take a step back from claiming this film as a 'feminist' film is that the protagonist here swings between two extremes – woman as the witch, wronged woman, and the woman as possessed with the spirit of Goddess Kali which ends up over-essentializing the conception of the 'weaker sex', woman. It is high time to realize that placing women at the center does not make the movie automatically feminist. It is ponderous upon and not independent of the way the story is being told, the way the characters are being formed apart from outraging at the patriarchy or fetishizing the human called woman. Henceforth, we are to rethink the very ways in which we categorize any film as feminist and burden it with celebratory entitles to be among 'the top 10 list of the feminist film'.

This study so far has focused on Bollywood films and their formation of the idea of feminism. Now to contrast and highlight the other way in which such mass-consumed popular culture is used, this research draws its attention to *Agent of Ishq*, devoted to exploring a new language for love, desire, and sexuality. Paromita Vohra as an artist has taken the legacy of feminism to a different stature where the focus is on inclusion, flexibility and de-binarizing things, and a redefinition of intersectionality. The way she has given a new mold to documentary filmmaking apart from its 'higher purpose' is crucial in understanding her philosophy about the impossibility of separating art from activism. Vohra's aversion towards the one authoritative body, rigid realism, politics of sobriety and the idea of activism, something placed over the aesthetic

are the founding stones that gives a new understanding not only to the nature of feminism as history or movement but feminism as the way of life, gives it “a loving eye” (Boom, 2015) as she says. Her oeuvre of works includes several documentary films on feminism, moral policing, copyright, public toilet, urban life, etc. which incorporate a significant number of popular cultural elements. Apart from *Agent of Ishq*, she has also directed a web series called *Connected Hum Tum*. However, this paper deals with how an online multimedia entertainment platform *Agent of Ishq* copes with the existing ‘wave(s)’ of feminism(s) in India, what kind of mark it leaves behind and how far it furthers the job of fourth wave feminism in terms of inclusion and intersectionality in an age of ‘no, I’m not a feminist but I believe in equality.’ The online project *Agent of Ishq* divides its matters into various sub-sections, ‘menu’-ed on the web portal—they address complicated issues regarding love, desire, sex, relationship, and biology and mix them up with pleasure and humor. The very form of it is intertwined with the concepts that the characters intend to uphold through songs, dance, personal diaries, recordings, fun videos, and limitless elements to connect to people. As the director of the project Paromita Vohra says:

We asked people – do you want to be an Agent of ishq? We did not say that we want to reform them, we asked them what they wanted to be... they were not being asked to enumerate their difficulties so that they could be categorized as an identity but rather to share what they had learned from their own lives. There were no boxes and so, no hierarchies; as a result, it created a place where people meet on an equal footing without erasing their differences. (Vohra, 2015)

For instance, one of the latest videos of *Agent of Ishq*, “Main Aur Meri Body” talks about how ordinary biological functioning has been kept as a restricted domain away from the ‘normal’ or ‘natural’ self of human beings. Teenagers who are open to exploring and understanding the reproductive mechanism of the human body just like any other internal body system have acted in the entire video clip. The animated photos and fun stickers have been implemented to suggest that these issues require a new form to get into the mind of growing-up boys and girls and not to be preserved as the only ‘A-rated’ domain of the world.



Figure 2: *Hormones displayed in the style of social media, 2022*

Another video clip titled “Menstruators will menstruate” is set in a slightly magical interior where the entrance to getting into the age of puberty is shown through a more self-embodied lens rather than guided by the prescribed rules and regulations of society. Three characters, ‘disabled’ by society in three different ways to talk about their specificities and deviation from the dominant norm and try to recognize their differences through self-esteem, dignity, and knowledge. The experience of getting a menstrual period in a classroom or the experience of a trans employee getting deprived of a menstrual leave is nurtured through questions and confusions. When the teacher instructs the class through setting binaries, someone speaks up: “you only speak of boys and girls, this binary is not a given. Not all women menstruate, and not all menstruators are women” which provoked the teacher to “dismiss the class” (AOI, 2022). Apart from that, *Agent of Ishq* is also devoted to dealing with the matter of relationships, pleasure, teen, sexual etiquette, laws about sexuality, LGBTIQ+, consent, erotic poetry, heartbreak, mental health, and many more. To talk about consent, two amazing videos are on the row which this research study will critically analyze. “Love in the Garden of Consent” tagged with the motto “#Marzi hain minimum” (that consent is a must requirement) starts with a ‘plate’ of choices which pave the diverse play of pluralism and intersectionality for the rest of the clip. In the first few scenes, the audience gets a glimpse of the shifting gaze of the characters.

Apart from the polarized and exclusionary binarized thinking, it portrays the female character watching over her phone and displaying the 'choices' among her male suitors. Such shifting gaze can also be seen in the first half of the video where the female employee is positioned at the center of every object around, and the male characters are seen as possessing seductive ability – “main khud apni marzi ki malik makaan, agar mein na chahu toh ishq kahan meri jaan” [I decide my moods, it's my choice , if I do not consent there is no love my beloved.]



Figure 3: *A Plate of Choices*, 2018



Figure 4: *Woman flaunting her choice unabashedly*, 2018

Again, when one of the characters in the video picks ‘casual consent in sexuality’ out of the choices and we are driven to the place of “dating grove”.

She chooses her likable partner on Tinder, which again ends up making the audience realize the immense agency and consciousness of governing her own body.



Figure 5: *Woman embodying agency through choice, 2018*

Another interesting clip on the row is the “Amorous Adventures of Shakku and Megha” in the ‘Valley of Consent’ understanding the matter of consent as something “complex and delicate”, handling a reluctance, and hesitation to subscribe to the binaries of ‘yes’ or ‘no’—and to explore more about the in-betweenness, about ‘maybe’- the delicacies and vulnerabilities integrated within each human self. Megha and Shokku, performs in a Maharashtrian dance form that foregrounds the slippage of their mind. Here the confession and revelation of the character shatter many mainstream portrayals of women framed into a dominant mode, with either the women as ‘heroic’ and adventurous characters or the women as the negative, villainous, skeptical characters, and herein lies the significance of Paromita Vohra for bringing the other side of the self into the forefront and portraying it with recognition. Megha and Shokku dominate the space but never get to create a hierarchy, which is shown through the male characters in the three consecutive narratives. The confusion between Megha and Shokku regarding the ‘maybe’ in consent does not get sufficed by today’s feminist dictum ‘no means no, I don’t know means know, maybe means

also no, only yes means yes.’ Also, when Megha goes to a cinema hall with her partner to watch the movie “*Kabhi Haan, Kabhi Naa*” (as is shown in the video) it is intonated with the unfiltered expressions women are coming up with. They try to make their partner understand their undecidability, which comes with dignity and thus create a whole world to explore in what has been left unexplored, cornered, and hidden. Such is the form through which Vohra upholds that there are many gradations of consent and so is of human experience.



Figure 6: *The movie title shown in the clip, 2016*



Figure 7: *The 'grey' areas of consent, 2016*

Another side of feminism that today's world suffers from is, as we have discussed at the beginning of this study, feminism as being a "free pass" people, be it of any gender, indicating extreme rage against discrimination towards women, or violence against women, but remain unanswerable to any accusation made by feminists solely because they hold up a feminist liberating flag. In a digital world, the concern about women and gender discrimination does not get sufficed through the only act of 'liking' or 'sharing'. Such a façade of empowerment that comes without self-question or which is more like an identity rather than a continuous process makes the historical journey of feminism more regressive and gives rise to many misinformed or uninformed versions of feminism. As Zinia Mitra puts light on this issue saying:

It can be argued that people do not click in 'like', share status, comment, sign internet petitions or join online groups in order to actually help the person or group in need, but rather to feel good, and to feel like they have done something positive for the person or for a cause. This is kind of a virtual counterpart of wearing a pin or a badge to display one's sympathies. (Mitra, 2020)

Such a dynamic is visible in one of the performances of *Agent of Ishq*, "Sorry Thank You Tata Bye-Bye" where the conversation between the ruling body like the government, media, and the ruled ones is established. They talked about the recent inclusion of government regarding the marital age of women which is increased from 18 to 21, but question the ruling authority saying "nothing about us without us" to which the government shed a patronizing gaze – "we told you Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao, take a selfie with our daughter—gave them the fit-bit of women's lib, still they complain and question and gib, the nation wants to know"—as if the entire nation has been subsumed to the autonomy of patriarchy. Such a statement often leads to enquire the steps and actions taken on behalf of women in hindsight.



Figure 8: Politician boasting of the 'luck' of Indian women, 2021



Figure 9: Women exercising 'nothing about us without us', 2021

Such instance is visibly echoed in the performance “Aika to the Baika (listen to the women)” where the lay police officer is like a reincarnation of male supremacy, inviting everyone to the police station where they solve many problems by only listening to the women named Shokku, Megha, and Akansha. When the female character Shokku comes to file a case of domestic violence or the treatment the woman named Megha gets when she complained about her rape at a night party, instead of falling under section 354 and domestic violence, the police officers categorize them to be as romantic or domestic matter and asks the

victims not to conceive of defaming their household or to stay away from the unhappy and serious feminist flag of #MeToo.



Figure 10: *Portrayal and notion regarding the MeToo campaign, 2020*

In the third case of Akansha, her individual will is placed in sharp contrast to the cultural and social etiquette of modesty and purity. Society asks her to get married and this tone also resonates with the lady police officer when she says “Get married, be clever. It’s a license for what...ever!”



Figure 11: *Society and law on marriage and settling life, 2018*

In these performances, the definition of politics as incorporating serious issues with serious form is placed in sharp contrast to the exotic and humorous elements. To render attention to such serious and in-depth issues, Vohra applies the forms and elements through an easy-to-go atmosphere. The tone seems to be an invitation to merge with the audience instead of creating a hierarchy. And herein lies the importance of the works of Vohra that dismantle the binary between art and the moral responsibility of art. Her experimentation with profound ideas of freedom, empowerment, and feminism has given a lens to the way Indians see the concept of women and feminism. She talks about how digital media formed the connection with people, and the very paradigmatic shift is a space for constant re-evaluation. The fear and confusion associated with expressing one's true self is the very motto of *Agent of Ishq*, rather than what the philosophy of feminism engages with. Apart from the feminist eye being the "loving eye" to the world, the legacy of *Agent of Ishq* does not stimulate women with templates, it does not put things into a box or indulges in political correctness, rather it talks about the experiences of people, of women where an open up discussion takes place and nobody is judged or excluded for being different. So far this research study has tried to uncover the various dimensions of feminism which might seem far-fetched from the main agenda feminism deals with. Readers might end up asking questions about how feminism is connected to sex education or does feminism extend its goals and aims to look for the 'rights' as a matter of human fairness or consider the gaze as the way of life. Coming back to the title of this paper which differentiates equality from equal rights the paper attempts to claim that not all equal rights provide a smooth way to equality. Equality is an amalgamation of both spoken and unspoken things, it questions how power operates, and what ideology it promotes and seeks new structures or forms to look at things. It is high time to realize that instead of a perfectly resolved feminist state, we should preferably ask questions about the ways of the world. Feminism is not a unitary identity but rather is a continuous process. Spreading "a loving eye" to the world, feminism strongly resists any fixity. The significance of the aforementioned performances lies in the fact that they do not set alternate ideology in place of a dominant one, rather they create a third space for inclusion and choice and thus redefines intersectionality:

We all want to tell the story of our life not as victims but as people who went through a journey and somehow these narratives about patterns and

overcoming them and they seem very productivity oriented that there is a way in which one can fix it, a solution...but actually where else we find patterns is in aesthetics so what if we thought of our patterns also as our aesthetics as who we are in some ways. (CSGS@Ashoka, 2020)

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‘Matinee Idol’ and his Spectators: The Female and the Male Gaze

Sudarshana Sen

Abstract: *The 24 July 1980 was a fateful day for the Bengali movie viewers. The superstar of Bengali cinema breathed his last. The year 2020 marked his fortieth death anniversary. The euphoria with the star of fifties and sixties lasts even today. His mannerisms, styled acting and his charisma had inflated profit for the producer, showered fame for himself creating a furor among the cine-goers. This article will focus on how spectatorship and gendered gaze can build a ‘star’ and what their relation to the star may be and what were the elements that acted as a catalyst to this.*

Keywords: *Bengali cinema, stardom in Bengali cinema, matinee idol, male gaze, female gaze*

Introduction

Uttam Kumar (3 September 1926 – 24 July 1980) a reel name, a popular star of the Bengali cinema was born as Arun Kumar Chattopadhyay in Kolkata. Though primarily his acts made him a ‘star’ in Bengali film industry, ‘Tollywood’, he had some significant presence in national film screen too. This 2020 marked his fortieth death anniversary. The reason for writing about him is that after so many years of his death, Uttam Kumar, a film actor of a regional cine-market¹ still lives in the heart of his viewers, radiant and lively as a ‘star’, and to understand the male gaze for we all have been conditioned to adopt the male gaze because that is the way we were raised by traditional cinema. He was neither born a luminary nor was a star-child. He had to struggle against failed attempts, give himself a screen name to appear in his subsequent endeavors. He tasted success in *Sare Chuattar* (‘74 and a half’, released in 1953), after nine flops at the box-office. His last film was *Ogo Bodhu Sundari* (‘Oh Dear Beautiful Wife’) by 1980 he was averaging up to eleven films per year, bagging 374 films in his pocket out of which 211 films were released. He is considered the biggest film persona in Bengal and still is alive in blog-pages, newspapers and

magazines. He was and still is considered the 'Mahanayak' (the great hero) of Bengali movies by cine-lovers.

The significance of the study lies in the fact that the star now dead for more than forty years is still remembered as a luminary— an identity of Bengali cinema, an icon. His picture was used to advertise for Kolkata International Film Festival (KIFF) in 2022. The poster had a smiling Uttam Kumar with the words to invite people to KIFF to meet.

He has attracted publications in his name even on his fortieth death anniversary in 2020. For example, the leading newspaper, *The Times of India*¹ observed his contributions to Bengali cinema in acting, directing and producing film. Not only in a leading newspaper, but there are numerous such publications in Bengal that reminiscent his contribution to Bengali cinema. His reputation even after his death (1980) is validated in the popularity of his films that are re-run on televisions. The Tollygunge Metro station in Kolkata has been renamed as 'Mahanayak Uttam Kumar Metro Station' in his honor and there is a theatre-hall, 'Uttam Mancha', named after him in Kolkata. A life-size statue has been erected near Tollygunge the tinsel-town of Bengali films. The Department of Posts in 2009, released a series of new postal stamps featuring the actor on them and a brochure with a note that said "Uttam Kumar – The Legend of Indian Cinema." The government of India arranged for the 'Uttam Award' on 19 June 2015 for 'Best Acting'. In the year of 2016, a television series called "Mahanayak" was telecast based on his life. These adulatory acts were set after 2001, twenty years after his death, and now another twenty have passed but he still attracts his audience with the same zeal. In a commemorative article in 2020, Sayandeb Chowdhury writes,

¹ 1. Perhaps he is the most popular star of Bengali cinema since he is the only star who is fondly remembered even after forty years of his death. There are commemorative volumes, articles published every year in the month he passed away. He has a fan base with active fan groups in the media. For example, there are at least two closed groups in the 'Facebook' with 12067 (Uttam Suchitra-The Golden Pair) and 3.5k (Uttam-Suchitra and Golden Stars of Bengal Screen) members. Each group posts at least ten posts a day on him, his life and achievements on an average.

1.<https://www.thehindu.com/thread/reflections/uttam-kumar-and-intimations-of-immortality/article32184880.ece>; 24 July 2020, retrieved on 3 October 2020 at 7 p.m.

For every bit of this purportedly *bhadrolok* acts of retention, there are also spontaneous, streetwise displays of exuberant adoration. Land in Calcutta and you would see broadsheets, hoardings, shops, posters, books dangling with his face. In quickly disappearing atriums of single-screen theatres across the city, he is ubiquitous. Uttam's smiling portrait also peeps out from sudden nooks and corners — neighborly salons, dusty tailor-shops, bare-boned photo-studios, rusty sweetshops and grimy eateries that are either in thrall of his everlasting charm or touting the honor of his visit into their midst many moons ago. The scale of Uttam's easy visibility across Calcutta and towns of Bengal four decades since his death makes one singular claim: that Uttam has not only refused mortality but has made a permanent home in the collective memory of Bengal.²

A film critic and academic, Sanjay Mukhopadhyay (2020) stated in an interview that Uttam Kumar was perhaps the biggest star that Bengal could ever produce. But as he was not acceptable as one in the intellectual circles after the Left Front government came to power Uttam Kumar was not recognized as an actor of importance. He faced negligence and was considered an 'actor with no biography.' The renewed interest in Uttam Kumar makes us wonder how his stardom has managed to stay alive and vibrant even after years of such intellectual disregard. He did not become a star overnight. He had his struggles, failures, highs and lows. His versatility in the various roles he played resulted not only in a stardom but he also earned acclaim of the critics. The star that he was can also be précised by assessing that eight of his blockbuster films were enacted in Hindi by renowned Hindi film actors.³ The adulation of an artist living on in

² <https://www.thehindu.com/thread/reflections/uttam-kumar-and-intimations-of-immortality/article32184880.ece>; 24 July 2020, retrieved on 3 October 2020 at 7 p.m.

³ Saheb Bibi Gulam, 1962 (Saheb Bibi Golam, 1956), Hum Hindustani, 1960 (Bosu Poribar, 1952), Kala Pani, 1958 (Sobar Opore, 1955), Lal Pathhar, 1971 (Lal Pathor, 1964), Angoor, 1982 (Bhrantibilash, 1963), Jibanmrityu (Jibon Mrityu, 1970), Chupke Chupke (Chhadmabeshi, 1971), Amar Prem, 1972 (Nishipodmo, 1970), Kati Patang, 1971 (Surjotopa, 1965), Anurodh, 1977 (Deya Neya, 1963), Abhiman, 1973 (Bilombito Loy, 1970), Bemisal, 1982 (Ami She o Sokha, 1975) and Ijaazat, 1987 (Jotugriha, 1964). Other than these there are a few of his movies that were adaptations. The total number of films remade and adapted are twenty.

the regional cine-market even after forty years of his death is an enormous success in itself. It shows a special bond between him and his spectators. This article will focus on the social construction of the stardom of Uttam Kumar. This article will be based on analysis of secondary material available. The flurry of literature accessible on Uttam Kumar are books, memoirs, newspaper articles and academic articles in journals that mostly range between the years 2005 to 2017 which in turn serve to showcase the lasting popularity that he has. The two books, *Bengali Cinema: The Other Nation*, (2010) and *Uttam Kumar and Suchitra Sen: Bengali Cinema's First Couple* (2013) that form the basis of this research article focus on cinema in Bengal vis-à-vis its local presence in opposition to the national cinema where the reference of Uttam Kumar is on how he is a part of this endeavor (Gooptu, 2010); and focus on the famous pair of Bengali cinema, Uttam and Suchitra, dealing with their on-screen chemistry with a slice of comparison to other such pairs in Hindi cinema (Chowdhury, 2013). The articles referred to here deal with love and romance depicted through the performances of Uttam Kumar (Panda, 2012), to the actor as the link in the transition of Bengali cinema and its melodramatic acts (Chatterjee, 2010), to the city space as used in films of Uttam Kumar (Chaudhury, 2017).

The literature so far has focused on the stardom and its relation to the milieu in which it was formed but there is perhaps no study that has focused on how the fledgling stardom of Uttam Kumar was constructed through spectatorship.

Sigmund Freud had singled out scopophilia as one of the component instincts of sexuality that exist as a desire apart from erotogenic zones in his *Three Essays on Sexuality* (1950). The convention in which mainstream mass films has purposefully grown portrays a hermetically enclosed universe that mysteriously unravels its world to the spectators, creating a sense of separation from it for the audience and at the same time appealing to their voyeuristic phantasmagoria.

Popularity and Stardom

We need to look at Uttam Kumar, as an actor who operated within the Bengali regional cine-market throughout his illustrious career, with a few exceptions when he acted in a few Hindi films. In 2016, a feature in a leading

newspaper in Bengali, *Ananda Bazar Patrika* carried a detailed analysis on his stardom. It said that many letters had reached their office after the star's demise in 1980. Most of it was from women among whom one author of a letter, a woman, stated that she had become 'a widow at the death of Uttam Kumar'⁴. He was an ideal man for any woman of the time. Rituparno Ghosh (2018) claims that Uttam Kumar was/is a 'phenomenon' in Bengal, the ultimate Guru (used in the sense Teacher/ Guide) despite Bengal having far more impressive personalities like Nikhil Bandopadhyay, Satyajit Ray or contemporary famous actors like Soumitra Chattopadhyay for instance to take the seat of a guru among the masses (Vol. 1, p. 230-31). It was Uttam Kumar who is/was established in the hearts of every woman in Bengal especially who were middle-aged and to whom love/romance meant the purushottam (the best man) named Uttam Kumar (Ibid; translation author's).

The directors with whom Uttam Kumar had acted, had great regards for his skills as an actor. Tapan Sinha, a renowned filmmaker once commented on Uttam Kumar that he had stood the test of time (Ghosh 2015, p. 26) and the actor could only be compared to himself and that he had very skillfully mixed his *Bengaliness* with international standard of acting in films...he had nurtured his sophisticated acting consciously with self-taught techniques (Chowdhury; 2013, p. 25). Satyajit Ray, an Oscar winning director from Bengal once commented to filmmaker Hrishikesh Mukherjee that Satyajit Ray could not have filmed *Nayak* (The Hero; 1966) without Uttam Kumar and referred to Uttam Kumar as the first and last hero of the Bengali cinema (Ghosh 2015, p. 49). Such was his popularity that he was not only adored by fans but was loved and admired by other professionals associated with Bengali film-making. In *Robbar*, a magazine commemorating Uttam Kumar's death in 2019 featured a number of articles among which a young Anindya Chattopadhyay⁵ wrote,

“...Uttam Kumar could be called the role model of the ideal net of infatuation. It was embodied in the 'guru' 'guru' (slang for boss) collective sounds...if he smiled at the viewers in his signature style of collecting his dhoti, the viewers would be mesmerized. This is called

⁴ A publication of Sambad Pratidin

⁵ A columnist, a singer, member of popular Bengali Band, Chandrabindu

sex-appeal. He had something infallible in his eyes, some prank in his smile, his relaxed personality which brought down every viewer. Many mothers and aunts of our times did not cook at home at his death, silently cried hiding their tears from their husbands..." [Translation by author]

Maitrayee B. Chowdhury (2013) writes that the Bengali intellectuals might not have been impressed by his popularity but most were silenced when Satyajit Ray selected him for the portrayal of the hero in his film *Nayak* (p. 65). Since he was regarded a hero in mainstream Bengali films and not so in the intellectually inclined Bengali films, Uttam Kumar's film acting was considered trivial by the intellectual class. Ray commented on his selection and noted the way Uttam had portrayed the character pointing that Uttam was a dedicated actor despite his Mahanayak status (ibid p. 65). In the 1950s, acting in films was theatrical. Uttam Kumar brought about a new taste by imbibing natural ways of talking, walking and other mannerisms which portrayed ordinary ways of everyday living. The interest to be different from others motivated him to do something new, that was the fundamental basis of his popularity (Anil Chattopadhyay, noted actor of Bengali cinema in Ghosh, 2015, p. 51). Critic and reporter Seabrata Gupta had echoed the same thoughts on Uttam Kumar citing his spontaneity in front of the camera. He was both an instinctive and a cerebral actor marking the distinctiveness of a complete artist (ibid: p. 84). As Rituparno Ghosh had commented, later on both kinds of film viewers, mainstream and intellectual, had to confide that he was an actor par excellence.

He had acted with a number of female actors, picturing romanticism on screen with ease and spontaneity, the monotonous rules of film acting could never tear off the naturalness from his performances. Gooptu (2010) claims that the character of Uttam Kumar as portrayed through films and perceived by Bengali audience was that of an exemplary Bengali *bhadralok* whose typicality stemmed not from large-scale associations but from the "subtext of an ordinary man". His style of wearing wrinkled dhoti (*Konchano* dhoti) and colorful punjabi (Long shirt with collars and side pockets) has been marketed by popular shops, even his style of wearing stripped shirt was a fashion in the name of 'Amanush Print' in the days after his film *Amanush* (1974) was released (Mukhopadhyay, 2012, p. 21). Such was his popularity that when he had organized a march calling all actors to join in order to raise fund for flood relief in 1950s, there was a crowd

which had to be handled by the state apparatus. He was advised not to walk with others and had to commute in a lorry. It was a big event where a sizeable amount of money could be collected and donated for the cause (Mukhopadhyay: 2012, p. 23). So Uttam Kumar was both an actor and a star. His popularity was such that he captured the entire attention of the public. No one except his heroine of many films, Suchitra Sen, could match his glamour and stardom in Bengali cinema in his life-time.⁶

Spectatorship and construction of Stardom

Psychoanalytic film theory is concerned with establishing the complex, myriad mechanisms by which the relationship of spectator to screen links the human psyche, particularly the unconscious, to the film text. Through the circulation of psychoanalytic attributes such as desire, phantasm, and identification, the spectator-screen process, among other cultural processes, constructs the psychoanalytic subject, also variously referred to as the desiring subject, the sexual subject, and the screen subject. Uttam had fitted the bill being the actor whom the audience desired and which helped him to keep other actors (heroes) of his time far behind.

The emergent spectator of cultural studies contributes two significant variations to the notion of spectatorship. First, the text is produced only at the moment of interaction with the audience member, bringing the spectator/reader/viewer to the forefront of the mediated event (which in cultural studies, to date, has been far more extensively researching on television analysis, not film). It becomes impossible to speak of the meanings of a text separately from its viewing subject, the two becoming indissoluble. Second, the viewing subject is composed of the interaction between the effects of discourses invoked by the text/representation *and* the effects of social and material discourses beyond. Spectatorship is formulated as the convergence of textual subjects and social subjects.

[T]he focus of critical attention in cultural studies switched from ideology and its effects toward audiences or readerships, since it is at this point that

⁶ Both actors worked in 30 films

meanings generated in and by media discourses actually go live socially, where textual and social power intersect, and where the distinction between them is meaningless. (Hartley 1996: 225)

Further, the spectator is no longer positioned in subjectivity by the text, but, under the concept of hegemony, can offer resistance to the ideologies of the text. Indeed, cultural studies understands popular culture as the terrain where cultural power, relationships, and systems of meaning are negotiated and established - and, consequently, can be resisted and/or reestablished otherwise.

Spectatorship has been theorized variously to date, as the construction of the viewing subject through psychic processes, discursive formations, and social and historical relations. It appears most productive to consider the spectator as the effect of such processes, formations, and relations as operating concurrently, rather than thinking of each dynamic as singular or exclusive of the others. Less clear, then, are the complex and simultaneous interconnections between these dynamics, which may render the spectator as anything along an indicator of viewership from passive swallower of pre-packaged ideology to active and successful resistant of the same oppressive psychic, discursive, and socio-historical forces. Each theorization - psychoanalytic, discursive, and social has contributed to the concept of spectatorship, while not managing to address all the problematic summoned up by the other, differing approaches.

Yet, neither the social subject nor the discursive subject adequately explains the determinants, the “why” of specific subject or spectatorial articulations, remaining open projects for both cultural studies and post-structuralism. This paper will take into account the spectator as a culmination of all: psychoanalytic, discursive and social.

The Gaze: Theoretical issues and Empirical Facts

The saying that ‘men act and women appear’ can be simplified in the sense that men look at women. When used as a verb in English language ‘gaze’ means looking steadily and carefully especially in admiration and surprise. There is a voluminous existence of the notion of ‘gaze’ in the writings of feminists and post-structuralists during 1970s and 1980s. Black feminist intervention which began to surface in 1990s was launched from two disciplinary locales: literary criticism and film studies. A steady glance through literature can take a point of

departure from Habermas (1989) who regarded public sphere as a way of cultural advance of the nineteenth century in the West that excluded the mass, producing a lively and knowledgeable citizenry. It debarred women since their intimate sphere was the family where discussions could take place (p.69). Women were given a subordinate position among the relatively small number of people who took part in the public sphere. With the decline of the public sphere and the rise of the mass media, the readership slowly gave way to viewership (p. 159) where women took an active part (Rabinovitz, 1990; p. 74). It was not same in the case of the Indian audience. In India, the transformation of readership to viewership was not so clearly visible. The Bengali public in particular were exposed to cinema at the turn of the nineteenth century but it was in the period between 1920s and 30s that there evolved a film culture in Bengal in the name of critical enquiry, writers on cinema etc. which was concentrated as a tradition in the hands of the *Bhadralok* elite class.

In the west, cinema appeared as a potential site of transgression, a setting that allowed women to reveal their troubling otherness, cravings and desires. It provided them with a new experience (Glover and Kaplan: 2013; p. 172). Cinema was considered as a new form of leisure available to working class women outside home. It was cheap, convenient; a part of shopping trip that which had a mundane accessibility. In India cinema was a luxury of the privileged class.

It began to spread as a medium of communication much later with the advent of capitalist endeavors. Cinema grew into a spectacle to be consumed (Mayne: 1988; p. 78). Because of its growing woman spectators in the West 'matinee idols'⁷ such as Rudolph Valentino of Hollywood were set as reliefs to them. He not only made women collapse, his appearances could lead to minor riots.

The viewers of Uttam Kumar were Bengali men and women, essentially middle-class. Uttam Kumar, was also a 'matinee idol', was a handsome male

⁷ 'Matinee Idol' is a term used to refer to male actors who were not only good-looking but were capable of giving massive hits in films that were showcased in the afternoons. The term was mostly used in 1920s to 1950s in Hollywood to denote male actors who were popular among women audience for their good-looks.

actor with good looks and extremely attractive to women spectators, was adorned both as an actor with merit and star in 1950s. He was portrayed in such way that he was shown as a desiring subject who can bestow the gift of 'sexual rapture'. Moreover, the publicity of the screen presence of Uttam Kumar was consolidated through fan clubs, magazines, interviews etc. such that the relationship of the star and the fans were perceived as obsessive. Tapan Sinha's *Galpo Holeo Sotti*, 1966 ('A Story, But True') has a sequence where three women of a middle-class joint household listen together to one Uttam Kumar interview, read aloud from a film magazine in their leisure. Yet Uttam Kumar referred to his female fans as sisters, thus prioritizing a domestic discourse that was against his romantic screen persona (Goopu, 2010). This insistence on a domestic image made him more popular among women. Despite his persona and acting, his image of a person circumscribed by domesticity was largely the reason of acceptance by his viewer, mostly among middle-class women.

Film studies and feminist underpinnings on women spectatorship revolve around Mulvey's contentions of male gaze. Mulvey (1989) draws upon psychoanalysis between this active male (actor) and passive female (viewers). Along with Mulvey, John Berger (1972) hooks (1992) and Judith Halberstam (2005) critique the culture of gaze as aligned with white, heterosexual, masculine subjectivity, producing images of women and ordered dominated subjects as fetishes to palliate male castration anxieties. hooks (1992) in particular argues that black women spectators construct a theory of looking relations that turn their delight in looking at films into the 'pleasures of interrogation'. The viewers in the mainstream have the determining 'male gaze' that projects its fantasy on the female figure while women are simultaneously consumers, are looked at and displayed. 'Female gaze' was later introduced as an antithesis to male gaze. Staiger (1992) claims that there can be no text without an audience, therefore women spectators had a mode of organizing and structuring a narrative surrounding around an actor whom they gazed at. Women here fantasized with Uttam Kumar. There are numerous stories that describe their anxiety over Uttam Kumar. But this feminine gaze is repressed, somehow irreversible producing women spectatorship as a position within the network of power relations defined by the dominant in the discourse. As Mulvey argued that the visual pleasures of Hollywood cinema are based on voyeuristic and fetishistic forms of looking and because of the ways these looks are structured, the spectator necessarily identifies

with the male protagonist in the narrative, and thus with his objectification of the female figure via the male gaze. The construction of woman as spectacle is built into the apparatus of dominant cinema, and the spectator position which is produced by the film narrative is necessarily a masculine one. It offers the spectator the pleasurable identification with the main male protagonist, and through him the power to indirectly possess the female character displayed as sexual object for his pleasure. Every woman, of all age desired Uttam: be it as a husband, as a boy-friend/ romantic interest or as a son. In every role that he played he became the object of desire and pleasure. The look of the male character moves the narrative forward and identification with it thus implies a sense of sharing in the power of his active look. Not only women spectators desired him, his male spectators blindly imitated his hair-cut, his style and choice of dresses, even his mannerisms in wooing girls as shown on screen. Mulvey's argument has subsequently been addressed in film criticism. The first raises the question of the male figure as erotic object, the second that of the feminine subject in the narrative, and, more specifically women's active desire and the sexual aims of women in the audience in relationship to the female protagonist on the screen (Stacey, 1987).

The discussion of gendered patterns of vision inevitably opens up the larger question of identification as the key player between film and spectator, the process that organizes subjectivity in visual and narrative terms. It seems useful at this point to invoke Mary Ann Doane's distinction of at least three instances of identification operating in the viewing process: (1) identification with the representation of a person (*male* character/star); (2) recognition of particular objects, persons, or action as such (stars, narrative images); (3) identification with the "look" with oneself as the condition of perception, which Metz, in analogy with Lacan's concept of the mirror phase, has termed "primary". These psychological mechanisms and their effects can be traced through the various levels of enunciation which structure cinematic identification, interweaving textual units such as shot, sequence and strategies of narrative. Most productively feminist film theorists have taken up the debate by insisting on the centrality of sexual difference, questioning the assumption of a single or neutral spectator position constructed in hierarchically ordered, linear processes of identification. Haywood (1993) had posited and questioned whether women as spectators successfully can acquire any authority within the structure of power relations.

While Mulvey initially reduced cinematic identification to a basically active relationship with a protagonist of the same sex (i.e., male), she subsequently modified this notion with regard to the female viewer who may not only cross but also be divided by gender lines (which in turn deflects identification from the fictive tales of a stable identity). As outlined above, the difficulty of conceptualizing a female spectator has led feminists to recast the problem of identification in terms of instability, mobility, multiplicity, and temporality (Hansen, 1986). de Lauretis believes that this 'sexual differentiation' within the spectators challenges Mulvey's and other film theorists' definition of cinematic identification as masculine: 'The analogy that links identification with the look to masculinity and identification-with-the-image to femininity breaks down precisely when we think of a spectator alternating between the two' (de Lauretis, 1984, p. 142–3). She proposes an either/or model of cinematic identification, in which the female spectator benefits from a double desiring position. She claims that there are two sets of identification, only one of which is already recognized by film theory. In addition to 'the masculine, active identification with the gaze (the looks of the camera and of the male characters) and the passive, feminine identification with the image', there exists another form of identification, which involves 'the double identification with the figure of narrative movement, the mythical subject, and with the figure of narrative closure, the narrative image' (de Lauretis, 1984, p. 144). This double figural narrative identification is what anchors the subject in the narrative flow – it is also what allows the female spectator to occupy both active and passive positions of desire at once – she is a doubly desiring spectator whose desire is simultaneously 'desire for the other, and desire to be desired by the other' (de Lauretis, 1984, p. 143). Uttam's fans especially women fans not only desired Uttam as their preferred personality in courtship but also sometimes nurtured a dedicated and close resemblance to his heroines in films, be it Suchitra Sen, Sabitri Chatterjee or the like and more importantly they wanted to be the center of attraction of Uttam Kumar as well. Mukhopadhyay (2012) notes an incident where Uttam had gone for a drive and settled for a cup of tea at a road-side tea-stall. Some women were astonished to find a gentleman who had such close resemblance to the actor. Others denied saying that it was impossible for the actor to come to an ordinary tea-stall. He quickly finished his tea and got into the car waving to those women that they were correct in identifying him; he was really Uttam Kumar. This incident shows

that he was a desiring subject to the women and that he too carefully constructed and cherished the 'desire' of these women.

People in Bengal especially women are nostalgic of the star that he was. Uttam Kumar himself had paid attention to the careful nurture of his fame. The resultant was an 'image of Uttam Kumar' and 'Uttam Kumar the person.' The two were very different. He was a married man yet a desired subject for women. He celebrated his marriage with his wife every year with quite pomp and splendor yet he was linked to many of his leading ladies. He stayed with one his female co-stars in the later part of his life. The burden of an extra-marital relationship and ensuing moral squalor was never questioned. It was commonly agreed by many in his audience that he was a victim of mischief. His image never got tarnished by the deviance that he portrayed in his personal life. Any matinee idol creates an aura of respect build on the viewer's benevolence. The actor becomes spontaneous in his actions and reactions in this milieu slowly. He becomes so mesmerized by the benevolence that this benignity becomes his existence. But without this compassion of the viewers the actor feels alienated and threatened (Ghosh, 2018, p. 236-238). The fans of Uttam Kumar have not accepted any of his after-generation actor as a star equal to him and the critics of Uttam Kumar have slowly accepted the actor in him. The viewers of Uttam Kumar's era have never left the cult that was 'Uttam Kumar'.

The Gaze of men spectators, fans and co-stars

The peculiarity of Uttam Kumar was that he was an object of desire not only to women but also to men. But their object in their gaze was not the same though the masculinity of the hero as projected in films was a matter of desire to both men and women. Rituparno Ghosh once commented that Satyajit Ray was clear in his projection of the hero and his masculinity in his film *Nayak* when he gauges on Uttam's handsome physique setting the camera on his broad shoulders and starts moving from back to the front thus specifying on the muscular toned body of the hero as the first projection of Uttam Kumar, the person playing the hero. In the film *Basanta Bilap* (1973) a character Sidhu played by Chinmoy Roy is asked by his aunt to buy two tickets for a matinee show. Sidhu takes the money but leisurely strokes off the time with his girlfriend. He insists his girlfriend to call him 'Uttam Kumar' ('Amay ekbar bolo, tumi Uttam Kumar'). The craze of every girl to see any man in a romantic relation as Uttam Kumar and the men's

awareness of it can be well understood here. Uttam Kumar was not the dream of women only but also an ideal set for any man. Adhir Bagchi a renowned singer and music director in many Uttam Kumar films thinks that the late actor was an ultimate in romanticism. He had a very proportionate figure, slightly thick lips, a special brightness taken together (from excerpts of an interview with Piyali Das, *AnandaBazar Patrika*, 2 September, 2017). Hrishikesh Mukhopadhyay, a noted filmmaker had once said that other than Durgadas Bandopadhyay⁸, Uttam was a handsome man with a sweet voice and restrained acting prowess (Ghosh, 2015). But Raja Sen, another noted filmmaker had said that Uttam did not have the good looks of Durgadas Bandopadhyay but possessed an appealing presence which brought him too close to his audience. Sailen Manna a noted footballer in Bengal commented that the director Asit Sen had introduced him to Uttam Kumar in 1961-62. He had a wonderful physique, broad chest and was handsome (Ibid)

Shankarlal Bhattacharyya, a columnist and reporter analyzed Uttam Kumar's popularity after death, saying that every woman was his fan but his haircut, his dress, his smile and his emotional outbursts and romantic glances and deep and intense looks into the eyes of his heroines were copied by men⁹ (Gooptu, 2010) Young Bengali men across class including the local loafers stepped smoothly into the actor's shoes and dreamt of romancing girls as he did on screen. Uttam Kumar had a broad popular appeal which could not be contained within middle-class domesticity. Uttam Kumar was undoubtedly the expensive Bengali star of his times.

The Gaze of the Woman spectators and co-stars

Women were not far behind in chronicling their vision of the actor. Both men and women were attracted to his physique and voice but women looked at something more. Noted music director, Ashima Mukhopadhyay, in an interview to a correspondent of *Ananda Bazar Patrika* once said, she being a Suchitra Sen

⁸ Durgadas Bandopadhyay was an actor, star and a 'matinee idol' of Bengali cinema before Uttam Kumar. He was called 'Douglas Fairbanks of the East'. <https://www.anandabazar.com/supplementary/patrika/some-unknown-information-about-bengali-matinee-idol-durgadas-bannerjee-1.675408> retrieved on 29 September 2020 at 7 p.m.

⁹ Posted by Alakananda Dasgupta in Uttam Kumar, Suchitra Sen-The Golden Pair, Facebook, 21 November 2020

fan did not feel any romantic pull towards Uttam Kumar when she first met him in person but acknowledged that he was 'really handsome' and that God had gifted him with all qualities that can make a man attractive to women. Supriya Chowdhury, a noted actress and a heroine of many Uttam Kumar starrers and his muse once remembered an incident where a group of women were awe-struck at Uttam Kumar at the lunch break during shooting of a film. The incident was so uncomfortable for both that they could not have their lunch in front of these women (Ghosh, 2015). Supriya Chowdhury in another interview had said that Uttam was like 'fire'. He was not conventionally good-looking but his sex appeal was so binding on others that it created a desire in every woman to have him as their desired man (Mukhopadhyay, 2006, p.36). Uttam too enjoyed the gaze and the unrestrained craziness that women fans and spectators displayed. Mukhopadhyay (2006) quotes an incident where a producer did not want to give Uttam Kumar the fees he had demanded and questioned his price in the market. Uttam took him to an under-graduate college in Kolkata and stepped out of the car to buy cigarettes from a shop nearby. The girls around the area flocked towards him as soon as they recognized who he was. Later Uttam was paid according to his demands for this eye-opener (p. 12). Mukhopadhyay also remembers an incident at a charity function organized by Films Production Assistance Guild in Mahajati Sadan in Kolkata. The police found it difficult to organize the crowd and the mob went crazy as soon as Uttam Kumar arrived. He heard an appeal of a woman and to his amazement found her at some height. He asked her how she had climbed so high to which she replied to everyone's amusement that she was standing on her husband's shoulders to view the hero of her heart. This amused Uttam Kumar too (Ibid). Uttam Kumar had also carefully nurtured his image of a star. Ranjan Bandopadyay, journalist and critic wrote that once in an interview, Uttam Kumar had revealed to him that the biggest quality a matinee idol should have was to keep himself away from public view as much as possible. Uttam Kumar had given Bandopadhyay his own instance by saying that no journalist could get dates for his interview too easily and also cited that the audience bought tickets to see him on screen. If he was easily available to them then they might not buy tickets for his films any longer. He, thus, disclosed his secret of maintaining the image of the 'matinee idol' that he had been successful in keeping alive.

The woman co-actors of Uttam were also awe-struck at the hero. A co-star of Uttam Kumar, Sandhya Ray remembers her first encounter with Uttam. He was already a star by the time she had started to act with him. In her first film shoot in *Mayamrigo* (1960) she had forgotten her dialogues while looking into his eyes while giving a shot. The same happened to her in *Bhrantibilash* (1963). In *Khana Baraha* (1981), the sequence where she wipes off Baraha's (played by Uttam Kumar) feet with her hair, the shot was too long as she had been lost in her thoughts of the opportunity of being able to do so (Mukhopadhyay, 2006, p. 68-70). Sumitra Mukherjee another co-star and the last leading woman with whom Uttam Kumar had his last sequence before he died, remembered her first encounter with the hero. She said she was so nervous that she could not deliver her lines, as her heart was pumping fast and shivering with excitement to be able to work with Uttam Kumar as a female lead. Lalita Chattopadhyay a fan of Uttam Kumar who later turned into actress once said, "Once I was in love with him and realized (later) that it was not romance but infatuation...he was an attraction, like a magnet, of extraordinary presence and acting. He was not good-looking in the conventional terms but had some flaws...but was flawless in his Bengaliness. This is the reason why viewers received him as a son, a husband, a father and a lover. He fitted in any role. It is for this that he is 'Uttam Kumar' the Mahanayak (the ultimate hero)." Sabitri Chatterjee, a renowned actress and a heroine in many Uttam starrers once in an interview said Uttam had a sex-appeal that transcended his characterizations in films. Be it the role of a servant in *Khoka Babur Protyabartan* (1960) or in *Saptapadi* (1961) he had an appeal that was created by him, well-practiced at home. This infallible attraction was such that all women viewers married or not, desired this man; all mothers wanted a son like him. There were many woman viewers who nurtured a secret desire to hug him like his heroine Suchitra Sen did in many films. This magic called Uttam Kumar is actually a common man's love of fame collectively spawned into a charisma that is Uttam Kumar (Robbar, 21 July, 2019; p. 22-23). Gooptu (2010) writes that Uttam Kumar had carefully cultivated the image of a respectful and cultured boy next-door whose domesticated masculinity made his sexuality unthreatening. It was this element of being domesticated coupled with ordinariness of discourse that produced such strong identification on the part of the Bengali public especially women. Himangshu Chattopadhyay (2004) writes:

Our acquaintance with Uttam Kumar and Suchitra Sen happened quite early in life. We were those born in 1950s. There was not a single day in our lives that they were not discussed and this was especially true among women. Young men styled themselves to be Uttam Kumar, for women it was fashion to the likes of Suchitra Sen...Bengali men were earnest Uttam Kumars in search of their Suchitra Sens. Uttam and Suchitra Sen pervaded every corner of Bengali life, the bedrooms, kitchens, drawing rooms....

Not only his women co-stars but also the contemporary woman actors of Bengali cinema think Uttam Kumar to be the ultimate hero. Swastika Mukhopadhyay, in an interview had said that she would have not gained her consciousness once given the opportunity to act with the actor. She said that the feeling of acting with him would have had such impact on her that she might have died. Paoli Dam, another actor of contemporary times echoed the same emotion and called it a dream or a fantasy to be able to act with Uttam Kumar. Uttam Kumar is considered the ultimate man of choice till now. He is living on in the heart of his followers with his charm and longing.

Conclusion

The gaze on Uttam Kumar by both men and women revolved around his physique, masculinity and his romantic image as portrayed in films. The fandom was such that Uttam Kumar was seldom evaluated as the person who acted but seen as the one who the spectators desired him to be. So, his liaisons with his co-stars never affected him or his star value. The stardom of Uttam Kumar had reached a peak (1950s to 1970s) at a time when India had consolidated an independent status but was persistent with the overshadowed postcolonial subjects, a time when Bengal witnessed a decline in national politics that brought about an erosion of Bengali life marked by refugee crisis, growing unemployment and food shortage. The Bengali *bhadralok* had been a part of the national politics and nationalist movement had steadily lost his ground and a sense of being historical agent. Gooptu (2010) points out that Bengali cinema of this time allowed the middle-class Bengalees an optimistic self-image through the emotions generated by Uttam Kumar's films. The intellectuals were faced with the challenge of burying Uttam Kumar and negotiating their intellectual objectives while Uttam's supporters transferred the authenticity of his acting as

the main tool and identity for advancing the values and ideals of the Bengali middle class. His star-struck audience remained dedicated to him and to his pursuits and carried his fame to the future generation. Till date his make-up room at New Theatre's studio is maintained as though he could walk in at any time. Most film makers and lovers of cinema agree that no other actor in Bengal has ever been able to generate the kind of mass hysteria that Uttam attracted. Such love, admiration and respect that a star has received so far in Bengal is rare. It is also rare perhaps at the national level. The stars of Hindi films, Raj Kapoor (1924- 1986), Dev Anand (1923-2011), Dilip Kumar (1922- if we think of the contemporaries of Uttam Kumar in Indian Film industry- had not been able to create, sustain and mesmerize the common viewers for long as did Uttam Kumar in Bengal withstanding the limited regional market of films in Bengali as compared to the larger cosmopolitan structure and demands of the market for Hindi. The male gaze persists due to the power structures behind it, and these structures generally do not support a gaze that women can look through. The star lives in the heart of his followers, both women and men.

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Power, Patriarchy and Women's Agency in Microfinance

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Abstract:

Technological innovation and environmental degradation have been prime agents for the existence and altering of social systems, historically world over. If latter provides basic resources for survival and sustenance and builds essential link between man and nature for human existence; the other provides tools (machines, industries etc.) with which to exploit resources for the same by earning livelihood (central to work). There are the changes seen and experienced not only in material world in terms of change in economic production from agriculture to industry, but also in terms of gender relations, with respect to women and work; especially because their work has been considered as informal and soft menial household work. Various theorists have studied this relationship between women and work (especially in the context of rural agriculture and allied activities), by framing an essential link between women, production and technological innovations. The paper focuses on the changing nature of work in relation to women's participation in agriculture, as central to development. Then it looks at women empowerment thorough microfinance assistances.

Keywords-*Women empowerment, technology, patriarchy, women's agency, microfinance.*

SPECIFICATION OF THE STUDY

Work has always been a source of empowerment, expression and extension of self, that one can potentially explore especially in the case of women, be it in a public or private sphere (as per the crude distinction that is often made). Attached with it also comes, not only the ability to work but also a) carrying forward or challenging various social, cultural values; as well as b) aspect of gaining political power of decision making. These are the critical factors, both external and internal for women to be placed in a position where they are.

As one can infer from the connection between capitalism and development that it is a project carried out under strong gender ideology, the persistence of western patriarchy's economic assumptions are aimed at profits and subjugates the more humane assumptions of economics as the provision of sustenance, creating a crisis of poverty rooted in ecological devastation.

The thought that the expansion and diffusion of the development process would improve women's economic position proved to be wrong. Development not only led to the creation of wealth but also created poverty and dispossession. Earlier tribal, women and peasants were fighting for liberation from colonialism and now development has similar colonizing effects on them. The development process has led to various degradation and loss of political control over nature's sustenance base. As the burden of work for the women have increased, it has affected their health, nutrition and educational status. Development has destroyed productivity and limited nature's rejuvenating ability. Development has led to more violent forms of oppression like patriarchy and gender subordination. The assumption that has been made is that nature is unproductive and production takes place only when mediated by technologies for commodity production, even when such technologies destroy life. It is a stage not of development but rather underdevelopment but maldevelopment.

Development in the present sense is thus a term synonymous with women's underdevelopment which simply means the domination of man over nature and women. The impact of it is that it sets a process of exploitation, inequality, injustice and violence that reduces women from creators of life to being resources in the fragmented model of maldevelopment. Such increasing maldevelopment and ecological destruction creates poverty that touches women most severely, as they are the "poorest of the poor" within family structure. This sort of development has brought back two sorts of poverty. Poverty as subsistence, and misery as deprivation.

Thus, in order to re-establish a workable and positive link between the aforementioned links, one needs to revive the feminine principle as a non-violent, non-gendered and humanly inclusive alternative for development to be truly development in the given paradigm.

At the turn of 21st century, the world as a whole has experienced a massive change as well as a carrying forward of some forms of traditional institutional relationships in its socio-cultural correlations especially in economic organizations. The main anchors of this transformation are two interrelated processes of interaction between technological innovation and environment degradation (with societal variables and its impact thereupon on one of the central aspects of human society – economic structure). We all have witnessed some transformative changes caused by technological advancement factors in terms of shift from traditional agriculture, cattle breeding to modern factory industry. At the same time claims are being made with regard to equal share of impact of technological orientation (under capitalistic tendencies) of economic activity on the ecological downturn and environmental degradation, affecting not only agriculture and allied services (one of the main source of subsistence for more than half of the population in developing and less developing region) but also the gender relationships of production and differential work patterns between men and women, especially the latter in terms of livelihood and work.

In the capitalist scenario, increasing emphasis has been given on the impact on men's work and labor, inherently creating and accentuating traditional conception of sexual division of labor based on physical hard work of men and soft domestic tasks of women, which historically has never been considered formal work outside private sphere even though they are involved in agricultural and allied task on the borders of private domestic sphere; with a patriarchal sense of private property. In such a case, a new fresh gender approach to 'work' and 'labor' with wider socio-economic-political-ecological structure is necessary to bring to the fore women's unheard, invisible exploitation as well as women's contribution to economy so that the exploitations can be curbed and its impact felt both in the economic and the ecological sense.

It is this latter relationship that has been increasingly scanned by various feminist thinkers, ecologists like Vandana Shiva as well as many development practitioners, to ascertain work and ecology as new parameters of establishing and analyzing women's relationship to the nature, economy (work) and society at large, as they believe that it can help restore the ecological balance. This approach becomes an important analysis and provides a totally different framework of defining conceptualization of work, technological innovation and

environmental degradation in the context of women's participation and its impact on them. Women since time immemorial have enjoyed their own privileged position in relation to nature, ecological preservation – known as earth goddess, found a source of sustenance in nature where their prime role was to sustain the family through basic household work, that included collecting grains and planting trees on the farms for daily livelihood. So, if nature is technologically manipulated or is a victim of environment degradation, it directly affects not only sources of livelihood (work or culture) for women folk but also their entire source of sustenance, which then becomes a reason for their further subjugation in society. Their attempt to work was and is never recognized as formal organized work even though the level and amount of work done by the rural women folk is much more arduous and painstaking in context of agriculture and the allied services, than their counterparts who either migrate to towns or are involved in the same work but have a differential aspect in terms of wages. The underlying premise to this aspect is not only that the conception of 'work' in the context of women and men work differently, but also the social-political-cultural framework of property relation (ownership of property and its use) within which the changing economic relationships of production and labor operate.

Feminization of poverty is an essential characteristic of a collectivist patriarchal society such as the one prevailing in India. At the non-affluent level of social stratum, comprising poor and disadvantaged women, self-help groups and government programs like the Swarna Jayanti Shahari Rozgar Yojana (SJSRY), West Bengal Swanirbhar Sahayak Prakalpo. (WBSSP) Swami Vivekananda Swanirbhar Karmasanasthan Prakalpa, (SVSKP) schemes are sources of financial, emotional and practical support. There are employment generation schemes in India, which aims at uplifting Below Poverty Level (BPL) women with a view to provide gainful employment to the urban unemployed or underemployed by encouraging the setting up of self-employment ventures or provision of wage employment. This paper seeks to analyze the role of such microfinance programs and self-help groups in the socio-economic empowerment of women.

Poverty has traditionally been defined in terms of income or expenditure and can be viewed in relative or absolute terms. It is also clear that in several societies households are not standardized units, since within household, women

and girl child often tend to be relatively undernourished. Gender constitutes the most profound differentiating division. Diana Pearce coined the term "feminization of poverty" which implies a new phenomenon, "women have always experienced more poverty than men". On the other hand, female labor force participation is highest among the poorest households in countries such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh where social norms constraint women to very insecure and poor working condition in the informal sector. Ensuring equity in women rights to land, poverty, capital assets, wages and livelihood opportunities would impact women's empowerment positively. Attitude of the women to accept their status as an unequal member of the family and society needs to be modulated. In fact it needs to be shown that she is an example of sustaining herself and her family. Based on the experiences of Bangladesh, Ghana, Mexico, and Bolivia – microfinance institutions can introduce several strategies that can make a positive contribution to women's empowerment and a holistic transformation to society including business training, discussion of social issues and leadership, ownership and control of credit institutions. But before these long-term goals, providing poorest women with the micro credit facilities to come out of hunger is the priority. Empowerment is a latent concept it does not lend itself to direct measurement.

The purpose of this study is to assess the impact of microfinance schemes on empowerment of marginalized women. This study will examine the linkages through which microfinance exerts a positive impact on women. Such groups use participatory processes to include women in the decision-making processes as well as provide opportunities to share knowledge, common experiences, and solutions to problems. Through their participation, members help themselves and others by gaining knowledge and information, and by obtaining and providing support to one another. The impact of such policies and the practices engendered by such microcredit programmes are very interesting to evaluate and learn from. It also addresses the immediate need of poverty alleviation through employment and thereby income generation. Not to mention the long run goal of redressing the role of women in the economy as well as their status in the society. Tangible achievements such as employment and higher wage earnings by the targeted population serve as proxies for qualitative and largely immeasurable aspects of women's empowerment and the formation of crucial

social capital of the economy. This achievement is particularly remarkable when perceived in the backdrop of the Marxist framework of looking at women's labor.

According to Engels (1884), women were exploited by men due to the monogamous structure of family and their isolation from the social-productive processes. The convention dates back to the Roman era. Monogamous marriage symbolizes the subjugation of the women to the men and the first-class possession along with private property and slaves. Moving forward in time, in the current day after women have been liberated in the labor market, the proletariat marriage remains monogamous. The legalistic stand of equating men and women is analogous to equating the proletariat and the bourgeoisie in labor contract. Freedom from marriage would dissolve the two basic problematic features of monogamy through the indissolubility of marriage as such, and the consequential supremacy of man. However, full freedom of marriage can be propagated only when there is abolition of the capitalist system of production and of the property relations created by it which exert a powerful influence on the choice of a marriage partner. The Marxist line of thought regards women as tools of exploitation for production and reproduction. Women herein are only allowed to have their basic needs as gifts from their spouses (male) to maintain their labor power. Women are taken as unproductive as they are needed to form surplus production and are engaged in (pro)creating items of productive value. The work of women is not necessarily confined to domestic household activities and child-rearing but also extend to working in farms in rearing cattle, and doing the unpleasant non-mechanical tasks allocated in agriculture as seen from official statistics in France and Morocco. Shalini Grover (2009) in her accounts of conjugality of a lower-caste woman in Delhi, describes a woman who had to constantly shift between her *pihar* and *sasural* for milking the cows in her natal home.

Since women's work has never been considered as a productive activity, her economic status puts her at a disadvantage. Hence, the utmost need arises for analyzing the contribution of self-help groups and microfinance institutions in enabling innovative and effective ways to empower women in society through their communities and families. Women are not generally given enough power to utilize funds or start a business for their welfare. Here microfinance plays a

key role by providing women with funds i.e. loans so that they can start their own enterprises and take care of their families as well.

Mayoux (1998) suggests, empowerment is a process of internal change, or power within, augmentation of capabilities, or power to, and collective mobilization of women, and when possible men, or power with, to the purpose of questioning and changing the subordination connected with gender, or power over. Empowerment can begin with personal empowerment that can exist within the existing social order. This kind of empowerment would correspond to the right to make one's own choices, to increased autonomy and to control over economic resources. Self-confidence and self-esteem also play an essential role in change. Empowerment signifies increased participation in decision-making and it is through this process that people feel themselves to be capable of making decisions and the right to do so (Kabeer, 2001). Personal empowerment can lead to changes in existing institutions and norms, however, without the collective empowerment the personal empowerment and choices will remain limited.

Historically, advancements in technology have added to marginalizing the position of women in the labor market rather than improving their status. Whatever is produced in the family for household consumption has potential monetary value, most of which is not used for calculating GNP of the nation since these are taken as self-consumption activities. Most of the operations of turning raw materials into commercial products are now industrialized and officially considered in computing the national product. Typically, the services provided by wives (without pay) are not commercialized and hence not included in the productive or value-added activities. The fallacy lies in the fact that when women work within the family, they are unpaid and when they work outside the family they are paid for the same services. This is also inclusive of the controversial debates in feminism in the bio-politics of sexual division of work. It must also be noted that with the rise of globalization, women have increasingly started producing goods beyond self-consumption, but their wages are all used up in the payment of child care and remaining taxes thus rendering them poorer, as compared to men (Engels 1884). It is noteworthy that the exploitation of women is life-long and they are exploited by the patriarchal structure and subdued by society with no social inclusiveness in terms of valorizing their paid and unpaid services.

THEORITICAL UNDERPINNINGS

Here two branched yet interlinked conceptual analysis will be made in order to understand the links and how their marginalized position is created by external force of capitalism -

- A. WOMEN – PROPERTY RIGHTS (labor, tools, land) – SEXUAL DOL – WORK (ECONOMY- AGRICULTURE)
- B. WOMEN – ECOLOGY/ENVIORNEMENT DEGRADATION – TECHNOLGICAL INNOVATION

Women, in a society is conferred with a social position, status in the society which determines her social, economic, and political entitlements in that society as opposed to men, be it with regard to family, property relations, decision making, work for livelihood. Underneath this lies the prime conception of sexual DOL (Division of Labor). Division of labor has been a concept which was explained by various theorists, primarily Marx. The concept of DOL connotes that in a given society different sections, as per age and gender particularly are entitled to do particular specialized task (work at the expense of giving up certain amount of labor power) as per their abilities and capabilities. For instance, in traditional societies, men were the hunters as they were considered to be strong enough to do physically demanding task, and women were entitled to look after homestead, family and the farm. The main reason for such an arrangement in the society was to avoid conflict of roles (status and equality) so as the community could function well with such a division of labor. This is one of the basic crude ways of defining the beginnings of DOL. However, the reality and its functioning are not as simple and free of polemics as it appears from above statements.

Maria Mies in her article titled 'Social Origins of the Sexual Division of Labor' (1981) has attempted to revive the debate of the search for the social origins of unequal and hierarchical relationships in general and the asymmetric division of labor between men and women in particular. This argument is directly against the dominant positivist, functionalist and evolutionist school of thought who have so far restricted themselves to some biological determinism of DOL. This search for the social origins of this relationship is part of the political strategy of women's emancipation (Reiter, 1977).

At the heart of her argument is the revival of the debate on sexual division of labor from the dominant biological determinism which naturally attributed the conception of oppression and dominance based on biologically given physical attributes of the ability to work in particular, that has led to gender hierarchy, where men are considered superior in showing their maximum physical abilities at work. Men are considered more hard-headed than women who are attributed more with soft skills, with abilities to look after the private sphere/household/ look after the reproductively of the family than work out in the public sphere of employment/ for collecting sustenance for economic productivity. And even if they work outside home in allied activities like cattle breeding, grain thrashing, dung making, it is not considered production for livelihood/ formal work/ public sphere of wage-earning work; rather considered as what Marx calls as production for life and not livelihood, the notion which Maria Meise has critiqued.

A section of ecofeminists called 'deep ecologists' have defended women's relationship with nature recognizing its value not solely for its usefulness to human beings but that nature has an inherent value, seeking to establish a condescending link between ecology as female representation 'mother earth', a source of nurturing, conservation, providing source of sustenance. Ecofeminists explore the connections between women and nature in culture, economy, religion, politics, literature or iconography, and address the parallels between the oppression of nature and the oppression of women. As a result of technological development and progression women are often relegated to a subordinate position in the social structure, which is wrongly attributed as a given condition by nature. There is no social element of oppression, subjugation attached to nature. Too often this concept has been used to explain social inequalities or exploitation relations as inborn and hence, beyond the scope of social change. This further translates also into the conception of labor for the same reasons. In fact, under its influence, often the aspect of women's work – as a labor (or labor power) is overlooked or has never been seriously considered. Women's work both in giving birth and raising children (production for life), along with other domestic chores and contribution in allied agriculture activity do not appear as work or labor. The concept of labor or work is usually reserved for men's productive work under capitalist conditions, which means work for the production (also of surplus labor), though women also perform such surplus-

value generating labor. Under capitalism the concept of labor is generally used with a male or patriarchal bias, where women are considered only as a menial domestic counterpart.

LOCATING PATRIARCHY IN THE SEXUAL DIVISION OF LABOR

This description could be used to categorize the sexual DOL as a transitional category between human work and natural activity. The relationship between male and female laborers or workers is one of domination and even exploitation, which is another aspect of this notion that is concealed. The term "exploitation" in this context refers to the separation and systematization that have occurred between the two categories as producers and consumers on a more or less regular basis. It is interesting to inquire into the reasons why and how this division of labor became a relationship of dominance and exploitation, an asymmetric, hierarchal relationship.

Maria Mies makes an effort to confront the late 20th-century political issues of Marxian thought. She interprets Marx's book methodologically in light of contemporary anthropology and what she refers to as "object-relations."

Mies traces the blame of such a conceptualization to Marx's writing of *Capital on Labor*. For him, 'productive labor' is one in which there is a change of natural matter, and a production is produced for human use, for the satisfaction of human needs.

Labor is, in the first place, a process in which both man and Nature participate, and in which man of his own accord starts, regulates, and controls the material re-actions between himself and Nature. He opposes himself to Nature as one of her own forces, setting in motion arms and legs, head and hands, the natural forces of his body, in order to appropriate Nature's productions in a form adapted to his own wants. By thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature. He develops his slumbering powers and compels them to act in obedience to his sway. We are not now dealing with those primitive instinctive forms of labor that remind us of the mere animal. An immeasurable interval of time separates the state of things in which a man brings his labor-power to market for sale as a commodity,

from that state in which human labor was still in its first instinctive stage. We pre-suppose labor in a form that stamps it as exclusively human. A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labor-process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the laborer at its commencement. He not only effects a change of form in the material on which he works, but he also realizes a purpose of his own that gives the law to his *modus operandi*, and to which he must subordinate his will. And this subordination is no mere momentary act. Besides the exertion of the bodily organs, the process demands that, during the whole operation, the workman's will be steadily in consonance with his purpose. This means close attention. The less he is attracted by the nature of the work, and the mode in which it is carried on, and the less, therefore, he enjoys it as something which gives play to his bodily and mental powers, the more close his attention is forced to be. (Marx: 1887)

However, in the Capitalist production, this concept of productive labor is narrowed down to mean only the production of surplus value for the realization of capital. According to Miles this sort of conceptualization is a result of narrowness. By way of this conceptualization, Marx has theoretically contributed to the removal of all 'nonproductive labor (that is, non-wage labor, including most of women's labor) from public visibility. Marx did not diagnose the sexual division of labor, the women's work at home and ignored women's reproductive labor. While discussing use and exchange values, Marx argues that the labor behind creating use-values (commodities that serves a useful purpose) cannot be termed as social labor. Miles argues that, this general production of life or subsistence production – mainly performed by non-wage labor of women and others – constitutes the perennial basis upon which capitalist productive labor can be built. She considers the capitalist production process as one which comprises both the (exploitation of) non-wage laborer, because of which wage labor is possible and the waged labor itself. Thus, she considers it pertinent to search the origins of the hierarchical sexual DOL, but recognizes that it should

not be limited to a moment in history, but one needs to answer this question by developing materialist, historical, non – biologicistic concepts of men and women and their relations to nature and history. Sexual division of labor is not a problematic situation existing only within the structure of the family but rather is a structural problem of the whole society – guided by conventional culture, values, rules and norms.

Maria Mies argues that it is important to make a distinction between women's and men's appropriation of nature, as we know that they are not biologically given but rather a result of a long social historic process. Women also had to secure the daily bread, not only for themselves and their children, but also for the men if they (men and/ or women) had no luck on their hunting expeditions. It has been found that gathering of plants, food, animals etc. were activities in place right from the beginning as the collective activity of women. It has been proved conclusively, particularly by the critical research of feminist scholars, that the survival of mankind has been due much more to 'women – the gatherer' than to 'man the hunter'. Even among the existing hunting and gatherers, women provide 60- 80 percent of the daily food, also in the early mode of production there was enormous increase in the productivity of female labor which according to most authors made the production of a surplus possible for the first time in history. Fishers says, they collected surplus grains and nuts in gathering stage. Also, the technological precondition for the collection of surpluses was the invention of containers, jars etc. whereas men contributed only a small portion by hunting (Lee and de Vore, 1976, quoted in Fishers,1979). Although women also participated in hunting the man the hunter model has been and is still used as an explanation for the advancement of the causes of social inequalities. Feminist scholars challenged this model, as a sexist projection of modern, capitalists and imperialist social relations into pre-history and earlier history. This projection serves to legitimize existing relations of exploitation, the dominance of men over women and establish the dominance as universal and timeless. Despite the awareness we are not able to prevent the establishment of hierarchical and exploitative relations between the sexes that persists.

We can conclude that the various forms of asymmetric, hierarchical division of labor which have developed throughout history up to present where the whole world is now structured into one system of unequal division of labor

under the dictates of capital accumulation is based on the social paradigm of the man predatory hunter-warrior and this hunter-warrior without producing anything himself, was able by means of arms to appropriate and subordinate other producers, their productive forces and their products.

This extractive, non-reciprocal, exploitative object – relation to nature, first established between men and women and men and nature, remained the model for all other patriarchal modes of production, including capitalism which gradually developed its most sophisticated and most generalized form. The characteristic of this model is that those who control the production process and the products are not themselves producers, but appropriators. Their so-called productivity pre-supposes the existence and the subjection of others and as seen in in the last analysis, also the female producers.

What emerges from this basic concept of sexual DOL are other main components which are essential parts to the understanding of the theoretical links of Work, Labor, and rise of Private Property under capitalism, technology, and women.

Marx used the expression ‘appropriation’ of the natural matter to conceptualize ‘work’ in its broadest sense. He saw work as the appropriation of nature for the satisfaction of human needs. Labor in the first place is a process in which both man and nature participate, and is a process in which man on his own accord starts controlling and regulating the materials of nature – with some tools (technology) which changes the entire nature from ecology to economics. By thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature. The labor process, in its elementary form is, according to Marx, a conscious action with a view to producing use values. In a wider sense, it is the appropriation of natural substances for human requirements. This exchange of matter between human beings and nature is the everlasting nature-imposed condition of human existence common to every historical phase. (Capital : vol 1, 1887)

As with the development of Capitalism, the private property system developed as opposed to communal ownership of property, primarily land, that had existed in earlier epochs. The land now came under direct individual ownership which meant differential ownership and usage rights of the powerful

and the subordinate structures. Friedrich Engels was the first to explicitly talk of its emergence in his work titled 'Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State' (1884; 1993, 1999, 2000). According to him, the determining factor in history is in the last resort the production and reproduction of immediate life. The former pertains to sources of labor for subsistence and the latter pertains to reproduction of human life, i.e, family. He brings in economic and historical materialistic explanations when it comes to patriarchy and private property. He adds that the monogamous patriarchal family was the first form of family based not on natural but on economic conditions, namely on the victory of private property over original naturally developed, common ownership. And it is system of private property that becomes the sole reason of estrangement and alienation of man from man, and man from nature, and the root cause of all violence.

Technological innovations thus have been at the heart of the expansion of capitalism and lies at the center of conception of work and labor. They are tools for productivity, as well as weapons for destruction. With more complex demands in productivity and to meet competitive market demands, technological progress has been tremendous in recent years in almost all the sectors of the society. It is important to point out here that it is not that these technologies per se that are responsible for the severance between man and nature, between man and man and man and woman, but that these technologies are carefully engineered by those who possess the economic powers to develop them and own them to serve their own ends. The emergence of a specialized and efficient technology implies the possibility of establishing relationships of exploitations and dominance. Hence, it is important to see their role beyond their existence as mere instruments.

In the process of the interaction of these components with each other, they have an immense capacity to change the external, ecological setting around them, which has increasingly contributed to environmental degradation with the establishment of modern industry, confiscation of natural land as private property etc. and in turn altered man – nature, man – man, man –woman relationship in social – economic – political terms, especially in context of women empowerment as women share a bond with Nature as nurturers . However, the ancient identity of nature as nurturing mother is undergoing change. Mother earth which was central to the organic world is now undermined by scientific

revolution and the rise of market-oriented culture. The new mechanical philosophy of the mid-17th century has achieved its ramification on the society and self in terms of the metaphor – machine. Reality redefined in this way led to the achievement of control over nature, society, and self.

It is in this context that we need to question the relationship between technology – ecology and women work. We find that technology has both positive and negative consequences. Positive in the sense that Technology can be crucial in supporting women's participation in higher-value activities in global agrifood chains, for instance helping women in carrying, packet their products, in activities related to agriculture and other allied activities like cutting etc. It contributes to increasing their productivity; the negative impact is larger – more technological innovations mean taking away their productive power replaced by machines, especially in those area of agriculture which demand elaborate manual labor, and those carried out by women outside their domestic sphere. Hence, more these new technological devices are deployed the more they take away major opportunity to expending women's labor power thus, again relegating them to the position of subordination, in socio-cultural setting of the society.

Another major negative consequence is with respect to its attack on ecology itself. For instance, changing the nature of seeds, cutting down of trees which is main sustenance of agricultural work for establishing industry poses threat to livelihood. As most of the work carried out by women in agriculture is for sustenance and surplus, if the work is taken away for them, it directly affects their livelihood and places them further into marginal position. This problem is further exacerbated when women are given little or no rights over property ownership of the agricultural land, the tools used for work leading to less decision making power of women in the area of workforce even though their participation is high. Thus the system becomes unequal, hierarchical, exploitative again. The definition of 'Work' for women which is more holistic, inclusive and context specific must be redefined in order to understand these exploitations and achieve empowerment.

UNDERSTANDING WOMENS AGENCY VIA MICRO-FINANCE

Social exclusion where certain groups are discriminated against and are not allowed to enjoy the same rights as the rest of the population based on race,

religion, gender etc. is widely seen as contributing significantly to poverty. A number of studies speak of robust economic decay characterized by increasing inequalities between social groups based on caste/ tribe, gender disparities, or urban-rural divides. Finance can always help the poor in climbing out of poverty. It is evident from the following examples discussed here that access to finance endows the poor with individual choice, economic freedom and dignity to carry out their economic plans. Further, access to financial facilities like savings, remittances, and insurance can help the poor in insuring themselves against periods of low income and maintain their consumption standards via savings. Research shows that the poor people value financial service which help them spend at one time, the income they have earned at other times.

The best-known example of microfinance institution is the Grameen Bank by Muhammad Yunus in 1976. The Grameen Bank opened the path to various modern microfinance mechanisms which promoted healthy and efficient lending to the poor population. There were numerous institutions that started supporting Grameen Bank and launched their own microfinance programs. The focus shifted from making profits to helping poor people. The financial services that were launched ranged from giving simple credit, saving account, housing loans, consumer loans and also various insurance services. In parallel with the growth of microfinance sector a number of upper-level organizations were created which gathered a lot of funds and knowledge from the people and about the people (Sinclair, 2006). The influence of microfinance on poverty is however a subject of controversy. There have been arguments that microfinance does have a positive impact on eradicating poverty (Fraser, 2007). We shall consider the differential effects of microfinance on the overall reduction of poverty and the empowerment of women in particular.

IS MICROFINANCE REALLY PRO-POOR?

MFIs are often alleged to generally focus on the monetary aspects of microfinance that entails the provision of an efficient financial market which is based on an economic, minimalist approach for targeting poverty. But of late many NGOs that have strategic alliances with MFIs, like the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India and the Indonesian Welfare Association

in Java that help in addressing empowerment issues of the non-economic aspects of microfinance like gender issues, human rights, justice, health issues and illiteracy etc. However, whether these issues make these NGO-MFIs complementary or competitive is a debate in microfinance literature (Remenyi, 2000).

MFIs also face the dilemma of retaining their old clients who have climbed out of the poverty line rather than letting them go into the hands of the commercial financial markets (Remenyi, 2000). Most prominent MFIs like the Grameen Bank, ASA, BRI and BRAC retain their old clients who are now Above Poverty Line (APL) for repeat business as they think of their successful clients as assets to be nurtured. But this policy is in direct conflict with these MFIs' policy of targeting the poorest of the poor and may misplace their resources away from potential new clients who are Below Poverty Line.

The identification of the poor is a very cumbersome process as the poor may often overstate or understate their household incomes (Todd, 1996). Thus, myriad cost-effective strategies on identifying the poor are done based on asset ownership, number of animals owned in the village etc., and based on these stratifiers the poorest are put at the bottom of the poverty pyramid and the richest are put at the top in order to decide the potential clientele for the MFIs (Remenyi, 2000).

Microfinance addresses poor people who do not have the reach to monetary services other than a few bankrollers and financiers who charge very high interest rates. The foremost benefit of microcredit is to provide cheap capital to all the poor individuals who cannot afford capital at a higher interest rate. The capital provided by these institutions can be used for micro-entrepreneurship and smoothening cash flows. In this way microfinance helps the poor to safeguard themselves and protect themselves against risks.

But critics have pointed out that microfinance is not very efficient in reaching poor people. They have pointed out that individuals who got loans through microfinance are generally the better off among the poor and so it helps only those individuals who do not really need the financial support (Ditcher 2006). A few MFIs give money to only those businesses which are specifically

income-generating projects and not for anything else and are therefore termed as microenterprises. They focus only on business creation and acquisition of assets.

Microfinance's targeted customers are by and large men and women who live in distant areas, and are destitute and often ignorant. These features make it unbearable for MFIs to work like the usual financial establishments. The specific constraints in relation to lending to the poor are recounted in *The Microfinance Handbook* (Paul 2007):

1. Very small loan quantities entail in amounts the same management costs as lending large.
2. Difficulty in obtaining information from clients is sometimes due to the language barriers presented by the poor who speak in local dialects.
3. Difficulty in physically reaching the clients.
4. Most often the poor have no tangible collateral for the loan.

The last three characteristics take the risk of the MFI loan not being repaid on time, which considerably also increases the cost per euro/rupee lent (Paul 2007). Hence, in order to be sustainable or at least not to lose too much money, MFIs had to be as cost-effective as possible and develop methodologies that reduce the risks of delayed repayments.

The truth, however, seems to lie in some place between these two viewpoints. True income-generating loans are not effective in the case of the very poor, unskilled people, but these loans always help smooth consumption (Ditcher, 2006). Moreover, many MFIs take action to reach the poorest and unskilled, for instance by providing skill drills in addition to more classical finance services. We may look at the example of The Foundation Carjaval in Columbia. (Ledgerwood,1999). Besides, figures from credible studies provide proof that microcredit has advantageous effects on the economy at a broader level. In Bangladesh where microcredit is more widespread than in any other country, Khandker (2005) conducted a study that led to the following conclusions:

“Each additional 100 taka of credit increased total annual household expenditures by more than 20 taka.” Moreover, “Moderate poverty in all villages declined by 17 percentage points – 18 points in program villages and 13 points in non-program villages (Khandker, 2005, p. 283).”

Microfinance is also reported to have had a positive impact on the features like child education in the MFIs' customers' families and infant/maternal mortality (more predominantly through better nourishment (Dunford 2005). One of the main disapprovals is that the expected enhancement of business related with income-generating loans is often carried out with the home engagement of clients' children in work (Balkenhol, 2002). While there is little hard evidence to support this, such deviances seem plausible and confirm the need of the borrowers.

Further, whether an MFI has a powerful impact on the way it works depends on its social union. For example, an NGO-driven MFI will be more concerned with social goals while a shareholder-owned MFI will place a higher importance on sustainability or profits (Tucker, 1995).

MICROFINANCE: A PANACEA FOR THE FEMINIZATION OF POVERTY

Since women's work has never been considered as a productive activity, her weak economic status puts her at a disadvantage. Hence, the utmost need arises for analyzing the contribution of self-help groups and microfinance institutions in enabling innovative and effective ways to empower women in society and through them their communities and families. Women are not generally given enough power to utilize funds or start a business for their welfare. Here microfinance plays a key role by providing women with funds i.e., loans so that they can start their own enterprises and take care of their families. Manoranjan Mohanty says:

The concept of empowerment implies formal rather than substantive power and it involves an external upper-level agency to grant power rather than people below seizing it in the course of struggle. Above all this concept is part of the political philosophy of the new economic globalization of western capitalism (Mohanty, 1995, p.1434).

In the feminist paradigm, empowerment goes beyond economic betterment and well-being to strategic gender interests. As Mayoux (1998) suggests, empowerment is a process of internal change or power within, augmentation of capabilities or power to, and collective mobilization of women

and when possible of men or power with, to the purpose of questioning and changing the subordination connected with gender or power over. Empowerment can range from personal empowerment that can exist within the existing social order. Thus, this kind of empowerment would correspond to the right to make one's own choices, to increased autonomy and to control over economic resources. But self-confidence and self-esteem also play an essential role in change. Empowerment signifies increased participation in decision-making and it is this process through which people feel themselves to be capable of making decisions and the right to do so (Kabeer, 2001). Personal empowerment can lead to changes in existing institutions and norms, however, without the collective empowerment the personal empowerment and choices are limited as Amartya Sen (1985) has explained.

The nature of empowerment can be diverse depending upon the parameters that define the lack of power within the institutional framework in operation. North (1990) points out that institutions are humanly devised and constraint and shape human behavior and they structure incentives in human exchange whether political, social or economic. It is the social or cultural environment that results in the varying degrees of empowerment of different members of the society which are broadly determined by not only formal constraints such as rules of law but also informal constraints such as the codes of conduct.

The Marxist lines of thought regard women as tools of exploitation for production and reproduction. It is also needed to contemplate on the mode of production, class analysis of women and the political perspectives, constituencies and alliances of the feminist movements. But women herein are only allowed to have their basic needs as gifts from their spouses (male). Women are taken as unproductive, they are needed to form surplus production and are engaged in procreating items of use-value. The work of women is not necessarily confined to domestic household activities and child-rearing but also extend to working in farms in rearing cattle, and doing the non-mechanical tasks allocated in agriculture as seen from official statistics in France and Morocco. Whatever is produced in the family for household consumption has potential monetary value, some of which are used for calculating the GNP of the nation and some of these are taken as self-consumption activities due to societal reasons. Just as there is

continuity for activities for self-consumption which are productive and unproductive, there is also continuity for services without pay and commercial services which implies that many of the operations of turning raw materials into commercial products are now industrialized which are then officially considered in computing the national product. The fallacy lies in the fact that when women work within the family and they are unpaid and when they work outside the family they are paid for the same services. This also points at the controversial debates of the sexual division of labor. It must also be noted that with the rise of industrialization, women have increasingly started producing goods beyond self-consumption but their wages are lower than men in most cases. It is noteworthy that the exploitation of women is life-long and they are doubly exploited by the patriarchal structure and are subdued by society with no social inclusiveness in terms of valorizing their paid/unpaid services. Women have always been subjugated as the wife or daughter or mother and they are thus subjugated as a common class. Communism may be feasible in a proletariat revolution where the household domestic amenities and wages for unpaid work will be easily available to the women (Delphy, 1977). Paradoxically, advancements in technology have added to marginalizing the position of women in the labor market rather than improving their status.

Microfinance institutions have about 80% women clients in the 34 largest microlenders worldwide. Microfinance programs have allocated loans to women clients and have found them to be diligent in terms of repayment of the loans. But many field-based studies have revealed that though women borrowed the loans in the household, the control over spending was often passed to the male members. This made researchers dig deeper into the aspect of distribution of loans by gender as a reliable indicator of distribution of benefits (Remenyi, 2000). Todd (1996) in her in-depth anthropological study of the Grameen clients said that in poor households it is very difficult to determine the individual household beneficiaries. She also claimed that it would be impractical to assume that all women were oppressed and that many women sought loans from the Grameen Bank to help their husbands, sons and other relatives. Also, it is believed that the poor households know better than to squander their loans, even if the households are not female headed (where the women are the prime beneficiaries). Hence it is important to assess the role of MFIs in lending to women and alleviating poverty and meeting their own sustainability goals. The

Grameen Bank initially lent money to fewer women due to Muslim cultural norms. But recently 95% of the bank's clients have been women. Moreover, the experience of the Grameen Bank has shown that women have better repayment records and are concerned with promoting the household's stability. The role of microfinance in developing nations like Bangladesh has brought about other social transformations like decline in fertility rates and illiteracy rates which implies that women have now more time and resources for self-employment (Armendariz & Murdoch, 2007).

Women play a crucial role in the socio-economic development of a country. But both in the industrially developed and less developed countries, women are burdened with cumulative inequalities as a result of socio-economic practices. This situation is worse particularly in the case of rural women and who are often overlooked in the third world agrarian systems. Despite the emphasis laid on equality of sexes in Indian constitution, women are still discriminated against. Backward mental attitudes resulting from blind adherence to tradition and the absence of education especially among rural women are partly to be blamed.

In rural households, the feeling that women are born to suffer and have to live a life of self-abnegation is deep rooted. In a village it is customary that certain jobs are specified for men and others for women, while some jobs are either jointly undertaken, or are interchangeable between men and women. But still in agriculture where nearly 60% of workforce are women they in general take up only specific jobs which the male workers usually avoid. It shows tendency towards a system of job segregation also in agriculture labor force. Such job segregation has several consequences. It creates a disparity in wage rates between the males and females, it reserves high prestige and high wage jobs for men and low prestige and low wages jobs for women workers in the agricultural field. It brings down the bargaining power of women labor in Indian labor market and reduces them to state of marginal, intermittent or reserve labor. According to Ester Boserup (1970), the division of labor according to sex is often explained as a natural result of physiological and psychological differences between men and women but apart from the obvious case of child bearing, there are extremely few convincing examples of sex division of labor being truly explicable in terms of natural difference between men and women.

Commercial banks favor men because they have larger businesses and have the assets which the banks seek as collateral. But microfinance involves small businesses in the informal sector and women make up a large and a growing segment of informal sector clients. Since women are more credit constrained than men, they tend to select themselves into microcredit contracts with all kinds of strings attached like small loans, training sessions, weekly meetings and the joint responsibility of repayment of loans. From the microlenders perspective, it provides better repayment rates, helps the women in spending the money for childcare and education and helps in poverty alleviation as women in the developing nations are seen as poorer than men being oppressed by their husbands and social norms (Armendariz & Murdoch 2007).

Advocates for microfinance claim that it helps in increasing the bargaining power of women within the household and can also help the women in the case of domestic violence and in voicing their rights as their household income increases. (Armendariz & Murdoch 2007). Microfinance has reduced the violence against women except for the case study by Rahman (1999) which states that microfinance has increased tensions among 70% of Grameen’s borrowers as men felt threatened about their roles as primary breadwinners in these traditional societies. Also, in Bangladesh, microfinance has helped in raising women’s income and has brought in the use of contraceptives as an aspect of empowerment. There have been various reports from countries such as Nepal, which shows that nearly 68% of the women had actually increased power in the decision making of the household (Shrestha, 1998).

Organization category	Number of participants (million)	Net savings (Taka/million)	Cumulative disbursement (Taka/million)
NGOs (533)	9.44	6,921	92,436
Grameen Bank	3.36	9,679	123,035
BRDB (Public sector organization)	1.65	NA	15,855
Total	13.35	16,600 (\$ 330 million)	231,326 (\$ 4.627 million)

Table :1.1 Microfinance in Bangladesh up to December 1999

Source: CDF Statistics, Vol. 9: 2000

NA= Not available

The impact on women's empowerment still depends on how well a particular program is designed (Armendariz & Murdoch 2007; Mayaux, 1999). Microfinance platforms, as pursued after the Grameen Bank experiment, gave priority to women as recipients for their core services. The Grameen Bank prioritized women as the target of their main services. Microfinance institutions served women first rather than men because of the reasons cited below (Davignon, 2004):

- A. Women take their loans and repayments very seriously, and certainly more than men do.
- b. The loan given to women is believed to benefit the whole household which includes children education, healthcare and housing compared to loans extended to men.
- c. Giving credit to women always enhances their self-confidence and status within the society as well as the whole family which helps them to gain respect and power.

After noticing the development possibilities for women through microcredit many socially oriented MFIs have started prioritizing women for their upliftment and development. Moreover, in 2001 an article published by the World Bank concluded that:

“Societies that discriminate on the basis of gender pay the cost of greater poverty, slower economic growth, weaker governance, and a lower living standard of their people (World Bank, 2001, p.63) ”.

Apart from these positive reports for women, it is often reported that gender segregation in lending has its own share of drawbacks. Sometimes, there have been instances where the husbands of these women have taken entire control of the loan, and left the women to repay the entire loan (Mayoux, 2000). However, these critical situations can easily be detected by the MFIs through client monitoring. The extent of interference may or may not worsen the situation for the woman herself.

Microfinance offers a basket of different lending procedures for women such as village investments, group-lending, and individual-based loan advances (Kevane & Wydick, 2001; Sharma & Zeller, 1997). Collection practices are

typically female-centered methods. Women receive assembly collections more effortlessly and are comfortable with group lending because they are deficient in physical security and are obligated to be involved in group lending methods of sanctioning loans (Armendariz & Morduch 2005; Mayoux, 2001). Lending methods are typically connected with wider communal assignments that include community banks and group lenders, which usually aim to reach the inferior households, including their women (Cull et al. 2008).

Similarly, the facility of non-financial services such as rudimentary financial and corporate training together with microfinance which is often referred to as 'microfinance plus', often tend to favour women. These MFIs providing non-financial services normally do so to the poorer and more downgraded clients (Lensink & Mersland 2009). It also reasoned that women receive non-financial facilities more eagerly as they need them more than men (Armendariz & Morduch 2005; Mayoux, 2001).

Women are likely to get minor advances because of either demand issues or supply issues. As far as demand is concerned, women are usually involved in small-scale events that necessitate less principal. It is also reasoned that they are averse to taking risks and consequently are less likely to ask for huge loans that exceeds their repayment capacity (Armendariz & Morduch 2005; Phillips & Bhatia 2007). As far as supply is concerned, Fletschner (2009) says that the absence of physical security may stop MFIs from providing big loans to women. By and large, the reviews assume that attention on women is related with minor regular loans. Moreover, in extremely male-controlled situations, women staff and leadership might be vital in reaching out to women. MFIs come in dissimilar packages and the emphasis on gender differs with the MFI's legal status. For example, NGOs tend to have wider social and governance forms that make them likely to reach sidelined clients such as women (Mersland, 2009).

SCOPE OF THE WOMENS AGENCY

Women play a crucial role in the socio-economic development of a country. But both in the industrially developed and less developed countries, women are burdened with growing inequalities as a result of segmented/socio-economic practices. This situation is worse particularly in the case of rural women who are often the overlooked feature of third world. However, despites

the emphasis laid on equality of sexes in Indian constitution, women are still discriminated and further segmented against in the social and economic spheres as discussed in the paper. Backward mental attitudes resulting from blind adherence to tradition and the absence of education especially among rural women are also to be blamed. The analyses of the sociological constructs of female labor show that women's unpaid and low paid work has never been seriously considered as a productive activity. Hence, the utmost need arises for analyzing the contribution of self-help groups and microfinance institutions in enabling innovative and effective ways to empower women in society.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR IMPROVING THE FUNCTIONING OF MFIs

Microfinance can serve as a quick way to deliver finance to the poor. But there is an immediate problem of lender of microfinance customer to graduate and there are problems of offering the reliability, convenience, continuity and flexibility required by low-income customers. In India and Bangladesh, the notion of graduation has been abandoned unlike in the case of Indonesia where the Bank Rakyat Indonesia (BRI) has built networks with Badan Kredit Desa (BKD), which avails graduation as they begin developing products that serve for the smallest scale clients. The problem of graduation to the formal banking sector must go hand in hand with the government and the private sector that can play a critical role in this context (Basu, 2006). In order to promote graduation of microfinance borrowers to the commercial lending sector there must be medium term key reforms in government policy to improve the efficiency and banking of rural finance. The low-cost ways of reaching the rural poor through the formal sector can be done via introducing flexible and easily accessible products, making composite financial services like insurances and remittances and simplifying the procedures to open a bank account and access credit, and provide better staffing policies and doorstep banking and use of technology to drive down transaction costs (Basu, 2006).

The improvement of incentive regimes and the promotion of competition can be done through the deregulation of interest rates based on disaster-based regulation and rehabilitation measures rather than the wavering of interest rates. The government must also revisit the policy of priority sector lending in rural areas and allow entry of private banks in rural areas. There must be more

regulation and supervision of RRBs and co-operative banks which would pave the way for restructuring these banks. Measures are also needed for improving contract enforcements and the legal framework of modifying land tilling laws. Better dissemination of credit information would directly increase the amount of financing for rural borrowers by reducing transaction costs and costs related to default risks. Default risks can be minimized by better price delivery, crop insurance and commodity price insurance. The scaling up of microfinance can be done by enabling a policy for banks to lend to SHGs to provide a legal and regulatory environment for microfinance (Basu, 2006).

Attention must also be paid towards the quality and sustainability. There must be a clear targeting of clients as seen from the studies of Bangladesh, Indonesia and other countries so that they serve the poor segments of society. They must design their products of low weekly installments as in the Grameen case and also good staffing would enhance the effectiveness of microfinance. The inclusiveness and competition in the microfinance sector can generate huge pay-offs for the poor as they always need someone to borrow money from.(Basu, 2006).

The overcoming of geographical concentration in microfinance can be done via setting of quality NGOs like Rastriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) that help in supporting hundreds of small NGOs all over the eastern region in India. There must also be attention given to the demands of the poor by providing them assistance in skills development, technology and marketing facilities that help in providing increase in incomes and improving rural livelihoods (Basu, 2006).

In the context of addressing the malady of poverty as a gender issue, the literature proposes that attention to women may have a differential influence on two main features of the MFI's general success (i.e., repayments and costs (Graham, 1999)). Muhammad Yunus gave an account of a stool maker in Bangladesh, (a woman by the name of Sufiya Begum) who had to borrow money from middlemen and was trapped in a vicious cycle of a loan which reduced her earnings to only 2 cents a day and made her incapable of getting out of the clutches of the moneylender. But the provision of microfinance to such rural target groups helped her to climb out of poverty. Basu (2006) gives an account of another fisherwoman from Raipally (Southern India) by the name of Pultibai whose family earning was only Rs.2 a day by selling fish. But in 1998 when a

Swayam Krishi Sangam (SKS) was established in Raipally which provided collateral free loans, it helped Pultibai to climb out of poverty by buying more fishing nets and selling more fish and finally earning both self-esteem and esteem in her village. The declaration that women are decent credit risks is frequently put onward by microfinance support systems and patrons. (Armendariz & Morduch 2005; D'Espallier et al. 2009; Gibbons & Kasim, 1991; Hossain, 1988; Hulme, 1991; Wydick, 2001; Khandker et al. 1995; World Bank, 2007). But women are probably able to get fewer loans either because of request issues (women's' doings are usually smaller) or collateral issues (women have less security at their disposal). Likewise, other discriminatory features may supplement additional limits such as lower knowledge levels or lower mobility which might lead to higher business costs. In short, a superior focus on women is connected with budgets associated with smaller loans. A better focus on women could have optimistic results on the general success of MFIs and lead to women empowerment.

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Scribbles on Theorizing the Personal in Feminism and Women's Research

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Abstract: *The terms "personal" and "political," like "private" and "public," are undergoing important changes in the current era, where Carol Hanisch's famous dictum "the personal is political" still serves as a persuasive justification for more recent uses of primary evidences in research and autobiography studies.*

Second wave feminism has clearly benefited from the awareness that 'the personal is political,' which influenced the growth of social analyses and theories, sparked fresh activities, and expanded the range of topics that could be categorized as 'feminist issues.' We have a strong aversion to the notion of subjectivity even in the context of subjective writing projects and are aware of the impersonal, distant tone employed and encouraged in academic works. The article questions why certain personal/subjective information is valued as knowledge or truth while some other information is downplayed or dismissed as anecdotal or just as personal experience, and it proceeds to examine feminist research and interventions in the area.

Keywords: *personal, political, Second wave feminism, subjectivity, memory*

We find that 'Personal' and the 'Political' like the 'Private' and the 'Public', are regularly going through significant changes in the present era where Carol Hanisch's famous phrase "the personal is political" still serves as an effective explanation of the rationale behind more contemporary uses of the primary evidences in research and autobiography studies. It is through the authors' participation in these changes that the women's autobiographies become most significant. The phrase "the personal is political," sometimes known as "the private is political," is a political catchphrase often used by feminists to emphasize the idea that women's personal experiences are influenced by their socio-political circumstances and gender inequality.

It is not difficult to demonstrate how the importance of women's personal experiences took the center stage during the second wave feminism movement.

The late 1940s post-war was distinguished by an unprecedented economic growth, baby boom and a move to family-oriented suburbs with the ideal of companionate marriages. The second wave of feminism in the United States emerged as a delayed reaction against this renewed strategy of domesticity of women after World War II. Domestic and household responsibilities that were considered to be the primary responsibility of women, approved and portrayed by the society and media, frequently left the women discontented and alone at home, cut off from participations in politics, economics, or law. Women tended not to seek jobs during this time. In *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) Betty Friedan was deliberate in her criticism of the stereotyped portrayal of women in the media and how confining them to their homes (as "housewives") constrained their potentials and squandered them. In cities and towns across the United States, organizations like the YWCA and League of Women Voters were crucial conduits for feminist advocacy. Women started speaking up in awareness raising groups (Consciousness-raising groups- often abbreviated as CR), began sharing their emotional experiences about confinement and dissatisfaction in their lives, began to converse openly on previously forbidden topics like abortion and domestic abuse. As women started to identify recurring leitmotifs in their narrations, they developed their own theories on why women were oppressed. Feminists contended that pre-existing ideas that were widely accepted as common knowledge and truths did not apply to everyone and were instead based on masculine experiences that were presented as universal. An easy illustration would be the early Marxist ideology, which defined employment as paid work performed outside the home that in turn obscured the unpaid domestic labor performed by women. An important groundwork was laid by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949) that investigated the notion of women as the "other". "Humanity is male, and man defines woman, not in herself, but in relation to himself". (Beauvoir, 5)

The phrase 'personal is political' gained popularity with the 1970 publication of an essay by American feminist Carol Hanisch, titled 'The Personal is Political' where she advanced her claim that many personal experiences

(particularly those of women) can be traced to their location within the system of power relationships. Written from the need to fight male supremacy as a movement instead of blaming the individual, Hanisch's essay visibly focused on the subjugation of women and the dominance of men.

When Hanisch was writing, the male-dominated political left frequently portrayed a conflict between personal and political matters; as a result, whenever women convened a discussion group around personal issues, it was disdainfully referred to as "therapy," a label Hanisch understood to be misleading.

WLM groups had been springing up all over the country—and the world. The radical movements of Civil Rights, Anti-Vietnam War, and Old and New Left groups from which many of us sprang were male dominated and very nervous about women's liberation in general, but especially the specter of the mushrooming independent women's liberation movement, of which I was a staunch advocate. (Hanisch: 2006)

Hanisch asserted that women's personal issues were primarily political issues. Since women's inequality was to be blamed for the problems they faced and women themselves were not at fault, the only way to address these issues would be through reformations rather than through personal solutions. Many feminist organizations supported this approach. For instance, the radical feminist group Redstockings argued that women were blind to the social nature of their situation, the class hierarchy in which the men are positioned over women. A black group emphasized that their feminism was formed by the personal experiences of its members which included experiences of racism and sexism.

bell hooks, the American feminist activist, and researcher has emphasized that it was her own experience as a woman that served as the foundation for her feminist philosophy. To this end, she discussed her own childhood experiences as a young black girl, in which she felt constrained within her family by gender ideologies and stereotypes. hooks responded by engaging in naive "theorizing" to better understand her situation because she was unable to specify it or articulate it to her family. Theory and politics were not remote and abstract to her personal life but rather closely related to it. The characteristics of "Black feminist epistemology," according to American sociologist Patricia

Hill Collins, encompass "lived experience as a criteria of meaning." She said that because it is based on real-world situations, personal experience is valued more highly among many black women than science or theory in terms of ontology.

Hanisch wrote that:

They [SCEF staff] could sometimes admit that women were oppressed (but only by "the system") and said that we should have equal pay for equal work, and some other "rights." But they belittled us no end for trying to bring our so-called "personal problems" into the public arena—especially "all those body issues" like sex, appearance, and abortion. Our demands that men share the housework and childcare were likewise deemed a personal problem between a woman and her individual man. The opposition claimed if women would just "stand up for themselves" and take more responsibility for their own lives, they wouldn't need to have an independent movement for women's liberation. (Hanisch: 2006)

Second wave feminism clearly benefited from the awareness that 'the personal is political,' which influenced the growth of social analyses and theories, sparked fresh activities, and expanded the range of topics that could be categorized as 'feminist issues.' However, it was not Hanisch alone who first made the argument that societal institutions or inequality are accountable for the disgraceful personal experiences of women. American sociologist C. Wright Mills in his *The Sociological Imagination* (1959) had presented an argument that personal experiences were inexorably linked to the larger social and historical environments. If a person lacks a job, for instance, there may be bigger societal patterns of unemployment that were tied to that person's joblessness. Betty Friedan wrote about "the problem that has no name" in her *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). It was a time women felt restricted, dissatisfied, and unhappy in their duties as spouses, mothers, and homemakers despite the fact that doctors and the women themselves frequently handled this discontent as 'personal issues'. Friedan attributed it to the status of women in society. Although it may be argued that *The Feminine Mystique* was only applicable to white middle-class women, the book eventually came to be regarded as a classic in feminist theory and history. The process, we know, had started with Friedan's surveying her

Smith College classmates for their 15th reunion; the findings encouraged her to interview other suburban housewives and include psychology, media, and advertising into her study. *Feminine Mystique* was built on personal narratives collected and collated. Looking back, we see that women's individual experiences have always served as the foundation for organizing feminist opinions since the beginning. For instance, we may look into the history of 1948 Seneca Falls convention.

The concept of the 'personal' in feminism has gone through significant developments by the end of the third wave of feminism in 2010. Personal experience is now increasingly recognized as a reliable testimony since speaking out about what one has experienced or witnessed has its direct practical and political significance. Without personal reports, we would not be aware of the horrifying incidents of rape and racial prejudice and other oppressions that are prevalent in the world.

Personal experience obviously is the most significant testimony if honestly dealt with. However, a debate seems persistent whether individual testimony should be accepted as authoritative sources in research. Individual works can only speak of individual subjectivities. The autobiographies, memoirs and life writings that are accounts of the authors' personal experiences reveal the relative nature of knowledge and how one's understanding of the world and common sense fluctuates depending on their social situation. The argument for personal experience as a significant testimony is part of the far wider challenge that is linked to postmodernism that critiques a component of a much larger account of what is now known as universalizing theory of the grand narratives.

We all possess a profound suspicion of the idea of objectivity in the context of subjective writing endeavors and are aware of the impersonal, detached tone used and encouraged in academic writings. The term 'objective' refers to factual information backed by data that is independent of bias. However, we ought to note here that what we consider to be objective material, especially historical information, may actually be the outcome of a subjective judgement or sentiment. Vicki Bertam in her article, 'Theorizing the Personal: Using Autobiography in Academic Writing' has posited a question on why some material is accepted as knowledge or truth while other information is demoted or

discarded as anecdotal or as merely personal experience. In this connection, it is helpful to see what D. Philips writes about Subjectivity and Objectivity,

A person does not have to write widely in contemporary methodological or theoretical literature pertaining to research in social sciences and related applied areas , ... in order to discover that “objectivity is dead” when the term happens to be used it is likely to be set in scare marks “objectivity” to bring out the point that a dodolike entity is being discussed. Or there is no such thing, authors confidently state, unmindful of the fact that if they are right then the reader does not have to break into a sweat—because if there is no such thing as objectivity, then the view that there is no such thing is itself not objective. But then if this view is subjective judgment of a particular author—readers are entitled to prefer their own subjective viewpoints – which, of course, might be that objectivity is *not* dead. (Philips :1990).

The engagements in epistemological criticism , which itself has a long history, are attempts to define knowledge formation, value judgments and expose society’s biases and exclusions. The superior status of written over oral knowledge is one objective that the critics of epistemology pay close attention to. These engagements endeavor to address the (often unintended) impact(s) that may result from the fact that a text is never innocent but is always embedded in power structures. Much of the twentieth-century literature dealing with the analysis of knowledge takes the tripartite analysis of knowledge consisting of “justified true belief” (often abbreviated as the “JTB”) as the starting point for the analysis of knowledge. Michael Foucault has made it known that ‘power is everywhere’, diffused and embodied in discourse, in knowledge and in ‘regimes of truth’ (Foucault 1991); he is “highly suspicious of claims to universal truths” (Rabinow 1984: 4);

...truth isn’t outside power or lacking in power: contrary to a myth whose history and functions would repay further study, truth isn’t the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: It is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it

introduces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its “general politics” of truth—that is, the types of discourse it accepts and makes function as true ; the mechanism and instances that enable one to distinguish true and false statements ; the means by which each is sanctioned ; the techniques and the procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth ; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault, 151)

Given the fundamentals of what is considered as knowledge, the use of autobiographical material where the traditional distinction between the researcher and the research is disturbed becomes problematic as the data used in research of these types become very subjective. A radical shift in conventional epistemology takes place each time a writer uses subjective knowledge of memories, experiences, etc. as data. The instances might be seen as exhibiting research that is unrelated to information sources conventionally derived from detached, objective authorities.

There is a shaky but tenuous consensus on reading autobiographies among readers and critics on several points. The link between the autobiographer, the text, and the audience has been dealt with at length by researchers like Elizabeth Bruss. The autobiographer, who is the narrator and is responsible for the development and structure of the text, is the key character of the text and her /his presence in and beyond the text can be independently confirmed. Moreover, the autobiographer also claims to believe what she/he says. The readers are permitted to take the autobiographical reports—whether they are about private experiences or publicly visible events—as accurate, yet it is also permitted that they independently verify or refute them.

Feminist sociologists have produced significant works in this field (theorizing the personal in women’s writings). The discomfort with the traditional relationship between researcher and research subject, which feminists found morally dubious, served as an early motivation. They were also dissatisfied with how most survey papers tended to treat women as passive objects of research (and frequently mistreated or suffering) rather than as active agents. In particular, Frigga Haug's work, namely, *Female Sexualization: A Collective Work of Memory* (1987) has had a significant impact. Haug and her coworkers

were interested in understanding the processes of female socialization because they wanted to reflect on the complexity of their own experiences accurately and give female agency back to descriptions of the process. They developed a collaborative theorizing of a methodology in which they served both as the subjects and the objects of their investigation. Frigga Haug and the other researchers of the methodology of “memory work” focused in particular on women's sexualization and the formation of gender and made a novel addition to the existing debates by using their own bodies as the subjects of research. They did this by recalling important past experiences —not the typical conventional ones like losing one's virginity, but experiences that came to them spontaneously and so appeared to have special significance for their unconscious. Everything related to each of these occurrences was remembered in as much detail as possible. Conventional autobiography's narrative progression was also disregarded by them in the process since it so blatantly appropriates its concepts of significance and sense of causality (in hindsight) from prevailing ideological structures. By doing this, they hoped to avoid merely copying the research paradigm that had already mapped the landscape of female socialization. Their groundbreaking study helped us gain a more comprehensive understanding of how societal standards and personal aspirations constantly interact. In the course of their investigation, they came to question the exaggerated value placed on individuality, highlighting how much individual identity is reliant on collective social experience.

In opposition to notions of experience as fundamentally unique, individual and arising from people's individual interiority, memory workers understand experience as collectively produced (Haug, 1987). Working as a collective facilitates researching both the shared aspects of experience and the social processes through which experiences are produced. Memory work typically entails a group of people with a shared interest in interrogating a particular topic – such as female sexualization (Haug, 1987, 1992), the gendered construction of emotions (Crawford et al., 1992), or embodiment (Brown et al., 2011) – meeting regularly over a period of months or years. The group members take on the roles of both research participants and researchers: they put

forward their own experiences as data (in the form of written memories) and they undertake a collective analysis of these experiences. They interrogate the social production of their experiences trying to identify points where experience is amenable to being reinterpreted, reworked and lived differently. In under-taking memory work, Haug and others found that what they had previously thought to be the natural sequences of their lives, started to appear as historically constituted avenues for interpreting and managing the material and social realities in which they were immersed. They began to see themselves as 'living historically', as women of their time and women able to act on and intervene in their time.

(Stephenson and Kippa: 2008)

Liz Stanley and Sue Wise in their book *Breaking Out*, (1983) argued for a similar in-depth examination of sociocultural study techniques. They claimed that sexism ingrained in the research procedures used by previous "feminist" works had gone unnoticed. In the existing approach, experimentation, objectivity, and rationality are the distinguishing characteristics of reliable and credible research while suspicious views are held about subjectivity, emotion, and experience. Comprehending that this contradiction is part of a problem facing feminist researchers, they presented a more radical strategy in which "experience, theory, and practice should live in a mutual and immediate interaction with each other" (1983: 181). Two other books that must not go unmentioned here are *Doing Feminist Research* edited by Helen Roberts (1981), and *Theories of Women's Studies* (1983) by Gloria Bowles and Renate D.Klein.

Literary theorists from more recent times have given us some similar instances. Nancy Miller aims to eliminate the conventional division between theory and subjectivity by focusing on the splitting of the "private life" and the "merely personal" in conventional academic discourse. Miller questions the public-private hierarchy that is seen as a founding condition of women's oppression. "The reason I feel embarrassed at my own attempts to speak personally in a professional context is that I have been conditioned to feel that way". (Nancy 1991: 5) She cites Jane Gallop as an example of a highly

sophisticated theorist who openly admits the imperative role that personal experiences play in the formulation of theories. “Nothing precludes us from incorporating personal experiences into our theory-based work”. Miller admits that to bring theory and the personal together is to create a profound challenge because “ it blows the cover of the impersonal as a masquerade of self-effacement” ... (Miller 1991: 24).

Nicole Ward Jouve advances a similar argument on the personal in writings. Well aware of the slipperiness of expression of identity through language, she maintains that the creation of a self can only ever be achieved through “process and relationship” (Ward Jouve 1991: 10). She entreats us to experiment with various subject positions, to understand how to use the word "as" and to be aware that we are describing a position rather than a person when we say "an image and a relation". “Relations never amount to identity, never are fixed” (Ward Jouve 1991: 11).

Patricia Williams, a black lawyer and Professor of Law at Columbia University uses her own personal experience in her work *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* (1993) to demonstrate how the so called objective judgments are actually impacted by the racism and sexism of dominant ideology by examining the invisible biases at work beneath the law's advocacy of its neutrality. She draws on her personal experience of how a young, white salesperson turned her away from entering a Benetton store. In New York, buzzer systems allow the store employees to control who can enter the buildings, thus, lowering the risk of theft and violence. Williams was debarred from entering a store and consequently submitted a report against the act in a law review. To her surprise she found that the reference to her race was deleted when the report was finally published because it was "against editorial policy" to describe physical characteristics of persons. She questioned this choice, arguing that without this information the readers would either assume that she must be paranoid or would have to infer her race from her experience thus indirectly reinforcing the stereotype that African -Americans are more prone to commit violent crimes than white citizens. She thus demonstrates how the legal recognition of racism as a crime has unintentionally led to a scenario in which all mention of race is avoided but people's opinions on racial discrimination continue to shape their thoughts. Williams also discusses

how hierarchical discourses are present within feminist discourses. Although Black feminists have made an attempt to claim a theoretical methodology that rejects abstraction, white people still frequently perceive their work as "experiential."

Chrie Morga in *The Bridge Called My Back : Writings by Radical Women of Colour* (1981) has identified that the difficulty lay in attempting to deal with oppression merely from a theoretical framework. No genuine, non-hierarchical relationship between the oppressor and oppressed can transpire without an emotional, passionate examination of the root of the oppression and without naming of the enemy both within and beyond.

Without an emotional, heartfelt grappling with the source of our own oppression, without naming the enemy within ourselves and outside of us, no authentic, non-hierarchical connection among oppressed groups can take place. (Moraga and Anzaldua 1981: 27)

These varied methodologies have had substantial influences in theorizing the 'Personal' in women's life writings. These researchers have questioned the validity of the assumptions of knowledge and also the exclusions produced by the strictly regulated epistemological paradigm. They broke the traditional boundaries of academic disciplines by admitting material that had previously been rejected into their own research.

Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives by Carolyn Steedman is an autobiography with a twist because it challenges and checks its own veracity while also using autobiographical material to challenge conventional ideas about class, psychology, psychoanalysis, cultural studies, and feminism. According to Steedman, such theories are typically created by people who have a strong linkage to the dominant culture and are therefore ill-equipped to capture the many nuances of "lives lived out on the borderlands" (1986: 5), which can include poverty, class, or ethnicity. In her book, she weaves memories through these theoretical frameworks and reveals the gaps in both her own life and that of her parents. Steedman makes the case, for instance, that because of her early realization of her father's powerlessness, she did not engage in the traditional Freudian internalization of patriarchal control. By focusing on theory in this way she makes clear the inadequacies of the fundamental perspectives of

some of our theories. Looking back on her mother's life, she makes the argument that in late capitalism, women's reproductive capacity is something they own and can, therefore, barter it in order to achieve their goals. She interprets her mother's refusal to become a mother as being motivated by her disappointment that her barter did not result in the consumer goods and the status she had yearned for. In doing so, Steedman challenges research paradigms that assume that women's decisions to become mothers are driven solely by biological impulses and the paradigms that have never explored the potential meanings of parenthood. The experience of reading Steedman's book is emotional due to the profoundly personal nature of the author's subject. Although it elicits emotional responses that are not often acceptable in academic writing, it remains analytically sophisticated.

The works of Liz Stanley are based on the idea that personal experience may yield a theory that is analytically sharp and experientially developed (1993: 214). She examines a journal she wrote throughout her mother's post-stroke deterioration, not to delve into her own psychology but to uncover more about the drives and purposes of storytelling. She recalls the pressing desire she had felt to write it, and, in retrospect, observes how bizarre the things she had documented were. This prompts her to reflect on the function of a journal, which provides comfort at a confusing period of time in an individual's life when typical reference points (as the distinction between "alive" and "dead") are shattered. She argues that humans often use stories to cover up the gaps in their knowledge of the contradictions, in their sense of self, since narrative is complicated and its referential claims frequently serve to patch over what is essentially an awareness of ontological complexity and fragmentation (206). The fact that any historical account is not a single linear nor one-dimensional narrative and that the accounts of the past is not/cannot be neutral or objective but rather told from a person's perspective was eventually realized. It was comprehended that writing history did not take place objectively; rather, it was created by authors who were examining their own times in the context of earlier historical eras or earlier periods through perspectives that were their own. These historical narratives might also cover stories about nationalism, patriotism, and a variety of other concepts that form the basis of knowledge data.

Postmodernism is aware that great narratives conceal, muzzle, and ignore the conflicts, instabilities, and differences present in every social structure. "Mini-narratives," or tales that explain particular customs and local occurrences without claiming universal applicability or finality, are perhaps preferred in these postmodern times. (In *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979), Jean-François Lyotard examines the epistemology of postmodern culture as the demise of "great narratives" or metanarratives, which he believes to be a fundamental aspect of modernity.)

Some claim that by pronouncing the author to be dead, postmodern critics have perhaps opened the way for the rise of autobiographers (who are not dead), who may be neither white nor male. Life writings of and by previously disadvantaged groups, such as women, slaves, dalits, and others who were previously concealed from history, can be written and read as histories representative of the lower stratum of the society and these subaltern histories provide a challenge to the grand narratives. (*c.f. The Subaltern Studies Reader* Ed. R.Guha)We have seen Stephen Greenblatt and other new historicists incorporate the co-texts with the contexts and refuse to privilege the 'literary texts' and have known that every piece of information about the past is only available to us in textualized form processed three times: first, through the ideology, outlook, or discursive practices of its own time, then through those of ours, and finally through the language's own (mis)representations. We will conclude with Doris Somner's important question which emphasizes the importance of these autobiographies:

Is autobiography the model for imperializing the consciousness of colonized peoples, replacing their collective potential for resistance with a cult of individuality and even loneliness? Or is it a medium of resistance and counter-discourse, the legitimate space for producing that excess that throws doubt on the coherence and power of excessive historiography? (Somner :1998, 1)

Given that subjectivity itself is never complete, whole or entire but rather multiple and shifting and maybe often even be contradictory, we confront a question , whether these life writings and subjective data will be regarded with the same reverence and be seen as authentic data as those in *The Confessions of St. Augustine* or Rousseau's *Confessions* . We, however, must acknowledge that for every evaluation different motivations may be at play. Some feminist critics

prefer explicitly individualized comments over the impersonal, measured evaluations. A personal tone is a strategy that may seem more sincere, or it may imply a critique of the critics' customary methods but it may also allow a space to express the evaluator's desired empathetic response to the person or subject of the study. Mary Ann Caws employs this strategy in her study of *Three Bloomsbury Women (2020)* and refers to her position as 'personal criticism'.

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Taming the Mind : Women in the Lunatic Asylums of Colonial Bengal

Dahlia Bhattacharya

Abstract:

The Lunatic Asylums in the colonial period did not have proper medical treatment or identification of female patients. The infrastructural facilities for the women were not given attention by the asylums. The Victorian morality recognized 'work' as a therapy and the 'mentally ill' were made to work in the garden, carpentry, grinding wheat and other works, leading to monetary gain in the asylums of Bengal. The funds were applied to maintain the asylums, sometimes the local jails and led to profits for the British. The paper seeks to look into the colonial policy with regard to asylums and the hard work imposed upon the female lunatics leading to asylum 'industries' and how it received a new direction of economic gain.

Keywords: *Female patients, diseases, mortality rate, therapy, Native –Only Asylums, overcrowding, asylum industries*

Mental health in the colonial period was a major concern of the British colonial rulers. It was considered as a moral responsibility. Protecting the lunatics who could not protect themselves was the chief moral concern of the medical community of British India, especially if the lunatics were categorized as wanderers or vagrants. Laws were passed in England regarding the vagrants and wanderers and they were taken to lunatic asylums. After the 1857 revolt the wanderers and vagrants were strictly placed under vigilance and were not able to choose their living arrangements because of the British concern for security. The anxiety for security and to check the further chances for another mutiny the British established lunatic asylums all over India.

Treating lunatics or mentally ill patients in India existed in the precolonial period. Ancient texts and medieval sources speak of the systematic process of curing the

mentally ill patients. With the establishment of the British rule and the introduction of western medicine, the colonial rulers concentrated in establishing lunatic asylums in India for the treatment of lunatics both native and Europeans modeled on the European institutions. With the expansion of dominance in India, the East India Company paid more attention in taming the criminals, mentally ill and insane by the Victorian concept of morality and care. In this backdrop the article aims to study the lunatic asylums of Bengal with a focus on the colonial policy towards the Indian lunatics particularly the women. The system of care and treatment of the patients in the asylum of Bengal is studied. The emphasis on the concept of work as therapy in the asylums has been highlighted.

Treatment of mentally ill in precolonial India

Ancient Indian scriptures have often quoted terms conceptualized on principles very similar to those of modern psychology and philosophy (e.g. Samkhya, Yoga) in terms of identifying mental disorders. Mental disorders were attributed to supernatural reasons such as possession by spirits or curses. Take for example of Atharva-Veda, which mentions that divine curses may lead to mental illnesses, while also giving a vivid description of what is now identified as Schizophrenia (Sharma & Varma, 1984). Use of charms, prayers & temple rituals were used to neutralize the influence of supernatural entities, while medicines in the forms of medicated 10-year-old ghee, rock salt and gurjo were prescribed by Indian sages to remove the curses (Parker et. al., 2001). In fact, Bhutavidya (knowledge of evil spirits) can be considered as an ancient form of Indian psychiatry. The idea of confining individuals to facilities was not yet conceived, and these individuals were treated as 'cursed' or 'bewitched' due to religious reasons, leading to isolation and worsening of mental health. Until about the 18th century, all abnormal behaviour was attributed to supernatural causes and the mentally ill were socially shunned, jailed and chained. Even though certain architectures from the time of Ashoka in India seem to show evidence of resembling the idea of a modern mental hospital, these findings are inconclusive (Daund et al., 2018).

The historical study reveals that Mahmud Khilji (1436-1469) established a 'mental hospital' at Dhar near Mandu in Madhya Pradesh and Maulana Fazular Lal Hakim was appointed as the physician. The Muslim countries were the first to conceive the idea of hospitals under the Arabian system of medicine which became a model for the establishment of European hospitals. The first hospital

for the insanes was founded by Wajid b. Abdal Malik in 707 A.D. There were two types of hospitals. One was 'immobile and fixed' and the other was 'mobile'. It kept the insanes locked up and chained under regular medical supervision. Under Firuz Shah Tughluq as many as 70 mental asylums were opened, lunatics were captured, chained and kept with a 'special diet'. The Mughals had established a system of care by creating *bimaristan*, a hospital for the insanes deriving from *bimar* (the Persian word for 'patient') and *bimaree* (meaning 'disease').

An overview of the Lunatic asylums in colonial Bengal

Some evidences suggest that Portuguese were the first to introduce modern medicine and hospitals to India during the 17th century in Goa. The history of western psychiatry in the Indian subcontinent starts with the establishment of mental hospital by the British East India Company in 1600. They were constructed exclusively for the European patients in India. The first asylum was established in Bombay in 1745 and the second at Calcutta in 1784, which were exclusively for Europeans.

After the Battle of Buxar (1764) the *diwani* of Bengal was granted to the East India Company and the centre of power was shifted to Calcutta. Bengal became politically the centre of power, revenue and diplomacy. During the period of Lord Cornwallis(1786-1793) there is a reference to a mental asylum in the proceedings of the Calcutta Medical Board as " The proceedings of the Calcutta Medical Board of 3rd April 1787, contain a memorial from Surgeon G.M. Kenderdine, in charge of the Insane asylum". The same proceeding mentions the death of the surgeon and the Board recommended to Government, in a letter dated 7th May 1787 the foundation of a regular asylum and nominated Assistant Surgeon William Dick to its charge"The Government appointed him on charge of the asylum with a salary of Rs.200 per month. Later on, Dick proposed to build a lunatic asylum of his own cost and East India Company agreed to pay Rs. 400 per month as rent. A General letter from Bengal dated 6th November 1788, reports in paragraph 98, that sanction has been given to the erection of a lunatic hospital for females, for which a rent of Rs. 200 will be paid. Dick continued his asylum service until 1818 and after his death in 1821, the Court of Directors of East India Company ordered to close this asylum .(Bandopadhyay,et al.,2018:192-197).

In the year 1817 Dr. Beardsmore opened a private asylum for European patients and proposed a medical board to keep the Company's patients at the rate of Rs.100 per month for higher class and Rs.50 per month for lower class. Board readily accepted his proposal, as it was cheaper than their apprehended cost. On 15th June 1821 five European patients were transferred to Beardsmore's hospital. The hospital was started with half a dozen patients and it increased to 50-60 in number.(Sengupta 1987:91-130).“The asylum had a central house surrounded by several ranges of barracks, which were thrown together within no definite plan but were added to suit the needs of the public. Every visitor was pleased with the cleanliness of the apartments and ventilation of the rooms. The gardens were beautiful and had a pleasing and refreshing appearance. Patients look happy, cheerful and comfortable. The asylum was managed by a European superintendent and a steward. There was an Apothecary to look after the male patients and a Matron to watch the female patients. Restrain was in use but it was in extreme moderation. Excited patients were treated with morphia, opium and hot baths. Sometimes leeches were applied to such patients in order to alloy their excitement but venesection was never done. Blisters were found useful in chronic patients as it helped them to shorten their period of excitement”.¹

By early nineteenth century the Court of Directors of the East India Company decided to build native asylums for criminals and lunatic vagrants. Initial attempts to put native Indian lunatics included the establishment of “Bengal Presidency Native Insane Hospital” near Russapaglah area of 24 Parganas, adjacent to the district jail in 1816 . One native doctor, one *jamader*, eight peons, two cooks, two *matores* and two *bhisties* were sanctioned at a very low budget. It was built to cater 50-60 patients, but a report in 1834 showed that there were at least 267 patients with a nominal increase in financial sanction. Another report in 1842 depicts condition of the hospital buildings was ‘filthy, crowded, defaced and broken’.²

Considering the deplorable condition of the hospital, a new hospital for the natives were planned by the East India Company. In September 1847, the patients of the Dullunda Lunatic Asylum was established which accommodated native insanes. “It was a circular building which had a courtyard within it. All round the courtyard were small rooms, each of which accommodated four lunatics. This building had a single entrance which had a big iron gate, guarded by a

sentry.”This native asylum was made for 150 patients, but had to accommodate almost double number of patients .³

In the post-1857 revolt phase with a change in the policies of the British towards consolidating their rule in India, a large number of asylums were opened in Bengal. In Bengal the Berhampore asylum was opened in 1886 which would deal with patients from Murshidabad, Rajshahi, Nadia, Jessore, Khulna, Bhagalpore, Malda, Purnea, Burdwan, Birbhum and Balasore. (Choudhury, 1997, p-42-50) The Central Lunatic Asylum of Ranchi was opened in 1918 and all the European and Anglo-Indian patients of Berhampore and Bhowanipore asylum were transferred there. (Hill, 1924, p-68-76) Bhowanipore asylum was ceased to exist as a regular asylum from 16th September 1918 and it was opened on the same day as a temporary ward for observation cases. The buildings at Bhowanipore Mental Observation Ward were completed in June 1923 and it was opened on the 1st May 1924. In the year 1922, the names of all the ‘lunatic asylum’ were changed into ‘mental hospital’. (Sharma, 2003, p-27)

Women patients in the asylums

The women patients in the asylum were kept in separate section of the same building and most of the native asylums were over crowded. MacPherson the superintendent relates that the asylums which could house 750 patients but most of them were overcrowded with as many as 1,041 patients.⁴ The overcrowding in the asylums was an issue for the superintendents particularly of Bengal. The annual asylum reports for both 1868 and 1870 points on the problem of overcrowding. A letter by the Surgeon R.F. Hutchinson, Superintendent of the Patna Asylum to the Surgeon Major H.M. MacPherson, the Secretary Inspector-General Medical Department, Lower Provinces dated 1st January 1868 writes that, “the main necessity of the asylum is for increased accommodation in the buildings.”⁵ It added that, “In May, 1866, I reported on the crowded state of the Asylum, and suggested a mode of relief. It was then overcrowded with 138 patients. How much more so is it now with 151! The general form and proportions of the Asylum are known to the authorities; so I shall merely observe that the main building has accommodation for 59 insanes; the old Civil Jail holds 25 ; and the female side has 20 cells. Thus the maximum accommodation is for 104 patients, not taking into consideration the deep verandahs in both Asylums; but with cell accommodation for 104 patients, we have a total of 151 (113 males and

38 females), or 47 beyond our capacity. Such being the case, (and we are receiving weekly additions to our strength,) some means should be devised for relieving the pressure before a dire epidemic of cholera sweeps away the surplus, as it did in 1866.”⁶ It seems that the report was made two years before but till 1868 there was no improvement or arrangements for the accommodation of the Indian lunatics in the asylums.

The accommodation was a major issue for the asylums particularly for women. “The accommodation on the female side of the Bhowanipur Asylum was risen from 24 to 28 by sub-dividing some cells.” The superintendent mentions that, “additional accommodation will shortly be ready at Bhowanipur Asylum by converting some old coach houses and stables into wards for females.”⁷

A complete different picture is found in the European asylums in Bengal. A report states that, “There were 17 persons admitted and 2 re-admitted to the European Asylum at Bhawanipur, a number in both instances identical with that of the preceding year, while there were 36 patients remaining from the previous year..... There was thus no overcrowding, as the asylum can accommodate 23 males and 19 females.”⁸ There was no overcrowding and the maintenance was good with proper medical care.

In the nineteenth century psychiatrists considered the architecture of the asylums as one of the most powerful tools for the treatment of the insanes. Jeremy Bentham believed in a panopticon architecture which allowed total and constant surveillance of the inmates. There should be a central tower with house staffs and was to be incorporated into a circular building that was divided into dormitories and wards. The idea of panopticon was to use control mechanism through surveillance.(Yanni, 2007,p-1-5) Foucault argued that the asylum was a form of moral imprisonment and the patients were to be controlled by judgment and surveillance. He considers that the concept of disciplinary power depends upon surveillance and not on repressive forces.(Foucault, 1977, p 205)

In colonial India, however, the lunatic asylums were not similar to the Benthamite structure. The buildings were “inadequate and dilapidated”.⁹ They did not have any uniformity in their planning or built up and most of them were constructed by the architects and engineers of the Public Works Department. Most of the asylums in Bengal were similar to the prisons with the high walls so

that the prisoners could not escape. The buildings of the Native only asylums were built sometimes by the prison labours and attention in its construction was least (Ernst, 2010, p-50) . Nearly all of the annual reports mention of the defective erection of the building and the sanitation problems. The Annual Report of Insane Asylums of Bengal for the Year of 1867 mentions of defective construction of the asylums and that “the buildings, together with the Asylum grounds, remain still very defective, from their low level and liability to inundation. Improvements much needed have been sanctioned by Government; viz., the drainage is to be improved, the drains within the quadrangle of the male part of the Asylum are to be filled up, the outside drains are to be made shallow, the privies within the buildings are to be removed, and a distinct hospital is to be erected”.¹⁰ It further states that “There must exist necessary precautions against the escape of the insanes, which the throwing open of the quadrangle would interfere with; and it is not proper that the insanes should be locked up and crowded into the cells at night. The verandah space should be available for them, and free to them. In the cold season *jhamps* or *purdahs* might be put up in the verandahs to guard against the cold”.¹¹

The Annual Report of 1868 of Patna asylum as well refers to the improvements in sanitation . It refers to the condition of the asylum as “The south end of the main building was untenable from the damp which showed on the walls three feet from the floor; and from having a northern aspect, and never being reached by the sun, it remains damp and disagreeable, and unfit for occupation. The sickness might have been considerable, had it not been for the large quantities of straw which I laid in for the insanes to lie upon”.¹²

The maintenance of the asylums of the natives was very poor as no separate amount of money was sanctioned by the Government for the maintenance of the asylums. Furthermore, the Government had no intention for their repair and renovation. The conditions of almost all the native asylums in Bengal were same. A similar report comes from the Dullunda asylum. It says, “At Dullunda the ill effects of overcrowding are practically reduced to a minimum by the doors at night being thrown open and the verandahs being occupied.”¹³

The women patients did not have any women doctors or attendants for their treatment. The reports gave much emphasis on physical treatment rather than on the mental condition of the patients. The female patients were classified

according to their age, occupation, caste, place and diseases. In most of the reports the common disease which a mental patient suffered was mania either chronic or acute. A number of cases in the Dacca asylum are classed under Dementia, congenital; at Patna and Dullunda under Dementia from protracted mania. In cases of men, the habits of debauchery, smoking ganjah and other intoxicating and narcotic drugs, indulging in opium and in spirit drinking lead to two-thirds of the cases of which the cases are supposed to be known.¹⁴ The female patients were classified into names which most of the times remained 'unknown'; the occupation of the patients were largely beggars, prostitute, housewives and others; the cause of insanity in most cases was sought to be ganjah, ebrietas, Datura or moral insanity. In 1862, A. Fleming, the Official Civil Surgeon of the Moorshedabad Lunatic Asylum, stated that institutionalised lunatics mostly belonged to the poorer classes of the community.¹⁵

Dr Fleming also mentioned that women were not brought to the asylums but they were who wanderers as Faqueer, the bazaar girl, and criminals. According to the official records, the majority of the lunatics, either male or female admitted in the asylums of Bengal were from the 'lowest and least educated classes'. This class composition of the lunatics continued to be the same throughout the nineteenth century. For instance, even after a decade later amongst the patients admitted into the Moydapore Asylum by 1872, the male population mainly consisted of cultivators whereas beggars made up the female population.¹⁶ The social composition of women continued to be the same when in Dullunda in 1875, here were two beggars, five coolies, one fisherwoman, one housewife, eight prostitutes, three domestic servants, one washerwoman among female inmates and twenty two cases were 'unknown'.¹⁷

The mental treatment of the patients were not much concern of the asylums. The asylums did not have any therapy for the improvement of the mental condition of the patients. The treatment and medical care in the asylums were not much important. The British colonial rulers had no concern about the recovery and well being of the patients of the asylums. The unresponsive attitude of the British Government over the lunatics in the asylums in Bengal led to frequent deaths. As a result the mortality rates of the asylums were quite high. The Annual Report of Insane Asylums of the year 1873 of Bengal claims that, "The total number of deaths during the year was 119, or 8 per cent. Of the total number treated and 12

per cent of the average daily strength. The corresponding ratios on an average of five preceding years were 9.2 per cent. and 13.9 per cent. respectively".¹⁸ There were frequent diseases in the asylums and the rate of mortality was ever increasing.

The diseases were the main reason for the mortality rate in the asylums and most of the patients were affected by the diseases after coming to the asylums. The diseases like cholera, fever, dysentery, Phthisis and other contagious infections largely affected the patients due to the poor accommodation and the system of treatment being used in the asylums. John Murray , the Inspector General of Hospitals, Indian medical Department writes to the Secretary of the Government of Bengal while submitting the abstract of the Insane asylums of Bengal of 1869 on the Dacca Asylum that, "The mortality has been 41, or 17.69 on the average strength. Of these, 6 or 2.59 per cent., were from cholera. This ratio is stated by Drs. Buckle and Cutcliffe's report as over 13 percent. But this ratio is taken from the number of cases remaining last year with those admitted during the year, instead of the average daily strength, as is usual in all medical statistical tables. The mortality in insane asylums is always high, but I think it would not have been so high at Dacca had there been more accommodation."¹⁹ Female patients died of dysentery, small pox, rheumatism and pleurisy. Therefore, the deaths in the asylums were due its ill maintenance, overcrowding, damp and cold buildings and basically no treatment of the patients.

Therapy for patients

The European concept of therapy of the lunatics or mental patients were the "suitable and judicious employment of the lunatics" and the treatment was considered as "best form of treatment of mental disorders".²⁰ Both male and female patients were made to work in the various industrial productivity. David Arnold mentions the colonial prison as the material adjunct of the colonial system. (Arnold 1994:148-187). Employment of the prisoners on outdoor labour helped to reduce overcrowding and allowed the mobilization of scarce labour for tasks such as digging canals, construction of roads and ironically, also building prisons. Regarding asylum labour, there were no clear rules but those who were capable of work were certainly employed in all asylums. The female patients were made to work within the asylum and not taken outdoors for work. They were assigned to less labour intensive work. Though work was considered as a

therapy for the lunatics in asylums, it was applied only in native –only asylums, while it was considered ‘uncongenial ‘for the European insane of any social class in British India, owing to the warm tropical climate. (Srivastava 2014:841-847)

The British believed that steady work would result in long lasting cure for the patients in the asylums. The asylums provide a record of rope- making, loom-working, tin- work, gardening, cooking, fetching water, masonry and other ground works. The British categorized the different jobs as “asylum industries”. The Berhampore Asylum Reports of 1913 mentions that the inmates of the asylum were employed on various useful industries, e.g. bakery, carpentry, tailoring , poultry farming , rug making, weaving, durry, dying thread, carpet making, pounding soorky, grinding gram, making of straw mats, etc. ²¹

The goals of the medical staff are exhibited in report on Dacca asylum: ‘As occupation is so essentially necessary in the treatment of the insane, I have to give them occupation without taxing their physical strength, and without using coercion, the great object being to make occupation subservient to health”. ²² The work was not been forced as the British believed that coercion would not lead to habit forming skills which is necessary to get cured. By 1870, the asylum industries started to expand and it gave new occupation for those physically unable or had “lost all muscle for work and all stomach for digestion”. ²³ The Superintendent J. Bedford Allen in Lunatic Asylum of Patna states that, “The food is un expectable in quality and sufficient in quantity. The *atta* is ground in the asylum by the female insanes, who also prepare *soojee* for sale”.²⁴

The annual reports of each year shows that profits were earned in the asylums from the labour and work of the lunatics.²⁵ Some industries such as asylums garden did benefit the patients. The Annual Report of 1862 shows that the production of the second year were feeding the Native –Only asylums, European asylums as well as some local jails. (Brumlik, 2014:1-10) The British used the garden industries for not only therapy but also to gain profit. In an annual report stated by A. Fleming, Surgeon Major, Superintendent of Moydapore Lunatic asylum for 1867 that “the diet of the asylum were provided by all the vegetables furnished from the Asylum garden worked by the lunatics.” While giving the statement of the Cost of Diet Surgeon Major, A. Fleming affirms:“ Exclusive of the cost of establishment, the expense of feeding each insane throughout the year has been Rs 15-9-8.After paying all expenses of raw materials purchased for the

manufacturers , the clear profits amount to Rs 156-13-10, which gives as the amount earned by each lunatic Rs.9-3-7.”But the profit amount was not handed over to the patients but it was for the British Government .²⁶ It should be noted that there is no mention of the care and treatment of the patients were mentioned in the reports . Unfortunately, the reports seemed to be a profit plan for the British government.

Conclusion

Therefore, to conclude it can be stated that the British lunatic asylums in Bengal posed a sense of Victorian morals but actually manipulated the diagnoses of patients. Women patients did not have any separate treatment system or doctors or nurses to take care. They were treated with negligence and carelessness. The asylums lacked infrastructure and medical facilities for the female patients leading to high rate of mortality among them. Work as a medicine for the patients was used in the native –only asylums and industries grew up with gardening, carpentry and even loom manufactures. Such method of cure was not applied for the European patients and the rationale illustrated was the tropical climate of the country with which the European was not habituated. Industries and manufactures brought profit to the British Government and the cost of food, building and cloth of a lunatic patient was made by the profit. The work, however, brought profit for the British Government. But the funds raised by the patients were not reinvested for the benefit of the asylum’s medical facility. It went into the treasury of the British Government for the benefit of the colonial rulers. Female patients were thus given more importance in their physical treatment rather than curing their mental illness.

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Published by: The Registrar, University of North Bengal
Printed at: The University Press, University of North Bengal