PREFACE TO THE EDITION

The collection of ideas in this volume of journal are deeply rooted in established literary and critical tradition, when placed side by side, they begin to reveal a pattern: a persistent unease with the stories we tell, and more importantly, the stories we refuse to tell. At its core, this body of work is not just about literature. It is about failure—narrative failure, ethical failure, historical failure. And perhaps, most urgently, it is about the failure of imagination.

There are books that arrive as finished arguments, polished and certain of their place in the world. And then there are collections like this one—restless, searching, unwilling to settle into the comfort of coherence. Across the collection, a pattern emerges. It is a pattern of failure—not as deficiency, but as revelation. The failure of narrative to contain the scale of ecological catastrophe. The failure of diasporic memory to reconcile longing with reinvention. The failure of canonical structures to accommodate voices that refuse to be aestheticized into comfort. These are not isolated concerns. They are symptoms of a deeper fracture: between the stories we have inherited and the realities we now inhabit.

Consider the question of climate. The argument, following Amitav Ghosh, is by now familiar but no less unsettling: that the modern novel, shaped by the logics of probability and individual interiority, cannot adequately register the enormity of environmental crisis. But what these essays make clear is that this is not merely a formal limitation. It is an ethical one. When literature cannot imagine the forces that define our present, it does not simply fall short—it participates in a collective evasion. The absence of climate from the novel is not neutral. It is structured silence.

That silence echoes elsewhere. In the domain of diaspora, for instance, what appears at first as variation—Jhumpa Lahiri's quiet melancholia set against Bharati Mukherjee's kinetic reinvention—reveals itself as a deeper tension between two incompatible ways of belonging. Nostalgia, in these readings, is not a stable emotion. It fractures. It distorts. It demands allegiance while simultaneously exposing its own impossibility. To remember, here, is not to return. It is to confront the unsettling truth that home may no longer recognize you.

If diaspora unsettles belonging, Dalit autobiography unsettles literature itself. The essays on Omprakash Valmiki and Bama do not seek to position these writers within an existing canon. They refuse the premise altogether. These texts are not requests for inclusion. They are acts of disruption. They alter the conditions under which literature can be read, taught, and valued. They insist that aesthetics cannot be disentangled from experience, that form cannot be privileged over truth. And in doing so, they expose the quiet violence of literary frameworks that have long mistaken exclusion for universality.

The encounter between Tagore and Yeats offers a different kind of disturbance. Often romanticized as a meeting of minds, it is here approached with a more careful attention to asymmetry. What emerges is not a story of mutual understanding, but of partial recognition—of two figures shaped by different histories, attempting to meet across an uneven terrain of power and perception. Misrecognition, in this context, is not failure in the conventional sense. It is evidence. It reveals the limits of what could be shared, and the conditions that made those limits inevitable.

Elsewhere, the essays turn to theatre, pedagogy, and subaltern fiction, but the underlying impulse remains consistent: a refusal to accept inherited categories. Mahesh Dattani's dramaturgy is read not merely as representation, but as an act of excavation—making visible what dominant narratives render unseen. The engagement with Gordon's synectics

model asks uncomfortable questions about creativity itself: who is permitted to imagine, under what conditions, and within which institutional frameworks. The subaltern essay, perhaps the most candid of the collection, acknowledges the limits of its own project. It does not claim to resolve the problem of representation. It insists, instead, on remaining within its tension.

What ties these diverse concerns together is a single, disquieting recognition: literature is not only reflective. It is constitutive. It shapes what can be seen, what can be said, what can be imagined. Its failures are therefore not incidental. They are consequential.

And yet, there is a quiet optimism embedded within this recognition. To identify the limits of narrative is to begin to move beyond them. To acknowledge complicity is to create the possibility of change. These essays do not offer solutions in any definitive sense. What they offer instead is attention—serious, sustained, and ethically grounded. They demonstrate what it means to read not as an act of mastery, but as an act of vulnerability. To allow the text to resist, to unsettle, to alter the terms of engagement.

Editing this collection was, at times, an exercise in discomfort. Several arguments here move in directions that resist easy agreement. Some conclusions remain open, deliberately unresolved. But that, finally, is the point. A journal of this kind is not a monument to settled thought. It is a record of thinking in motion—of scholars willing to inhabit uncertainty rather than conceal it.

If there is a single thread that runs through these pages, it is this: that literature, at its most vital, does not confirm what we already know. It exposes what we have refused to see. And in doing so, it demands not just new interpretations, but new forms, new vocabularies, new ways of imagining the world.

The question, then, is not whether literature is capable of meeting the demands of our time.

The question is whether we are prepared to let it change enough so that it can.

Happy Reading!

Prof Neeru Tandon

Principal VSSD College, Kanpur, India.

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Narrative Failure and Ecological Crisis: Amitav Ghosh's The Great Derangement in Postcolonial and Ecocritical Perspective

Lima Antony

Professor, Department of English, St. Xavier's College for Women (Autonomous), Aluva, India.

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Abstract

This paper explores the argument advanced by Amitav Ghosh in The Great Derangement that the conventions of literary realism are inherently ill-suited to representing the large-scale and unpredictable phenomena of climate change. The study analyzes Ghosh's claims across the book's three sections—Stories, History, and Politics—situating them within the broader contexts of ecocriticism and postcolonial environmental thought. It draws on concepts such as Nixon's notion of slow violence, Chakrabarty's theses on the climate of history, and Morton's theory of hyperobjects, while also examining how Ghosh's own fiction, The Hungry Tide and Gun Island, attempts to enact the principles outlined in his critique. The paper contends that Ghosh's most significant contribution lies not only in his literary diagnosis but in his insistence on linking environmental catastrophe to the legacies of colonialism and capitalism, a connection that much Western ecocriticism has been slow to acknowledge.

Keywords:- Amitav Ghosh, ecocriticism, climate change, The Great Derangement, Anthropocene, postcolonial environmentalism

Introduction

Amitav Ghosh tells a story about a tornado. In 1978, living in Delhi, he witnessed one a terrifying, improbable event that left a trail of destruction through a city where tornadoes are not supposed to happen. Years later, when he tried to incorporate the experience into a novel, he found he could not. Not because the memory had faded but because the event felt, in fictional terms, implausible. Readers would not believe it. It belonged to the world of disaster movies, not serious literature. And therein, Ghosh argues, lies the problem: "serious literary fiction" has made itself incapable of engaging with the kinds of extreme, improbable, devastating events that climate change is making routine (Ghosh, The Great Derangement 9).

The Great Derangement, based on lectures delivered in Berlin in 2015, is Ghosh's attempt to explain why this is the case and what it means. The "derangement" of the title is not psychological but cultural: a collective inability to face what we already know about the climate crisis, an inability that Ghosh traces to the deepest structures of modern Western culture its literary conventions, its historical narratives, its political institutions. The book is slim but its

ambition is enormous, and it has provoked a critical conversation that shows no sign of abating. I engage with that conversation here, trying to identify what is most valuable in Ghosh's argument and where its weaknesses lie.

Stories: Why the Novel Cannot See the Storm

Ghosh's literary argument is elegantly simple. The modern realist novel, which took shape in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, emerged during a period when European society was learning to think of nature as background predictable, manageable, essentially static. The novel focuses on human psychology, social relationships, the gradual unfolding of character within stable settings. Extreme natural events floods, earthquakes, hurricanes appear, when they appear at all, as metaphors for human turmoil rather than as literal realities deserving attention in their own right.

Climate change explodes this framework. The events it produces Category 5 hurricanes, unprecedented wildfires, coastal cities drowning are not metaphors. They are facts. But they feel, within the conventions of literary realism, melodramatic, implausible, genre-fiction-ish. A tornado in Delhi is real; in a literary novel it reads as contrived. Clark's concept of "scale effects" captures the difficulty well: climate change operates at temporal and spatial scales that dwarf human experience, and the novel, which is calibrated to individual lifetimes and local communities, cannot accommodate that scalar mismatch without bending its own conventions out of shape (Clark 72).

This is a genuinely interesting diagnosis, and I find it largely persuasive. But it is not without problems. Some critics have objected that Ghosh underestimates the flexibility of the realist tradition that writers like Barbara Kingsolver and Ian McEwan have addressed climate change within recognizable literary frameworks. Others have questioned whether the distinction between "literary fiction" and "genre fiction" that Ghosh's argument depends on is as stable as he assumes. Science fiction, after all, has been thinking about ecological catastrophe for decades. Ghosh acknowledges this but considers it a symptom rather than a solution: the fact that climate-related fiction is relegated to genre shelves confirms his point about mainstream literature's refusal to engage.

History: The Carbon Economy and Its Colonial Roots

The second section of The Great Derangement shifts from literary criticism to political history, and this is where Ghosh's argument becomes most distinctive. Climate change, he insists, cannot be understood apart from the histories of colonialism and capitalism that produced the global carbon economy. This is not a popular position in mainstream environmentalism, which tends to frame the crisis as a universal human problem requiring universal solutions. Ghosh thinks this framing is dishonest. The industrial revolution that launched the carbon economy depended on colonial resource extraction, and the wealth that allowed Western nations to industrialize was extracted, in significant part, from colonized peoples. To discuss climate change without discussing empire is to mystify the problem.

Nixon's concept of "slow violence"—environmental degradation that unfolds gradually and disproportionately harms the poor and the colonized—provides a powerful companion to Ghosh's historical argument (Nixon 2). Chakrabarty's "Climate of History" theses complicate it usefully: if humans have become a geological force, as Chakrabarty argues, then the distinction between natural history and human history collapses, and traditional humanistic frameworks are inadequate to the new reality (Chakrabarty 209). Ghosh accepts this but pushes back against what he sees as Chakrabarty's insufficient attention to the unequal distribution of both responsibility and vulnerability. The Anthropocene is real, but it is not evenly distributed. Guha's distinction between the "environmentalism of the rich" and the "environmentalism of the poor" captures the class dimension that Ghosh insists on (Guha 3).

Politics: The Failure of Institutions

Ghosh is scathing about the Paris Agreement, which he sees as diplomatic theatre a performance of concern that leaves the fundamental structures of the carbon economy untouched. The voluntary, non-binding national commitments, the absence of enforcement, the marginalization of the most vulnerable communities these are symptoms, in his reading, of a political system constitutively incapable of addressing a crisis that transcends national boundaries and time horizons.

The most provocative element of his political argument is the suggestion that religious traditions might offer resources for environmental thought that secular modernity has foreclosed. Enlightenment rationality, with its sharp distinction between human subjects and natural objects, has produced a worldview fundamentally inhospitable to ecological thinking. Religious traditions with their sense of the sacred in nature, their practices of restraint, their narratives of interdependence may provide alternative frameworks. Morton's concept of "hyperobjects" entities so vast and temporally distributed that they overwhelm human cognitive categories (Morton 1) gives philosophical backing to Ghosh's intuition that we need entirely new ways of thinking about the relationship between humans and their environment. The suggestion has been controversial. I think it deserves serious consideration rather than reflexive dismissal.

Ghosh's Fiction as Practice

The Great Derangement is a book of criticism, but Ghosh has also been trying to write the kind of fiction he argues for. The Hungry Tide (2004), set in the Sundarbans, refuses pastoral idealization: its mangrove forest is a place of beauty and terror where human and nonhuman worlds interpenetrate in ways that are both ecologically fascinating and physically dangerous. Gun Island (2019) goes further, deliberately incorporating extreme weather, mass migration, and the uncanny into a narrative that moves between the Sundarbans, Venice, and Los Angeles. It is not, I think, entirely successful the novel sometimes feels like an illustration of a thesis rather than a fully realized work of fiction but the ambition is admirable, and the attempt to practice what his criticism preaches deserves recognition.

Conclusion

The Great Derangement is not a comfortable book, and it does not offer comfort. What it offers is a diagnosis: literary fiction has failed to engage with the defining crisis of our era, and this failure is not accidental but structural, rooted in the very conventions through which modern literature represents the world. Ghosh's insistence on connecting this literary failure to the political failures of the nation-state system and to the historical legacies of colonialism gives his argument a scope and a seriousness that most ecocriticism lacks.

Whether the literary world will rise to Ghosh's challenge remains to be seen. The "great derangement" he diagnoses is not merely literary but civilizational—a collective refusal to face what we already know. Literature alone cannot cure it. But literature, at its best, can make the unthinkable thinkable and the overwhelming imaginable. Ghosh has written a book that insists, with considerable force, that this is no longer optional. It is, in the most literal sense, a matter of survival.

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Nostalgia And Cultural Hybridity In Indian Diaspora Literature

Rini Joy

Research Scholar, Sree Shankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Kalady, Kerala, India.

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Abstract

This paper places Jhumpa Lahiri and Bharati Mukherjee side by side a pairing that is more contentious than it first appears. Both are Indian American writers; both deal with immigration, identity, and the pull of the homeland. But their temperaments are so different, their formal choices so divergent, that reading them together illuminates the full range of the Indian diasporic imagination rather than a single point within it. Using Bhabha's "third space," Boym's distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia, and Hall's dynamic model of cultural identity, I argue that Lahiri's fiction inhabits a space of melancholic liminality where the past is both wound and refuge, while Mukherjee's writing plunges into transformation with a recklessness that is either exhilarating or alarming depending on where you stand. Neither writer sentimentalizes nostalgia. Both treat it as a lens sometimes distorting, sometimes clarifying through which the contradictions of diasporic life become visible and available for literary exploration.

Keywords:- Diaspora, Nostalgia, Cultural Hybridity, Jhumpa Lahiri, Bharati Mukherjee, Identity, Third Space

Introduction

The Indian diaspora is vast, various, and in literary terms astonishingly productive. From V.S. Naipaul's Caribbean dislocations to Salman Rushdie's transatlantic fictions, from the plantation narratives of indentured laborers to the campus novels of H-1B professionals, the literature of the Indian diaspora spans continents and centuries. But certain themes recur with almost obsessive regularity: the gravitational pull of the homeland, the bewilderment of arrival, the negotiation of competing loyalties, and running through everything like a bass line nostalgia. The diasporic subject is, almost by definition, someone for whom the past is elsewhere.

But nostalgia is not one thing, and this paper is an attempt to demonstrate that by reading two writers who are often grouped together and should not be. Jhumpa Lahiri and Bharati Mukherjee are both Indian American, both women, both concerned with immigration and there the resemblance essentially ends. Their generational positions differ (Mukherjee arrived as an adult in the 1960s; Lahiri was born to immigrants and raised in Rhode Island). Their aesthetics differ (Lahiri's spare, muted realism versus Mukherjee's lush, energetic

maximalism). And their relationship to nostalgia differs in ways that, I think, reveal something fundamental about the range of possible responses to diasporic displacement.

Theoretical Orientation

The theoretical vocabulary for talking about diaspora has grown enormous, perhaps too enormous hybridity, liminality, third space, cultural translation, creolization, transculturation. I will try to use only what I actually need. Safran's typological essay (1991) provides the baseline: a diasporic community is dispersed from an original homeland, maintains collective memory of it, feels some degree of alienation in the host country, and harbors a desire however attenuated for return (Safran 83). Clifford's complication is essential: diasporic identities are shaped not only by roots but by routes, by ongoing processes of travel and connection (Clifford 306).

Hall's notion of cultural identity as "not an essence but a positioning" (Hall 226) as production rather than inheritance is central to my argument. So is Bhabha's "third space," the site of hybridity where cultural meanings are negotiated and transformed rather than simply received or rejected (Bhabha 227). But the single most useful theoretical text for what I am doing here is Boym's The Future of Nostalgia, with its distinction between restorative nostalgia (which tries to reconstruct the lost home) and reflective nostalgia (which lingers over fragments, accepting incompleteness and impermanence) (Boym 41). That distinction maps onto the Lahiri-Mukherjee contrast with almost uncanny precision though, as I will show, the mapping is not quite as clean as it first appears.

Lahiri: The Weight of Small Displacements

Lahiri's fiction is quiet in a way that can make you underestimate it. The stories in Interpreter of Maladies and the novel The Namesake operate at low emotional volume no melodrama, no pyrotechnics, just the steady accumulation of precise, heartbreaking detail. A mispronounced name. A spice jar that triggers a wave of homesickness. A telephone call to Calcutta that costs more per minute than the caller can afford but that she makes anyway, because the alternative silence, disconnection, the slow decay of a relationship conducted across twelve time zones is worse.

The title story of Interpreter of Maladies stages a miscommunication between Mr. Kapasi, a tour guide in India, and Mrs. Das, an Indian American tourist. He imagines a connection between them; she needs someone to confess to. Their "interpretations" never align (Lahiri, Interpreter 66). It works simultaneously as a realistic vignette and as a parable of the diasporic condition: the longing to be understood across cultural distance is real, but the understanding itself remains elusive, partial, shadowed by assumptions that neither party can see clearly enough to correct.

The Namesake traces the Ganguli family through three decades, and it is through the parents Ashoke and Ashima that nostalgia takes its most restorative form. They recreate Bengali rituals in suburban Massachusetts, maintain a network of friends who share their displacement, and keep planning a return to Calcutta that never quite happens. Their son Gogol, saddled with a name that links him to a Russian writer he has never read, enacts a different struggle: not between India and America but between competing versions of himself (Lahiri, Namesake 76). Mishra's concept of "the diasporic imaginary" a structure of feeling defined by "the trauma of separation" and the impossibility of full return (Mishra 7) captures Lahiri's world with painful accuracy.

Mukherjee: The Exuberance of Becoming

Mukherjee refused nostalgia. Or at least, she refused what nostalgia typically requires: a backward glance, a lingering attachment to what was left behind. She called herself an

"American writer" not Indian American, not South Asian, not hyphenated and she meant it polemically, as a rejection of the exile's melancholy that she saw as a trap (Mukherjee, "Immigrant Writing" 28). Her characters do not mourn the homeland. They consume America with an appetite that is sometimes joyful, sometimes violent, always transformative.

Jasmine is the exemplary text. Its protagonist cycles through identities Jyoti, Jasmine, Jase, Jane each corresponding to a different phase of life in America. The novel is propelled by violence (her husband murdered, a rapist killed in self-defense) and by a refusal to let the past determine the future. Mukherjee described it as an attempt to "rewrite the book of America" from the immigrant's perspective (Mukherjee, "Beyond Multiculturalism" 454), and the rewriting is exhilarating even as it raises uncomfortable questions about what is lost in the process of perpetual reinvention.

Alam has noted that Mukherjee's embrace of assimilation and transformation is anomalous in South Asian diaspora writing, which tends to emphasize cultural preservation and the pain of displacement (Alam 72). This is true, and it is part of what makes her work valuable as a counterpoint to Lahiri. But even Mukherjee's fiction is not uncritical of the American promise. The Middleman and Other Stories includes brutally frank depictions of exploitation, precarity, and the violence that the immigrant body absorbs in the process of becoming American. Exuberance, in Mukherjee's world, is never innocent. It always has a cost.

Reading Them Together

The differences are clear enough. But what about the convergences? Both writers are obsessed with domestic space as the primary theater of cultural negotiation. Kitchens, dinner tables, bedrooms these are the sites where the tensions of diasporic existence are actually lived, where the smell of turmeric coexists with the sound of American television, where children absorb their parents' longings without quite understanding what they are absorbing. Brah's concept of "diaspora space" the point where genealogies of dispersion intersect with genealogies of staying put (Brah 16) captures this domestic terrain precisely.

Caesar's characterization of Lahiri as "minimalist realist" and Mukherjee as "maximalist transformation narrative" (Caesar 51) is a useful shorthand, if a somewhat blunt one. What it misses is the degree to which both writers understand nostalgia as a mode of cognition rather than a mere emotion a way of knowing the present through the lens of an absent past. The difference is in what they do with that knowledge. Lahiri sits with it, lets it ache. Mukherjee pushes through it, uses it as fuel for reinvention. Neither response is more "authentic" than the other. Together, they map the full emotional and political terrain of the Indian diaspora in America.

Conclusion

What I take from this comparative reading is a conviction that nostalgia is not a weakness of diasporic literature but one of its most powerful resources. In Lahiri's hands, it becomes an instrument of precision, illuminating the hairline fractures that run through immigrant families with an almost clinical attention to detail. In Mukherjee's hands, it becomes something to resist and transcend, a gravitational pull against which the immigrant selfdefines its freedom. Neither writer sentimentalizes the homeland or idealizes the host country. Both understand that diaspora is not a problem to be solved but a condition to be inhabited with difficulty, with loss, with occasional moments of unexpected grace. That is not a comforting conclusion. But it is, I think, an honest one.

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Dalit Autobiography as Counter-Canonical Literary Genre

Moushami Mohammed Ali

Assistant Professor, Department of English, St. Joseph's College (Autonomous), Irinjalakuda, Kerala, India.

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Abstract

Dalit autobiography is not a comfortable genre. It is not supposed to be. When Omprakash Valmiki published Joothan in 1997 and Bama published Karukku a year earlier, they were not adding politely to the Indian literary canon; they were challenging its foundations. This paper examines both texts as interventions that unsettle the aesthetic norms, epistemological assumptions, and social hierarchies embedded in mainstream Indian literary culture. Drawing on autobiography theory (Lejeune, Smith and Watson) and Limbale's aesthetic of Dalit literature, I argue that Valmiki and Bama deploy life-writing not as self-expression in the liberal humanist sense but as political testimony, communal witness, and aesthetic provocation. Their narratives demand to be read on their own terms terms that privilege fidelity to experience over formal elegance, collective identity over individual personality, and the urgency of social justice over the pleasures of aesthetic contemplation. Whether the Indian literary establishment is ready for that demand is another question.

Keywords:- Dalit Autobiography, Omprakash Valmiki, Bama, Caste, Life-Writing, Counter-Narrative

Introduction

The title Joothan is a slap. In colloquial Hindi, the word means leftover scraps the food discarded by upper-caste families and passed to Dalits after celebrations. Valmiki chose this title deliberately, refusing the sanitized vocabulary with which polite discourse typically discusses caste. He wanted the word to sting. And it does.

Bama's Karukku the Tamil word for palmyra leaf, whose serrated edge can cut makes a similar gesture, though in a different register. Where Valmiki is controlled and furious, Bama is exuberant and defiant. Where Joothan chronicles the caste violence of rural North India with documentary precision, Karukku navigates the intersecting oppressions of caste, gender, and institutional Christianity in Tamil Nadu with a narrative energy that keeps threatening to overflow its own banks.

Together, these two autobiographies represent something genuinely new in Indian literary history not the first Dalit writing (the Marathi tradition is older), but among the first to reach a national and international audience and to force the question: what happens to the Indian literary canon when Dalits start telling their own stories? My argument is that Dalit autobiography does not merely expand the canon. It calls the entire idea of the canon into

question, exposing the caste privileges and aesthetic assumptions that have governed which stories count as literature and which do not.

Theory: What Kind of Autobiography Is This?

Lejeune defined autobiography as a "retrospective prose narrative" focused on "individual life" and "the story of his personality" (Lejeune 4). It is a definition that works tolerably well for Rousseau or Augustine but runs into trouble with Dalit life-writing, where the self is constitutively social. Valmiki does not write about himself as an autonomous individual navigating personal choices. He writes about himself as a member of a community defined by its subjection to a system of inherited degradation. The "I" of Joothan is always also a "we," and to read it as a story of individual development is to misunderstand its fundamental purpose.

Smith and Watson's broader theorization of "life-writing" is more helpful, precisely because it recognizes that autobiographical practice takes radically different forms in different cultural contexts and that the Western emphasis on individual selfhood is not universal but culturally specific (Smith and Watson 14). The Latin American genre of testimonio provides another useful reference point: Beverley defines it as a first-person narrative that speaks for a community, using personal experience as evidence of collective oppression and as a call to action (Beverley 33). Dalit autobiography shares these features: testimony, collective address, the inseparability of the personal and the political.

Ambedkar's Shadow

You cannot talk about Dalit literature without talking about Ambedkar. His Annihilation of Caste (1936) the speech he was never allowed to deliver, which became instead one of the most devastating critiques of Hindu social organization ever written provides the intellectual foundation for everything that follows. Caste, Ambedkar argued, is not a corruption of Hinduism but its organizing principle (Ambedkar 263). Reform from within is impossible; the system must be destroyed.

Ambedkar's personal trajectory from an Untouchable child humiliated in school to the architect of the Indian Constitution is itself the ur-narrative of Dalit autobiography: the story of an individual who transcends impossible circumstances while insisting that individual transcendence is not enough, that the structures must change. The Dalit literary movement that emerged in Maharashtra in the 1960s and 1970s, with writers like Baburao Bagul and Namdeo Dhasal, took Ambedkar as its founding figure. Dangle's anthology Poisoned Bread (1992) brought this tradition to anglophone readers and demonstrated its range .

Valmiki: The Refusal to Look Away

Joothan opens with a geography of exclusion the Chuhra settlement in Barla, physically separated from the main village, located near the pond where animals are washed and garbage is dumped. This is not setting as backdrop; this is setting as argument. The spatial organization of the village is the caste system made material, and Valmiki describes it with a refusal of literary embellishment that is itself a literary choice.

The incidents accumulate: the young Valmiki made to sweep the school compound while his classmates study; his father forced to carry dead cattle; the family eating joothan from upper-caste weddings. Mukherjee, in her introduction to the English translation, notes that Valmiki's prose "refuses to dress up the wound, to make it palatable" (A. Mukherjee xvi). This is exactly right. The absence of sentimentality is not artlessness; it is a deliberate rejection of the aesthetic conventions that would transform Dalit suffering into a pleasing literary object. Valmiki will not give you the satisfaction of a beautiful sentence about ugliness.

The pivot comes when Valmiki encounters Ambedkar's writings and his experience reconfigures from personal misfortune into systemic oppression. Guru has argued that this is the characteristic movement of Dalit autobiography: from the individual to the structural, from suffering to analysis, from testimony to politics (Guru 5004). Joothan performs this movement with a clarity that leaves the reader no room for comfortable sympathy. It does not want your sympathy. It wants your outrage.

Bama: Caste, Gender, Christianity, and the Body

Karukku complicates the picture. Bama is a Dalit woman, which means she faces discrimination not only from the caste system at large but within the Dalit community itself. She is also Catholic, which adds another layer: the promise of Christian equality turns out to be, in practice, another mask for caste hierarchy. The nuns who ran her convent school reproduced the same discriminatory patterns Dalits assigned menial tasks, denied authority, treated as charity cases rather than equals that the Church was supposed to have transcended.

Bama's prose is as different from Valmiki's as you can imagine. Where he is controlled, she is exuberant. Where he strips language down to bare testimony, she fills it with the rhythms and idioms of Tamil Dalit speech colloquialisms, slang, the distinctive vocabulary of the Paraiyar community. Holmstrom notes in her translator's introduction that Bama deliberately violates standard Tamil literary conventions, asserting the dignity and expressiveness of a linguistic register that the literary establishment treats as beneath notice (Holmstrom ix). The language itself is an act of resistance.

Brueck's work on Dalit women's writing highlights the double marginalization at stake: Dalit women challenge both the caste hierarchy of the dominant society and the gender hierarchies within their own communities (Brueck 89). Bama's narrative bears this out. Her account of convent life exposes caste discrimination within the Church; her depictions of village life expose the sexual exploitation and domestic violence that Dalit women endure at home. Karukku does not pick one axis of oppression and stick with it. It insists on the intersection and that insistence is what makes it so difficult and so necessary.

Conclusion

Dalit autobiography matters not as a subcategory of Indian autobiography but as a direct challenge to the principles on which the Indian literary mainstream has operated. Valmiki and Bama do not write to be admired. They write to be heard, and they write in the full knowledge that the literary establishment they are addressing has been built on the erasure of voices like theirs. Limbale's call for a Dalit aesthetic grounded in experience, justice, and collective identity rather than formalist criteria (Limbale 19) is not a lowering of standards; it is a redefinition of what standards should mean in a society still structured by caste.

Whether the canon can absorb these texts without neutralizing them is an open question. There is always the risk that incorporation becomes domestication that Dalit autobiography will be added to syllabi and anthologies in a way that allows the institution to congratulate itself on its inclusiveness without confronting the structural inequalities that made the exclusion possible in the first place. Valmiki and Bama, I suspect, would be unsurprised by this outcome. They have seen how systems absorb dissent. But they wrote their books anyway, and the books remain sharp-edged, uncomfortable, unassimilated. That is their greatest achievement.

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Tagore And Yeats: A Cross-Cultural Literary Dialogue

Rakhi Ramachandran

Assistant Professor, Department of English, St. Joseph's College (Autonomous), Irinjalakuda, Kerala, India.

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Abstract

In 1912, W.B. Yeats read Rabindranath Tagore's English prose translations of his Bengali devotional poems and declared himself profoundly moved. The introduction he wrote for Gitanjali helped secure Tagore the Nobel Prize in 1913 and established the terms in which Western readers would understand and misunderstand the Indian poet for decades to come. This paper reexamines the Tagore-Yeats encounter, arguing that it was shaped as much by mutual misrecognition as by genuine affinity. Drawing on biographies by Dutta and Robinson and by Foster, and engaging with the orientalism critique associated with Said, I trace the structural parallels between two poets who were simultaneously conducting projects of cultural nationalism in colonized nations, while also atending to the asymmetries of power and perception that ensured their dialogue would remain, in important respects, a conversation at cross-purposes. The paper does not debunk the encounter. It tries to understand it honestly, which is a more difficult and more interesting task.

Keywords:- Tagore, Yeats, Gitanjali, Comparative Literature, Orientalism, Irish-Indian Literary Connections.

Introduction

Yeats was not a modest man, and his introduction to the English Gitanjali does not pretend to modesty. "I have carried the manuscript of these translations about with me for days," he wrote, "reading it in railway trains, or on the top of omnibuses and in restaurants, and I have often had to close it lest some stranger would see how much it moved me" (Yeats, Introduction xiii). It is a wonderful sentence self-dramatizing, performatively intimate, designed to make the reader trust Yeats's taste by witnessing his emotion. But it is also, I want to suggest, revealing in ways Yeats did not intend. What exactly was Yeats reading? What did he think he was reading? And how much of what moved him was Tagore, and how much was Yeats himself reflected back in an exotic mirror?

These are not hostile questions. I admire both poets enormously, and I think the encounter between them facilitated by the painter William Rothenstein at a London gathering in the summer of 1912 was a genuinely significant event in literary history. But significance does not require transparency, and the Tagore-Yeats relationship was marked by misunderstandings that are at least as instructive as the moments of genuine connection. This paper traces both.

Parallel Nationalisms, Different Tongues

The structural parallels between Yeats and Tagore are striking, and they have been noted often enough. Both lived in nations under British domination. Both were centrally involved in cultural movements that sought to recover indigenous traditions as foundations for national identity. Both distrusted aggressive political nationalism even as they participated in nationalist cultural projects. And both produced bodies of literary work that are inseparable from the historical circumstances of their production.

But the parallels break down on closer inspection. Yeats wrote in English he had no other literary language, despite his romantic attachment to Irish as a symbol of cultural authenticity. Tagore wrote in Bengali, a language with an autonomous literary tradition stretching back centuries. As Kiberd has argued, the Irish Literary Revival was constitutively shaped by its dependence on English, a condition that produced both creative energy and permanent ambivalence (Kiberd 115). Tagore faced no equivalent linguistic dilemma. When he translated his own poems into English, he was performing an act of cultural export, not of cultural survival. This asymmetry matters enormously for understanding what happened when Yeats read those translations.

Das has documented the network of Irish-Indian cultural connections in the early twentieth century political solidarity between nationalists, mutual fascination among literary intellectuals (Das 78). The connection was real. But it was also, inevitably, unequal. Ireland was a colonized European nation with deep cultural ties to the imperial metropole; India was a vast, internally diverse subcontinent whose relationship to Britain was qualitatively different in scale, history, and racial politics. To treat the Yeats-Tagore encounter as a meeting of equals is to misunderstand the colonial literary world in which it took place.

What Yeats Heard and What He Didn't

Yeats's introduction to Gitanjali reads Tagore through the lens of Yeats's own obsessions: the search for a spirituality rooted in lived experience rather than institutional religion, the dream of a culture where art and devotion are inseparable, the longing for an organic community untouched by industrial modernity. "A whole people, a whole civilization, immeasurably strange to us," Yeats writes, "seems to have been taken up into this imagination; and yet we are not moved because of its strangeness, but because we have met our own image" "Met our own image." There it is. Said would have recognized the gesture immediately: the East as mirror for Western desires, the other culture valued not for its otherness but for its resemblance to an idealized self (Said 3). Yeats found in Tagore the organic, spiritual, premodern poet that industrial England could not produce a figure who validated Yeats's own artistic project by embodying it in a more "authentic" cultural context. Dutta and Robinson, in their biography, document both Yeats's genuine enthusiasm and his tendency to simplify Tagore into a mystic sage, stripping away the social critic, the educational reformer, the political commentator (Dutta and Robinson 198). Tagore himself was uncomfortable with the casting.

And then, abruptly, Yeats lost interest. Foster's biography reveals that by 1914 barely two years after the rhapsodic introduction Yeats was privately dismissive, telling friends that Tagore had "spoiled his work" (Foster 467). The reversal is instructive. What Yeats had admired was not Tagore but an idea of Tagore, a projection that the actual, complicated, fully human poet could not sustain. When the projection failed, the admiration evaporated.

What They Shared (and Where They Diverged)

It would be a mistake, though, to reduce the encounter entirely to orientalist projection. There were genuine affinities real thematic resonances that exist independently of Yeats's

distortions. Both poets were preoccupied with the relationship between the spiritual and the material, seeking a language that could hold both without reducing one to the other. Both found in nature a vocabulary for spiritual experience that avoided the abstractions of systematic theology. And both distrusted the aggressive nationalism that surrounded them, though they arrived at this distrust from very different positions.

Tagore's skepticism about nationalism was, arguably, the more radical. His 1917 lectures, published as Nationalism, warned that the nation-state was a Western invention fundamentally hostile to India's pluralistic traditions (Tagore, Nationalism 18). This is not a position Yeats would have endorsed. Yeats's nationalism was culturally romantic a dream of Ireland as Celtic otherworld and it remained central to his imaginative life even as he grew politically conservative. The gap between Tagore's cosmopolitan internationalism and Yeats's mystical nationalism is one of the real differences that the encounter's surface of mutual admiration tended to obscure.

Formally, the differences are even starker. Yeats was a formalist of extraordinary discipline compressed, allusive, intellectually demanding. Tagore's Bengali poems are musical, flowing, and rhythmically complex in ways that his English prose translations could not capture. Chaudhuri has argued convincingly that the Gitanjali Yeats championed was, in important respects, not the Gitanjali that Bengali readers knew (Chaudhuri 34). The translation smoothed out the musicality, flattened the cultural specificity, and left something that was more amenable to Yeats's orientalist reading than the original warranted. Lago's study of Tagore's correspondence documents the poet's growing frustration with being reduced to a handful of devotional lyrics when his actual output novels, stories, essays, songs, paintings was staggeringly diverse (Lago 112). Ray has called the Western "cult of Tagore" a product of Western needs rather than Indian realities (Ray 87). The assessment is harsh but not unfair.

What Remains

Despite everything I have said about misrecognition and asymmetry, the Tagore-Yeats encounter matters. It established a precedent for cross-cultural literary dialogue that subsequent generations would build on, and it raised questions about translation, reception, and the politics of literary reputation that remain unresolved. For Irish studies, the Indian connection expanded the frame beyond the familiar Anglo-Irish binary, situating the Revival within a global network of anticolonial cultural movements. For Indian studies, the Yeats connection illustrated both the possibilities and the dangers of Western recognition the way international prestige could elevate and distort simultaneously.

Conclusion

The literary dialogue between Tagore and Yeats was not the seamless communion of kindred spirits that Yeats's introduction implies, nor was it the straightforward case of orientalist appropriation that some postcolonial critics have alleged. It was something messier and more human: an encounter between two gifted poets who shared enough common ground to recognize each other's importance but whose differences ensured that recognition would always be entangled with projection, simplification, and the power imbalances of the colonial literary world.

The most honest thing I can say about this encounter is that it demonstrates both the necessity and the impossibility of reading across cultural boundaries. Necessary, because literature that speaks only to its own tradition is impoverished. Impossible, because the act of reading across cultures is never transparent it is always shaped by the assumptions, desires, and blind spots that the reader brings. Yeats heard in Tagore what he needed to hear. Tagore accepted Western recognition on terms that constrained as much as they celebrated. These are

not failures to be corrected but features of cross-cultural exchange that we ignore at our intellectual peril.

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Synectics And Creative Capacity: Gordon's Enduring Pedagogy

Emily Paul

Assistant Professor, Marian College Kuttikkanam (Autonomous), Kerala, India.

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Abstract

This paper examines the synectics model developed by William J. J. Gordon in 1961, a framework for understanding and teaching creativity that has been alternately celebrated, neglected, and rediscovered over the past six decades. Gordon's central claim that creative processes are not mysterious gifts but describable and teachable cognitive operations challenged the romantic mystification of genius that characterized mid-twentieth-century psychology and continues to remain relevant today. The study traces Gordon's intellectual influences, including Gestalt psychology, pragmatism, and Arthur Koestler's theory of bisociation. It also explores the four analogical mechanisms that form the core of the synectics method and evaluates their application in English language and literature classrooms, with particular reference to recent work by Yohannan and Thamarasseri on innovative teaching models. While acknowledging the limitations of the synectics approach, the paper argues that it should not be viewed as a simple formula for producing creativity. Rather, it represents one of the more carefully theorized and practically useful pedagogical tools available to educators seeking to move beyond rote instruction while maintaining an element of structured learning.

Keywords:- Synectics, Creativity Theory, William J.J. Gordon, Analogical Thinking, English Language Pedagogy, Innovative Teaching

Introduction

Everyone talks about creativity in education. Administrators invoke it in mission statements. Curriculum designers build it into learning outcomes. Employers tell survey after survey that they want graduates who can "think creatively." And yet ask any teacher what creativity actually means, how you recognize it, how you teach it, and you will get, more often than not, a vague gesture toward something ineffable. Creativity is, in educational discourse, one of those concepts that functions better as aspiration than as description.

William J.J. Gordon thought this was nonsense. Or at any rate, he thought it was unnecessary nonsense. Working in the 1950s with industrial inventors and engineers at the Arthur D. Little company in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Gordon spent years tape-recording creative problem-solving sessions, transcribing them, and hunting for recurring cognitive patterns. What he found was that breakthrough ideas consistently emerged through analogical thinking through the unexpected yoking of domains that had no obvious connection (Gordon

33). The name he gave to his system was synectics, from the Greek for "joining together of different elements," and in 1961 he published the book that would make it famous: Synectics: The Development of Creative Capacity.

The claim at the core of synectics is deceptively simple and genuinely radical: creative processes can be described in operational terms and taught to ordinary people. Not inspired into them, not coaxed out through unstructured brainstorming, but taught through specific, sequenced techniques of analogical and metaphorical thinking. The dominant view of creativity in Gordon's day was still deeply romantic (the lone genius, the lightning bolt of inspiration), and the psychometric approach pioneered by Guilford and Torrance could measure creative aptitude but could not explain the process. Gordon's contribution was to move from measurement to mechanism. That is a bigger shift than it sounds.

Gordon's Background: An Unconventional Path

Gordon was not a psychologist. He was not, strictly speaking, an academic at all. He came from the world of industrial design and invention, and this matters, because it gave his observations a concreteness that more purely theoretical accounts of creativity tend to lack. He was watching real people solve real problems in real time, and the patterns he identified emerged from hundreds of hours of recorded sessions, not from laboratory experiments or psychometric instruments.

What struck him most forcefully and what becomes the organizing insight of the entire synectics enterprise was the centrality of metaphor and analogy. The engineers and inventors he observed did not arrive at solutions through step-by-step deduction. They got there by making wild, seemingly irrational connections: comparing a mechanical problem to the behavior of insects, or a design challenge to the structure of a seashell. Arthur Koestler, working independently, arrived at a strikingly similar conclusion three years later in The Act of Creation, calling the process "bisociation" the intersection of two previously unconnected frames of reference (Koestler 35). That two researchers approaching the question from such different angles reached the same conclusion is, I think, significant.

Gordon drew on eclectic sources: Gestalt psychology's emphasis on pattern and perception, the pragmatism of James and Dewey, bits of psychoanalytic theory about unconscious association. But his distinctive move was to insist that these insights could be synthesized into a teachable method not a philosophy of creativity or a theory about creative people, but a set of procedures that anyone could practice and improve. This insistence on operationalizability is both the strength and the vulnerability of the synectics model, as I discuss later.

Making the Strange Familiar, Making the Familiar Strange

The conceptual heart of synectics lies in two complementary processes, and their elegant asymmetry is worth dwelling on. The first making the strange familiar is essentially the process of comprehension: taking something new and unfamiliar and relating it to what you already know. Students do this constantly: they encounter a new concept and assimilate it into existing frameworks. Teachers facilitate it with analogies, examples, and scaffolding. It is necessary, but it is not creative. It domesticates novelty rather than exploiting it.

The second process making the familiar strange is where the creative work happens, and it is much harder to teach because it runs against the grain of virtually everything conventional education rewards. Making the familiar strange means deliberately disrupting habitual perception, looking at ordinary things as if you have never seen them before, turning objects and ideas upside down and sideways to see what new patterns emerge. Gordon was not the first to notice this mechanism the Russian formalists called it ostranenie, and Brecht's

Verfremdungseffekt operates on similar principles but he was among the first to propose it as a teachable cognitive skill rather than an artistic gift (Gordon 37).

The pedagogical implications are significant, and somewhat uncomfortable. Schools overwhelmingly privilege the first process. Get the right answer. Reduce ambiguity. Assimilate the new into the known. Synectics insists that genuine learning like genuine creativity requires the willingness to dwell in unfamiliarity, to tolerate not knowing, to entertain connections that initially seem absurd. As Bruner argued in a different context, the most powerful learning happens at the edge of established categories, where things stop making sense in the usual way (Bruner 68). Most classrooms are not designed for that kind of discomfort.

The Four Analogies

Gordon identified four types of analogy as the primary tools through which the synectics processes operate, and each deserves some attention. Personal analogy asks you to identify empathetically with whatever you are studying to imagine being a chemical molecule, a fictional character, a grammatical structure migrating between languages. It sounds silly, and in practice it can feel silly, which is part of the point: the silliness loosens the grip of habitual thinking.

Direct analogy is more straightforward: explicit comparison between two different domains. Alexander Graham Bell compared the bones of the ear to a telephone membrane. A student might compare the structure of a sonnet to the layout of a garden. Prince, Gordon's collaborator, emphasized that the most productive direct analogies are those drawn from domains maximally distant from the problem (Prince 78) which is counterintuitive but makes sense if you think about it. Close analogies reproduce existing assumptions; distant ones force genuine reconceptualization.

Symbolic analogy, sometimes called compressed conflict, involves oxymoronic juxtapositions: "living death," "aggressive passivity," "structured freedom." These function as cognitive irritants, forcing the mind to reconcile incompatible ideas and discovering new meanings in the process. For literature teachers, this mechanism is practically a gift it maps directly onto the discussion of paradox, irony, and ambiguity that any good literary education requires.

Fantasy analogy suspends reality constraints entirely. What if gravity worked sideways? What if English had no prepositions? What if a poem could be read backward? By entertaining impossibilities, fantasy analogy breaks the tyranny of the actual and opens imaginative space. Vygotsky's work on imagination in children provides theoretical backing: imaginative play is not an escape from reality but a method of exploring and expanding it (Vygotsky 15). Adults, unfortunately, tend to lose this capacity unless someone deliberately cultivates it.

Synectics in the English Classroom

The application of synectics to language and literature teaching has attracted growing interest, and Yohannan and Thamarasseri's recent study is a helpful contribution. They position synectics alongside other innovative models jurisprudential inquiry, role play, concept attainment, advance organizers and argue for its potential to engage learners in active, creative processing of linguistic material (Yohannan and Thamarasseri 58). The emphasis on active processing is key: synectics asks students to do something with language, not just receive information about it.

In literature classrooms, the possibilities are particularly rich. Close reading real close reading, not the mechanical identification of literary devices that too often passes for it requires exactly the defamiliarization that Gordon's second process promotes. Ask students to read a familiar poem as if they were encountering human language for the first time. Ask them to translate a passage of Dickens into the emotional register of a weather forecast. Ask them to

express a novel's central conflict as a compressed conflict in two words. These are synectics exercises, whether or not the teacher uses the term, and they generate engagement at a depth that conventional discussion questions rarely achieve.

Joyce and Weil include synectics in their influential Models of Teaching, outlining two classroom strategies: Creating Something New (using analogies to generate original work) and Making the Strange Familiar (using analogies to understand difficult concepts) (Joyce and Weil 219). Both have been adapted for English classrooms. The evidence, I should say honestly, is encouraging but not overwhelming rigorous empirical evaluation of synectics in language teaching remains limited, and the field would benefit from more controlled studies.

Honest Limitations

Synectics is not without problems, and I want to name them rather than pretending they do not exist. First, the model originated in industrial problem-solving, where "creative success" has relatively clear criteria: the invention works or it does not, the design problem is solved or it is not. In humanistic and aesthetic domains, criteria for creativity are murkier, more contested, and more culturally variable. Transferring a method from engineering to poetry is not a straightforward operation.

Second, Gordon's research was conducted with groups, and the group dynamics the way one person's analogy sparks another's, the social permission to be silly may be as important as the cognitive techniques themselves. Individual creative work, which is what most writing and much literary analysis ultimately involves, may not respond to the same procedures in the same way.

Third, there is a risk of reducing creativity to technique. Ken Robinson's widely cited arguments about creativity in education point toward a broader conception that includes not just cognitive processes but institutional conditions curriculum design, assessment practices, school culture (Robinson 116). Torrance's longitudinal studies suggest that creativity is a disposition shaped by environment and personality across a lifetime, not just a skill activated by the right exercise (Torrance 44). Synectics addresses one piece of a much larger puzzle. Claiming more than that does the model no favors.

Conclusion

For all its limitations, Gordon's synectics remains sixty-odd years on one of the more carefully thought-out and practically actionable models of creative pedagogy available. Its core insight, that creative thinking depends on disciplined analogical reasoning rather than mystical inspiration, has been amply confirmed by subsequent cognitive science (Hofstadter and Sander offer a particularly compelling recent treatment (Hofstadter and Sander 24). The four analogical mechanisms provide teachers with concrete tools rather than vague exhortations, and the two fundamental processes making the strange familiar and making the familiar strange offer a conceptual framework of genuine elegance.

But synectics works best, I think, when it is embedded in a broader educational philosophy that values intellectual risk, tolerates ambiguity, and rewards genuine exploration rather than the reproduction of expected answers. It is a set of cognitive strategies, not a substitute for good teaching. For English teachers who are tired of the false choice between grammar drills and unstructured "creative writing" exercises, synectics offers a principled middle path structured enough to be teachable, open enough to surprise. That is a rare and valuable combination.

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Deconstructing Gender Binaries in Dattani's Indian Theatre

Barkha Rautela

Assistant Professor, SSJ D.W.S.S.S. Government P.G. College, Ranikhet, Uttarakhand, India.

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Abstract

This paper examines how Mahesh Dattani dismantles rigid gender categories through his radio play Seven Steps Around the Fire, a work that thrust hijra lives into the consciousness of mainstream Indian English theatre. Dattani does not simply portray hijras as exotic curiosities or pitiable victims—he constructs a dramatic architecture where their erasure from legal, medical, and social discourse becomes the very engine of the plot. Drawing on Judith Butler's ideas on gender performativity alongside South Asian scholarship on third-gender traditions (particularly Gayatri Reddy and Serena Nanda), a close reading is undertaken that attends to what the play refuses to show as much as what it reveals. The murder mystery format, this paper argues, is not incidental but essential: it mirrors the investigative labor required to make visible what dominant society has rendered systematically invisible. The paper also engages with K. Prabha's recent work on feminist interventions in Dattani's drama, extending her analysis into territory she does not fully explore—namely, the specifically transgender and non-binary dimensions of the playwright's vision.

Keywords:- Gender Performativity, Hijra Identity, Mahesh Dattani, Indian English Drama, Queer Theory, Seven Steps Around The Fire

Introduction

Indian English drama has always had an odd reputation or perhaps no reputation at all, depending on whom you ask. For decades, scholars treated it as the poor cousin of fiction and poetry, two genres that produced internationally celebrated figures from Narayan to Rushdie to Roy. Theatre, everyone seemed to agree, belonged to the regional languages: Hindi, Marathi, Bengali, Kannada. English was for novels. So when Mahesh Dattani arrived on the scene in the early 1990s, writing plays exclusively in English and staging them in Bangalore, the critical establishment was not quite sure where to file him. He did not fit.

And that, I want to suggest, is precisely the point. Dattani's refusal to fit into linguistic categories, into genre expectations, into polite thematic territory is what makes his work so important for thinking about gender. Seven Steps Around the Fire, written for BBC Radio 4 in 1999, takes on what may be the most radically marginalized community in South Asian society: hijras. These are individuals whom Serena Nanda famously described as occupying a space "neither man nor woman" (Nanda 15), though even that formulation is too neat, too binary in

its negation. What Dattani understood and what his play stages with considerable sophistication is that the problem is not simply that hijras fall between categories but that the categories themselves are instruments of violence.

My argument in what follows has three parts, and I want to be upfront about them. First, I read Seven Steps as a work that does something structural to the tradition of Indian English drama it changes what the form can talk about and how. Second, I put Butler's gender performativity in conversation with the realities of hijra life in India, and I am candid about the tensions this produces. Western queer theory does not map smoothly onto South Asian gender systems; pretending otherwise would be intellectually dishonest. Third, I do a sustained close reading of the play, attending to its use of the radio medium, its diary-frame narration, and its strategic silences. My guiding claim is that Dattani's theatre does not just depict gender fluidity. It takes apart the machinery that produces and polices gender in Indian social life.

Existing Scholarship on Dattani

The critical literature on Dattani is growing but remains, to put it bluntly, thin in places. Erin Mee's work on contemporary Indian theatre offers a helpful overview, situating Dattani among playwrights who pushed back against the dominance of mythological and realist modes (Mee 42). Angelie Multani's edited collection is useful as a starting point, though the essays tend toward thematic description rather than the kind of theoretical heavy lifting the plays deserve (Multani 8). Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri gives Dattani sustained attention in her study of Indian English drama, but her reading of Seven Steps feels rushed, as if she recognized the play's importance without having the space or perhaps the inclination to unpack it fully (Chaudhuri 134).

K. Prabha's recent article makes a stronger intervention. She argues that Dattani's plays dismantle patriarchal structures by exposing the violence woven into normative domesticity and heterosexual institutions (Prabha 97). This is a persuasive reading, and I draw on it throughout this paper, but I think Prabha stops short. Her analysis focuses on feminist themes in a broadly cisgender register; the transgender and non-binary dimensions of Dattani's work which are, after all, front and center in Seven Steps receive less attention than they warrant. Anita Singh's essays on Dattani's use of space (both literal and metaphorical) offer another productive angle, particularly her observation that spatial marginality in the plays mirrors social abjection (Singh 63). But again, the formal dimension the question of what the radio medium does to the representation of gendered bodies goes largely unaddressed.

This is the gap I am trying to fill. Most Dattani criticism treats the plays as containers for social messages. Extract the theme, analyze the message, move on. But a radio play is a strange animal. It strips away the visual body entirely, forcing the listener to construct gender from vocal cues alone. That formal feature has political implications that nobody, as far as I can tell, has seriously theorized.

Theoretical Framework: Butler, Reddy, and the Limits of Translation

Let me be direct about the theoretical scaffolding. Butler's Gender Trouble argues that gender is not the expression of some inner truth but a "stylized repetition of acts" that creates the illusion of a stable gendered identity (Butler, Gender Trouble 33). This is by now a familiar argument, almost a commonplace in gender studies, but its radicalism should not be dulled by familiarity. If gender is performed rather than possessed, then the regulatory norms that police gender the Love Laws, as Roy might call them are not protecting a natural order but producing one. Bodies That Matter pushes further, insisting that even materiality is a process of reiteration, that bodies "come to matter" only through their relation to regulatory ideals (Butler, Bodies 2). The pun on "matter" substance and significance is deliberate and devastating.

But here is where things get complicated, and I want to be honest about the complication rather than papering over it. The hijra community, as Gayatri Reddy documents in With Respect to Sex, does not straightforwardly map onto Western categories of transgender identity or queer subjectivity (Reddy 28). Hijras have their own kinship structures, their own ritual practices, their own internal hierarchies. The guru-chela system, the nirvan operation, the badhai performances at weddings and births these constitute a social world with its own logic, one that Butler's theory can illuminate but cannot fully contain. To read hijras solely through a Butlerian lens flattens their specificity into a generic narrative about gender subversion. And yet to reject Butler entirely would mean giving up analytical tools that are genuinely useful for understanding how the play works as theatre.

So I take a deliberately mixed approach. I use Butler where Butler helps and set her aside where she does not. I supplement her with Revathi's autobiography The Truth About Me, which provides a first-person account of hijra life that both supports and complicates performativity theory (Revathi 45). And I keep returning to Spivak's haunting question "Can the subaltern speak?" (Spivak 271) because it puts necessary pressure on the whole enterprise of representing hijra subjectivity through the conventions of English-language drama. Dattani, to his credit, seems aware of this pressure. Seven Steps does not pretend to solve the problem of subaltern speech; it dramatizes the problem itself.

Reading Seven Steps Around the Fire

The play opens with the sound of a diary being opened. A small thing, apparently. But consider what it establishes: we are entering this world through Uma Rao's written record, through the consciousness of a sociology researcher studying hijras for her PhD. Her husband, Suresh, happens to be the police superintendent investigating a hijra's murder. Dattani is not being subtle here the academic gaze and the juridical gaze are presented as twin instruments of surveillance, both claiming authority over hijra lives from positions of comfortable exteriority.

The murdered hijra is Kamla. And here is the devastating formal choice: Kamla is never heard. Not once. She exists entirely through other people's accounts Anarkali's grief, the police investigation's paperwork, fragments of gossip and evasion. In a play about hijra identity, the hijra at the center of the story is voiceless. If that is not a staging of Spivak's thesis, I do not know what is. The subaltern does not speak in Seven Steps not because Kamla has nothing to say, but because every institutional structure in the play conspires to ensure that her speech never reaches us.

Anarkali is a different matter altogether. She is the hijra Uma actually talks to, and she is magnificent: sharp, sardonic, unsparing. When she describes the guru-chela hierarchy or the economics of badhai, she is not providing ethnographic footnotes for the listener's benefit. She is asserting that the hijra community's social world has its own coherence, its own dignity, its own rules and that the dominant society's refusal to see this coherence is a form of willful ignorance. I find Anarkali one of the most compelling characters in Indian English drama, and it bothers me that she gets less critical attention than she deserves.

The plot turns on the revelation that Kamla had secretly married Subbu, the son of a powerful man. The seven steps of the title are the saptapadi the ritual circumambulation of the sacred fire in a Hindu wedding and the fact that a hijra and a man performed this ritual is, within the play's moral universe, the ultimate transgression. Not just illegal. Ontologically impossible, according to the logic of Hindu marriage law. And so Kamla was killed not as a crime of passion but as an act of ontological enforcement, a restoration of the binary order her existence had ruptured.

Dattani does not stage this as melodrama. The truth seeps out sideways, through half-truths and bureaucratic obstructions, and when the case is finally closed Subbu's suicide, the father's connections ensuring silence Uma's diary registers it with a flatness that reads as

exhaustion rather than closure. The system absorbed the disturbance and resealed itself. What lingers is Uma’s question, which is also our question: what word exists, in any language, for what Kamla was?

Language, Medium, and the Politics of Voice

That question about language is not rhetorical it is the play’s deepest argument. Throughout Seven Steps, characters grope for adequate vocabulary. Uma defaults to the clinical terminology of her discipline: "eunuch," "transgender," "third gender." None of it works. Anarkali inhabits a messier linguistic space where Hindi, Urdu, and English collide, and the instability of her language mirrors the instability of the categories everyone keeps trying to impose on hijra identity.

If Butler is right that gender is constituted through discourse (Butler, Gender Trouble 25), then the collapse of language around hijra identity is not just a failure of representation it is an active mechanism of exclusion. The law that criminalized hijra sexuality (Section 377, at the time of the play’s writing), the medical establishment that pathologized hijra bodies, the academy that turned hijras into research subjects all these discursive regimes parade through the play, and all of them prove, in the end, inadequate to recognize hijra personhood. Dattani is staging a crisis not of identity but of discourse.

And then there is the radio medium. On stage, you see bodies. You categorize them male, female, ambiguous before a single word is spoken. On radio, bodies vanish. Gender becomes purely vocal: pitch, register, intonation, the grain of the voice. For a play about gender fluidity, this is an extraordinary formal decision, because it forces listeners into the active construction of gender, making audible the perceptual habits that normally operate below the threshold of consciousness. I am surprised more critics have not discussed this. As Prabha rightly observes, Dattani’s method involves "making visible the invisible mechanisms of patriarchal control" (Prabha 99) but on radio, the mechanism is not visibility at all. It is audibility.

Conclusion

Seven Steps Around the Fire is, I think, one of the most intellectually serious works in the Indian English dramatic canon and I use "serious" not to mean solemn but to mean genuinely rigorous in its thinking about gender, power, and theatrical form. Dattani does not offer solutions. He does not tell us what word to use for Kamla, does not suggest that legal reform will fix what ails the gender order, does not pretend that a single play can undo centuries of entrenched caste-class-gender violence. What he does is refuse to let us look away.

The play’s relevance has only grown. The NALSA judgment of 2014, the Transgender Persons Act of 2019 these are steps, but activists on the ground will tell you they are faltering ones, hedged with compromises and shot through with the same bureaucratic logic that silenced Kamla. The questions Seven Steps poses about who gets to define gender, who gets to speak, and whose life counts as grievable remain, for all the legislative activity, stubbornly unresolved. Dattani’s theatre cannot resolve them. But it can and does insist, with a quiet, persistent fury, that we not stop asking.

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Subaltern Voices And Narrative Resistance In Indian Fiction

Claris Annie John[1] Ritu Shepherd[2]

[1] Research Scholar, Assistant Professor, Nehru Arts and Science College, Coimbatore, India.
[2] Associate Professor, Nehru Arts and Science College, Coimbatore, India.

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Abstract

The question of narrative authority over India's story animates this paper's examination of how Arundhati Roy and Salman Rushdie two writers who could hardly be more different in temperament and technique—have attempted to represent subaltern experience in their major novels. Drawing on Gramsci's concept of the subaltern and Spivak's still-unsettling challenge regarding subaltern speech, this paper argues that both The God of Small Things and Midnight's Children develop narrative strategies specifically designed to disrupt dominant historiography and make space for voices typically excluded from official accounts of the Indian nation. Serious attention is also given to the objection that English-language fiction by privileged cosmopolitan authors may transform subaltern experience into commodity rather than genuine representation. The analysis extends to Mahasweta Devi and Rohinton Mistry, whose different approaches Devi's confrontational minimalism, Mistry's patient social realism the picture in useful ways. The central contention is that subaltern representation in Indian fiction is most powerful when it is most honest about its own limitations.

Keywords:- Subaltern Studies, Indian English Fiction, Arundhati Roy, Salman Rushdie, Postcolonial Narrative, Representation

Introduction

There is something uncomfortable about the Indian English novel's relationship to the poor. The genre is written, overwhelmingly, by English-educated, upper-caste or upper-class writers for an audience that shares their linguistic and cultural capital. And yet these same novels aspire with what sometimes feels like compensatory urgency to represent the full spectrum of Indian experience, including (especially) the experiences of those who lack the education, the language, or the social standing to tell their own stories in this particular medium. The gap between teller and told is the elephant in the room of Indian English fiction, and it has been there from the beginning.

Subaltern studies, as a scholarly enterprise, made this gap its explicit subject. Ranajit Guha's founding intervention in the early 1980s argued that both colonial and nationalist historiography had systematically erased peasant agency, absorbing every popular uprising into narratives driven by elite actors (Guha 1). Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" pushed the critique further and, for some readers, pushed it to a breaking point by questioning whether the

institutional structures of academic knowledge production could ever genuinely accommodate subaltern voice, or whether representation always involved a kind of epistemic violence (Spivak 271). Heavy stuff. But it bears directly on the literary question, because the novel is itself an institution with its own protocols, conventions, and exclusions.

In what follows, I examine how four Indian writers have navigated this minefield. Roy and Rushdie are the primary focus, chosen not because they are the only writers to engage with subalternity but because their strategies are so dramatically different: Roy's broken chronology and sensory overload versus Rushdie's exuberant fabulation and unreliable narration. Devi and Mistry provide contrasting points of reference. I am not looking for a winner. I am looking for what each approach reveals and conceals about the possibilities and limits of subaltern representation in English-language fiction.

Theoretical Ground: Gramsci, Guha, Spivak

A few theoretical clarifications before we get to the novels. Gramsci's subaltern, as developed in the Prison Notebooks, is not simply "the poor" or "the oppressed." It designates social groups whose consciousness and agency are obscured by the cultural hegemony of ruling classes (Gramsci 52). The emphasis on hegemony matters: it means subalternity is an epistemic condition, not just an economic one. You can be materially impoverished without being subaltern; you are subaltern when the dominant discourse cannot recognize your perspective as legitimate.

Guha and the Subaltern Studies collective applied this framework to India with devastating effect, demonstrating that nationalist historiography the story India told itself about its own liberation had written peasants and tribals out of the script just as thoroughly as the British had (Guha 3). Spivak's contribution was to radicalize this insight by asking whether the academic recovery of subaltern voice was itself a form of appropriation whether "giving voice" always involved speaking for rather than allowing to speak (Spivak 283). Bhabha's theorization of mimicry and the "third space" complicates things differently, suggesting that subaltern agency might operate not through direct speech but through irony, displacement, and the destabilization of dominant categories from within (Bhabha 37). I find all three positions partially convincing and none fully satisfying, which is perhaps how it should be with genuinely difficult questions.

Roy: The Small Things That Shatter

The God of Small Things (1997) is organized around an act of transgression so radical that the novel can only approach it sideways: the sexual relationship between Ammu, a divorced Syrian Christian woman, and Velutha, a Parayava carpenter. Everything in the novel orbits this event the broken chronology, the layered perspectives, the obsessive return to the same scenes from different angles. Roy's formal choices are not decorative. They enact the experience of living under a social order where certain truths cannot be stated directly but can only be approached through indirection, repetition, and the accumulation of seemingly minor details.

Velutha is, by any measure, a subaltern figure. Untouchable, Communist, manual labourer he exists at the intersection of every axis of marginalization the novel identifies. His murder by the police is the book's moral nadir, narrated with a precision that refuses both sentimentality and sensationalism. But what makes Roy's treatment of subalternity genuinely interesting, rather than merely sympathetic, is her attention to the "Love Laws" "the laws that lay down who should be loved, and how. And how much" (Roy 33). These are not written statutes. They are enforced through glances, spatial arrangements, the minute choreography of everyday social life. The violence they produce is not exceptional but structural, not dramatic

but banal. Roy understands and this is what elevates her novel above the social-protest tradition that the most effective oppression is the kind that does not need to announce itself.

Ahmad, writing from a Marxist perspective, has questioned whether Roy's lyrical prose aestheticizes the very suffering it claims to denounce whether the beauty of the writing provides a kind of readerly pleasure that softens the political edge (Ahmad 68). It is a fair objection, and I do not think it can be entirely dismissed. But I also think it underestimates what Roy's prose is doing. The lyricism is not a consolation; it is a trap. It draws you in, makes you feel, and then confronts you with an outcome that no amount of beautiful language can redeem.

Rushdie: The Unreliable Nation

Midnight's Children (1981) approaches subalternity from an entirely different angle. Where Roy is microscopic, Rushdie is panoramic. Where she works through sensory intensity, he works through intellectual exuberance. Saleem Sinai, born at the exact moment of Indian independence, discovers that all the children born in that first hour of freedom possess magical powers a premise so gloriously absurd that it short-circuits any pretension to documentary realism. The novel is a national allegory, and the midnight's children represent the unrealized democratic potential of the Indian masses.

But the allegory does not end happily. The midnight's children are eventually rounded up and sterilized during the Emergency their powers destroyed by an authoritarian state that cannot tolerate uncontrolled multiplicity. Rushdie's magical realism operates here as what Boehmer calls "narrative excess" (Boehmer 196): it overwhelms the reductive categories of official history with a surplus of story, voice, and possibility that the state apparatus is designed to suppress.

The problem of representation is built into the novel's structure. Saleem is not subaltern; he is upper-middle-class, English-educated, and his access to the midnight's children comes through telepathy a power that is obviously a metaphor for the novelist's claim to imaginative empathy. And he is an unreliable narrator. His dates are wrong. His memories are fabricated. His account of history is shot through with error and self-serving distortion. This unreliability is not a flaw but a thesis: all narration of the national story is partial, interested, and ideologically shaped. Nobody tells the truth about India. Some people are just more honest about their lies.

Devi and Mistry: Other Angles

Mahasweta Devi's fiction, brought to anglophone readers primarily through Spivak's translations, occupies a position of deliberate discomfort. Stories like "Draupadi" confront the reader with subaltern bodies violated, exploited, refusing to be pitied in ways that reject the aesthetic distance literary convention normally provides. Devi's Draupadi, stripped and gang-raped by security forces, stands before her captors not in shame but in defiance, her wounded body itself becoming a weapon. Spivak's introductory essays to these translations have become theoretical texts in their own right, raising questions about the ethics of cross-cultural mediation that are directly relevant to the novels under discussion here (Spivak, "Translator's Preface" iii).

Mistry's A Fine Balance (1995) takes the social-realist approach. Four characters two low-caste tailors, a student, a widow navigate the Emergency in a Bombay apartment, and the novel documents, with meticulous patience, the cascading violence inflicted on the poor by the state. The realism is effective but raises its own issues. Tickell has argued that realist fiction about suffering can produce "compassion fatigue" a domestication of misery that allows the reader to feel virtuous without being transformed (Tickell 142). I think Tickell is partially right. But I also think Mistry's relentless accumulation of detail serves a different function: it makes

visible the sheer bureaucratic ordinariness of state violence, the way atrocity is administered through paperwork and procedure.

Conclusion

There is no right way to represent the voiceless, and pretending otherwise would be a disservice to both the writers and the communities they depict. Each approach examined here carries risks aestheticization, mythologization, domestication, alienation and none achieves the transparency of subaltern self-representation. That is not a failure of these novels; it is a structural feature of literary mediation that no amount of good intention can overcome.

What the best of this fiction does achieve is something arguably more valuable than transparency: it makes the reader aware of the gap between representation and reality, between the story told and the life lived. Roy's fractured narrative, Rushdie's unreliable narrator, Devi's refusal of aesthetic comfort, Mistry's accumulation of devastating detail each insists that reading about subalternity should be difficult, not consoling. It is in that difficulty, rather than in any achieved transparency, that the political and ethical force of subaltern fiction resides. Spivak was right that the subaltern cannot simply be "given voice." But she was also right that the effort to understand, imperfect as it must always be, is worth making so long as it comes with honesty about what it can and cannot accomplish.

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