सत्यमेव जयते
Ministry of Education
Government of India

UNIVERSITY GRANTS COMMISSION

Malaviya Mission Teacher Training Centre

Gauhati University, Guwahati, Assam

UGC Sponsored
Short Term Training Programme on Indian Knowledge Systems

In Collaboration with
Indian Knowledge Systems Division, Ministry of Education,
Government of India, New Delhi

9-14 October, 2023

Certificate of Participation

This is certify that ..... Priyanka Kaya .....

Assistant Professor/ Associate Professor / Professor/ ..... of

..R. G. Barooah College..... affiliated to .....Gauhati University.....

participated in the **Six-Day Short Term Training Programme on Indian Knowledge Systems** from 9th October to 14th October, 2023 and secured grade..... grade A .

Coordinator Gauhati University	Director UGC-MMTTC Gauhati University	National Coordinator IKS Division of MoE New Delhi	Vice-Chancellor Gauhati University

UGC-Malaviya Mission Teacher Training Centre
University of Hyderabad

ज्ञान-विज्ञान विमुक्तये

CERTIFICATE OF PARTICIPATION

This is to certify that **PRIYANKA RAYA,** ASSISTANT PROFESSOR in the Department of ENGLISH , R.G.BARUAH COLLEGE has successfully completed Two week online Refresher Course on Comparative Literature and Translation Studies organized by the MMTTC, University of Hyderabad from 16-12-2024 to 30-12-2024 and obtained Grade B.

Dr. V. Vamshi Krishna Reddy & Dr. Naresh Annem
Coordinators

Prof.P.Prakash Babu
Director

Certificate ID: **MMTTCUHRCCLTS109**

Grade 'A+'	Grade 'A'	Grade 'B'	Grade 'C'	Grade 'F'
85% and above	84% to 70%	69% to 60%	59% to 50%	< 49%

Original Article
ISSN (Online): 2582-7472

ShodhKosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts
July-December 2023 4(2), 3551–3555

SUBVERSIVE PERFORMANCES AND GENDER IDENTITY IN A. REVATHI'S THE TRUTH ABOUT ME: A HIJRA LIFE STORY (2010)

Dr. Indu Swami [1], Priyanka Raya [2]

[1] Assistant Professor, Department of English, Assam University, Diphu Campus, Diphu - 782460, Karbi Anglong, Assam
[2] Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of English, Assam University, Diphu Campus, Diphu - 782640, Karbi Anglong, Assam

Corresponding Author
Dr. Indu Swami,
induswamionline@gmail.com

DOI
10.29121/shodhkosh.v4.i2.2023.3958

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Copyright: © 2023 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

With the license CC-BY, authors retain the copyright, allowing anyone to download, reuse, re-print, modify, distribute, and/or copy their contribution. The work must be properly attributed to its author.

OPEN ACCESS

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the performative nature of gender identity through the lens of Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity and its application to transgender narratives, specifically A. Revathi's autobiography, The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story (2010). It examines how Revathi's lived experiences challenge the traditional binary framework of sex and gender by exposing the socially constructed and fluid nature of these categories. Drawing on Butler's theoretical framework, the paper highlights how repeated performative acts, encompassing language, attire, and behavior, shape and affirm gender identity, revealing it as an ongoing cultural process rather than an innate essence. Revathi's narrative, including her struggles with gender dysphoria, her journey toward self-acceptance, and the transformative impact of sex reassignment surgery, underscores the ways transgenders disrupt heteronormative notions of coherence between sex and gender. Furthermore, the study situates Revathi's experiences within the broader socio-cultural context of Indian transgender communities, examining how societal norms and historical perceptions influence the performance of gender. By analyzing Revathi's life story, this paper concludes how transgenders use performance to navigate, resist, and redefine culturally imposed gender roles, thereby affirming Butler's assertion that gender is a stylized and iterative construct, rather than an inherent reality.

Keywords: Sex, Gender, Performance, Transgender, Butler, Gender Dysphoria

1. INTRODUCTION

"Individuals are denied their rights in the name of sex, sexuality, caste, and religion... I am one such individual who has been marginalized because I was born a male and wanted to live my life as a woman" (Revathi, 2010, p. v).

Adrienne Rich's idea of compulsory heterosexuality highlights how society pushes the idea that being heterosexual is the only "normal" way to be, and along with that comes strict expectations about how men and women should behave. These expectations have traditionally tied gender to biological sex, with the assumption that being male or female automatically dictates how one should act. However, newer ideas about sex and gender challenge this by showing that gender is not something set in stone or determined by biology. Instead, it's a social construct, something we learn and perform through the way we act, dress, and interact with others. For transgender people, this idea is especially important

because they challenge the notion that sex and gender must match in a certain way. They show us that gender is more of a process—a series of actions and choices that are not dictated by biology. As Simone de Beauvoir (1989) famously said, "One is not born a woman, but becomes a woman," (p.301) emphasizing that gender is not an innate trait but something shaped by society and experience. This idea helps to break down the notion that there's only one way to be a man or a woman, and invites a more open, fluid understanding of identity that does not rely on rigid, fixed categories.

This idea of gender as a fluid, social construct connects directly to Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity in Gender Trouble (1990), where she expands on the idea that gender identity emerges through repeated social performances rather than being a fixed trait. According to Butler, gender is not a singular, natural act but something we do repeatedly through actions, gestures, and behaviors that align with socially accepted norms. These repeated performances, over time, create the illusion of a stable gender identity (Butler, 1990). Thus, gender, rather than being an innate characteristic tied to biological sex, is a social process—something we continually enact, perform, and express, often without conscious awareness, shaping our identity through each act and behavior (Butler, 1990). The idea that gender is constructed through repeated acts connects to Rich's critique of compulsory heterosexuality by showing how societal norms and expectations shape and reinforce what is considered "acceptable" gender expression.

In various transgender narratives, the assumed coherence between "sex" and "gender" is often questioned and challenged through acts, gestures, and performances that denaturalize this binary relationship. Transgenders do not necessarily identify with the "sex" assigned to them at birth and use various forms of performance to express their gender identity. The term "transgender" was first introduced by Virginia Prince, a self-declared cross-dresser and advocate from Southern California, who championed freedom of gender expression. However, the term gained its contemporary meaning after appearing in the title of Leslie Feinberg's influential pamphlet, Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come. According to Susan Stryker (2008), a transgender person was defined as "somebody who permanently change[s] social gender through the public presentation of self, [with] or without recourse to genital transformation" (p. 4). Feinberg, however, extended the term to a more political context, advocating for a unified alliance among all individuals marginalized or oppressed for diverging from social norms of gendered embodiment. Feinberg envisioned "transgender" as an inclusive, pangender umbrella term, encompassing transsexual individuals, drag queens, cross-dressers, masculine women, and others willing to identify with the term. This movement, rooted in Feinberg's vision, profoundly influenced public discourse on transgender issues for over a decade, emphasizing the need for social, political, and economic justice.

In India, transgender individuals are referred to by various terms, with "Hijra" being the most common. The existence of Hijras in Indian society can be traced back to antiquity, with the concept of 'Ardhanarishvara'—a deity embodying both male and female principles. Historically, they were regarded as bearers of blessings and fertility and served as confidants, musicians, and performers in Mughal courts. However, societal changes and modernization have altered these traditional roles, leading to a re-evaluation of their place in contemporary culture.

The transgender community, through its writings and theorizing, has sought to provide an insider's perspective on how trans people understand and navigate gender issues. Historically, transgender individuals in public discourse often took on the role of apologists, defending their existence and experiences against societal misunderstandings. However, a significant shift has occurred, marking the emergence of a new form of transgender performativity and textual expression. Today, transgender individuals are not just participants in the conversation on gender but are also shaping it as theorists. They critically engage with and reinterpret the idea, the word, and the signifier "gender," offering fresh insights that challenge traditional norms and expand our understanding of identity and embodiment (Stryker,198).

In India, several transgender individuals have courageously documented their struggles, reflecting on their assigned sex and the gendered identities they ultimately perform. These narratives commonly explore themes such as challenges against societal norms, journeys to self-acceptance, and the creation of distinct identities. For instance, Living Smile Vidya's I Am Vidya (2007), the first autobiography by a transgender person in India, chronicles her journey of self-discovery and gender performance. A. Revathi's The Truth About Me (2010), originally written in Tamil and later translated into English, provides a poignant account of her life as a hijra, grappling with discrimination and the complexities of sex work. Laxmi Narayan Tripathi's autobiographies, Me Hijra, Me Laxmi (2015) and Red Lipstick (2016), delve into her childhood, her journey as a hijra, and her role as an activist. Similarly, A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi (2017) by Manobi Bandopadhyay, India's first transgender college principal, co-authored with Jhimli Mukherjee Pandey, examines the challenges of navigating an unaccepting society. Akkai Padmashali's A Small Step in a Long Journey (2022)

recounts her fight for acceptance and equality as a transgender rights activist. Adding to this body of work, The Yellow Sparrow (2019) by Shanta Khurai provides a deeply personal account from the Northeast Indian state of Manipur.

Building on the ideas discussed, this paper explores how the act of performance reveals the ways in which transgender individuals challenge heteronormative notions of sex and gender. It aims to shed light on Judith Butler's concept of gender as a repeated social performance, rather than an expression of innate truth. The study focuses on Male-to-Female transgender A. Revathi and her deeply personal narrative as shared in her autobiography, The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story (2010).

2. DISCUSSION

Transgender individuals often experience gender dysphoria—a deep discomfort or distress caused by the mismatch between their true gender identity and the one assigned to them at birth. A. Revathi, born Doraiswamy into a Dalit family in a small village in Namakkal taluk of Salem district, felt this incongruence from a young age. As a child, Revathi naturally gravitated toward what were considered "feminine" activities—drawing kolam, helping her mother in the kitchen, and admiring the colourful ribbons, flowers, skirts, and blouses worn by the girls around her (Revathi, 2010). These behaviours were often dismissed by those around her, with remarks like, "He'll outgrow all these when he grows older" (Revathi, 2010, p. 4). Yet, despite the pressure to fit into societal expectations, Revathi couldn't ignore her true self. Reflecting on her childhood, she writes, "I did know that I behaved like a girl; it felt natural for me to do so. I did not know how to be like a boy…" (Revathi, 2010, p. 7). This internal conflict vividly captures her early struggles with gender dysphoria, shaping her journey toward understanding and expressing her identity.

Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity provides a helpful lens for understanding Revathi's experience. According to Butler, gender is not something we are born with; it's something we perform over and over through actions and behaviours shaped by societal norms. This constant repetition creates the illusion of a stable, "natural" gender identity. Butler (1990) writes, "Gender is a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions are obscured by the credibility of those productions… the construction 'compels' our belief in its necessity and naturalness" (p. 190). In other words, society enforces rigid expectations about how men and women should behave, punishing those who deviate. Revathi's story is a powerful example of someone who defies these norms, showing that gender isn't an unchangeable truth but something shaped and reshaped by how we act and how society reacts to us.

As Revathi grew older, she began to feel a deep, inescapable sense of femininity, as if she were a woman trapped in a man's body. This inner conflict was made even more painful by the fear that society would never accept her true self. During the Mariamman festival, when she played the role of Kurathi, dressing as a girl allowed her to finally express the feminine feelings she had long suppressed. For Revathi, wearing female clothes was not a disguise but a way to embrace her true identity. On the contrary, wearing male clothes felt like she was hiding who she really was.

Revathi's sense of belonging grew even stronger when she learned about other boys who wore sarees and had undergone sex reassignment surgeries. She was especially inspired by Amma from Dindigul, who had not only undergone the surgery but also wore sarees with pride. Revathi was taken into Amma's household as a 'chela,' where she could dress as she wished and, for the first time, truly feel at home. She began to grow her hair, understanding that long hair was an essential part of femininity, and feared that returning home might result in her family cutting it off. Wearing a saree without long hair, she felt, would bring dishonour to her new family.

In her efforts to pass as a woman, Revathi adopted the dress, language, and behaviours traditionally associated with femininity. Her experience echoes that of drag performers, who dress as women not just to imitate but also to challenge the idea of fixed gender identities. Like them, Revathi questions the notion of a stable, permanent gender identity. Judith Butler points out that imitation, like Revathi's, "gives us a cue to the way in which the relationship between primary identification—that is, the original meanings accorded to gender—and subsequent gender experience might be reframed" (Revathi, 2010, p. 187). Revathi's journey shows how gender is not something inherent but a series of performances, and in doing so, she challenges the traditional, rigid understanding of sex and gender as fixed and natural.

For many Male-to-Female transgender individuals, one significant way to affirm their identity is through sex reassignment surgery, often referred to as 'Nirvana.' A. Revathi shares her experience of undergoing this surgery, which was performed in an unhygienic environment, without proper medical examination or post-operative care. Despite these challenges, Revathi's primary desire was to remove the male 'object' that didn't align with her true self, and to finally live

as a woman, just like other women. After the surgery, Revathi felt a profound sense of relief and joy, describing her experience as feeling like a flower that had just blossomed. She reflects, "Before I got nirvaanam done, I was beset by a strange fear. I felt a pinprick of disquiet, going to the bathroom, or going out of the house. I could not think of myself as a complete woman. But now, all that was gone—the fear, the sense of unease that haunted me. Deep within myself, I recognized that I was now a real woman. And I felt joy about it" (Revathi, 2010, p. 92).

This passage highlights not only the immense emotional and psychological relief Revathi experienced after aligning her physical body with her gender identity but also connects to Judith Butler's understanding of the body as a dynamic entity, constantly shaped by social, cultural, and political contexts. Butler challenges the traditional view of the body as a stable, fixed object. She proposes that the body is a "variable boundary," which means it is not static but can change according to how gender and sexuality are understood and regulated by society. Butler argues that the body becomes a surface where societal norms and gender expectations are inscribed, and in this context, gender is a performative act—"a corporeal style, an 'act'... which is both intentional and performative" (Butler, 1990).

Revathi's experience of undergoing surgery and feeling complete can be seen as part of her performance of gender, in which the body is not only transformed physically but also aligned with her internal sense of self. This reflects Butler's notion that gender is not a pre-existing essence but something that is performed, constructed, and reaffirmed through acts and actions. Revathi's story, much like Butler's theory, emphasizes that the body is not a fixed entity but a canvas upon which society's norms and expectations are inscribed, and through this, Revathi was able to assert her gender identity in a way that felt both authentic and liberating.

3. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the discussion shows how Butler's concept of performativity helps us understand how transgender individuals break away from traditional ideas of gender. Through the repeated actions, expressions, and performances of their true gender identity, they challenge the societal norms that try to define them. This process highlights how gender is not something fixed or innate, but rather a series of repeated acts that create the appearance of a stable, gendered self. By living and expressing their identities, transgender individuals reveal that what we often see as a fixed gender is actually something that is built through constant social actions. Through their personal experiences, they remind us that gender is not an inherent trait, but something that evolves through the way society sees and shapes us.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

REFERENCES

Beauvoir, S. de. (1949). The Second Sex. Vintage Books.
Butler, J. (1990). Gender Trouble. Routledge.
Butler, J. (1993). Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex. Routledge.
Mondal, M. (2014). Gender geometry: A study of A. Revathi's autobiography The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story. Lapis Lazuli-An International Literary Journal (LLILJ).
Revathi, A. (2010). The truth about me: A hijra life story. Penguin Books.
Rich, A. (1980). Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence. In Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 5(4), 631–660. https://doi.org/10.1086/493756
Shamim, M., & Bushra. (2023). Truth unmasked: The voice of an Indian transwoman in The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story. The Creative Launcher, 8(5), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.53032/tcl.2023.8.5.01200-212
Stryker, S., & Aizura, A. Z. (Eds.). (2013). The Transgender Studies Reader 2. Routledge.
Stryker, S., & Whittle, S. (Eds.). (2006). The Transgender Studies Reader 1. Routledge.
Tanu, P., & Panniko, D. (2018). Production of gender: A study on performativity in female-to-

male transsexuals. Masculinities and Social Change, 7(3), 255-278. https://doi.org/10.17583/MCS.2018.3607

INSIGHTS

EDITORS
DR. PRANJIT KUMAR NATH
DR. UTPAL KALITA

INSIGHTS
Collection of Research Articles

Edited by
Dr. Pranjit Kumar Nath and Dr. Utpal Kalita

Printed at
GPHI
Visakhapatnam

Editorial Board
Editors
Dr. Pranjit Kumar Nath
Dr. Utpal Kalita

Members
Mr. Ajit Talukdar
Mr. Mihir Mazumdar
Dr. Leela Kalita
Mr. Khanindra Das

Copyright © 2023, Editors

Offices
Bhubaneshwar, Guwahati, Hyderabad, New Delhi, Visakhapatnam

All rights reserved. No part of this book or parts thereof may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any language or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior written permission of the copyright owners and the publishers.

The view expressed in this book are those of the authors not necessarily that of the publisher. The publisher is not responsible for the views of the authors and the authenticity of the data, in any way whatsoever.

ISBN:- 978-93-95606-25-7

Published by Global Publishing House India
90, Saheed Nagar, Bhubaneswar-7, Odisha
H. No.4, Bye lane-7, New Sarania, Gandhi Basti, Guwahati-3, Assam
No. 13-1-1, Vigneshwara Enclave, Anthony Nagar, Maharanipeta, Visakhapatnam-2, AP

7. The Sattriya and the Manipuri: Two Classical Dance Forms of North-East India
— *Dr. Mallika Kandali* 63

8. Reading Caste, Identity and Negotiations in Yashica Dutt's Coming Out as Dalit: A Memoir (2019)
— *Priyanka Raya* 74

9. The variety of Assamese and Tiwa spoken in Morigaon: A comparative study of their mutual influences
— *Dr. Manoj Kumar Das* 88

10. Anthropomorphism as a Narrative Tool in the Re-Telling/ Showing of Contemporary History in Malik Sajad'sMunnu: A Boy from Kashmir
— *Rupam Hazarika* 97

11. Brief study of existing National Education Policies,NEP 2020: its challenges and Opportunity in Higher Education
— *Samir Roy* 111

12. The Corrosion of Culture among the Second-Generation Immigrants in the Works of Jhumpa Lahiri
— *Sarmistha Das* 123

13. Stress and Impact of Life Skills as Coping Mechanism
— *Dr. Sikha Saikia* 131

14. Portrayal of Gender Sensitization in Selected Myths and Folktales of Assam
— *Tania Tarannam* 139

Reading Caste, Identity and Negotiations in Yashica Dutt's *Coming Out as Dalit: A Memoir* (2019)

Priyanka Raya

Abstract

Identity crisis remains one of the prime motivational forces behind the emergence of Dalit writings in India. It always advocates the complex question of search for identity through various negotiations and assertions. With the prime assumption that identity is in a constant state of flux, the present study is an attempt to examine the representation of Dalit identity in Yashica Dutt's *Coming Out as a Dalit: A Memoir* (2019). It investigates how the author constructs her identity as Dalit in opposition to a tradition that frames Dalit as inherently 'untouchables' and are subjected to oppression of different kinds.

Keywords: Identity, dalit, untouchable, oppression

In the post-Ambedkar period, Dalit life writings have recounted the raw wounds of caste system on Dalit life through the idioms of hunger, exploitation, discrimination and humiliation, and have also registered the simultaneous struggles by Dalits to reclaim their robbed humanity. However, YashicaDutt's*Coming Out as Dalit* sets forward as a 'new' note to the already existing polyphony of voice that Dalit life writings are. The Memoir is an account of a young middle-class Dalit girl whose childhood is fraught with struggles to keep her caste identity hidden. It dwells on the dreams and aspirations of a new generation of Dalits and the persistently creeping shadow of caste on them.The memoir also sketches a contemporary shade of the Dalit life in which the narrator not only reveals a hitherto-concealed 'lie' of being a Brahmin and examines the lived 'lie', but also unravels the many facets of caste(ism) that systemically operate in modern institutions today. The narrator sets out to scrutinise her formerly "performed" life in the consciously assumed Dalithood unveiling negotiations, tensions and, ultimately rupture in this performance of imitating upper castes.In that sense, this text seems to be grappling with the psychological dimension of the question of why Dalits have remained stuck in the closet of social anonymity and what is the way to come out of it. Thus, Dutt's text directly brings under investigation the myriad expression of intergenerational conflicts within Dalit middle-classes in addition to her own experiences of double marginalization.

Yashica was born in a Valmiki (Dalit) family in Ajmer, Rajasthan on 5 February 1986. Remarkably, Dutt's family members in Rajasthan came from the 'low' manual scavenger caste, and yet they were able to climb up the social ladder. But the cost of this success was dramatically embodied in the young Yashica herself. Her remarkable and persevering mother realised that her daughter would need to attend good private schools in order to learn to speak English fluently. And this the young Yashica and her stalwart mother actually accomplished,

at significant financial cost. But there was another, far greater cost – the young schoolgirl had to hide her Dalit identity. She had to constantly pretend that she was 'upper-caste' – and succeeded in doing so. By the time she was working as a fashion journalist in Delhi, she was 'passing' as a young Brahmin woman, and was accepted as such. People seek to 'pass' in many societies. It is similar to the phenomenon of African Americans who look 'white' seek to 'pass' as 'white'. Thus Dutt says in the preface of her memoir,

> Hiding one aspect of your identity is like leading a double life. You don't feel like you belong anywhere. You create masks to wear in each of your lives, and switch artfully between the two. Eventually, the two blur together and you no longer remember who you are. Pretending to be from a that's not Dalit is something like that. And there are so many of us who are living this lie. (Dutt xi)

The earlier dalit writings were limited to presenting, archiving, and reinterpreting caste within local contexts, Dutt's text is essentially an attempt to re-narrate caste in a wider global context. The reader finds an interesting expression of Dalit middle-class mannerism in her memoir. The intergenerational tensions are evident in the way the writer portrays her relationship with her mother, which also forms the substantial part of this book. This is an important clue to understanding how gender plays a crucial role in presenting a renewed aesthetics of caste. For instance, the importance of this mother-daughter relationship should be seen in the context of how 'Dalit women's testimonios offered counter narratives that challenged the selective memory and univocal history both of the Dalit and the women's movements' (Rege, 134). Selective memorization of episodes to reconstruct family history can undermine or ennoble a person's character in the family and is known to have an undermining effect on Dalit patriarchy in particular, especially in women authored narratives. For instance Dutt's memory of her father involves his carelessness, alcoholism

and violent nature, which marks his overall presence as that of a toxic male. One episode deserves particular attention in this regard in which she says the following:

> He (Dad) would start drinking early in the evening and by the time Mum had cooked and served dinner and finished cleaning up, he would be intoxicated. When she returned to studying after he had passed out, Dad interpreted this as a taunt against his relatively low rank in the exam. She testified that he would drag her from the makeshift kitchen at the back of the house to their room, beating her all the while. (Dutt. 6)

In this episode, the violence inflicted by her father upon her mother is at once an exemplary note on Dalit patriarchy, which is held responsible for creating obstacles in the lives of Dalit women. It may not be that her father did not do things that could have been significant in her development, but Dutt selectively chooses episodes to ufnderline a political point—to subvert Dalit patriarchal values. It is in this regard that the mother-daughter relationship assumes an increasing significance not only in re-imagining gender relations within Dalit literary works but also in arguing how gender continues to shape literary aesthetics and issues. Apart from seeing the inherent feminist politics in Dutt's selective memorization for the purposes of attacking Dalit patriarchy, one should come back to consider how Dutt's entire idea of caste as performance is predicated upon her mother's memories. In other words, Dutt grounds her theoretical formulation of caste as performance specifically in a feminist epistemology. The importance of this move can be realized by the fact that such couching of female experience in new formulation of caste will turn Dalit female experience into a rich epistemological resource not only for social theory but also for Dalit aesthetics and literary theory (Gurjar and Srishti, 7).

The struggle to acquire education despite rampant discrimination in school has been a recurring theme in Dalit life writings. *In Coming Out as Dalit*, Yashica re-emphasises her ancestors' struggle to acquire education when she says :

> Until three generations ago, Dalits were denied access to learning. My great grandfather defied this social order and learned to write by scratching in the mud with a stick. His son, my grandfather, like many others of his generation, fought every step of the way to enter the civil services. (Dutt 1)

Furthermore, regarding her great grandfather, Yashica continues that he too challenged the rigid prohibition on Dalit education by attending classes even when the teachers refused to teach him. It was this protest against the caste system allowed her grandfather to graduate with a degree in English literature. As Yashica traces back her ancestors' struggle to acquire education and the subsequent entry of her grandfathers' (on both sides) into the Indian Civil Services, the focus of narration here is a familial "past," which is sketched in the background of the continuous Dalit struggle for liberation and the provision of reservation in the constitutional polity of the country. In this recounting of the past, education is treated as a vital source of mobility and a catalyst for refashioning the "outcaste" self, which, in combination, aid in undermining the dictates of caste system. While the legacy of this struggle positively informs the educational opportunities of future generations in *Coming Out as Dalit*, the narrator in particular undergoes a peculiar training and refashioning in the school that was situated in the flux of a city. Yashica describes how Ajmer (Rajasthan) in the 1990s, with its factories and well-connected rail networks and, more importanty as an attractive education hub, presented the perfect platform to transcend their caste. And despite financial constraints, she joins Sophia, "one of the top convent schools in Ajmer," as a step towards her efforts to transcend caste. Yet transcending caste called for more than a good education; she needed to have as her mother says a 'good standard' as well.

For Dutt, middle-class aspirations for social mobility are nothing but attempts to imitate the upper-caste lifestyle from which Dalits should return to their symbols of cultural origin. Born into a

middle-class Dalit family of civil servants, she was "trained" since childhood to hide her Dalit identity and perform "upper casteness" through her fashion, lifestyle choices (e.g. movie nights, birthday party), and command of English. Therefore, joining the convent school meant making better this performance of her. Regarding the rationale behind her family's decision to send her to live in the middle-class, "upper-caste" hostel, Yashica explains that living with upper-caste girls was meant to train her to be like them. By picking up little details like how they spoke, braided their hair or tucked in their sheets – some of the markers of upper-caste culture – she would successfully blend in with them for the rest of her life. In her case, 'learning' in school days always involved a constant process of keeping up the 'upper-caste' appearances. In this regard, Yashica recounts, "But a boarding school meant that I would need to pretend I was upper caste in nearly every breathing, waking and sleeping moment – an onerous effort for most adults and nearly impossible for a seven-year-old" (26). These insightful accounts suggest how caste as a regime of social regulations, not just conscripts its subjects at birth but continues to mould them through minute aspects of everyday life. They also indicate that the so-called "standard" cultural habits and manners of the "upper caste" are nothing but constructed pretences towards caste "superiority." Therefore, for Yashica, imitating the "upper caste" as part of her "standard education" meant pretending after a set of pretence. It was not so much transcending caste as "training" herself in the hegemonic pretentions of "upper" caste. And by implication, she sheds light on the socio cultural fallacies of caste system.

Dutt writes referring to her mother that sometimes her mother wore tiny kitten heels when they went out, even though the piercing pain in her injured ankle would make it difficult for her to sleep later that night (19). The display of affectation on her mother's part is then one of the central preoccupations of Dutt's narrative, but this affectation is not generated by the desire for

class mobility as much as it is produced by the desire to hide one's caste. Therefore, affectation is itself identified as a way to hide caste and does not figure simply as a product of middle-class aspirations. These aspirations are not divergent and varied in the case of class but are singular and determined to avoid the stigma of caste. As she writes:

> So she spent money we clearly didn't have on more expensive things that would make up for my caste. Shoes that lit up with multi-coloured lights as I walked, the It kid's shoe of 1992, high-quality buckets and mugs made from shiny plastic and matte gold studs for my ears were meant to convey that we were rich so that no one would wonder if we were the right caste. (Dutt 26)

Here, one already sees a new urban aesthetic of caste where class behaviour is identified as fundamentally a caste behaviour. Coming back to the understanding of this double experience, where class abuse filters as caste abuse, is what characterizes many of the tensions that are felt over generations in Dutt's family. While her mother unsuccessfully suffered the pain of 'kitten heels' to pass as an upper caste, even then, she could not remove the wound of caste or prevent her children from experiencing the intergenerational trauma of caste. As Dutt observes thinking of her childhood how her Dad would often drop her brother to school and pick him up in the Omni. When his classmates discovered that his father was a 'driver', they used every occasion to taunt him about it. The status that her Mum had worked so hard to create and keep going all these years was shredded, and they were by then too poor to do anything about it. Class mobility has been unsuccessful in removing what can be referred to as the wound of casteism as there seems to be an organic transfer of class discrimination to caste discrimination over generations.

When Dutt's father arrives in Omni, which she later introspects, is it because he could not afford a more luxurious car, being in the lower class, or is it because they were Dalit and

hence could not afford another car. Dutt's father was a lower-class Dalit man who could only afford a cheaper vehicle, but he was not like many other Dalit who cannot even think of purchasing a four-wheeler. She through this sets to highlight how caste and class have converted into a silent indistinguishable anathema of social life. While the popular perception would have the world believe that class has replaced caste, as Dutt notes, that 'a new "middle class is developing in cities previously dominated by caste." Dutt chooses to interpret this hybrid form of discrimination as essentially caste discrimination, and it is this move of reading the concoction of class and caste as essentially caste-driven that gives rise to a new urban aesthetics of caste—an aesthetic that reinterprets and reconstitutes various intersections of marginality into a solid presentation of caste. In other words, this merging of intersectionality opens Dutt to brand all experiences of marginality into caste-like experiences. One can argue here that the structures of global capitalism have not liberated the marginalized population of the Third World nations; rather, they have incorporated them into new structures of marginality without replacing the existing ones. The number of opportunities opened by these structures, for instance, Dutt's mother working as an Amway sales agent, allowed Dalits to keep afloat above the existing structures of caste dominance, but this did not place them in any superior position in the class hierarchy. In fact, here, the Dalit literature, more than ever before, acquires a truly bahujan character as marginality of such type is pervasive across classes and castes not just in India but in the whole world. Dutt demands from her Dalit readers that they acknowledge themselves as Dalit and all their attempts toward social mobility as imitating upper-caste culture. Once they realize the futility of their ostensible modern lifestyle, they can be willing to consider their true Dalit identity.

Yet *Coming Out as Dalit* is a bildungsroman in the unique sense that it evolves from the institutional space of school and then delves into the terrains of higher education. As her delicate

negotiation vis-à-vis the stigmatised "outcaste" identity continues from the school into the college, Yashica admits, "My Dalitness still weighed heavy on me; I dragged its carcass behind me through my childhood and into adulthood" (xii). Therefore, when she decided to study at St. Stephen's, 'a delicious but impossible option'(58), the attendant financial burden weighed heavily on the "performance." On the deep dilemma in stating a hitherto-concealed identity, Yashica ruminates,

> As we filled out the admission form, Mum suggested, for the very first time, that I tick the box that said I was an SC/ST candidate...If I checked that box, I would taint my achievements with the "quota student" tag. My lifetime of lessons to successfully appear upper caste would be rendered useless with that single stroke. (Dutt 60)

While she desperately needed the financial aid meant for Dalits for pursuing education, the disquiet of the narrator over her identity was not entirely limited to matters financial. Entering an "exclusive club" (61) well known for being an elite space, St. Stephen's compounded Yashica's anxiety over "passing":

> I noticed that other students who had come with their parents to fill in the form were smartly dressed, impeccably accented and walking around like they belonged there. With my downward gaze and stooped shoulders, I didn't (Dutt 60–61).).

This gnawing sense of unbelonging experienced by the narrator might seem as an inevitable consequence of the "training," which required consenting and internalising the supposed "standard" habits and manners of the "upper caste."

However, it is far from an individually experienced instance of unbelonging. In a study on the experience of Dalit students at an "elite university" in India, Samson K.Ovichegan in his book titled *Faces of Discrimination in Higher Education in India: Quota Policy, Social Justice and the Dalits* concludes, this

premier university is yet another arena in which the practice of caste division continues to exist. The university environment in this case reinforces and maintains a divide between Dalit and non-Dalit. Dalit students do, indeed, experience overt and covert discrimination based on caste at this premier university. (374) AlthoughOvichegan keeps the name of this particular "premier university" in question secret, the observations made could be adjusted to understand similar contexts. Therefore, the systemic (re)enactment of caste hierarchy in the university environment, in which the privileged castes reproduce their hegemonic pretence, conveys to the narrator that she is an unwelcome other. From the foregoing experiential vantage point, Yashica further investigates the presence of caste in institutions of higher/professional education, and its consequences on Dalit scholars.

In this context, Yashica's decision to "come out" was prompted by the "institutional murder" of the Dalit research scholar Rohith Vemula in 2016 at the University of Hyderabad (UoH). Also, she has dedicated the memoir to her mother and "Rohith Vemula, who lit a flame that made her silence impossible. The powerful words written by Rohith in his last letter proved to be catalysing for Yashica in the sense that they melted away her hitherto-harboured assumptions that caste i.e. "outcaste" identity could be camouflaged by "performing" "upper caste" implying "caste-less" or "caste" with positive significance through which she could then live in a make-believe bubble "beyond" or "post-caste." On this, Yashica reflects:

> Rohith, a PhD scholar at Hyderabad University, had allegedly [died by] suicide as a result of relentless caste-based persecution at the university. When news of his suicide broke in the mainstream media in January 2016, my own Dalit identity was deeply buried beneath layers of convent education, urban upbringing and a hardened resolve to avoid engaging with anything related to caste. (Dutt xiv)

Death is an event that occasions mourning for the departed. Yet some deaths call for contemplation, justice, and moral awakening before a moment of mourning could be possible. As an act of contemplation and "personal/ political" awakening, Yashica not only dwells on the chain of events preceding the institutional murder of Rohith and the aftermath, but also proceeds to consider the dreams and struggles of Rohith in detail. She also narrates about the institutional murder of other Dalit students, such as PulyalaRaju, Senthil Kumar, MadariVenkatesh, and Balmukund Bharti, and the rape and murder of Delta Meghwal and Jisha, in institutions of (higher) learning such as University of Hyderabad (UoH) and the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS). In all of these contemplations she reconsiders her identity and decides to unveil to the world the true identity that she has been hiding for the longest period of time.

One of the most crucial shifts in the entire text comes through Dutt's reading of caste as a performance as opposed to caste being understood as a birth-marker of social divide. It must be noted here that it is only in Dutt's text that caste is made to appear as a performance and that writers before her has always worked with a very ritualized understanding of caste. For the latter, the city appears to be a hopeless and chamber-like place of atrocities and mental suffering. But when Dutt's text figures caste as performance, then the right to the city, which is also a right out of the suffocating chamber-like anonymity, is articulated through a sense of mastering the art of performativity: 'They were a curated performance designed mostly by Mum's aspiration to break out from our lower caste' (Dutt, 2019, p. 20). Dutt's parents, her mother in particular, spent all her life mastering this art of performativity, which may not have erased the stigma of caste completely but certainly helped Dutt to gain certain premium that may accrue as a result of these performances.

It is also important to take into account the global exposure that Dutt as a writer had while coming to an understanding of caste as a performance. Dutt was influenced by a seminar she attended in Columbia on what is called 'passing' in the African-American context to understand how 'Blacks' also try to pass as 'Whites'. Additionally, the narratives of 'passing' have become central in discussing questions related to race, freedom and performativity in a post-modern ethos where racial differences are thought to have been dissolved in cultural differences. Dutt is then suggesting by brining caste into the domain of performativity, what Stephan Knadler highlights about race in her essay 'Traumatized Racial Performativity'(2004) that,

> Postmodern versions of racial integration and tolerance need the narrative of passing to argue that racial barriers, which are now no more than cultural differences-ways of talking, dressing, playing music-can be crossed over as part of the play of a consumerist multiculturalism. (Knadler 68–69)

Dutt's characterization of caste as performance suggests that caste differences are predicated upon carefully curated socio-cultural performances rather than any ritually assigned position in the society.

One can, therefore, borrow Knadler's concept of 'Traumatized Racial Performativity' to interpret the phenomena of lower castes passing as upper castes as 'Traumatized Caste Performativity'—traumatized because this transition is often a never-ending and traumatizing experience where the person forever lives in fear of being called out and stigmatized upon the disclosure of his birth identity. Since caste barriers are now also reduced to cultural practices, the 'coming out' then should be understood as a freedom from this traumatizing performance involving the imitation of upper caste. Yet Dutt does employ various strategy to acquire a positive sense of identity. She highlights how the strange accent she had inherited by pretending to be 'Ruth

from Gloucester' at DCC, which made her sound like a rather pretentious, rich, South Delhi teenager, worked in her favor. (Dutt, 68) or the Tumblr page she creates for the hidden Dalits like her adds a new wing to her veiled identity or her choice to come out from the closet of her identity through a facebook post. Thus, the possession of powerful accent and language in addition to what can be called in the Foucauldian language 'new technologies of power', digital media, together constitutethe agency to perform caste positively. If one transports Stephen Knadler's remarks to the Indian context, then we can suggest that Dutt is somewhere arguing that caste differences can be crossed over or powerfully altered by a careful negotiation with the opportunities available within consumerist multicultural societies. It is within this context that the concern for new technologies of power is evenmore because the use of digital media has become one of the most decisive elements of contemporary life and also of access to the city in many ways. Henry Jenkins Identifies this as the rise of 'participatory cultures' (Jenkins, 8) where people across the world come together to share, create and learn innewer ways without the presence of barriers. Dutt, by owning these new technologies of power, can create participatory cultures to not only regenerate but also powerfully re-signify caste experiences.

The way YashicaDutt's narrative is a kind of 'coming of the closet' story, similarly, the story of the entire Dalit literature is also a 'coming-out' narrative from marginality and exploitation, and as such shares influences and similarities with othersuch global narratives of coming out. The coming-out narratives were best studied by the queer theorist Eve Sedgwick in her impressive work *The Epistemology of the Closet (1990)* where she states that the narrativeswereinitially adopted by the gay and lesbian communities. She adds that we must remember that these narratives of 'coming out' acquire their forceful legibility from several topical forces that are structurally rooted in our experiences of the modern world (72).

One should, therefore, place Dalit literature today at least in the two broad currents of thought: one of them is the global feeling of marginality instilled through the presence of global economic structures as we argued previously; the other, concomitant with the first, is the politics of identity that seems to operate through this larger feeling of marginalization, where all identities basically seem to be claimingtheir share of political-economy and their right to the city. One can see these affinities being highlighted in Dutt's autobiography in the episode when she was still studying at Columbia, where she seems to havea fascinating exposure to the performative power embodied within the discourse of queer and racial identities. The new aesthetics of caste tries to develop synergies with other marginal subjectivities to globalize the discourse of caste. Dutt has realized the need to forge stronger voices by developing synergies with other marginal subject positions.

Works Cited

Dutt,Yashica. *Coming Out as Dalit: A Memoir*. Aleph Book Company,2019.

Ovichegan ,Samson K. *Faces of Discrimination in Higher Education in India*: *Quota Policy,*

Social Justice and the Dalits.Routledge.2015.

Rege, Sharmila,ed. *Writing Caste/Writing Gender: Narrating Dalit Women's Testimonios*.

Zubaan,2006.

Sedgwick, E.*The Epistemology of the Closet*.University of California Press.1990.

Changing Scenerio in North East India

Education, Society, Language & Literature

Edited by:
Dr. Pranjit Kumar Nath
Dr. Utpal Kalita
Dr. Karabi Kakati
Archana Bora

CHANGING SCENARIO IN NORTH EAST INDIA : EDUCATION, SOCIETY, LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE :

Editor : Dr. Pranjit Kumar Nath, Dr. Utpal Kalita, Dr. Karabi Kakati, Archana Bora

Publisher : Global Net Publication
(An Imprint of Asian Humanities Press)
3rd Floor, 4736/23 Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi-110002
Contact No : 80113-48501, 75770-73317
Tel. No. : +9101143074469

First Impression : 2024

©: Author
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher, in writting.

This book is sold subject to the condition that is shall not, by way of trade or otherwise be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher prior conset in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

Online Contact : globalnetpublication@gmail.com

ISBN : 978-93-6761-589-8

Printed at : *Das offset, Assam, India*

Price: ₹ 1199/-

9. The Impact of Blended Learning on Student Achievement in Higher Education : A Case Study of Assam 107-118

✍ *Dr. Indrani Kalita*

10. NEP 2020 And Mainstreaming of IKS : Challenges and Opportunities for Indian Knowledge System 119-124

✍ *Dr. Karabi Kakati*

11. The Emergence of Christianity and its Influence on Apatani Society 125-138

✍ *Dr. Ligang Suniya*

12. Literature as an Instrument to Conserve Biodiversity 139-145

✍ *Dr. Manoj Kumar Das*

13. Bridging the Digital Divide : A Study on Govt. of India's E-Learning Initiatives 146-155

✍ *Merina Ahmed*

14. Voice of Resistance : A Comparative Study Between Yaruingam's Ngazek and Things Fall Apart's Okonkwo 156-166

✍ *Nikita Rahman*

15. Impact of National Education Policy-2020 in Transforming School Education of Nalbari District in Assam 167-179

✍ *Dr. Nitumoni Das*

16. Socio-Economic Status of the Bodos in Assam : A Rural Picture 180-198

✍ *Dr. Phanindra Kalita*

17. From England to Assam : The Cultural Journey of Shakespeare Through Translation 199-207

✍ *Priyanka Raya*

From England to Assam : The Cultural Journey of Shakespeare Through Translation

Priyanka Raya
Assistant Professor
Department of English
R.G.Baruah College, Guwahati, Assam

ABSTRACT

William Shakespeare's works have had a profound impact on literatures around the world, influencing a wide range of cultural and literary traditions beyond their original English context. His themes of love, power, betrayal, and the human condition, along with his innovative use of language and complex characters, have made Shakespeare a universal figure in world literature. Writers and translators from various cultures have adapted and reimagined his plays, incorporating local elements to make his works resonate with their own audiences. This paper specifically focuses on tracing Shakespeare's influence in Assamese literature, exploring how his works were introduced through translations and adaptations. By examining the various ways in which Assamese writers have localized Shakespeare's themes, plot structures, and characters, this study highlights the transformative role of translation in bringing Shakespeare into the Assamese literary scene.

Keywords : Shakespeare, translation, adaptation, localized, Assamese literature

"And the thing about translation is that there is no way around it. In a country as multilingual as ours, unless you have really good translations, you are doomed"

– Amitav Ghosh(Das,88)

As Amitav Ghosh observes, translation is crucial in a multilingual country like India, facilitating human exchange across diverse regions, languages, and cultures. Indian literature itself is deeply rooted in translation, with regional versions of the Ramayanas, Mahabharatas, and Bhagavatas representing significant contributions to the country's literary heritage. K. Satchidanandan highlights that, until the nineteenth century, much of Indian literature comprised "creative translations, adaptations, retellings, interpretations, epitomes, and elaborations of classical texts" (Satchidanandan 201). Furthermore, translations between Sanskrit, Persian, and Arabic have played a pivotal role in weaving together various cultures and religions. Translation impacts all aspects of society, from everyday speech to national unity, and has never been regarded as secondary; instead, it is celebrated as an original and significant contribution alongside the accomplishments of literary geniuses in their respective languages.

Translation involves both interpreting the original text and adapting it for a new audience in the target language. This task presents a dual nature: it is straightforward in that the translator is provided with a pre-existing set of ideas, but complex because it extends beyond merely reproducing the source text in another language. Literary texts are deeply embedded in the culture, history, politics, and social institutions of the original language community. Consequently, the translator must navigate the challenge of conveying these multifaceted ideas to readers who may be unfamiliar with the source culture. This inherent non-translatability often prompts a reevaluation of translation practices.

The term "translation" originates from the Latin *translatio*,

where *trans* means "across" and *latus* means "carrying," reflecting the process of transferring meaning from one language to another. Jeremy Munday defines translation as a process between two distinct written languages, involving the transformation of a source text (ST) in the source language (SL) into a target text (TT) in the target language (TL) (Munday 5). This definition underscores the intricate nature of translation as it requires not only linguistic transfer but also cultural adaptation.

In the Indian context, the term for translation is *anuvadha*, which means repetition or retelling a text with different wording. However, this should not be confused with a literal or word-for-word rendering of the original text into the target language. In various regional languages, *anuvadha* has led to a rich array of terms that describe the translation process, including *Tarzuman*, *Anukaran*, *Bhasantar*, *Roopantar*, *Vivartanaṃ*, *Sweekaran*, and *Mozhimattam*. Notably, these terms do not align with the Western concept of "carrying over" meaning from one language to another. Instead, they reflect a broader understanding of translation that highlights its dynamic nature in India. This diversity in terminology underscores how translation practices in India are distinct and reveals that translators have not been constrained by the perceived superiority of the original text.

In contrast to the translation traditions of monolingual European literary cultures, Indian translators have not been burdened by an anxiety over maintaining strict authenticity to the original texts. In India, the emphasis has always been on the imagination and creativity of the translators, which has allowed them to establish themselves as original poets within their own languages. Unlike figures such as Etienne Dolet of sixteenth-century France, who was executed for his interpretive liberties while translating Plato, Indian translators have not faced such extreme consequences. Instead, translation in India has been viewed as a process of revitalizing the original text through the lens of a new cultural and temporal context. The belief that complete fidelity to the original is impossible has led to a high regard for translators, who are seen as not merely

Indian elements during translation.

As Poonam Trivedi notes, the engagement between Shakespeare and India can be categorized into five main tendencies: the English Language Shakespeare, the Localized Shakespeare, the Universalized Shakespeare, the Indigenized Shakespeare, and the Post-colonial Shakespeare. The Localized and Universalized phases, in particular, highlight the practice of translating Shakespeare into regional languages. The Localized phase is characterized by early adaptations that altered characters, settings, and actions to align with the sensibilities of the target audience, effectively making Shakespeare's works resonate within an Indian cultural context. This approach aligns with the observation that, rather than adhering to a literal translation, playwrights often infused their adaptations with local color and cultural relevance. The Localized phase in Assam is evident in the early adaptations, such as *Bhramaranga*, where *The Comedy of Errors* was not only translated but also recast in an Indian setting, or in *Amar-Lila*, where *Romeo and Juliet* was adapted with Indian names and cultural contexts. These adaptations transformed Shakespeare's characters, settings, and narratives to align with Assamese sensibilities, effectively making the foreign elements of Shakespeare's plays their own.

Writers in Assam made deliberate efforts to bring Shakespeare closer to the local audience by employing storytelling techniques that resonated with Assamese readers, much like Charles Lamb had done with his adaptations. Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare,* first published in 1807, served as amodel for these efforts. The first such endeavor in Assam was undertaken by JnanadabhiramBarooah, who adapted *The Merchant of Venice* into a story format after spending his early years in England, aiming to make Shakespeare's works more accessible. Following this, Annada Sahitya Mandir of Jorhat published a series of small books, each containing a story drawn from Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare,* to further popularize Shakespeare among the Assamese. These adaptations included JajneswarSarma's*Dhumuha* (The Tempest), published in 1931, and *Dhenisar Saud* (The Merchant of Venice), which came out in 1930.

Earlier, in 1928, Bipin Chandra Barua's *BhramaRanga* (The Comedy of Errors) had also been published. Dulal Borthakur contributed with stories based on *Othello* and *King Lear*, while other titles like *AthensarTimón* (Timon of Athens), *Cymbeline*, and *Pericles* were also adapted. Notably, *Pericles* was translated by Sarat Ch. Goswami, a distinguished educationist (Barua 13-14). Through these adaptations, writers sought to make Shakespeare's plays more relatable by recasting them in a narrative form that was engaging and familiar to Assamese readers, thereby bridging the cultural and linguistic gap between Shakespeare's works and the local literary landscape.

Shakespeare's influence has deeply permeated the creative consciousness of Assamese writers, with his characters and dramatic techniques often finding their way into Assamese literature. This influence is particularly evident in Assamese historical plays by LakshminathBezbarua. His plays *Jaimati* (1916), *ChakradwajaSingha* (1921), and *Belimar* (1926) feature characters and themes that reflect Shakespearean elements. For example, the character of Gajpuria subtly echoes Falstaff, Priyaram resembles Prince Hal, and the tragic figure of Badan Chandra parallels Richard III. Assamese playwrights have also drawn from Shakespeare in their plot structures, incorporating the idea of tragic relief by juxtaposing light and serious scenes—a technique inspired by Shakespeare's works. The Shakespearean fool has also found a place in Assamese drama, more closely than the Indian classical *Bidushaka*(Barua15). This presence of the fool in Assamese plays from the 1930s illustrates the adaptation of Shakespearean elements in local contexts.

The influence of Shakespeare on Assamese literature does not end with historical adaptations. In recent times, his impact persists in the writings of contemporary Assamese playwrights and authors. Modern works often reflect Shakespearean plot structures, characterization, and thematic elements, demonstrating how Shakespeare's legacy has evolved in the Assamese literary landscape. For example, contemporary writers frequently employ

Shakespearean motifs such as complex character arcs and intricate plots, while also exploring universal themes of ambition, betrayal, and redemption. The adaptation of Shakespeare's narrative techniques and character archetypes continues to enrich Assamese literature, blending traditional Assamese storytelling with the dramatic depth and sophistication of Shakespeare's works. Translators and playwrights have brought Shakespeare into the present day, reshaping Assamese literature by integrating his innovations and transforming the narrative style and character development. This ongoing dialogue with Shakespeare's legacy highlights his enduring relevance and the dynamic nature of Assamese literary creativity, ensuring that his influence remains a vital and transformative force in the field.

REFERENCES

- Barua, Navakanta. "Shakespeare in Assamese." *Indian Literature*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1964, pp. 12–15. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/23329675. Accessed 22 Aug. 2024.
- Bezbarua, Lakshminath. *Bezbarua-Granthavali*, vols. 1. Sahitya Prakash, 1968.
- Hazarika, Atul Chandra. *Ashru Tirtha*. Sarada Prakashan, 2016.
- Jana, Jayanta. "Shakespeare in Comparative Discourse and Influence Studies in the Assamese Language Print Media." *Space and Culture, India*, vol. 2, no. 4, 2015, pp. 3–16. ACCB Publishing.
- Lamb, Charles. *Tales from Shakespeare*. Edited by Mary Lamb and Charles Lamb, 1st ed., Macmillan, 1900.
- Mahanta, P. *Western Influence on Modern Assamese Drama*. Mittal Publications, 1985.

- Munday, Jeremy. *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Applications*. Routledge, 2001.
- Panja, Shormishtha, and BablimoitraSaraf, editors. *Performing Shakespeare in India: Exploring Indianness, Literatures, and Cultures*. Sage Publications, 2016.
- Satchidanandan, K. "Reflections: Rethinking Translation." *Indian Literature*, vol. 45, no. 1, 2001, pp. 5–8. *JSTOR*. Web. 21Aug. 2024.
- Shakespeare, William. *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*. Wilco Publishing House, 2011.
- Trivedi, Poonam, and Dennis Bartholomeusz, editors. *India's Shakespeare: Translation, Interpretation, and Performance*. Pearson Longman, 2006.

JYOTIRMOYEE

A PUBLICATION OF THE WOMEN'S CELL, D.K.D. COLLEGE, DERGAON



EDITORS

DR. T.G. DEVINA **DR. S. UPADHYAYA**

জ্যোতির্ময়ী

JYOTIRMOYEE

A bilingul compilation of articles on women issues.

Edited by
Dr. T.G. Devina, Dr. Sristisri Upadhyaya

Published by AMULYA KUMAR BORAH
on behalf of AITIHYA ESHONNA
Golaghat Town, P.O. & Dist. Golaghat (Assam)
PIN: 785 621
Printed at Partha Imprint, Dergaon, Golaghat (Assam)

First AITIHYA ESHONNA Edition: March, 2024

ISBN: 978-81-963743-7-2

© Author

Cover Design:
Parthaprotim & Jyotisman Baruah

Price: Rs. 1200/- (Rupees one thousand two hundred only)

The editorial board is not responsible for the information given in the articles.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, microfilming, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner and the publisher.

CONTENTS

- **Women in Agricultural field**
  Dr. Kumari Sunita 1
- **Women in Science and Technology**
  Ratna Kalita, Munmi Phukon 6
- **Indian Women in Agriculture**
  Dr. Eliza Khatiwora 19
- **Women's Puberty and Legal Hush Hush With Indian Temples**
  Shyamalima Borah 31
- **Empowering Agriculture via Start-ups Led by Women: Prospects and Obstacles**
  Bidisha Hazarika, Dr. Diganta Kumar Bora 38
- **Evolution of Gender Representation in Bollywood: A Parched Perspective**
  Priyanka Raya, Gautami Bharali 47
- **E. K. Janaki Ammal : A Pioneering Woman Botanist**
  Dr. Deepa Sharma, Dr. Sristisri Upadhyaya 52
- **Gender Dynamics in the Tea Plucking Industry: Exploring the Preference of Women Workers Over Male Counterparts**
  Himakshi Baishya, Dhyanjyoti Sarmah, Lakhya Jyoti Gogoi 57

Evolution of Gender Representation in Bollywood: A Parched Perspective

Priyanka Raya[1] & Gautami Bharali[2]

[1]Assistant Professor, Department of English,
R.G. Baruah College, Guwahati
[2]Assistant Professor, Department of English,
N. A. M. College of Education, Hojai

Introduction:

Media, in all its forms, serves as a powerful mirror reflecting societal norms, values, and beliefs. Through the lens of cinema, we are presented with narratives, characters, and imagery that not only entertain but also deeply influence our perceptions of gender roles, expressions, and identities. Cinema has the unique ability to transport us into different worlds and perspectives, allowing us to inhabit the lives of characters who may be vastly different from ourselves. In doing so, it also offers a window into the complexities of gender identity, showcasing a diverse array of experiences and challenging traditional stereotypes.

From classic Hollywood films to contemporary indie productions, cinema has evolved to incorporate a broader spectrum of gender representations. We see characters breaking free from binary constraints, exploring fluidity, and embracing authenticity in their expressions of gender. These portrayals not only reflect the lived experiences of many individuals but also contribute to a more

inclusive and accepting cultural landscape. Moreover, cinema serves as a platform for dialogue and reflection on gender identity issues. Thought-provoking films spark conversations, challenge assumptions, and inspire empathy, fostering greater understanding and acceptance of diverse gender identities.

In the early years of Bollywood cinema, gender roles were often portrayed in a conventional and stereotypical manner. Male protagonists were typically depicted as strong, heroic figures, while female characters were relegated to secondary roles as love interests or dutiful daughters. These traditional portrayals reinforced societal norms and expectations surrounding gender, perpetuating stereotypes and limitations. In the latter half of the 20th century, Bollywood began to witness a shift towards more nuanced and complex representations of gender.

The 21st century saw a significant increase in the number of female-centric films in Bollywood, with actresses taking on roles that were more diverse and multifaceted. Films such as "Pink", "Neerja" ,"Parched" etc. showcased strong and independent female protagonists, breaking away from traditional stereotypes and celebrating female empowerment. These films not only resonated with audiences but also paved the way for greater inclusivity and representation of women in Bollywood.

In the vast expanse of cinematic storytelling, few narratives resonate as profoundly as those that challenge entrenched gender norms and societal expectations. Leena Yadav's 2016 creation "Parched" stands as a beacon of such resistance, offering a mesmerizing portrayal of three women - Lajjo, Rani, and Bijli - whose lives intersect in a rural Indian village, where patriarchal structures loom large and the dictates of tradition weigh heavily upon them.

'Parched': A Departure from Conventional Representation

Set against the rugged backdrop of Rajasthan, "Parched" paints a vivid portrait of a community steeped in age-old customs and traditions, where women are relegated to subordinate roles, their agency and autonomy stifled by the oppressive grip of patriarchal norms. Yet, within this seemingly suffocating environment, Lajjo, Rani, and Bijli emerge as defiant agents of change, challenging the status quo and subverting gender roles with unwavering courage and determination.

At the heart of "Parched" lies the character of Lajjo, whose journey serves as a poignant exploration of womanhood in the face of adversity. Infertility and spousal abuse serve as constant companions on her path, yet Lajjo refuses to be defined by her struggles. Instead, she embraces her agency and autonomy, defying societal expectations by daring to pursue a relationship outside the bounds of her marriage. In doing so, Lajjo asserts her right to happiness and fulfillment on her own terms, shattering the confines of traditional gender roles with each bold step she takes.

Equally compelling is the story of Rani, a young widow whose resilience in the face of tragedy serves as a testament to the strength of the human spirit. Widowed at a tender age, Rani refuses to be reduced to a mere symbol of grief and loss. Instead, she embraces her newfound independence, challenging patriarchal norms and societal expectations at every turn. Through her defiance, Rani emerges as a beacon of hope and inspiration, inspiring others to reclaim their agency and assert their right to self-determination.

Bijli, the third protagonist of "Parched," confronts gender roles with a boldness and determination that is as inspiring as it is revolutionary. As an erotic dancer ostracized by society for her profession, Bijli refuses to be defined by societal judgments and expectations. Instead, she embraces her sexuality and agency,

challenging the notion that women should be confined to restrictive roles dictated by men. Through her friendship with Lajjo and Rani, Bijli embodies the transformative power of solidarity and mutual empowerment, inspiring others to defy societal norms and assert their right to autonomy and self-expression.

Through its rich tapestry of storytelling and nuanced character development, "Parched" offers a compelling commentary on the enduring struggles of women in patriarchal societies and the transformative power of resilience, courage, and defiance. By defying gender roles and societal expectations, Lajjo, Rani, and Bijli emerge as symbols of empowerment and liberation, inspiring audiences to challenge oppressive norms and envision a world where women are free to pursue their dreams and aspirations without fear or constraint.

One of the most striking aspects of "Parched" is its emphasis on female solidarity and companionship. Despite their disparate backgrounds and experiences, Rani, Lajjo, and Bijli find solace and strength in their bond with each other. Their collective journey towards liberation serves as a potent metaphor for women's empowerment in a society rife with oppression. The film then subverts the traditional Bollywood narrative by prioritizing the agency and autonomy of its female characters. Instead of merely serving as catalysts for male protagonists' journeys, these women emerge as protagonists in their own right, driving the narrative forward with their courage and resilience.

In addition to its exploration of female experiences, "Parched" also challenges conventional notions of masculinity. Through the character of Gulab, the film interrogates toxic masculinity and its repercussions on both men and women. Gulab's transformation from a domineering husband to a more empathetic and introspective individual underscores the potential for change and redemption.

The success of "Parched" signals a broader shift within Bollywood towards more nuanced and socially conscious storytelling. Filmmakers are increasingly exploring diverse narratives and amplifying marginalized voices. Female-centric films, once considered risky ventures, are now finding widespread acclaim and commercial success, challenging the industry's traditional patriarchal hegemony.

"Parched" stands as a testament to Bollywood's evolving role in addressing social issues and challenging cultural norms. As the industry continues to diversify and embrace a wider range of narratives, films like "Parched" play a crucial role in amplifying marginalized voices and fostering empathy and understanding. By confronting uncomfortable truths and championing inclusivity, Bollywood has the power to inspire meaningful change and shape a more equitable society.

Conclusion:

Thus, through its bold storytelling and unflinching portrayal of female agency, "Parched" serves as a beacon of hope in a cinematic landscape undergoing profound transformation. As audiences demand more from their entertainment, Bollywood has an opportunity and a responsibility to continue pushing boundaries and serving as a catalyst for social progress.

Works Cited:

1 Kumar, Sashi. *Unmediated: Essays on Media, Culture and Cinema*. New Delhi, 2017.

2. Mukhopadhyay S, Banerjee D. "Bollywood, Popular Visual Media, and Sexism in India: A Critical Glance Back" *Journal of Psychosexual Health*, vo.3 no.3, 2021, pp.256-261. doi:10.1177/26318318211027312

3. *Parched*. Directed by Leena Yadav, Ajay Devgn FFilms Production ,2016.

Selected Papers from the ELTAI Annual Conference 2024

RECLAIMING NARRATIVES

IDENTITY, ENVIRONMENT, AND RESISTANCE IN INDIAN LITERARY STUDIES AND BEYOND



Edited by

Nizara Hazarika

M. S. Xavier Pradheep Singh

ELT@I
English Language Teachers' Association of India

14. **Ecological Narrative in Sylvia Plath's Poetry: Exploring Nature, Self and Biophilic Relations** 90
Noirrita Priyadarshini

15. **Nature, Identity and Narrative: An Ecocritical Perspective in Easterine Kire's *When the River Sleeps*** 96
Payel Das

16. **Language, Culture and Traditions of the Hijras: A Study through Select Life Narratives from India** 101
Priyanka Raya &Indu Swami

17. **Literary Narratives as Instruments of Peace and Peacebuilding** 107
Richa Chand

18. **The Runway Distress: Understanding Cultural Pathology in the Light of Existential Paradigm of the Fashion Industry** 114
Rimpi Sahu

19. **The Art in Narration: Interrogating Graphic Life-Writing in India** 123
Rupam Hazarika

20. **Animal Transformations in Angela Carter's Works and Margaret Lyngdoh's Study of Khasi Culture** 132
Suprovo Dutta

21. **Defying Stereotypes: The Legacy of Helen and Leela Naidu in Bollywood's Gender Landscape** 138
Uttam Baliram Sonkamble & Shital Kishor Aher

22. **Roots in Earth, Hearts in sky: Women's Intimate Bond with Nature in Anuradha Roy's Literary Landscape** 144
Valuganti Aishwarya Sree & Namburi Thyaga Raju

23. **Land, Nature and Spirituality: Environmental Consciousness in *The Legends of Pensam*** 152
Vanlalliani, K. C. Lalthlamuani & F. Lalchhanhima

16

Language, Culture and Traditions of the Hijras: A Study through Select Life Narratives from India

Priyanka Raya
Research Scholar, Assam University, Diphu Campus

Indu Swami
Assistant Professor, Department of English, Assam University, Diphu Campus

Abstract

The presence of the hijra community in the country's cultural and historical landscape traces back to antiquity. Despite being integral to the country's history, their unique culture, traditions, and terminologies often remain marginalized in mainstream discourses. This paper aims to explore the cultural dimensions of hijra identity by analysing two groundbreaking transgender life narratives, namely A. Revathi's *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story* (2010) and Akkai Padmashali's *A Small Step in a Long Journey* (2022). The narratives not only provide personal accounts of their challenges and triumphs but also highlight the collective culture of the hijra community in India, how they navigate their place within Indian society while preserving their traditions and cultures. Thus, the study seeks to uncover the unique social practices, culture, and rituals that form the bedrock of hijra identity in India as presented in the selected transgender narratives.

Introduction

Long before legal recognition affirmed their place in modern India, Hijras have existed in the margins and heartlands of history, weaving themselves into the country's cultural and mythological fabric. Their presence is not a recent phenomenon but one with roots as deep as the epics themselves. The *Ramayana* tells of a moment that transcends time—a moment when Rama, upon his exile, bid his followers, both men and women, to return home. Yet, there were those who did not fit within these categories, those who existed in the in-between space. These were the hijras, left uncertain of their place in the world. Instead of departing, they chose devotion, waiting in meditation for fourteen years until Rama's return. Moved by their steadfast faith, he blessed them, recognizing not only their endurance but their right to exist. This tale is more than mythology; it is a mirror of history—one that reflects both the reverence and alienation hijras have faced through the ages.

Hijras are a distinct socio-cultural group in South Asia, recognized as male to female transgenders. They are known by different terms across various regions and cultures, such as *Aravani* in Tamil Nadu, *Jogappa* in Karnataka, *Khwaja Sira* in Pakistan, and *Kinnar* in North India. They have existed for centuries, often associated with spiritual and ritualistic roles, such as blessing newborns and newlyweds. While some undergo castration (nirvana) as a rite of passage, others do not, yet they all share a collective identity shaped by their community bonds and cultural traditions.

Serena Nanda in her ethnographic study of the hijras *Neither Man or Woman: The Hijras of India* (1999) defines them as individuals assigned male at birth but perceived as incomplete men, a perception rooted in their anatomy, appearance, and psychological identity. When asserting their

identity as neither male nor female, they often begin by explaining how they do not fit into the category of men, emphasizing the absence or imperfection of a penis, as well as differences in physiology, sexual functions, emotions, and preferences. Their identity is shaped by both an ascribed status—being born this way—and an achieved status, marked by the conscious renunciation of sexual desire and activity. While hijras are distinctly not men, they are also not fully women, though they present themselves in a way that aligns with femininity. Their adoption of female dress and mannerisms is often exaggerated, sometimes to the point of caricature, and their overtly sexual or suggestive behaviour contrasts with the socially accepted conduct of women in traditional roles such as daughters, wives, and mothers (5). This distinct performance of femininity, separate from conventional gender norms, highlights the hijra identity as one that exists beyond the rigid binary of male and female.

Hijra communities are organized into tightly-knit groups, which provide a vital support system and a sense of belonging for their members. These communities function as both social and cultural units, preserving unique language, traditions and practices that have been passed down through generations. Central to the structure of these communities is the guru-chela system, a hierarchical relationship where the guru, typically an elder or more experienced member, provides guidance and mentorship to younger individuals, referred to as chelas. This system is not merely a mentorship arrangement but functions as a familial bond, with the guru assuming a nurturing and protective role. The chela, in turn, learns the customs, rituals, and values that define hijra life, ensuring the transmission of cultural and spiritual practices within the community. Rituals play a significant role in hijra communities, serving both as cultural expressions and as a means of spiritual fulfilment. Hijras are traditionally involved in performing ceremonies such as blessings at weddings, childbirths, and other life milestones, thus reinforcing their importance in the social and religious fabric of Indian society.

The growing trend of life writing has provided a vital lens for understanding the culture and lived experiences of the hijra community. This research draws on two autobiographies: *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story* (2010) by A. Revathi and *A Small Step in a Long Journey* (2022) by Akkai Padmashali. Born as Doraiswamy in Namakkal district, Tamil Nadu, Revathi has emerged as a powerful voice in the transgender rights movement. Her first book, *Unarvum Uruvamum (Our Lives, Our Words)* (2004), documents the real-life struggles of hijras in South India, while *The Truth About Me*, originally written in Tamil and translated into English by V. Geetha, brings her personal journey to a wider audience.

Akkai Padmashali, a prominent activist, motivational speaker, and singer, was born as Jagadish in Bangalore. Her contributions to the hijra community have earned her the Rajyotsava Prashasti, Karnataka's second-highest civilian honour, and an honorary doctorate from the Indian Virtual University for Peace and Education. Her memoir, *A Small Step in a Long Journey* (2022), reflects her personal struggles and advocacy for transgender rights. This research engages with the autobiographical narratives of A. Revathi and Akkai Padmashali to explore the cultural frameworks, social structures, and ritualistic practices that define hijra identity in India. It critically examines the linguistic and symbolic systems that shape hijra communities. By analysing these narratives alongside broader cultural practices, the study underscores the role of language in both constructing hijra identity and safeguarding their heritage. Through this exploration, the research aims to contribute to a deeper scholarly understanding of how hijra traditions and social customs function as integral components of their lived experiences and collective identity.

Discussion

Serena Nanda (1999) describes Hijras as individuals who do not fit within the conventional categories of "man" or "woman," instead embodying an alternate gender that is deeply personal and self-defined. Their presence challenges the rigid structures of Indian society, which has long been built on binary notions of gender. Despite facing social exclusion, Hijras find strength in their close-knit communities, where they share a unique way of life shaped by their own rituals, traditions, and relationships. At the same time, they hold a revered place in cultural and religious spaces, often seen as "special, sacred beings" through their role in ritual performances. Nanda explains that the "special powers" ascribed to them stem from their distinct gender identity, lending legitimacy to their function as ritual performers. This role is more than just a duty—it becomes central to their sense of self, shaping their collective identity and offering them a source of dignity and recognition in a society that often marginalizes them (12).

The language of the Hijras is deeply embedded in their culture, traditions, and identity, with many terms unique to their community. They have specialized and sometimes secret words used for communication, reflecting their social structures and way of life. For instance, *Pottais* refers to a sari-clad woman, while *Thandu* denotes the fee paid to adopt a *chela* (disciple). *Pampadhuti* signifies the act of paying obeisance to elders, and *Jamat* refers to the internal court or forum where important community decisions are made. The term *Naik* is used for the chosen head of a Hijra household, while *Masoka* describes a woman in good circumstances. Additionally, the Hijras have distinct words for everyday aspects of life, such as *Godi* for the police, *Kanwasi* for a phone, and *Tooktani* for a spittoon. Their linguistic system is strongly influenced by feminine roles and relationships, rooted in the *Guru-Chela* tradition. Within this structure, the *Guru* assumes the role of a mother, while *Naanis* represent grandmothers. The bond between *chelas* (disciples) and their peers is defined through familial terms such as *Doodh Beti* (sisters), *Kaalaguru* (the Guru's sister), *Gurubai*, *Badagurubari*, and *Chota Gurubai* (all referring to the *chela's* sisters). At the heart of this hierarchy, the *chela* is considered the daughter, reinforcing a familial framework that mirrors traditional kinship systems while uniquely shaping Hijra identity.

Excluded by mainstream society, Hijras have built their own close-knit community, which plays a crucial role in shaping their sense of identity and belonging. Within this community, authenticity and kinship are defined through the *reeth*—the traditional *guru-chela* system—where one must be formally adopted by a *guru* and become part of an extended Hijra family. Adoption into the Hijra community is not just a social formality but a fundamental step in affirming one's identity as a Hijra. A significant example of this ritualistic adoption is seen in the case of Akkai Padmashali, who was formally included into the Hijra community by her *guru*, Jarinamma. The ceremony follows a specific ritual: a plate is placed on the ground, and on it, a vessel containing a piece of cloth, a small betel leaf, and a symbolic fee of four rupees and four annas is arranged. This ritual takes place within the *jamat*, the internal court or governing forum of the Hijra community, overseen by a *naik* or *nayak*, who serves as the judge (Padmashali 41). The same ritual was done for Revathi. This adoption process is more than a ritual—it is a profound act of inclusion, solidifying one's place within the Hijra kinship system and affirming their identity within the larger Hijra tradition.

The *guru-chela* relationship lies at the heart of Hijra identity, shaping both an individual's social acceptance and their advancement within the community. This bond is not merely symbolic; it carries prescriptive responsibilities and contractual obligations, marking the initiate's formal entry into a new familial structure. By becoming a *chela*, an individual acknowledges the social and economic duties that come with this adoption, integrating themselves into a hierarchy that defines

Hijra social organization and control. *Chelas* are expected to be respectful, obedient, and loyal, serving their *gurus* by attending to their domestic needs. In return, *gurus* bear the responsibility of ensuring their *chelas'* well-being. They provide shelter, food, and clothing, safeguard their health, and impart the customs, rituals, and etiquette essential for their *chelas'* growth within the community. This exchange sustains the Hijra social structure, reinforcing bonds of kinship while allowing initiates to gradually rise in rank and establish their own place within the larger Hijra collective. The relationship showcases inequality in rank but runs as a relationship of reciprocity. Thus, Gayatri Reddy (2010) notes "Although clearly hierarchical, with seniority among hijras (as a principle of both social organization and social control) being reckoned through the unequal power structure of gurus and chelas, this relationship is a mutually beneficial, reciprocal one" (157).

The hijra household is organized as a commune. The members contribute part or all of their earnings to the household, and they may also help with household chores. In return, they get a roof over their heads, food, protection from the police, and a place to carry on their business, whether this is performing, begging, or prostitution. Thus, the hijra household functions as both a residential and an economic unit. The hijras living in a household are subject to its rules, more or less strict depending on the region. There are seven named houses into which all hijras are divided: Laskarwallah, Chaklawallah, Lalanwallah, Bendi Bazaar, Poonawallah, Ballakwallah, and Adipur. These named divisions exist with some slight variation from region to region all over India. The main function of the houses appears to be to divide the community into groups in order to facilitate intracommunity organization. The houses are not ranked, and there does not seem to be any advantage in joining one over another. Akkai Padmashali belonged to the Laskarwallah House.

Hijras, having their own customs, rules, and rituals, also have a structured system for maintaining order and justice within their community. This forum, known as the *Jamat*, serves as a space for mediation, decision-making, and dispute resolution. In her autobiography, Revathi emphasizes the significance of the *Jamat*, explaining that as Hijras are "marginalized by mainstream society, denied a legal existence, and dispossessed of their rights" (62), they turn to their own community for protection and support. The *Jamat* is led by a chosen head, the *Nayak*, who ensures the well-being of the Hijras and takes responsibility for major decisions affecting the community. Through the *Jamat*, the Hijras have established their own cultural framework, creating a system that provides both structure and a means of asserting their rights in a world that often denies them recognition.

One of the *guru's* chief responsibilities is overseeing the *chela's Nirvana* operation, the ritual castration that marks a significant transition in a Hijra's life. This process as highlighted by Serena Nanda involves three stages:

> The first stage involves separation, where the individual distances themselves from their previous male identity. The second stage is a liminal phase—corresponding to the post-operative recovery period—where the individual exists in an in-between state, no longer male but not yet fully recognized as a Hijra. In the final stage, an elaborate initiation ceremony marks the individual's rebirth as *nirvan*, a "true" Hijra, believed to be free from the curse of impotence and now a conduit for the Mata's divine power (27).

Not only must the *guru* grant permission for this act, but she is also responsible for supporting the *chela* financially during the forty-day recovery period when she is unable to work. During this time, it is often the *chela's* biological mother rather than the *guru* who looks after her.

However, at the end of the seclusion period, the *guru* plays a crucial role in organizing the *dawat*, a celebratory feast that publicly marks the *chela's* transformation into a *Nirvana Sultan*. This responsibility is both an honour and a duty, making it one of the most significant roles a *guru* performs for her *chela*.

After six months of becoming a *chela* to her *guru*, Revathi was sent for her *Nirvana*. She was given the choice of having the operation performed either by *Thayamma* (a traditional Hijra surgeon) or by a doctor. Before the operation, she was required to perform religious rituals, including praying before *Pothiraja Mata* and breaking a coconut in front of her picture. Small yellow cloth bundles containing a rupee and 25 paisa were tied to her wrist, and she was given a coconut and a lemon, believed to protect her from evil during the process. Post-surgery, strict dietary restrictions were imposed—she was not allowed to consume milk or fruit for forty days. On the fortieth day, a *puja* was performed for their *Mata*, and a pot of milk mixed with water from a river or pond was offered to appease the Goddess. This ritual was followed by a feast. A special custom also dictated that the *guru* would gift her *chelas* who had undergone *Nirvana* with a *jok*, a ceremonial gift set consisting of a green saree, a blouse, an inner skirt, a nose ring, anklets, and toe rings.

On the other hand, initially hesitant to undergo *Nirvana*, Padmashali eventually embraced the tradition. The post-*Nirvana* celebration, known as *Jalsa*, is a moment of joy and acceptance within the Hijra community. Similarly, when a member of the community dies, a ritual mourning period of forty days is observed. This is followed by a grand celebration to honour and remember the deceased. Padmashali describes this as "a moment of acceptance, of emotion, of remembrance." During the mourning period, *chelas* dress in white sarees, refrain from wearing a nose ring, bindi, or even eyeliner, and are not allowed to leave their home. This ritual closely mirrors the mourning customs observed by Hindu widows after the death of their husbands.

The Hijra community, with its deeply rooted traditions and structured hierarchy, provides its members with a sense of belonging and identity. However, this structure also enforces strict rules and social expectations, sometimes resulting in severe punishments for perceived transgressions. Hijras are required to pierce their nose and ears and grow long hair as part of their identity and tradition. Respect for one's *guru* is paramount—*chelas* must never address their *gurus* by name, instead referring to them by the places where they reside. Senior Hijras, such as *Nayaks*, must always be addressed by their titles, and *Paampaduthi* (bowing to elders) is a mandatory practice. Hijras are also required to offer a portion of their earnings to their *gurus* in exchange for protection and guidance. Emphasis is placed on grooming and effeminate behaviour as markers of belonging.

Despite these rigid customs and hierarchies, the Hijra community remains a vital space for those seeking identity, acceptance, and solidarity. While challenges persist—both within the community and in broader society—their resilience and deep cultural heritage continue to shape their unique existence, preserving traditions while navigating the evolving landscape of gender and social inclusion.

Conclusion

The hijra community, with its intricate social structures, rituals, and traditions, stands as a testament to resilience, identity, and belonging in the face of historical and social marginalization. Their lives are shaped by deeply rooted customs that not only provide a sense of purpose but also reinforce their unique cultural heritage. From the guru-chela system to the sacred ritual of Nirvan, each practice plays a crucial role in affirming their place within the community and the larger social fabric.

References

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. Routledge, 1990.

Ekins, Richards and King, Dave. *The Transgender Phenomenon*, Sage, 2006.

Halberstam, Judith. *In a queer time and place: Transgender bodies, sub-cultural lives*. New York University Press,2005.

Hall, Donald E. *Queer Theories*. Plagrave Publishers, 2017.

Jaffrey, Zia. *The Invisibles: A Tale of the Eunuchs of India*. Pantheon Books, 1996.

Nanda, Serena. *Neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India*. Wordsworth Publishing Company,1999.

Padmashali, Akkai, and Gowri Vijayakumar. *A Small Step in a Long Journey: A Memoir*. Zubaan Publishers, 2022.

Reddy, Gayatri. *With Respect to Sex: Negotiating Hijra Identity in South India*. University of Chicago Press, 2010.

Revathi, A. *The Truth About Me*. Translated by V.Geetha. Penguin Books, 2010.

Rich, Adrienne. *Of Women Born, Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. Virago, 1979.

Stryker, Susan and Stephen Whittle. *The Transgender Studies Reader 1*. Routledge, 2006.

Taparia, Swadha. "Emasculated Bodies of Hijras: Sites of Imposed, Resisted and Negotiated Identities." *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, vol.18, no. 2, 2011, pp.167-184.

Vyas, S. and Shingala. *The Life Style of the Eunuchs*. Anmol Publications, 1987.

Wilhem, Amara Das. *Tritiya Prakriti: People of Third Sex: Understanding, Homosexuality, Transgender Identity and Intersex Conditions through Hinduism*. Xlibris Corporation, 2008.

Witz, A. "Whose Body Matters? Feminist Sociology and the Corporeal Turn in Sociology and Feminism." *Body and Society*. vol.6, no.2, 2000, pp. 1-24.

INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL BIOTECH HUB
DERGAON KAMAL DOWERAH COLLEGE, DERGAON

Reaccredited by NAAC with A+ (CGPA: 3.37)
DERGAON, GOLAGHAT, ASSAM

CERTIFICATE OF PARTICIPATION

This certificate is presented to
Priyanka Raya, Assistant Professor
of R.G.Baruah College
For active participation in the
Three Days Faculty Improvement Programme on
"Climate Change, Biodiversity and Role Of Biotechnology"
at D.K.D. College, Dergaon, Assam
Organized by
Institutional Level Biotech Hub, D.K.D. College, Dergaon
from 20th – 22nd March, 2024

(Dr. Ranjit Kumar Bordoloi)
Principal
D.K.D. College , Dergaon

(Dr. T G Devina)
Principal Investigator
D.K.D. College Dergaon

INDIRA GANDHI NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY

Staff Training and Research Institute of Distance Education

New Delhi 110068

Control No.:223056165S

UGC-Approved Short-Term Professional Development Programme

Under Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya National Mission on Teachers and Teaching

This is to certify that

PRIYANKA RAYA

RADHA GOVINDA BARUAH COLLEGE

participated in and successfully completed the

Professional Development Programme on 'Implementation of NEP-2020 for University and College Teachers'

held from 12-20 June, 2023

and obtained 'A+' Grade

Prof. Santosh Panda
Director, STRIDE &
Coordinator of NEP-PDP Committee,
Indira Gandhi National Open University

New Delhi
Date of Issue:June 26, 2023

Prof. Uma Kanjilal
Pro-Vice Chancellor
Indira Gandhi National Open University

REFRAMING WOMANHOOD

DISCOURSES, IDENTITIES AND RESISTANCE

Edited by
KABITA BHUYAN
JINI RANI BORO

10. Her Voice, Her World: Indigenous Knowledge and the Politics of Resistance in Karbi Women's Narratives

Dr. Kadombini Terangpi 94

11. Women's Health and Well-being: Intersectional Perspectives

Dr. Karabi Kakati 102

12. Economic Determinants of Linguistic Behaviour: A Socioeconomic Analysis of Assamese Language Evolution

Manoj Kr Das 124

13. Education, Voice, and Resistance: Negotiating Identity Beyond Tradition in Easterine Kire's A Terrible Matriarchy

Pranita Kalita 131

14. Gendered Lives and Quiet Resistance in Prajwal Parajuly's "The Cleft"

Priyanka Raya 139

15. Women at the Helm: Need of Gender-Inclusive Leadership

Rahul Das 147

16. Globalization and Women's Lives: Negotiating Work, Family, and Identity in a Global Era

Dr. Sahnaz Sultana 156

17. A Feminist Cartography of Loss: Displacement, Belonging, and Women's Memory in the Film Mati

Sarmistha Das 162

18. Women's Leadership in Higher Education: Challenges, Enablers and Emerging Opportunities

Syeda Maboda Ahmada 168

19. Participation of Women in Higher Education Institutions of Assam: A Statistical and Policy Analysis

Dr. Utpal Kalita 178

20. নির্মল প্রভা বৰদলৈৰ সাহিত্য সৃষ্টি আৰু নাৰীৰ অস্তিত্ব

ড° লীলা কলিতা 192

Gendered Lives and Quiet Resistance in Prajwal Parajuly's "The Cleft"

*Priyanka Raya**

Prajwal Parajuly is a prominent diasporic writer whose works explore themes of migration, displacement, cultural identity, and social inequality within South Asian and transnational contexts. Born in Kalimpong and educated in India, the United States, and the United Kingdom, Parajuly occupies a liminal position between cultures, which enables him to write with sensitivity about both homeland realities and diasporic experiences. His debut collection of short stories, *Gurkha's Daughter* (2013), is widely acclaimed for its nuanced portrayal of Nepali lives shaped by class divisions, economic precarity, gender hierarchies, and cultural transitions.

A significant aspect of Parajuly's fiction is his sustained attention to gendered lives, particularly the everyday experiences of women situated within patriarchal social structures. His stories frequently centre on female characters whose lives are shaped by domestic labour, widowhood, marriage, migration, and social marginalisation. Rather than presenting overt acts of rebellion, Parajuly foregrounds subtle forms of resistance, emotional endurance, and silent negotiations through which women respond to oppression. In his short story "The Cleft," Parajuly reveals how women's bodies, labour, and emotions become sites of control and discipline, while also allowing space for quiet resistance and emerging feminist consciousness. Through such representations, Parajuly's diasporic writing bridges local realities

*Assistant Professor, Department of English, R.G.Baruah College, Guwahati

and global feminist concerns, making his work particularly significant for gender-focused literary analysis.

Prajwal Parajuly's "The Cleft", from his collection of short stories *The Gurkha's Daughter,* presents a portrayal of how gender, class, caste and domestic servitude shape women's lives in a patriarchal Nepali Society. The interactions between the female characters Parvati, Sarita, Erin and the young domestic help Kaali expose the multiple ways in which women internalise and reproduce patriarchal domination while simultaneously struggling against their own forms of oppression. Although the story centres on the journey to the funeral of Parvati's mother-in-law, its true narrative trajectory unfolds through the complex relationships between the women, each situated at a different place in the hierarchy of gendered power. Feminist theory alerts us to the need to examine such relational power structures not as isolated incidents but as historically produced systems that determine who speaks, who is silenced, who commands authority and who is deemed unworthy of dignity.

Feminism is both a political movement and an intellectual framework that places gender at the centre of analysis when interpreting cultural practices and addressing demands for equality, rights, and justice. A key assumption within feminist thought is that gender roles are not natural but socially constructed. Feminists argue that identities such as "daughter," "wife," or "mother" are not biologically predetermined; rather, women are trained to perform these roles through social conditioning and cultural expectations. As Simone de Beauvoir famously writes, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman,"(283) highlighting how society shapes women into particular behavioural patterns that support and maintain patriarchal norms. In this sense, feminist theory becomes a philosophical and analytical tool that examines how gender roles are produced, reinforced, and represented in cultural forms such as literature, cinema, and other narrative traditions.

This paper seeks to offer a feminist reading of Prajwal Parajuly's "The Cleft" by examining how patriarchy operates through intersecting structures of gender, class, caste, and domestic servitude in Nepali society. It seeks to analyse the complex

relationships among the female characters—Parvati, Sarita, Erin, and Kaali—to show how women occupy different positions within social and gender hierarchies and how they simultaneously experience oppression and participate in sustaining patriarchal norms. Using feminist and subaltern perspectives, the study shows how women's bodies become sites of control, discipline, and conditional care. It also discusses internalised misogyny, widowhood, marital restrictions, and the tension between traditional patriarchal values and liberal feminist ideas. The paper argues that "The Cleft" reveals not only male domination but also female complicity, while highlighting quiet forms of resistance and emerging feminist awareness.

Discussions:

At the heart of the story is Kaali, the thirteen-year-old servant girl whose cleft lip becomes both a literal and metaphorical symbol of her marginality. She is the embodiment of what Gayatri Spivak terms "the subaltern"—the woman doubly marginalised by poverty, caste, lack of education and a deformity that marks her as "other." A feminist analysis immediately reveals how Kaali's body becomes the site on which power is inscribed. Her cleft lip is not just a medical condition; it is a justification for ridicule, humiliation, and the withdrawal of opportunities. Parvati repeatedly reminds Kaali, saying " Your name is Kaali, you dark girl, and your brain is as dark as your face. You understand nothing" (Parajuly 3) that no one else would employ a "girl like her", reinforcing bodily difference as destiny. Kaali's physical appearance becomes the reason she is denied education, affection and self-worth. She is told that even the promise of corrective surgery depends not on her needs but on her "good behaviour," (Parajuly 6) as though medical care is a reward for obedience rather than a right. This conditionality mirrors the wider patriarchal policing of women's bodies, where bodily autonomy is mediated through male or elite female authority.

Parvati's treatment of Kaali is central to a feminist understanding of how patriarchal norms reproduce themselves through women. Although Parvati is also a woman constrained by widowhood, ritual impurity, financial limitations and social

scrutiny, her own experiences of gendered suffering do not generate empathy for Kaali. Instead, she wields the little authority society affords her by dominating a child who is even more powerless. She insults Kaali's appearance, calls her "dirty," "uncivilized," "black as coal," and repeatedly reminds her of her lowly origins. Parvati's cruelty reveals how patriarchy encourages women to assert superiority over other women when they cannot exercise it over men. This shows how hierarchical societies turn the oppressed into agents who perpetuate the very systems that subjugate them. Parvati's internalised misogyny becomes a tool of violence, and Kaali becomes its most accessible target.

A feminist reading also uncovers the ways in which women themselves are constructed through patriarchal expectations. Parvati's status as a widow positions her in the most vulnerable category of womanhood in traditional Nepali society. Her narrative reveals the ritual restrictions imposed on widows—no colourful clothing, no jewellery, limited participation in ceremonies, and social isolation. She openly expresses envy when she sees married women's bright attire, sindoor and symbols of conjugality. Her identity has been stripped down to the category of "widow," which determines how she moves, eats and appears in public. Her longing for companionship, her fear of loneliness, and her desire for emotional connection expose the emotional violence widows experience. Feminism recognises widowhood as a tool for disciplining women's sexuality and autonomy, and Parvati's reflection on her life illustrates how effectively this discipline operates.

While Parvati represents internalised patriarchy, Sarita embodies a different kind of conflict—the conflict between traditional expectations and emerging feminist consciousness. Sarita is married, has a teenage son, and appears materially comfortable, yet she feels constrained within her marriage. Her interactions with Erin, the Australian woman she calls "Aamaa," reveal her attraction to an alternative model of womanhood: educated, self-sufficient, liberal and unafraid to voice personal needs. Erin introduces Sarita to ideas that challenge patriarchal expectations, such as the value of education for women at any age, child-rearing without physical punishment, and the

legitimacy of a woman seeking personal fulfilment. Sarita's desire to go to college is a clear feminist impulse—a move toward self-realisation beyond domestic duties. But this desire clashes with the expectations of her culture, and Parvati's constant reminders that "women like them" should be content with marriage and motherhood reveal the conservative ideological policing at work (Parajuly 16).

Sarita's emotional vulnerability is revealed when she confesses she is contemplating divorce. Her admission shocks Parvati, whose worldview is shaped entirely by patriarchal norms that consider divorce shameful, immoral and destructive. Sarita's yearning for autonomy and emotional well-being represents a feminist awakening, but her struggle shows the immense social and familial pressures that restrict women's choices. Parvati dismisses Sarita's pain by comparing it with "real suffering"—husbands who beat their wives, husbands who abandon families, or those with mistresses. According to Parvati's patriarchal logic, Sarita's husband is "good enough," so Sarita's unhappiness is invalid (Parajuly 29). This reflects a broader feminist critique of how women's emotional suffering is trivialised unless it fits the narrow definitions of violence visible within patriarchal discourse.

Erin's presence adds another dimension to the feminist reading of the story. As a white foreign woman, she is positioned outside the Nepali patriarchal system, and therefore becomes a symbolic representation of an alternative model of womanhood. She is educated, independent, assertive, and financially stable. She can sponsor Sarita, can influence how Sunny is raised, and can openly express opinions without fear of social backlash. For Sarita, Erin becomes an aspirational figure, someone whose approval she seeks and whose lifestyle she admires. Yet, Erin's position is also complicated: she arguably embodies a form of liberal, Western feminism that may not align seamlessly with the lived realities of Nepali women. Her influence on Sarita is liberating but also destabilising, as Sarita finds herself caught between the norms of her society and the ideas Erin represents. A feminist critique would point out the danger of imposing Western models of empowerment onto contexts shaped by class, caste, family networks and economic dependency. Erin's well-meaning guidance cannot fully account for the structural barriers

Sarita faces, and the story reveals the limitations of a feminism that does not engage with local socio-cultural complexities.

Against this backdrop, Kaali's silence becomes the most telling feminist commentary within the story. She speaks when spoken to, obeys orders, and internalizes every insult. She knows her place in the hierarchy and rarely questions it. Even when she expresses a desire for schooling, Parvati dismisses it, telling her that "with that face" education is useless. Kaali's dreams are shaped by others' expectations, but her spirit remains alive in small moments of humour, curiosity and resilience. Her question about whether dead people know they are dying, her desire for better food, and her careful saving of money earned during festivals—all reflect an inner world full of possibilities that the patriarchal structure tries to suffocate. Feminist theory highlights how marginalized women resist in subtle, everyday ways, and Kaali's resistance is embedded in her hope for surgery, in her attachment to Sarita's encouragements, and in her small acts of self-preservation.

What makes "The Cleft" especially compelling through a feminist lens is how it exposes complicity across generations and classes of women. Parvati, despite being oppressed as a widow, refuses to empathize with Sarita or Kaali. Sarita, despite her progressive impulses, accepts the privileges of her class, often overlooking Kaali's suffering. Even Erin, despite her compassion, remains protected by her whiteness and economic power, and cannot fully participate in the emotional and cultural burdens the Nepali women carry. The story thus highlights a key feminist insight: women do not experience patriarchy uniformly, and their positions within intersecting hierarchies shape how they relate to one another. Instead of solidarity, the story shows fragmentation—women turning against other women because the structure encourages comparison, judgment and competition rather than mutual support.

The journey to the funeral intensifies these tensions. Rituals surrounding death reveal the patriarchal policing of women's bodies and behaviours. Parvati's inability to eat, her fear of being judged, and her anxiety about performing the correct rituals highlight the rigid expectations placed on widows. Sarita's

navigation of these rituals alongside her internal dilemmas demonstrates the pressure to perform ideal womanhood even while her inner life is in turmoil. Meanwhile, Kaali becomes both an observer and unwilling participant in this theatre of gender, watching women negotiate spaces of power they do not fully control.

In the end, the feminist force of "The Cleft" lies in its unflinching depiction of the structural violence that governs women's lives in Nepali society. Kaali's cleft lip symbolizes the scars patriarchy leaves on women—visible for some, invisible for others. Parajuly shows that patriarchy is not a monolithic oppression enforced only by men; it is a system sustained through families, rituals, internalised beliefs and the policing performed by women themselves. Yet the story also reveals moments of potential transformation—Sarita's pursuit of education, Kaali's dream of surgery and a better life, Erin's encouragement of new possibilities, and even Parvati's occasional reflections on her own loneliness. These moments suggest that while patriarchy persists, resistance grows quietly, reshaping women's identities in ways that future generations may carry forward.

Conclusion:

"The Cleft," thus, becomes more than a story about a journey to a funeral. It becomes a study of how patriarchy fractures women, pits them against each other, and denies them solidarity, while also offering glimpses of feminist consciousness struggling to emerge. Reading it through a feminist lens uncovers the layered oppressions and complex emotional landscapes that define women's lives in the story, reminding us that empowerment is rarely linear or simple. Rather, it is a slow, often painful negotiation between what society expects women to be and what they dare to imagine for themselves.

Works Cited

bell hooks. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. 2nd ed., Pluto Press, 2000.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, 1990.

de Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. Translated by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier, Vintage Books, 2011.

Nayar, Pramod K. *An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. Pearson Education India, 2010.

Parajuly, Prajwal. *The Gurkha's Daughter*. Quercus, 2013.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, University of Illinois Press, 1988, pp. 271–313.

Reframing Womanhood: Discourses, Identities and Resistance is a multidisciplinary edited volume that explores women's identities, struggles, empowerment, and resistance in contemporary society. The book discusses themes such as motherhood, reproductive rights, unpaid care work, digital feminism, political participation, education, and marginalized women's experiences. Through literary, social, economic, and historical perspectives, the articles challenge patriarchal norms and highlight women's agency and resilience. Special emphasis is given to voices from Assam and Northeast India. The volume promotes gender equality, inclusive knowledge production, and feminist scholarship, making it a valuable academic resource for students, researchers, and scholars



Kabita Bhuyan, Secretary, Women's Studies Cell, is an Assistant professor in the Department of Economics, R.G.Baruah College, Guwahati, Assam.



Jini Rani Boro, Assistant Secretary, Women's Studies Cell, is an Assistant Professor in the Department of History, R.G.Baruah College, Guwahati, Assam.

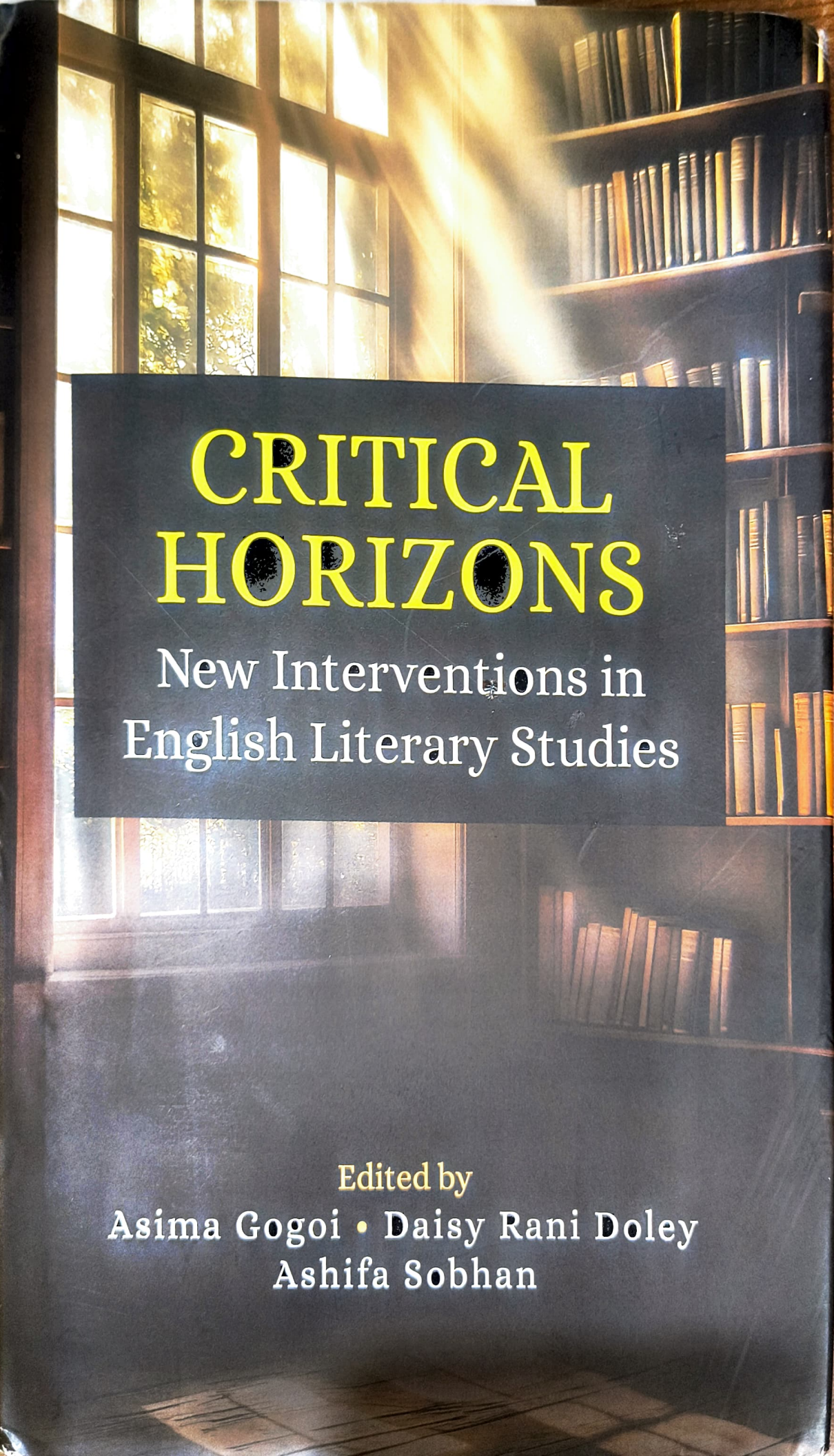
GLOBAL PUBLISHING HOUSE (INDIA)

• Bhubaneswar • Guwahati • Hyderabad
• New Delhi • Visakhapatnam

Price : ₹ 1395.00

ISBN: 978-93-47586-30-9

9 789347 586309



CRITICAL HORIZONS

New Interventions in English Literary Studies

Edited by
Asima Gogoi • Daisy Rani Doley
Ashifa Sobhan

Cartographies of Pain: Mapping Memory, Place, and Post-Partition Trauma in *Jangam*
Hunali Mech
64

Reclaiming Identity through Querencia in Kali Fajardo-Anstine's "Sugar Babies"
Bhargavi Gogoi
72

Analysing the Postmodern and Postcolonial in the Netflix Series *Sex Education*
Kaushik Bhuyan
81

Climate Fiction and Eco-Anxiety: Mapping Solastalgia in *Savi and the Memory Keeper* and *A Cloud Called Bhura*
Monsumi Sarma
87

Home and Belongingness in Dibyendu Palit's *Alam's Own House*
Priyanka Raya
93

From Ballad to Canon: The Literary Aesthetics of Bhupen Hazarika's Lyrics
Debraj Buragohain
99

The Application of *Rasa* Theory in Kalidasa's *Abhijnana Shakuntalam*: An Analytical Study
Chinmoyee Saikia
106

Domestic Space as Everyday Resistance in Diasporic Households: Reimagining the Identity of Women in Anita Rau Badami's *Tell it to the Trees*
Meghali Gogoi
115

Home and Belongingness in Dibyendu Palit's "Alam's Own House"

Priyanka Raya

Introduction

The Partition of India in 1947 and the subsequent independence of Bangladesh—formerly East Pakistan—from West Pakistan in 1971 form an important historical backdrop for understanding the notions of home and belongingness in Dibyendu Palit's "Alam's Own House." The divisions created havoc in the lives of people who were otherwise bound by shared linguistic and cultural affinities. The abrupt separation from their ancestral land and the forced migration across the border created a profound rupture in both personal and communal identities. With the physical homelessness crept in a sense of psychological dislocation that lingered long even after resettlement. The tensions between origin and destination, memory and present reality, and belonging and estrangement are central to Palit's narrative. Thus, partition becomes more than a historical event; it brings forth the notion of a fragile home and the precarity of belongingness.

The notion of home has been discussed in migration and displacement studies not as a stable physical site, but as a construct shaped by memory, longing, and identity. It highlights the fluid and emotionally charged nature of home. In her *Cartographies of Diaspora* (1996), Avtar Brah describes home as a 'mythic space of desire' that is constructed through memory and may become a 'place of no return' (192). This longing to return to the place of origin is what she terms 'homing desire'. In a similar vein, Salman Rushdie proposes that

exiles create 'imaginary homeland' out of fragmented memories. These fragmented memories create an idealised reconstruction of places that are a thing of the past and no longer exist in the same form as they used to be. The reconstructions are partial and selective which makes their sense of home unstable and haunted by absence (Rushdie 12).

A new dimension was added to this perspective by Homi K. Bhabha through his idea of 'unhomliness'. Bhabha defines unhomliness as a condition in which the boundaries between home and the world gets blur and generates a sense of estrangement even with familiar spaces (Bhabha 13-15). Edward Said further argues that exiles give birth to 'unhealable rift' between individuals and their lands of origin. This makes displacement a permanent, unhealable psychological rupture moving beyond its scope as a temporary dislocation (Said 173). For many uprooted individuals, past homes then become a nostalgia; an emotional space preserved and reconstructed through memory. With these theoretical perspectives in mind, this paper seeks to examine how ideas of home and belongingness are reshaped, destabilised, and emotionally renegotiated in Dibyendu Palit's "Alam's Own House," highlighting how characters grapple with fractured attachments, shifting identities, and the lingering pull of places left behind.

Discussion

Dibyendu Palit's "Alam Own House" opens with Alam's journey towards Kolkata from Dhaka to attend a seminar on friendship between the two countries, i.e. Bangladesh and India. The opening questions the grounds on which belonging is claimed. In one of her letters addressed to Alam, Raka asserts that "Certain roots are meant for certain roots only" (13). This claim of hers unsettles Alam as it denies his continued claim to Kolkata as home. His reply, "If I understand it the way you mean it, then don't forget that I was born in Kolkata in the very house to which this letter is being addressed. Doesn't that give me roots in Kolkata?" (Palit 13). This presents a strong contrast between Raka and Alam's understanding of 'roots' and addresses a tension between two competing models of belongings: one based on lived attachment and the other on the fact of birth. Alam's notion of rootedness erupts from his birth, and for Raka, roots emerge in due time through inhabitation. The story thus denies any simple notion of

home by suggesting that birth alone does not secure a sense of belonging, but the experience of living in a place can redefine who a 'native' is.

Alam journey back to his place of birth, Kolkata, intensifies his uncertainty about home. When he is reminded by his friend that Kolkata must be familiar, Alam replies:

> It is the land of my birth to which the narrator observes that with these words he could submerge himself in his own identity. Was the land of one's birth also one's native land? This question often made him feel homeless. It did now again (Palit 19).

Here, the psychic dislocation produced by partition is clearly evident. The phrase "land of my birth" is immediately undercut by the question of whether that land still counts as "native" after political borders have shifted and people have migrated. Alam's homelessness is not confined to the loss of a home; it is the loss of his sense of security that came from 'native land'. It shows a disjunction between where one is born and where one is allowed to belong. Thus, producing a metaphysical homelessness where identity itself feels unmoored from geography. This sense of homelessness extends even to the sky above the divided land. At one point, Alam remarks, "This sky space belongs to India," and Feroze adds that "we have no, what you call, fundamental rights over it" (Palit 15). The sky, which is a symbol of free, unbounded space, becomes nationalised. The use of this image suggests how partition is not only a cartographic event but also an experiential one. It rebuilds how individuals inhabit and perceive space.

The story also narrates how, as an extended consequence of partition, homes were exchanged and families were compelled to restart their lives on unfamiliar land they relocated to. Alam's father witnessed these changes firsthand and reflected on how partition has taken form in two forms: one political and the other mental. He adds that the second one that they are experiencing has not been signed and sealed by Mountbatten (Palit 20). He reminiscences of the time when both Hindu and Muslim patients visited his chamber without any hesitation and he too would use the same stethoscope. However, the situation was so grim that his practice turned into prejudice. The Hindu patients no longer visited his chamber. This reveals how political boundaries were drawn swiftly, but the psychological boundaries

that emerged crept in slowly and painfully disturbing the communities that once lived in union. This erosion of shared trust became more visible when the homes were exchanged between Alam's family and Anantashekhar's family. Anantashekhar's house in Dhaka was left "lying waste" after their departure, and the proposal to exchange properties appeared practical, even necessary. Beneath this decision lies a harsher truth of homes being reduced to negotiable assets, which was once repositories of memory, history and emotion. This highlights how addresses may change, houses may be reclaimed, but the deep emotional connection of one's sense of belonging cannot be rewritten. Thus, Alam realises that "man's continuity survived in blood, not in his address" (22).

When Alam returns to what he still calls 'his own house', he has to face the gap between memory and material change. Although he had no difficulty in locating his own house, he also tells Raka that it was not possible for anyone to be born in the same house twice, except for him. He highlights how deeply his identity is bound up with this particular space. But the present reality does not match this intimate connection when he notices that the 'kathchampa tree' that once marked the peculiarity of his home has disappeared and has been replaced by a sweet shop. The new owners, i.e., Anantashekhar and his family, identify with the house through this new marker. The transformation of the house signifies a shift in how the space is socially recognised and remembered. Dibyendu Palit here dramatizes how old memories are overwritten by new forms of occupation and memory, thereby rendering former inhabitants invisible. The narrative suggests that belonging is not only erased by law and migration but also by the silent accumulation of everyday changes.

Not only Alam but Sneha, Raka's mother, also echoes the feeling of homelessness. Sneha now dwells in Alam's house, yet she is reminded very often of the place where she was born, grew up, and spent most of her life, which she calls the "umbilical cord." She confesses that despite having her own house and property in India, she has a constant feeling of being homeless. This deeply moving confession shows how a house, property, and belongings do not guarantee inner stability. The metaphor of the "umbilical cord" suggests a connection to the land of her birth that cannot be severed by migration. Her family has resettled and rebuilt, yet the ache of

displacement lingers. Through her character, Palit reminds readers that the sense of homelessness was shared by families on both sides of the border.

Raka's reflections introduce another dimension to this loss. In one of her letters, she writes, "It was because of this hesitation that our addresses had changed—yours and mine. And many people's before us. But if that hesitation wouldn't have been there, we would probably never ever have had the opportunity to meet" (Palit 34). The "hesitation" she speaks of refers to the fear, confusion, and political tension that caused families to flee or relocate. Yet Raka sees in this painful history the possibility of new relationships. Her words reveal a tender irony: displacement, though devastating, brought her and Alam together. This recognition complicates the story's emotional landscape. Partition created immense loss, but it also generated new communities, friendships, and affections. Belonging, Palit seems to suggest, is not merely inherited; it is also created in the aftermath of loss.

The story concludes with one of its most striking and poetic insights. Alam realises that his emotional attachment to his childhood home is inseparable from his love for Raka. The narrator observes how Alam hadn't realized that it was actually Raka that he saw when he saw his own house. This metaphor recasts Raka as a living home—an embodiment of comfort, memory, and belonging. In a world where houses can be lost and borders redrawn; relationships become the true anchors of identity. Palit's imagery suggests that home is not just a physical structure but a person, a connection, a memory. This shift from geography to intimacy is perhaps the story's most profound commentary on belonging.

Conclusion

Dibyendu Palit's "Alam's Own House" ultimately reveals that the experience of home is far more complex than physical geography or national identity. Through the journeys, memories, and emotional struggles of its characters, the story shows how Partition fractured not only territories but also the inner lives of individuals who carried their displacement within them. For Alam, Sneha, and even Raka, home becomes an ever-shifting idea—something remembered, imagined, reclaimed, or rediscovered in relationships rather than

spaces. The narrative demonstrates that belonging is not guaranteed by birth or ownership but shaped by the emotional ties and lived experiences that bind people to places and to one another. By portraying how landscapes change, memories fade, and identities are renegotiated, Palit underscores the enduring truth that home often resides not in land or property but in human connection, intimacy, and shared histories. Thus, the story becomes a poignant meditation on the fragile nature of belonging in the aftermath of displacement.

Works Cited

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.

Brah, Avtar. *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. Routledge, 1996.

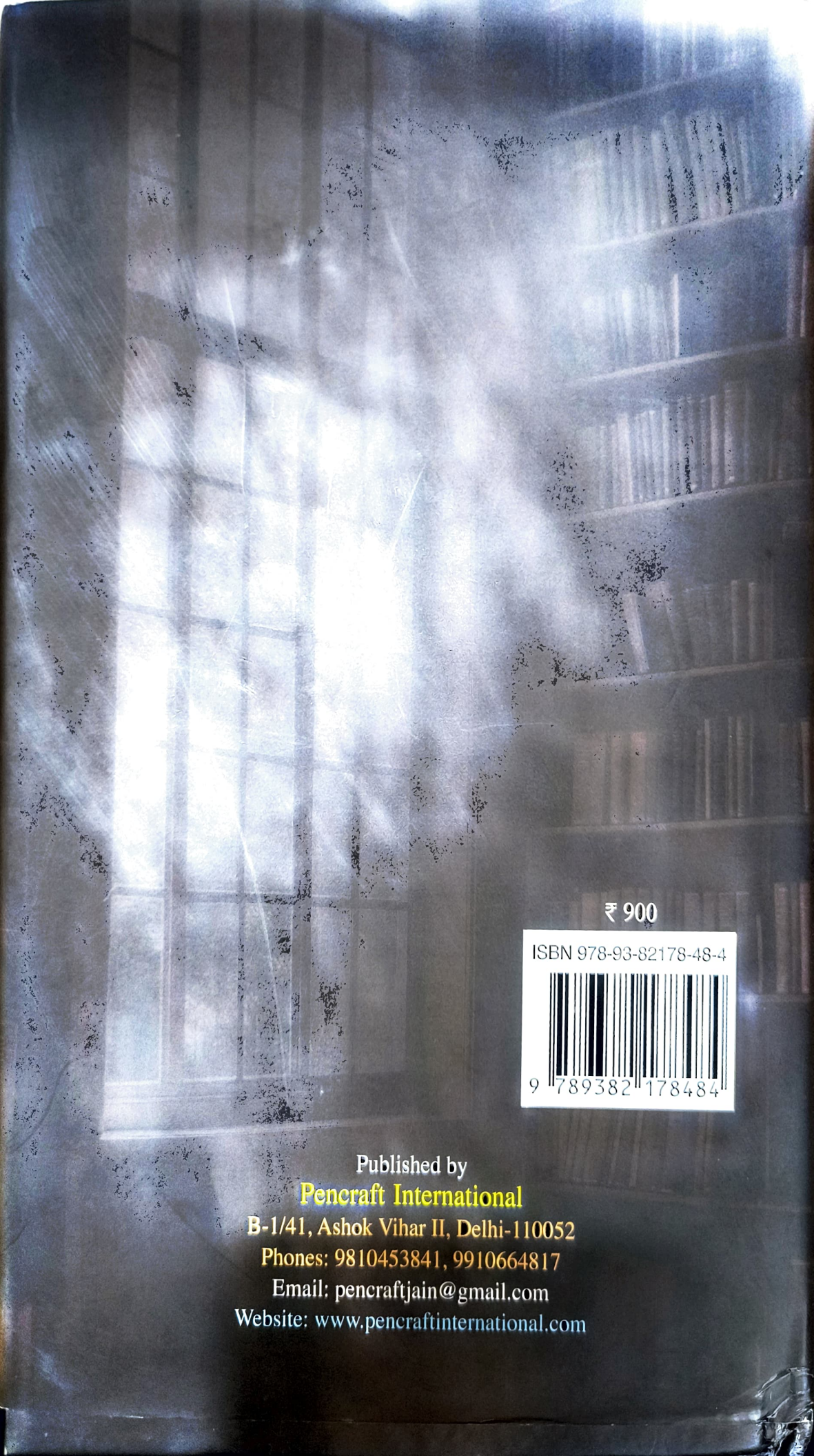
Das, David. "Divided Home, Divided Identity: A Postcolonial Study of 'Alam's Own House.'" *The Creative Launcher*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2020, pp. 50–57. doi:10.53032/tcl.2020.5.1.08.

Jain, Jasbir. *Reading Partition/Living Partition*. Rawat Publications, 2007.

Palit, Dibyendu. "Alam's Own House." *Stories About the Partition of India*, edited by Alok Bhalla, Indus, 1999, pp. 13–34.

Rushdie, Salman. *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981–1991*. Granta Books, 1991.

Said, Edward W. *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. Harvard UP, 2000.



₹ 900

ISBN 978-93-82178-48-4

Published by
Pencraft International
B-1/41, Ashok Vihar II, Delhi-110052
Phones: 9810453841, 9910664817
Email: pencraftjain@gmail.com
Website: www.pencraftinternational.com