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Literature for the Children

Dr. S. Ramaratnam,
Vice Chancellor, Jagadguru Kripalu University, Odisha, India

Introduction:
There is a saying - It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men. The minds of the children are unpolluted and hence they can quickly absorb whatever is given to them. Hence it is the responsibility of the parents, elders and teachers to give them all the good things of life, at the young age. Moreover, whatever is learned by the children at the young age lasts long. It is, therefore, necessary to initiate the children into morals and values at the young age, which will stand as a guard for them throughout their life. Values imparted in a raw manner will not attract the children. They have to be given like a sugar-coated pill, covering them up with stories, music and literature. Mammaṭa says in his Kāvyaprakāśa.

kāvyam yaśase arthakṛte śivetarakṣataye /
sadyaḥ paranirvṛtaye kāntāsammitatayaḥ upadeśayuje //

‘Literature contributes to fame and prosperity. It dispels all the evil. It accords wonderful relaxation. It advises like a loving wife.’

Creativity is natural to children and it is the duty of the elders to nurture this innate ability in children by providing exclusive literature for them. Children's literature is important because it provides students with opportunities to respond to the problems of life; it gives students appreciation about their own cultural heritage as well as those of others; it helps students develop emotional intelligence and creativity; it nurtures growth and development of the student's personality and social skills; and it transmits important literature and themes from one generation to the next.

Giving children access to all varieties of literature is extremely important for their success. Educators, parents, and community members should help students develop a love and passion for reading. Not only is reading literature important in developing cognitive skills to be able to succeed in a school or work setting, but it is valuable for other reasons as well. The first value to note is that children’s literature provides students with the opportunity to respond to literature and develop their own opinions about the topic. This strengthens the cognitive developmental domain as it encourages deeper thought about literature. Quality literature does not tell the reader everything he/she needs to know; it allows for some difference in opinion. One reader may take something completely different away from the piece of literature than the next reader, based on the two personal viewpoints and experiences. Students can learn to evaluate and analyze literature, as well as summarize and hypothesize about the topic.

The most important factors of Children’s literature are simplicity and direct approach. Children also like the beats and the music. That is why children are taught rhymes in the preschool classes. In general, rhymes may or may not have a cogent meaning. But in Indian context the rhymes have an exalted meaning as well. Majority of them inculcate bhakti or
devotion in the minds of the children. For that matter, even the lullabies are bhakti oriented. The pregnant mother is advised to listen to soulful music. Babies pick up musical instincts even from the sixth month in the mother’s womb. It is said that Prahlāda used to listen to the stories of Lord Kṛṣṇa even while he was in his mother’s womb. Let us see this Sanskrit stanza which is taught even before the children are taught to read and write.

karāravindaṁ padāravindaṁ mukhāravinde vinīśayantam /

vaṭasya patrasya puṭe śayānaṁ bālāṁ mukundaṁ manasā smarāmi //

‘I adore Lord Kṛṣṇa who takes up his lotus like foot with his lotus like hand and ushers it into his lotus like mouth and who lies on the leaf of the banian tree.’

Most of the words in the verse like kara, aravinda, mukha, patra and manas are commonly used in all the languages of India and so it is very easy for the children to grasp the meaning. The verse is also about another child, that is, Kṛṣṇa. Identifying himself or herself with the main personality depicted in the story or a verse is one of the characteristics of the children. The present verse kindles the imagination of the children. It can easily understand the concept as it would have seen babies thrusting the thumb of the leg into their mouth.

Second, children’s literature provides an avenue for students to learn about their own cultural heritage and the cultures of other people. It is crucial for children to learn these values because, developing positive attitudes toward our own culture and the cultures of others is necessary for both social and personal development. In saying this, however, when teaching students about the cultural heritage of others, one should be very careful in selecting which books to recommend to young readers. The Vedas are the National heritage of India. The students were taught the Vedas from the age of about 7. Keeping the student in the mind, the first hymn of the Rgveda is kept simple and straight. The first stanza runs thus –

agnimīle purohitam

yajñasya devamṛtvijam

hotāraṁ ratnadhatamam

We see that it has only three lines compared to most of the hymns that contain four lines. Most of the words in the stanza like agni, purohita, yajña, deva and ratna would have been already known to the student. At the same time, being set to the metre, it is rhythmic which the children love.

Many books are available that depict culture as an important piece of society that is to be treasured and valued, and those books can have great value for children. It is for this purpose that the childhood exploits of Rāma or Kṛṣṇa are elaborated in the epics and the Purānas.

Moreover, children’s literature helps students develop emotional intelligence. Stories have the power to promote emotional and moral development. Children’s literature contains numerous moments of crisis, when characters make moral decisions and contemplate the reasons for their decisions, an important skill for children. Instead of just saying ‘be kind to
animals’ the stories make animals as characters in their theme, as for example, the monkeys in the Rāmāyāṇa story. Kṛṣṇa is depicted as a cowherd boy tendering the cows. The Pañcatantra stories make animals and birds speak and evoke emotions like human beings. There are stories which tell children that base qualities like anger, jealousy and greediness lead to misery. Such stories also make children lean symbolism which is reflected in the ritual and philosophy of the tradition. We know from Gandhiji’s life of how the Hariścandra story had a great impact on him. Children’s literature encourages students to think deeper about their own feelings.

Children’s literature also encourages creativity. Many of them encourage students to learn about music and art, and they are engaging in their design and interactivity. Children’s literature promotes the development of students’ internal imaginations.

Children’s literature is of value because it fosters personality and social development. Children are very impressionable during the formative years, and children’s literature can help them develop into caring, intelligent, and friendly people. For example, we have the story of Śibi who was prepared to sacrifice his own life for the sake of a dove. King Dilīpa was prepared to sacrifice his life for the sake of the cow which is depicted in the second canto of Kālidāsa’s Raghuvamśa.

Children’s literature can foster social development by encouraging students to accept other people and their differences. The concept that before the eyes of God everybody is equal, and that God sees only true bhakti and not external show is demonstrated in stories like Nandanar charitram.

Moral stories present situations that might encourage students to become more open-minded to different types of families and understand that love is the most important thing in a family. Children’s literature can also encourage students to develop relationships with people, encouraging social contact.

Literature encourages students to be considerate and friendly people, and these traits may be consistent with developing students into quality citizens.

Children’s literature is of value because it is a timeless tradition, one in which books are the major means of transmitting our literary heritage from one generation to the next. Children are only young for a short time, and so we must give them access to a basic literary heritage of timeless books. Quality children’s literature has the great power to captivate audiences for many generations.

Children’s literature is extremely valuable in both the school setting and at home. Teachers and parents should both be able to differentiate between quality and mediocre literature, in order to give students access to the best books to encourage these important values of literature and considering developmental domains.

There are story books meant for children that are more than a thousand years old. For example, the Pancatantra and the Aesop’s fables.
The Children literature in English like Alice in Wonderland is well known but what we are looking at is the moral or life lesson that each one of them can teach us.

1. **Alice in Wonderland** by Lewis Carrol (1832-1898) - *If everybody minded their own business, the world would go around a great deal faster than it does.* Lesson: Of course, it’s important that we care about our fellow human beings, but minding our own business when it comes to gossip, and the affairs of others is always a good rule to live by.

2. **TREASURE ISLAND** (1883)  
   By R.L. Stevenson (13 November 1850 - 3 December 1894). In this novel, one learns about the importance of responsibility, courage, and resourcefulness.

3. **THE TALE OF PETER RABBIT** (1902) By Beatrix Potter (28 July 1866 - 22 December 1943). Peter Rabbit was a dreamer who jumped way out of his comfort zone when he ventured into Mr. McGregor’s garden. Not every adventure end in near-tragedy as Peter’s did, and life is more interesting when we test the boundaries of our worlds.

4. **WIND IN THE WILLOWS** (1908)  
   By Kenneth Grahame (8 March 1859 - 6 July 1932)  
   The major value system shown in this novel is based on the importance of friendship. Throughout the book, the main characters act in selfless ways, showing how their friendship overcomes obstacles such as greed and violence.

5. **PETER PAN** (1911)  
   By J.M. Barrie (9 May 1860 - 19 June 1937)  
   (a) Happy thoughts lead to positive thinking. When Peter says, "Think of the happiest things, it's the same as having wings," he was not joking. Although he was trying to help the Darling children be able to fly, this quote can be applied to everyday life. Thinking positively is a great feeling!  
   (b) Karna is real. Captain Hook has gotten what he's deserved not only once, but twice. Although some villains will never learn or change their ways, karma will eventually bite them.  
   (c) Everyone needs to have some fun and act like a child occasionally.  
   (d) Be realistic. Wendy, John, and Michael had a lot of fun in adventuring in Neverland, but they ultimately decide they needed to go home. The sad truth is, even though we all need to release our inner child every once in a while, we can't stop growing up and maturing.  
   (e) Explore the world. It's important to be spontaneous and experience places you have never been to before, similar to the Darling children.  
   (f) Be courageous. Wendy puts on a brave face in front of her little brothers when she is instructed to walk the plank. It's not only adults who have to be strong!  
   (g) There is nothing equal to mother’s love. Wendy, John and Michael all end up missing their mother's love and care. Even Peter seeks Wendy to be a motherly figure for him and the lost boys. There's no denying we just need our moms to love and guide us sometimes.
(h) Have faith and trust in your abilities. Without faith and trust, Wendy and her brothers would not have been able to fly!

(i) Never go back on your word. Peter Pan is an honorable character because he never breaks a promise. He gave his word to Captain Hook that he wouldn't fly during their sword fight at the end of the movie. He did just that, and he was victorious!

(j) Test your friends for their loyalty. There’s no denying that the Lost Boys are the best friends Peter could have. They trust what he says, stick by his side and never throw him under the bus. Everyone needs friends like these!

(k) Learn basic skills. For example, basic sewing skills could come in handy when you least expect it. For example, if you need to fix a hole in your shirt or sew your shadow to the bottom of your shoe -- a needle and thread can work wonders!

(l) Be fearless. "Think of all the joy you'll find, when you leave the world behind and bid your fears goodbye." -- "You Can Fly!"

C.S. Lewis (29 November 1898 - 22 November 1963)
Moral principles such as honesty and integrity, forgiveness, courage, and self-sacrifice, are emphasized in this novel as these are represented by various characters, human and animal, in the novel. Mr Tumnus and Edmund stand for the moral values of honesty and integrity, while Lucy and Peter represent forgiveness; Peter, Edmund and Mr Beaver are brave warriors with courage, while Aslan, Edmund as well as Lucy all promulgate the spirit of self-sacrifice.

7. THE LORD OF THE RINGS (1954)
By J.R.R Tolkein (3 January 1892 - 2 September 1973)
There are at least six lessons to be learnt from this novel. (a) be courageous while facing the problems of the world. (b) the world needs more hospitality (c) fellowship is more valuable than gold (d) mercy is strength -quote - “Many that live deserve death. And some that die deserve life. Can you give it to them? Then do not be too eager to deal out death in judgment. For even the very wise cannot see all ends.” (e) Nothing great can be achieved without the spirit of sacrifice. In the novel Frodo gave up his peaceful life at home in order to destroy the Ring, knowing the mission would likely claim his life. In the end, even though Frodo survived his journey he could not go back to his life in the Shire. He had given everything to protect the world, and now, he had no place in it (f) there is always hope for a better world.

8. HARRY POTTER series (1997-2007)
By J.K. Rowling (born 31 July 1965)

Values – (a) True friendship can get you through anything. An unlikely trio to begin with, Harry, Ron and Hermione proved time and time again that real friendship forges an unbreakable bond. Together they managed to face Dementors and Death Eaters, Dolores Umbridge and Horcruxes. Not to mention the truly horrifying pitfalls of teenage life: relationship problems, jealousy and school exams. With true friends it doesn’t matter if you argue over a possibly-jinxed new broomstick or accidentally swallow a love potion because at the end of the day, they’ll always have your back. (b) Be brave - Harry had to summon
up all his courage when he sought out Voldemort in the Forbidden Forest. (c) People can
surprise you. A towering half-giant could turn out to be a loyal, kind and gentle friend
while a stuttering, nervous teacher may be harbouring Voldemort in his turban. A dark,
bitter Potions master may sacrifice everything to right a wrong for the love of his life, and
even a paragon of wisdom like Dumbledore could have a complicated past. People aren’t
always what they seem: well, almost nothing is in the wizarding world, and that’s an
important lesson to remember (d) Do not hesitate to seek the help of others when in need.
Harry was often loath to ask for help, even when he really needed it. Whether that was
working out what a clue meant during the Triwizard Tournament, or tracking down a long-
lost diadem, his first reaction was often to try and do things alone. Borne out of good
intentions, this attitude is nonetheless crippling in the right circumstances and luckily,
Harry came to realise that although there are some battles you need to fight alone, there are
others that you can’t. (e) Brave the heartbreak. It’s sad but it’s true. Just as Harry and Cho,
Lavender and Ron, and Lily and Snape showed us, sometimes things don’t work out the
way we’d like them to.

You might suffer a broken heart through unrequited love, or lose those you love most, but
the books also show us that life goes on. People recover and forge ahead and even death
isn’t something to be feared; it is, as Dumbledore so eloquently said, ‘but the next great
adventure’. (f) True love lasts forever. Love is a strong theme throughout the books; if you
love someone completely it can never be undone. Lily’s love for Harry granted him
protection and Snape’s love for Lily shaped his path after her death. True love lasts forever.
Just because a person dies doesn’t mean our love for them does; a comforting lesson we can
take heart in. (g) Money isn’t everything. Harry may have inherited a whole vault of gold
from his parents, but it couldn’t buy him the thing he perhaps yearned for the most: the
family that was lost to him. On the flip side of the coin, Ron had grown up wearing and
using hand-me-downs in a household that was constantly worrying about costs, but his
home was full of love and life. He may have been jealous of Harry’s status and wealth, but
Harry envied Ron’s big family and happy home. It just goes to show at the end of the day,
money really isn’t everything. (h) Face your fears. However scary it may seem, sometimes
we have to face our fears to get what we want. Poor Ron had to ‘follow the spiders’ to find
the cure for Hermione after her run-in with the Basilisk and Harry had to deal with his
terror of Dementors. Ginny had to face her fear of actually talking to Harry to actually get
him to notice her, and Mrs Weasley faced her biggest fear of all – losing a member of her
family. Sometimes the only way is the hardest way, and it’s times like these that we find
out what we’re really made of.

9. The Happy Prince by Oscar Wilde (1854 – 1900)
The moral lesson of "The Happy Prince" by Oscar Wilde is that the worst aspects of
modern society can be overcome by love and charity, which have the unique ability to
unite men and make them whole. Wilde wrote the fairy tale during the Victorian era,
when the East End of London was awash with the suffering and forced labor of children,
many of whom were forced into prostitution and almost all of whom lived in abject
poverty. This social context is generally accepted as the inspiration for the story. The
author strives to find solution to these problems.

10. The Elephant’s Child by Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936)
The Elephant’s child is a fable about a young elephant that was full of questions which led to a
great curiosity and always got in trouble because of always asking questions. The moral of the
story is – keep asking questions even if you were to court troubles. If you do not ask questions you will never know the truth.

11. A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens (1812-1870)
   The story is about the transformation of the main character from a miserly close hearted person to a man whose heart is open to the pain and struggle of others, a man who has become someone who will participate in the world around him, rather than withdraw from it.

12. The Old man and the sea by Earnest Hemingway (1899-1961)
   “Success” is all too often assumed to be the indicator of the value of a man. But success, in and of itself, merely speaks to a particular status and may have nothing to do with the journey that the man took to get there, or whether or not he retained his integrity along the way. Among the many aspects of the story, it is the idea of redefining success and victory that makes The Old Man and the Sea, Ernest Hemingway’s classic novella, so profound.

13. Carry on, Jeeves by P.G.Wodehouse (1881-1975)
   The moral of the story is that one can look for nature for solving problems of life. For example, Corky, a struggling artist in the story, who relies on his uncle, is afraid his uncle won't approve of his fiancée. Jeeves suggests a plan involving books about birds. One can read the story and understand how far a person can rely on out of the world solutions to problems of life.

   Confidence in ourselves and in our skills allows us to push our limits, achieve more than we otherwise would, try even in those borderline cases where a less confident person would bow out. But is there such a thing as being too confident, a flip side to this driver of success? Absolutely. It’s called overconfidence: when confidence trumps accuracy. In other words, we become more confident of our abilities, or of our abilities as compared with others', than would be wise given the circumstances and the reality. And this surplus of belief in ourselves can lead to some not so pleasant results.

Every language has its own share of Children literature. It is our duty to share the values of these works with the other linguistic groups through translations so that the general moral standard of the world goes up.
Contemporary Indian English Fiction: Need for Direction

Prof. Dr. Jagdish Batra

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Abstract:
Ever since Salman Rushdie won the Booker in 1981, hundreds of Indians – both talented and naïve – have published their stories and novels. My research shows that since 2000 AD, some 1000 novels have been published by Indians living in India or abroad. Going through them, one finds almost every theme taken up. Similarly, style variations ranging from conventional realistic to postmodern ones are observed in this fiction.

And yet there is much left to be desired. It is not only the slowdown in grabbing international awards -- that was not always a fair parameter -- but analyzing the writings on the basis of their seriousness in probing various issues and aspects, one finds the Achilles heel. While comparison with celebrated works in world literature brings out the dearth of originality, the comparison with our own regional language literatures points to the lopsided nature of Indian fiction written in English. Most of it reflects an outsider elitist’s point of view and speaks poorly of the rooting of writers in Indian ethos. Some works show simply the urge to cash in on a craze for a certain approach or theory. My paper examines a good number of Indian novels written in English and identifies strengths and weaknesses of this important genre.

Introduction

It is a matter of some satisfaction that the domain of Indian English Fiction, which some predicted as being on the verge of death¹, occupies an enviable place in the literary world today. During the first decade of the 21st century, the writer of these lines had been able to note 416 novels written in English by Indians or writers of Indian origin, whether settled in India or abroad². From 2011 till the time of writing this piece, another 657 novels have been published. Based on this pattern, one can hope for a minimum one thousand novels by the end of this decade, i.e., till 2020 AD.

The writer of these lines accessed the subject matter of 401 novels out of the novels published since 2011. The theme-wise break-up is as under:

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<td>Multiculturalism</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fantasy</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual/Relationships</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>401</td>
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As can be observed from the statistics that light fiction is in the lead and within this category, campus/romance reign supreme with thrillers not far behind. That has been the trend everywhere, but what is more, myth-based fiction has had an upsurge in India. At the same time, as I shall point out later in this paper, some new trends are also emerging which reflect the commitment of our young writers towards innovation. Serious fiction, by implication, has taken the backseat. It is a matter of some solace, however, that the socio-political segment still has some 52 novels or roughly 13% portion. In order to find out the strengths and weaknesses of Indian English Fiction, let us have a quick survey of leading writers who have published novels in recent past.
Individuals/Relationships

Individual as a theme would include a protagonist who wishes to carve a niche for himself/herself against the tide of the time. The issue of identity is central to this genre. Since identity is built up in a society, the relationships that the individual builds with others in the world do have a bearing on his/her personality. Family, as a microcosm of society, represents a network of relations that nature provides to one and that culture transforms in time and space. The status of a woman is closely linked to the state of affairs and the value system prevalent in the Indian family system – close as well as extended. Even the neighbourhood as also the society at large has a part to play in the life of a woman. Subsumed under this category are also the novels dealing with psychologically different – let’s not call them deviant – individuals.

The major novelists who have written in recent past on this theme include Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapur, Jaishree Misra, Jerry Pinto, Janice Pariat et al. The position of women has been a constant concern of many writers, particularly women writers. They have rightly condemned the patriarchal attitude of Indian society. Their women characters have reflected the changing mindset of society too, as for example, Shashi Deshpande, who is a doyen in this field and who has written about different relationships like mother-daughter, father-daughter, husband-wife, etc. has, over the years, brought about a change in her characters, so that the forward-looking Manjari of Moving On (2004) hardly resembles the submissive Jaya of That Long Silence (1989) in terms of liberated lifestyle.

The issue of relationships is a complex one and how the self-behaves vis-à-vis others in a society depends on many factors, most of all one’s own mind which is indeed a hard thing to fathom. Manju Kapur’s novel Custody, focusses on the after-effects of divorce on a family in an interesting way. The characters re-set their lives and just move on in a show of individualism in our times. There is this novel Em and the Big Hoom by Jerry Pinto in which the writer portrays a recluse and complex mind compounded further by age.

The individual identity striving to make its presence felt becomes a hard nut to crack if the individual belongs to the LGBT community. Award-winning Assamese writer Janice Pariat’s Seahorse is a bildungsroman which is entangled with the myth of Poseidon and Pelops, portrays beautifully the homosexual relationship.

Socio-political problems

It is true that the milieu forms the backdrop of every novel, but if any particular socio-political problem has been focussed upon in a novel, that needs to be put in this category. Prominent novelists who have come out with their stories belonging to this genre recently include Aravind Adiga, Jeet Thayil, Kishwar Desai, Anees Salim, Kota Nilima, Kancha Ilaiah, et al.

Aravind Adiga’s first novel The White Tiger got the writer the Man Booker prize. It presents the semi-literate, ruralite chauffeur Balram who learns to deal with the world and rise in it through devious and deceitful means. The message that the writer seemed to give was that the poor should be given what is due to them otherwise they will take to the path of violence. However, this is a rather reductive reading of the Indian situation and by no means can India be divided into the “India of Light” and the “India of Darkness”, as the writer does it in the novel. Adiga’s second novel Last Man in the Tower deals with the problem of tenant-landlord relations in the metropolis Mumbai.

Jeet Thayil takes up the problem of drugs in Mumbai in his novel Narcopolis. The narrative becomes authentic as the writer too had been an addict himself. Former journalist Kota Neelima’s Shoes of the Dead makes an intensive study of the problem of insolvency of farmers leading to suicides in a large number of cases in the Vidarbha region of India.

Journalist Kishwar Desai, penned her novel Witness the Night in which she takes up some serious social problem of female foeticide. Kancha Ilaiah’s Untouchable God castigates the upper classes for their inhuman attitude towards the so-called lower classes. Anees Salim focusses on the lives of
ordinary Muslims in India, their hopes and aspirations, fears and prejudices, etc. Similarly, Jaspreet Singh’s *Helium* deserves special mention as it is written by the son of a police officer who was involved in the 1984-Sikh massacre in Delhi. It is like confession by a son atoning for the guilt of his father!

**History/Politics**

History – ancient or recent as well as politics forms the basis of many novels these days. While some novelists have an inclination towards true depiction of history, others go at a tangent and treat the historical landscape as a background only. Amitav Ghosh is a serious novelist who does a lot of research when he undertakes to write a novel based as these are on a concept. His novel *River of Smoke* completed the *Ibis* trilogy that deals with the infamous opium trade which also led to the Anglo-Chinese War of 1839-42. The other novel *Flood of Fire* shows the conflict between the state that wishes to resist the drug trade ruining the youth and Britain siding with its corporates in the name of free trade. Ghosh seems to be reminding the readers about the possible fallout of globalization and free trade in our times.

Indu Sundaresan wrote a trilogy covering history of the Taj Mahal and another novel on the subject of the famous Kohinoor diamond. India’s premier poet Keki N. Daruwalla’s novel *Ancestral Affairs* recounts the heavy partition days when the state of Junagadh ruled over by a Muslim Nawab acceded to India much against the wishes of the ruler. The novel is interestingly written with lots of wit and humour and of course, word play of which Daruwalla is the master. Other writers who deserve mention are Madhulika Liddle, Jaishree Misra, Kunal Basu, et al.

**Myth-based**

Like history, ancient myth and epics too provide a fertile ground to imaginative minds. The popularity of myth-based novels can be gauged from the fact that in a short span of time, these have been translated in many regional and foreign languages. Important authors belonging to this genre include Ashok Banker, Amish Tripathi, Devdutt Pattanaik, Anand Neelkantan, Namita Gokhale, Sharath Komarraju, Anuja Chandramouli, et al. This tribe is on the increase.

Ashok Banker is probably the first novelist who took up myth as the staple in a big way. A prolific writer, he has written around 40 novels based upon Ramayana and Mahabharata apart from so many others. He has, Of course, amalgamated his imagination with the narratives circulating in society. His humanization of divine characters like Rama and Krishna created a furore at first but the trend has caught on with many writers following the lead. So far as the style and language is concerned, he still holds the number one position.

Amish Tripathi has followed Banker’s lead and has been selling well though he is no match to Banker in terms of beauty of language. His major novels are *The Secret of the Nagas* and *The Oath of the Vayuputras*. In these feminist times, the mythical stories too have been interpreted from the feminist viewpoint. Sita has been almost the universal choice with popular novelists. Thus, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni in her *Under the Sorrow Tree – Ramayana*, relates the story of Ramayana from Sita’s viewpoint as she does in her *Palace of Illusions* from the standpoint of Draupadi.

Dev Dutt Patnaik, a physician-turned-author, has to his credit some thirty books focusing on the relevance of ancient myths and legends for our times. Along with his TV show on epics, he has become immensely popular. His books include illustrations as also morals deduced from stories. As a true scholar, he goes in for research to rationalize various symbols and actions of characters. His book *Sita* underlines the role of Sita in making Rama a god. His earlier work *Jaya: An illustrated Retelling of Mahabharata* became hugely popular. In his *The Girl Who Chose*, Patnaik shows how the entire Ramayana story is related to Sita’s choices.
Multiculturalism/Diasporic

It is a fact that most of the acclaimed writers belonging to Indian English Fiction are, in fact, diasporic. Now, the condition of the diasporic in the Indian context is such that they have strong family ties because of which they are emotionally linked to India. On the other hand, their bread and butter dictate their allegiance to the host country. This dilemma is slowly getting diluted because of the rise of materialism in life. Several writers of standing belong to it – Salman Rushdie, Jhumpa Lahiri, Rohinton Mistry, Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Kiran Desai, Aravind Adiga…the list is endless.

M.G. Vassanji, born to Indian parents in Kenya and residing presently in Canada, has published recently The Magic of Saida which explores the history of East Africa from pre-colonial times to the present. Vassanji believes that past is never dead and is always affecting present in shaping lives and cultures. Another writer of repute Bharati Mukherjee has penned her eighth novel Miss New India in which the protagonist Anjali Bose, who comes from a small Bihar town, has brush with the India of today in Bangalore.

Terrorism

Terror stalks entire world, therefore it is natural for writers to take it up as a theme and who would be better equipped to talk of it than Salman Rushdie, who, even though a Muslim, has been the victim of the fatwa or the death-threat by Ayatollah Khomeini. Those days of self-incarceration are at the back of this novel whose title Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-eight Days alludes to that period.

Known for his pioneering role in establishing the postmodern novel in Indian literature, Rushdie has taken the classical turn in his latest novel The Golden House. He takes up the life of a Mumbai don who shuns the underworld in the aftermath of the terror attack on The Taj Hotel in which his wife is killed. He shifts to New York along with his three sons, but despite his riches, he and his children do not get a happy life to lead. His two sons meet violent death. He, along with his eldest son and second wife – a petite Russian girl – gets burnt up in the plot hatched by his mafia adversaries, and poetic justice is meted out to the family. Rushdie’s style is interesting with his sharp wit and word play, and what’s more, the language is not as complicated as in Midnight’s Children.

Arundhati Roy has come out, after 20 years, with her novel The Ministry of Utmost Happiness which is unwieldy tome covering at least three themes – neuters, violence in Kashmir and the Naxalite movement. The writer is a known activist with sympathies towards terrorists and the novel illustrates her viewpoint, even though she tries to appear neutral. The use of different registers – diary entries, police station FIR’s, catalogues, Urdu poetry, etc. makes the novel appear like a patchwork. As compared to Roy’s previous novel The God of Small Things, this one is short on artistic merit and is more of propaganda material.

Mukul Deva, a former army Major, has carved out a niche for himself publishing around a dozen novels in a span of six years! These fall in the category of spy thrillers dealing with terrorism. His novels bring a realistic touch as he has worked in the field himself. The novel with the queer title How to Fight Islamist Terror from Missionary Position by Tabish Khair is a satire on the prejudices which people harbor without much basis. Others who have written on this theme include Anita Krishanan, Jaggi Bhasin, Sanjeev Sahota, Joseph Sebastian, Piyush Jha, Abhay Narayan Sapru, et al.

Margins/Space

By margins are meant the people living on the margins of society in terms of money, caste, race, religion or class. The Parsi playwright and story writer Cyrus Mistry has written about his community in his novels like Chronicle of a Corpse Bearer. Kiran Nagarkar published The Extras, which takes forward the story of the characters Ravan and Eddie in the novel of the same title published way back in 1995. He arouses laughter a la P.G. Wodehouse. Based as they are in a Mumbai chawl (tenement),
these characters aspire to be film actors one day in Bollywood, but end up being extras only. Some essays and poems interspersed in the novel dent its unity.

There are people who do not get talked about in fiction. Kunal Basu’s *Kolkatta* shows Jami, who starts his career as a masseur, is soon engulfed in sex trade offering services to rich women. Also life at the margin in Indian society is touched upon by some authors, like Kavery Nambisan in whose novel *A Town Like Ours*, a prostitute talks about herself and others.

**Regional**

In recent past, a number of novelists have written with strong focus on the topography and culture of their native places—areas that had been overlooked so far. The north-east India needed this attention. So, Suravi Sharma Kumar’s novel *Voices in the Valley* touches upon the landscape, climate, flora and fauna of Assam in a big way. Besides, it deals with the problem created in that state due to the influx of Bangladeshi migrants. Similarly, Aruni Kashyap’s *The House with a Thousand Stories* focusses on Assam, whereas Easterine Kire’s *When the River Sleeps* is all set in Nagaland. Similarly, Charu Singh touches upon Sikkim and Tibet region and Nilendu Sen reveals the tribals’ world.

**Popular**

This segment contains light fiction written mostly by young writers and centering around campus, career, crime, etc. Chetan Bhagat is still the name ruling this genre. He is the first novelist in India who sold a million copies of his romantic novels. All his novels have some theme of interest to youth which makes them popular, like cricket, examinations, coaching centres, call centre jobs, etc. Most of his novels have been turned into movies. His novel *Revolution 2020: Love, Corruption, Ambition* was published in 2011. The other popular novel is *Half Girlfriend* which is the story of love between Madhav, a Bihari boy who is rather weak in English and Riya, a sophisticated Delhite girl.

One of the best-selling Indian authors, Durjoy Dutta has penned 16 novels so far, mainly centering on love and romance. His first novel, *Of Course I Love You! Till I Find Someone Better* (co-authored with Maanvi Ahuja) was released in 2008 while he was still a student. At the young age of 27, Nikita Singh has a dozen novels to her credit. These have interesting titles like *Love @ Facebook; Accidentally in Love… With Him? Again?* etc. The success of these novelists has inspired many young people from all walks of life to pen novels. So, it is difficult to name all of them here. Ravi Subramanian, Preeti Shenoy, Anuja Chauhan are some important names pertaining to this genre.

**NEW CATEGORIES**

**Reflective thrillers**

As the fret and frenzy of the present-day life accelerates, we find even the young people also trying to find peace in the conventional manner, or at least experimenting with whatever holds hope of a break from the humdrum routine. It is in keeping with the change in disposition of the young people that we find some thrillers with added stress on serious matters. Karan Bajaj has been enchanted by the Indian system of yoga. So, in his novel *Keep Off the Grass*, it is Samrat, born of Indian parents settled in America, who comes in search of his roots to India. However, in the name of spirituality he takes drugs and meets hippies and *aghoris*. His novel *Johnny Gone Down* details a series of bizarre events that lead an MIT graduate to have several avatars as a Buddhist monk, a drug lord, a software expert and a game fighter.

Even though a writer of thrillers, Ashwin Sanghi has created a postmodern mélange by mixing myth, science, history, politics etc. in his works. *The Krishna Key* is not exactly a re-telling of Mahabharata story. In this thriller, a murderer executes his meticulously planned murders, believing he is the reincarnation of Krishna! His latest work *Keepers of the Kalachakra* has the Buddhist myth of Kalachakra or wheel of time as the motif. The story relates to our times and begins with the search of
the cause of some disease that has struck dead leading figures of the world. The intelligence agencies of the U.S., Russia, China and India come together for this sake. As the work proceeds in a lab in India, we come across several discussions on the philosophies, myths, legends of different civilizations. All this is interspersed with references to contemporary events and personages. So, there are shifts of time and space, but the story is riveting.

Corporate Fiction

The newly inaugurated genre of Corporate Fiction is a reflection of the postmodern world where MNCs mould not only the economy of the host country but also the mindset of employees with regard to questions of nation and nationality. So far as the women are concerned, they are still seen as objects of desire, what with stress on immaculate dressing in modern attire, acquiring latest gadgets and cars and going abroad without so much as a murmur on the advances of male bosses.

P.G. Bhaskar, a banker, published five novels of which *Jack Patel’s Dubai dreams* and *Jack is back in Corporate Carnival* are based on banking operations in Dubai and Africa. Humour is his forte which makes his novels interesting and readable. Ravi Subramanian, a banker by profession, who started out with catchy titles like *If God Was a Banker* (2007) and *I Bought the Monk’s Ferrari* (2008), produced four novels during this period. Also, Nirupama Kaushik (*A Romance with Chaos*), Amrita Tripathi (*Broken News*) Abhijit Bhaduri (*Married but Available*) fall in this category of fiction.

Speculative/Dystopic

Novels based upon science and fantasy have been written earlier also by writers like Jayant Narlikar and Chaman Nahal, but it is a nascent genre all the same. Envisioning future has been mostly along dystopic lines and is becoming popular lately. The writers are tempted to imagine a world where the normal rules of the world have been suspended or are changed. Samit Basu’s *The Simoqin Prophecies*, part of his Game World trilogy, is perhaps one of the earliest specimens of dystopic novels in Indian English writing. Prayag Akbar’s *Leila* envisages human settlement in the form of residential colonies on the bases of communities only. MG Vassanji’s *Nostalgia* is a sci-fi thriller of a period when science has controlled age leading thereby to population explosion.

Conclusion

This sketchy discussion leads us to the following conclusions, which, if addressed, should further enrich the genre of Indian English Fiction.

1. **Need for in-depth study of social problems** – Most of the works coming out these days have a superficial treatment of social and individual issues. While towering figures like Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh take their craft seriously, the overwhelming popular novelists have to raise the bar. For example, Chetan Bhagat diagnoses the issue of Gujarat riots in his novel *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* as a case of mismanagement. This one-line assertion is not backed by any in-depth analysis of the issue. There should be more serious attempt at analyzing societal problems and the role of the individuals therein.

2. **Dominance of Diaspora** - The immigrant population of India has grown steadily since the first batch of indentured labourers were taken to far off lands like Fiji and Guyana by the British colonialists. What these immigrants felt then is no longer the case, because now migration is based upon choice and if you have money in your pocket, you can easily visit your native land. At the same time, it is not always the concern for the welfare of the lost homeland but the material gains in terms of book sales and awards that impel a diasporic writer these days to present an exotic picture of their earlier homeland. So, the debate whether the description of the lost homeland is authentic or exotic refuses to die down. This is a tricky question and can be decided on case-to-case basis. While Jhumpa Lahiri’s subtle stories have a lot of realism about them, the novels by Rohinton Mistry and Bharati Mukherjee do have an element of make-believe in them.
3. **Native sensibility and idiom needed** – It is not only the diasporic writers, but the home-based category of writers too is dominated by, what is normally referred to, as the public-school graduate, English-speaking, metropolis-based elite class which does not have the real connect with the ordinary people. Their model of language is the Yankee English, their depiction of life is superficial and sensibility far from intense. Literature written in regional languages is, therefore, more in tune with the Indian sensibility.

4. **Representation of rural India lacking** – As stated earlier, most of the writers are based in metropolitan cities, so that they are not aware of the problems or lifestyle of rural India. So, this rural life, warts and all, needs realistic portrayal in Indian English Fiction without romanticizing or exoticization. Rural life which accounts for the bulk of India’s population finds better representation in the fiction of regional languages.

5. **Balanced fascination for western poetics/theory/practice** – While the new ideas coming from the West should be welcomed as Mahatma Gandhi famously said, we should not be blown off with the wind. Let us not take all that comes from the west as *brahmavakya* or biblical truth. Churning out of theories in the west can be compared to creating ever new fashions and there is the play of power politics involved. We must apply our mind before taking in the ephemeral constructs. Postcolonialism does not actually mean anything for us so long as we keep on lapping up blindly what is set as agenda by the academy in the West. The notion of nation, for example, is sought to be sullied through a narrow definition of nation, thus questioning the unity even as their own nations remain intact!

6. **Identity of the Indian English novel - This** genre is still faced with identity crisis. What should truly distinguish the Indian novel from the novels produced elsewhere should be true reflection of Indian culture. Sure, there is not all positive about it; there are many weak elements, but merely focusing on the negatives – which seems to be the trend – becomes a biased projection. Again, what we have had in the name of culture, even in serious fiction so far, is a smattering of words from Indian languages. There is no in-depth analysis of Indian philosophy and application of Indian poetics.

**NOTES**

1. There were several scholars and writers who forecast the early demise of the genre of Indian English novel. To them, it was no better than a ‘hothouse plant’ as V.K.Gokak once commented. Uma Parmeshwaran had even set the year 2000 as the ‘dirge date’ of the Indian novel that was ‘destined to die young’. (Pathak, R.S. “Contemporary Indian Fiction in English: Some Recent Trends in Themes and Techniques’, *Points of View*, Vol. VIII, No. 1, 2001, p. 31.)

2. The survey of the Indian English Fiction was published in the form of Introduction to an anthology titled *21st Century Indian English Fiction: Emerging Issues & Challenges*, edited by the writer of these lines and published by Prestige Books International in 2012. It documents 442 novels published during the period January 2000-June 2011. Similarly, another book titled *Studies in Fiction, Feminism, Diaspora: India and Beyond* published in 2017 (other details remain same) documents the novels published by Indian writers from the year 2011 to 2015, which number 446, thus showing a more than 100% spurt in novel production over the corresponding period in the previous decade.

3. It is common these days to come across news reports of young successful people quitting job to experiment with vocations or pastimes of their choice. Karan Bajaj himself did so to interview religious masters and do meditation in the Himalayas. A report in *1843 Magazine* quoted in the Times of India (Feb. 25, 2018) captioned “Why honchos quit rat race to bake bread, tune bikes” details how corporate honchos flush with money and status chose to work in bakery for creative satisfaction, because the ‘craft’ allowed them to control “one’s own destiny, acquiring a range of skills, creating beautiful and delicious things, forming friendships with suppliers and customers.”
(With special mention of Hem Barua, Nabakanta Barua, and Nilomoni Phukan)

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Introduction:

Modernism is a specific moment developed in the literary and cultural domains and it is dominated by a novel perception of life evolving in the distinct environment in regard to its political, economic and intellectual aspect. This movement, very much individualistic in its nature, is deeply attached to the human mind instead of being attached to the materialistic world, and it is also connected to the exploration of fresh avenues after breaking the traditions, rather than sticking to the tradition. In between the first and the sixth decade of the Twentieth Century, the advent of Modernism occurred.

This distinctive form of Modernism introduced in the European literature of the Twentieth Century was disseminated to the literatures of the countries of rest of the world. This resulted in the transformed socio-economic and the mindset that brought about the fresh Ideas and concepts and fresh thoughts to the minds of the poets of different countries, confusion, anxiety, complications or complexities became the constant companion of man. The feelings of the man who were advancing towards Modernism gradually turned introspective. With their faith shaken by both the world wars followed by the abominable repulsiveness of Atom bomb as well as Hydrogen Bomb and the war-reportage from Korea took the creative minds of the modern poets towards the internationalization of the literature. In order to trace back proper source of Modernity, we must recognize the sociological and historical truth.

Like the other provinces of India, the colonial invasion by the British led to a new environment in Assam, while the theme and poetic imageries and style of Assamese Poetry underwent a total change in the environment shaken by the World War II. The crisis brought about by the World Wars made the mindset as well as the social surroundings corroded with rudeness and skepticism. Consequently, experiments were going on the new literary modes like symbolism and Imagism. This transitional phase starting from the forty’s decade of the twentieth century in the domain of Assamese poetry is mainly the after-effect of the Modernist Movement.

Modernism manifested from symbolism conveyed the message of obscurity of poems. However, the trend of symbolism influenced the Assamese poets to some extent, who were influenced by Modernism. During the last phase of the Nineteenth century, the Symbolist Movement or the Movement of symbolism made its advent in France and it was extended its domain to the literary, artistic and cultural fields. Published in 1890, ‘The symbolist Movement of literature’ by Arthur Symons gradually made its way towards English literary domain. W.B. Yeats was instrumental in bringing this movement in the English literature, although it was an ephemeral one. The Assamese poets too were inspired by English literature in the beginning. It is only during the Post-World War II phase that the Assamese poets were much influenced by the German, Japanese and Chinese poets.
Hem Barua

The first Assamese poet influenced by the symbolist poetic trend was Hem Barua (1915-1977). Through his poem titled ‘Bandor’ (MONKEY), Hem Barua pioneered the symbolist trend in the realm of poetry of Assamese literature. The poems of this poet are prominent and worthy to mention – both from the historical and artistic aspects. In the first literary period of his life although Barua was influenced by the poems of T.S. Eliot, he also embraced the poems of Ezra Pound, Luis MacNeice etc. Despite being impressed by the Western symbolist trend, his poems never departed from indigenous tradition and thoughts. Hence the complexities of symbols are absent in his poems. The symbols employed in his poems comprised Rama, Krishna, Kansa, Sita, Jesus, Buddha, Shakuntala etc. Hem Barua distinctive perspective is expressed through his poems based on the themes of the crisis of civilization, the value of labour etc. Stephan Mallarme, the French symbolist poet, loved to use his favorite symbol ‘blue sky’ repeatedly in many of his poems. Similarly, the favourite symbol of Hem Barua was ‘JON’ (i.e. moon). His poems reflect the moon sometimes as a ‘EJONI SHETA SUWALI’ (i.e. a pale girl) who appears to be a widow with the head covered with a white scarf, or sometimes “KHINAI NUHUA HUA MRITUMUKHI” (i.e. the girl who has become enfeebled and a deathly pallor on her appearance) or” ‘BOROFOR MAJE- MAJE BAT BISARI BONAI PHORA’ (i.e., searching for path in the snow) and symbolizing the moon as the helpless life, while sometimes he envisaged ‘TEJ ARU DHUA’ (i.e., blood and smoke) in the moon (From the book titled ‘Pratidhwani.’)

Hem Barua follows the specific style of reflecting the modern society through the symbols alluded to the mythological text, that is revealed in the following lines from his anthologized poem:

‘Hera Mahabharatar  Bir ARJUN /
Juge Juge Tumi Brihannala
Rono Khetrar Tumar Akhaya Khyati
Junar Puhar
Suryya Tumar Rother Sarothi --(Adha Dozzon Kabita)

[i. e., Hey Arjuna, the valorous warrior of the Mahabharata / you make your advert as a eunuch in every era / your immortal fame in the domain of the battlefield can be compared to the Moon / while the sun-god appears to be charioteer of you]. In this context, Brihannala symbolizes the infallible and effective force. The poet is desirous of visualizing the valorous Arjuna as Brihnnala in every era whose imperishable fame glimmers like moonlight, and also wishes the Sun to become his alert Charioteer. Here “the moon” symbolizes “hope ” while the sun symbolizes peace . This poet also mentioned the political context of the poems with great emphasis. Hem Barua was deeply attached to the life of the common people. ‘Mamata’s chithi’ (i.e., a letter from Mamata) by Hem Barua is a prominent symbolist poem, and this poem reflects the eternal wail of a young widow caused by the feelings of aspirations and losing it.
Imagism, another literary trend emerged from Modernism was also given an innovative form by Hem Barua. Just like T.E. Hume of English literature, Hem Barua pioneered the Age of transition in Assamese literature through his imagery of ‘JON’ (Moon). This imagery of ‘Moon’ devised by Hem Barua reflects the pen picture of an afflicted contemporaneous society. Hem Barua’s fascination for the poems of T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound led to the subtle similarities somewhere in the usage of imageries. Sometimes, being influenced by the Western Imagist poet Ezra Pound. Hem Barua writes:

TOMAR BUKUR NTITYAROTA TARUNIR DORE
KIMAN JE PALTORA NAO
ARU KOT SARU BOR DHOU, POCHUAR BOTAHAT
NACHE, UTHE ARU MORE
(BALICHANDA)

[i.e. Countless sailing boats and how many waves creating movements by the West Wind big and small-there move those waves on your breast – like the dancing. damsels- those waves dance, surge, undulated and disappear]. With the frivolity of a dancing damsel a “sailing Boat” is whirling round the middle of the Brahmaputtra River. Through this imagery, the association of the waves causing the surges or ripples splashing against the sailing boats are reflected in the poem.

Nabakanta Barua:

The most prominent Assamese poet representing the symbolism in the forty’s decade of the Twentieth Century is Nabakanta Barua. Challenging the traditional subject-matter and theme, Nabakanta Barua’s innovative thoughts emphasized the intellectual strain, and thus replacing the heartfelt emotions and romanticism. [Nabakanta Barua’s first anthology of poems ‘Hey Aranya Hey Mahanagar’(Published in 1951) turned the tide of Assamese poetry. The book was set on the backdrop of the city of Kolkata. The solitude felt by the urban soul in the city or the affliction of the unrecognized individual as a nonentity was introduced to the Assamese reader by Nabakanta Barua for the first time.]

Similar to the ample usage of the imagery ‘blue sky’ by the French symbolist poet Mallarme, the poet Nabakanta too used the imagery of ‘sky’ with various symbolizations in different poems composed by himself. Sometimes he envisaged the open sky; sometimes he confined the sky in the frame of the window, sometimes the sky appears to him in a coppery hue; sometimes he romances the realm of the sky ‘As blue as jealousy’.

Nabakanta Barua as a poet believes in the Assamese tradition as well as Indian tradition and hence he culled the themes of his poetry from Indian Mythology, Fairy tale and Folk tale and symbolizes them in his poetic expression. Nabakanta Barua used ‘God’ as a symbol of imagination and limitation. A poet gifted with a universal bent of mind, Nabakanta Barua sketched the ‘child’ as the possessor of an innocent, simple and free life–
Khelok shishur dole

Prithibir chutale –chutale(Mur Desh: Kotona Desh )

[i.e. Let the children play on the courtyard of the world......]

Nabakanta Barua had an interest for Buddhism and Buddhist Philosophy and this poet uses the quest for wisdom as a symbol in his poem. Apart from that, ‘the so-called crisis of the modern civilization wilted and devastated the social, mental and intellectual aspect of human life. This degeneration and decay are very nicely depicted through his apt usage of symbols in his poem titled ‘Yaat Nadi Asil’. (5) In the poem ‘Polos’ (i.e., alluvium) by Nabakanta Barua, we may notice the appliance of symbols and imageries. The title of the poem suggests that it is a symbolist poem, but the subject of the poem converges the three time-periods. Often Nabakanta Barua expresses his feeling like the German impressionists using the Chiaroscuro effect by the juxtaposition of light and shade. Sometimes he also creates beautiful imageries similar to the Japanese ‘Haiku’ poems. Nabakanta Barua thus says in the poem titled (Rod ) ‘the sunlight.’

Pothorua bat / mora sapor dore
Beka, dhighol boga thor / kothona jupai jiraise
Boga phulam chati tu meli

[i.e., The open path of the paddy field/just like a dead snake/A Coiled, Zigzag, long white one/The Kathana tree taking rest/ spreading its flowery white umbrella.]  In the above mentioned poem “Rod” the poet uses a beautiful imagery of “dead snake ” lying in the scorching heat of sunlight indicating the desolation of a path through an open field, while the imagery of “flowery umbrella” signifies the sunlight afternoon.

Nilomoni Phukan

Another prominent poet of Assamese poet is Nilomoni Phukan. The strife and affliction emerging from a number of emotions, feelings and vicissitudes of life– all these made him a poet. His collections of poems, from namely, ‘Phulithoka Surjyyamukhi phultur phale’ (i.e., looking at the blooming sunflower) [First published in 1971] to ‘Nitrya rota Prithibi (i.e., The Dancing Earth) [published in 1985]– the poems by Nilomoni Phukan echo the post-symbolist poetic strain through which the poet delves into the mysteries of life. The symbols such as rain, fish, water, banana leaf, sky, bird, sunrise, forest-fire etc. are evoked out of their distinct connotations[.3] The poems penned by Phukan such as ‘Eta horina Puwali ’ (i.e., a deer cub), ‘Phuli thoka suryamukhi Phultur phale ’ (i.e., Looking at the blooming sunflower), Tuponitu teu muk khedi phurisil” (i.e., He haunted me even when I was asleep) etc., implications are dormant. Thus, being distinctly influenced by the French symbolist poetic camp, this poet was much outside from the conventional poetic style, and started using fresh symbols.
“A poem is like a picture ought to try to be like a poem. A picture is often called silent poetry and poetry a speaking picture.” (4) [Literary Criticism: A Short History– WinSAT & Brooks, Page 264]

In general, the imageries used in the modern poems are different from the conventional imageries. Conventional Imagery was merely a rhetoric. But the modern poet makes even the silence a vocal one through his pictorial presentation of his poem. A poem penned by Nilomoni Phukan may be mentioned here:

“Khirikiedi sumai aahil /ghuronia eta Beli
Shuithoka kesuatur mukhat
Pori hol eta pokhila”

[i.e., Right into the window there entered a round moving smile/And became a butterfly when it dropped into the face of the sleeping child.]

His passion for creating imageries drew Nilomoni Phukan gradually closer to the folklore. And subsequently in the later phase of his creative life, he was profoundly impressed by the Spanish poet, Federico Garcia Lorca. His love for tradition is also a remarkable aspect of his poems. Apart from the influence of Western poets on Nilomoni Phukan’s poem, his use of imageries make us feel the smell of earth as well as the heartbeat of the populace.

Conclusion

The Modernist Movement is basically the outcome of European ideas and thoughts. Since Assam was not affected by the World War I, this Modernist Literary Movement made its advent in Assam a bit later, yet the Assamese poets who were enlightened with Western education, became inspired by this Modernist Movement and greeted the complex and critical thoughts like symbolism and Imagism to Assamese poetic realm with a hearty welcome. However, both these trends did not take the shape of distinct Literary Movements, rather the Assamese poets came forward to apply both the trend to Assamese poem with individually distinctive outlooks. At the same time, the poets also changed the form of their poems. Although the language of the Assamese poets was a provincial one, yet they have succeeded to master an International Movement or topic and brilliantly presented this in a unique and fresh form and structure with a flavour of Assam’s soil and thus they have become successful to share these international literary trends.
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Revelation as Truth: Grandfather’s Visions in Marilynne Robinson’s Gilead

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Abstract:
This paper intends to focus on old minister John Ames’s dubious representation of his grandfather’s visions and the generational disagreements towards them with their distinctively different conceptions on visions to shed light on the revelation as truth. This paper would first present Ames’s narration of his grandfather’s visions, in which he gives an expression of grandfather’s piety and responsiveness to the visions he claims to see and also his distrust over his grandfather’s visions due to his fanatic conduct. Then, this paper would analyze Ames’s representation of his father’s less religious intuition to transform ordinariness into visions and his father’s morally judgmental attitude towards his father’s visions which blocks his acknowledgment of the truthfulness in grandfather’s visions. Finally, this paper would illustrate Ames’s reflection on his own evaluation towards his grandfather’s visions, which requires him to shackle off his predecessors’ authority to encounter his inner self to acknowledge his own failure. His self-transcendence to encounter and reach the testimony of the other further enlarges his own visions and his grandfather’s visions for his son, his continuing self, to reach truth. Narrative and interpretation of generations’ experiences becomes another kind of revelation.

Key Words: Marilynne Robinson, Gilead, revelation as truth, grandfather’s visions

Introduction
In her acclaimed Pulitzer Prize Winner novel Gilead (2004), Marilynne Robinson brings to light the dubious nature of religious visions. Taking the epistolary form of an old and dying minister John Ames writing a long letter to his seven-year-old son, the history from antebellum revivalism is capsuled within the faith and experiences of the three generations’ lives of Congregational ministers since the narrator’s grandfather. Grandfather’s visions are one of Ames’s spiritual difficulties recurring in his mind and throughout his letter for comprehensive attention and interpretation. Visions from God have been the vital source of meaning and spiritual guidance for grandfather. However, his visions have been furiously resisted and rejected by his own son. His grandson, the old narrator, also criticizes the narrowness of his grandfather’s vision in the beginning of the novel. Therefore, the novel creates bitter tension and even conflict and doubt towards grandfather’s divine revelation among the generations who do not have the same visionary experiences as grandfathers’. Their own distinctively different conceptions towards visions further aggravate the disagreements and conflicts. Ames writes his letter to his much treasured and beloved little son, who he regards as God’s miracle for him. Taking the form of a father’s last words to his son, the confessional, confidential, intimate and even begging tone is assumed to replace the authoritative tone of a preacher, which is a better vehicle for imparting some spiritual truth to a son.

Leah incisively notes that, vision has become the root of the disagreement among the generations (54), which needs the mutual honor for reconciliation. However, he only presents grandfather’s judgmental attitude without further illustrating father’s disbelief and Ames’s role as a narrator to evaluate their stands and his own. Stout criticizes both grandfather’s visions as in a “dramatic and unmediated way” and father’s rejection of any visions outside the Bible to favor Ames’s conception of visions of recognizing ordinary elements of life as revelatory (585). However, he has not emphasized the generational attention to grandfather’s visions, especially Ames’s partial recognition of the truthfulness of his grandfather’s visions. Chodat believes that Ames’s visions of aesthetic attention to the world are “essentially speculative and narrowly private” (347), whereas the elders selflessly contribute to the well-being of others (340). Hinojosa points out the narrow and static quality of all of their visions to argue Robinson’s lamentation on the narrow vision of much current
thought (139). They seem to overlook Ames’s partial acknowledgment of grandfather’s visions and enlargement of their visions.

Therefore, this paper intends to shed light on the importance of divine revelation as the religious experience through the narration and reflection of John Ames by answering the following questions: Firstly, how does Ames works out to dubiously represent his grandfather’s visions; his father’s disbelief in his grandfather’s visionary account, and his own unique acknowledgment of his grandfather’s visions and what are the implications therein? Secondly, what kind of revelation Ames and Robinson intend to convey in this novel?

1. Ames’s Narration of his Grandfather’s Narrated visions

Vision as the direct communication with God appears suspicious to others who do not have the same religious experience and who have the different views on what a vision should be. When grandfather narrates his vision to others, the divine light once supposedly descending upon him has become the word proceeded from human utterance, which is an external authority when conveyed to the minds of others. Although it indicates the preciousness and irreproducibility of human experience of divine revelation, it provokes sufficient doubt in others for the reality of grandfather’s visions. Ames’s representation of his grandfather’s visions told to him by his grandfather demonstrates his dubious narration.

In Ames’s narration of his grandfather’s visions, though it might be “unreliable” accounts, he gives an expression of his grandfather’s faithfulness to his vision. In grandfather’s narratives of his visions, his visionary experiences have the real power to transform him and designate the meaning of life for him. There are two occasions that grandfather mentions his visions about abolition, both of which tell the transformative experiences. When he privately tells Ames he sees that the Lord touches his shoulder, “holding out His arms to him, which were bound in chains” (Robinson 49), he takes the slaves as the Lord incarnated and decides to make himself useful to the cause of abolition. The vision he claims to have experienced calls his immediate action. Likewise, in his National Day celebration sermon, he claims that the Lord comes to command him to “(f)ree the captive, preach good news to the poor. Proclaim liberty throughout the land” (175). Grandfather regards these familiar scriptural words powerless to motivate him, until the Lord inspires him by standing beside him and relaying these words to him. Grandfather’s responsiveness to the will of God is manifest in his immediacy to the cause of abolition with great religious intuition. His self-sacrificial commitment and passionate action for social justice for the pure sake of Jesus Christ shows his great love for God and others. “All the regret he ever felt was for his unfortunates, with none left over for himself, however he might be injured” (36). Grandfather has many visions over time when he has established a permanent relationship with God. Ames recollects “my grandfather’s grave would look like a place where someone had tried to smother a fire” (50). He would like to consume himself life-long for God and others.

When grandfather is affirmative of all his visions, Ames diverges from his grandfather’s assurance to represent the bitter aspect of grandfather’s visionary experiences. Ames relates one of his grandfather’s visions of helping the poor, he then points out that grandfather responds by stealing when he retired and had no income, “the old man would be radiant and purposeful and a little more flagrant in his larcenies” (97). It appears sad, contradictory and even ironical to Ames when he evaluates the truthfulness of his grandfather’s visions. Besides, there is no miraculous deed that grandfather has brought. Although he has many visions over time, the fulfillment has been difficult and demanding, “(t)he water never parted for him, not once in his life, so far as I know” (90). Ames makes the biblical allusion that God divides the water for Moses (Exo 14:21-22) to indicate that God is with Moses, the true prophet.

Ames realizes that his grandfather’s religious practice also might incur the danger of fanaticism and irrationalism, which is another source for distrust. The Holy Spirit pouring upon this world has
the ultimate reality for grandfather. Grandfather sidelines Scripture to emphasize on his visions. In grandfather’s view, the visionary experiences illuminate his life and safeguard his faith, therefore, it has become the focus and sole arbiter of his religious conviction. When he is refuted by his own son, he leaves a note that “(w)ithout vision, the people perish” (Robinson 85). Referring to the biblical text that “Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he” (Pro 29:18), Ames may notice that grandfather leaves out what immediately follows this tag, possibly suggesting a kind of negligence to the Ten Commandments as the Law, deliberate or not. Ames has also discovered that his grandfather deliberately strains the interpretation of the Bible to justify himself through building a claim that “being blessed meant being bloodied” (Robinson 36).

Furthermore, grandfather’s enthusiastic and passionate behavior indicates a void of reasonable and prudent consideration. It further develops into being judgmental and self-righteous. In his covering for John Brown, he should rather have concealed himself before the pursuing soldiers. Ames’s father and Ames himself assert that “(h)e was never a practical man again” (108). Grandfather later with contempt accuses those who had not devoted to abolition of doughfaces, which bears derogatory and intolerant sense. Ames mockingly retorts as “(w)ith reason, I believe” (174). Grandfather is slow to acknowledge and confess his guilty conscience. In one of the photographs of grandfather, the camera falls upon him like the judgment, when his countenance betrays both his guilty conscience and his concealment of it “and he is still thinking how to reply and keeping the question at bay with the sheer ferocity of that stare” (81). The impracticability, unreasonableness and self-righteousness indicate the fanatic passion in his religious practice. Ames counters fanaticism with his resort to the authority of the scripture and his representation of the censorship from others to his grandfather’s visions and practice.

Through the divine revelation upon grandfather, the meaning of supernatural vision is completed as well as the critique of Reason in the Age of Enlightenment. The total dependence upon God to give meaning of his life is put against the exclusion of supernatural possibility with God in Deist view. The obedience to God exactly rejects the over-emphasis on the autonomy of human beings to turn away from God which is manifest in the notion that Enlightenment is mankind’s exit from its self-incurred immaturity (Kant 58). The love for and trust in God, which vouches for the authenticity of the religion, resists the mere moral imperative as the authority of religion, the spontaneity of the moral feeling is ultimately the feeling of pious love. Paul Ricoeur perceives what Kant as a rationalist rejects -- the notion of gift, “(t)he gift (from God) generates an obligation, not of law but of love” (Vanhoozer 127). And the critique to the irrationalism and fanaticism by reference to scripture and censorship from others is offered.

2. Ames’s Narration of his Father’s Rejection of his Grandfather’s Visions

Ames’s father’s view of vision could be concluded in Ames’s observation that his father “never encouraged any talk about visions or miracles, except the ones in the Bible” (48). Ames means that his father had less inclination to acknowledge supernatural visions or miracles manifest in this world around his life. Besides, his father believes only the visions that are authorized by the Bible. The first point is distinctively shown in the sharp contrast with Ames who has the extravagant religious intuition to recognize the visionary aspect of life in this world. When Ames and his father return from grandfather’s grave in bright full moonlight, the splendid landscape stimulates excessive feeling in him to the extent that he regards it as a miracle. Ames attributes the sublime image to the blessing brought by his father’s prayer or dead grandfather which shows his belief in man’s ability to usher a transcendental connection. However, his father would say “(y)ou know, everybody in Kansas saw the same thing we saw” (48) to refer to the fact that there is “no special reference to the two of us” (48). Although his father acknowledges the beauty of the landscape, he resorts to natural law for the explanation of this phenomenon to avoid establishing a supernatural connection. Although Ames observes his father is visibly shaken and moved to tears, his religious sensibility is undermined in his denial of the scene as vision or miracle.
Therefore, compared to Ames, his father has less of the intuition to transform religious practice into visions. Ames recalls his father once told him the story when they came back from Civil War that women had planted climbing roses for the church and they would have their prayer meetings and Bible studies even though the church is in desolation. Ames recognized his father’s appreciation of the beauty those women were creating for the church and the great piety in their work. However, it is the old Ames who transforms the facts of their pious religious practice into the vision. “I truly believe it is waste and ingratitude not to honor such things as visions” (97). Ames’s father is more judgmental while Ames is more compassionate to others’ religious experiences, even the flawed ones. Ames believes there is something more than beauty, a sacredness in these women, as he asserts, “My church is sanctified by their stories” (96). There is the tapestry made by them, which Ames’s father with indignation accuses them of replacing the Ark of the Covenant with the words “The Lord Our God Is a Purifying Fire” (99) which was a distortion of the biblical injunction. Ames instead emphasizes on the efforts dedicated into the making of it. This is further manifest in the fact that his father chooses to dispose of grandfather’s very sermon on the National Day while Ames chooses to save it.

Ames’s father’s morally judgmental attitude is deeply embedded in his aversion of sin, especially the sin of bloodshed, which comes from his traumatic childhood memory of the guilt of causing a potential death when he chooses to leave an injured soldier alone in the dangerous prairie. With his own judgmental view towards himself, he is never self-healed and self-forgiven. Therefore, he would preach that his Lord hates falsehood and our works will be exposed in the naked light of truth to refer to his father’s false prophecy and fratricide, which is unforgivable to him and to God. As Ames bitterly remembers, his father in fury protests against the truthfulness of grandfather’s visions when grandfather preaches people fighting the Civil War that “(t)his has nothing to do with Jesus. Nothing. Nothing” (85).

When he fails to acknowledge the essential dignity in grandfather’s religious practice, he overlooks the message of grandfather’s vision that there is the responsibility towards racial justice, which is true and real. Ames’s father further loses this kind of vision when he, as a preacher, preaches to validate the indifference to the afflicted. Ames’s father’s response to the fire deliberately set on the church of the colored people by whites is: “Consider the lilies, how they grow (83)”. The original biblical text is preached by Jesus to his disciples to mean that provision would be made and Christians will have higher cause to fulfill and thus do not need to worry about daily provision (Luk 12: 27). Ames’s father reduces the colored people to the natural plants of lilies and indifferently asserts that they would be cared even though they are segregated. He loses the visions from Bible when he uses the biblical discourse to support his own stand. Ames compassionately and empathetically represents his father’s rejection of generating this-worldly visions and the supernatural visions his father once invited, which undermine and impoverish his religious experiences.

3. Ames’s Partial Acceptance of Grandfather’s Visions

The dying father’s aspiration to make himself known to his dear son through which he refers to some truths for spiritual guidance require the exercise of knowing faculties for insights and epiphanies. Therefore, reason has here been one of the knowing faculties, together with intuition, perception, feeling and interpretation for the unfolding of spiritual truth. The narrative in words facilitates his discernment in grasping meaning and truth. It has often been neglected by scholars that Ames actually arduously reaches a unique acknowledgement of the truthfulness of his grandfather’s visions from God.

As an indirect witness of his grandfather’s vision and the third John Ames (both his grandfather and his father named John Ames), both his grandfather and father provide different perspectives and exert their authority on him. Ames is not a compromiser, he is the third evaluator of his grandfather’s visions, whose efforts and insights are based on his previous generations’
examination of visions (justifiable or not), but distinctively different from theirs, which renders his own reconstruction of revelation as possible truth. Ames shackles off their “authority” and makes his own mind on his grandfather’s visions, suggesting the necessity of heartfelt recognition of grandfather’s revelation as truth.

As the first-person narrator, Ames expresses distrust of his grandfather’s visions several times until in the near end of the novel when he has realized the truth in his grandfather’s God-inspiring visions. In both cases when grandfather forces to transmit his visions of abolition, he imposes his furious gaze upon Ames. In Grandfather’s narration of his vision of the Lord bounded in chains when Ames observes “(h)e eyed me with one of the seraph eyes he had, the old grief fresh in it” (Robinson 49). Ames, with great perception, has recognized both the sacredness in grandfather and of his pathos in his unfulfilled cause and devoid of followers. On the National Day sermon, grandfather relates his vision, only to be regarded as “outlandishness.” Grandfather is then “eyeing the crowd with dispassionate intensity of death itself” (176). Grandfather’s extreme disappointment has also been felt by Ames. He captures his grandfather’s intention to transmit his visions unto him with his disciplinary gaze. Yet he silences himself in the whole process of retelling his grandfather’s visions, which implicates an avoidance of response. Ames remains reserved to his grandfather’s visions which are manifest in his indifference to racial justice.

Ames’s father also exerts influence on Ames. When Ames is told by his grandfather of his vision, he undergoes the spiritual turmoil of fear resultant of his awareness of the burden and gravity of grandfather’s vision. He resorts to his father for spiritual guidance. His father calmly assures him that there is no reality in grandfather’s vision. He reflects that “he seemed to want to assure me that I need not to fear that the Lord would come to me with His sorrows. And I took comfort in the assurance” (49). His father’s determined denial gives him relief and warrant that he could ignore his grandfather’s vision. The textual representation of his silence indicates his once acceptance of his father’s authority without further inquiry.

It is his honest encounter with and examination of his inner self that renders him possible for his rejection of their authority over him and his own acknowledgement of his grandfather’s visions. He confesses to his son that he is uncomfortable about grandfather’s vision because he does not have the strength and courage to carry out the grand narrative of social justice. The retrospective and introspective view betrays his regret, shame, frustration and even guilt over his inability to face up to his grandfather. Then he realizes that it is quite wrong of him to stand with his father to recede into his “old dry husk”. In Ames’s re-examination of his sermon on the day of Pentecost, he reminds himself of the Holy Spirit once comes to the world (245), which bears a strong metaphor with grandfather’s generation of revivalism when God breathes the Holy Spirit to those followers. Ames realizes that the radiance dies out and Gilead has now reduced into “poor gray ember”, which echoes with grandfather’s interrogation that what is left in Gilead is only “just. Dust and ashes” (176). He realizes his own failure and his grandfather’s strength and courage, and he could only resort to and hope for God’s grace to infuse the world with Divine Spirit again.

Ames constantly encounters grandfather’s visions, whose otherness obliges his contemplation and self-transcendence to receive grandfather’s visions. Ames has his own conception of visions, which is distinctively different from his grandfather’s. Ames generates his visions by his great sensibility to transform his religious experiences into visionary images. Therefore, Ames’s visions are deeply rooted in this world and in his memory. Conversely, grandfather’s visions are other-worldly. Ames’s visions are attested by life as truth in years of experiencing sacredness and holiness, as he believes “the visionary aspect of any particular day comes to you in the memory of it, or it opens to you over time” (91). Inversely, grandfather believes his visions as truth because he considers them as from God, which indicates that grandfather’s visions are immediately ignited by his dazzling experiences. Ames’s is affirmative of truthfulness of his own visions. Ames’s encounter with his grandfather helps him see more of the divine truth. It is manifest in the fact that Ames finally enlarges his own visions as well as his grandfather’s visions.
Ames’s visions of ordinary beauty and daily enjoyment, though bears some truth, are essentially private. Ames finally relates grandfather’s visions to the biblical vision of everyone joyfully dwelling in the streets of Jerusalem prophesied by Zechariah, the prophet (242). He enlarges his vision to forge an abundant and peaceful life for others or at least hope for his son, his continuing self, to do it. What is essentially absent from Ames’s visions is his action to change the reality, while his grandfather struggled all his life to fulfill the promise of an equal and good community. Ames also enriches his grandfather’s visions by extending his love to every existence. Ames’s grandfather takes the slaves as the Lord incarnated, whereas Ames takes any infant human face as related to incarnation and claims the necessity of an “obligation to a child” (66), especially with his encounter with his beloved godson (John Ames Boughton), who demands a home in Gilead for his colored wife and son. Through the three generations’ reflection on visionary experiences and practice, the vision as truth would illuminate his son’s life and this is what Ames intends for his son.

Conclusion

Ames’s final acknowledgment of his grandfather’s visions as an indirect witness, further makes it possible for his seven-year-old son, and for all the sons of God as indirect witnesses of visions in the age of the absence of God, to receive and transmit the Divine revelation which once illuminates, empowers and gives the meaning of life for Ames’s grandfather. Both Ames’s and his grandfather’s visions bears the truth and authenticity of religious experience. Old Ames generates his visions from memory, which affirms the lived and experienced truth of religion. Grandfather also self-authenticates the truth from God by his responsiveness to God to initiate great social reform for the afflicted. Ames’s narration gives confessional and comprehensive accounts to what is essentially private and incommunicable within subjectivity for new revelation of truth and meaning to be further disclosed through narrative encountering “the other” like grandfather, father, Jack, his son and even himself. Therefore, narrative of generations’ religious experiences helps to clarify falsehood and reach truth, which is another kind of revelation Robinson proposes. Revelation as truth is preferred to Enlightenment Reason.
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A Study of Human Values Reflected in the Works of Sudha Murthy

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Sudha Murthy, an eminent writer, philanthropist, co-founder of Infosys focuses on ethics and values in her writings. Through her literature work the readers got to know about hidden and unusual tales from Indian Mythology and her experiences. From her real-life stories in “Something happened on the way to heaven” one gets inspired with positive thoughts. The book “The Day I stopped Drinking Milk” is carried away with fantastic elements of wit and humour. Literature related to incidents in the lives of successful people with whom we are able to associate nurtures integrity with the narrations is interwoven beautifully in her books. Her work for society is actually a reflection of the lives of people; it is the mirror image of a society. Education for Peace is a value of concern and has been a part of the curriculum to promote peace, humaneness and tolerance in a multicultural society like India. The present research studies aim at exploring the bases such as, psychological, sociological and economical aspects of a person and his behaviour. My focus is also on clarifying the meaning and discovering new concepts of literature through her thought processes. Her books like “The Serpent’s Revenge”, “Man from the Egg” are some of the works giving new angle to the world of literature.

Keywords: Values, society, integrity

Sudha Murthy is an Indian writer who is a lover of books and writes in Kannada and English language. She was born on 19th August in 1950 in the District Shiggaon in Karnataka (India). Currently she is the chairperson of the Infosys Foundation. Sudha Murthy books which has brought to us messages of human values like patience, love and attitudes that motivate us to think deeply and create awareness about the need for ethics and morals in our dealings with others. Success can be considered as the offspring of a plan that has been well executed. Sudha Murthy books teaches us that successful living requires that one devote one’s life to fulfil a worthy plan. A planned life not only helps to set the right goals, but also teaches an individual the ability to achieve success through hard work. Her stories edify that life provides enough problems to decrease our happiness; therefore, it is foolish to be stuck in self-pity and envy, giving oneself more misery. These stories instead instil courage in us to emerge winners even from the worst situations. Sudha Murthy stories teaches us the thought of simple living and high thinking, as they emphasize that peace and prosperity is a collective process. It is therefore appropriate to say that Sudha Murthy works are committed to transforming basic human values like love, respect, faith, honesty and many more. Her books teach us to develop the right attitude towards life. Attitude is the way one interprets experience. It is the sum total of our beliefs, assumptions, expectations and values. It also determines the significance we attach to events and our response to them. Sudha Murthy books shows us that when our attitude is positive, we are helpful, generous towards the poor, and needy; and we have a better sense of judgment in solving problems and taking the right decisions in life. She offers living proof of Norman Vincent Peale’s saying

“People become really quite remarkable when they start thinking that they can do things. When they believe in themselves, they have the first secret of success.”

According to her educators, parents and community members should help students in developing love and passion for reading. Reading literature is not only important for developing cognitive skills but it also provides various opportunities to students for how to respond to literature, and also makes them sensible towards their cultural heritage, and it also develops emotional intelligence and creativity, while nurturing growth and development of a student’s personality and social skills and it transmits relevant literature and themes from one generation to the next. They are able to form opinions on their own and to express themselves through language in summarizing the plot of the different books.
Values like compassion, innocence, caring and sharing, respect, and appreciation, attitude towards hard work, marriage, money and relationships can be sketched through good literature. It is this great potential to bring out the good in all of us that is the prize or empowerment that awaits those who take up the problem of deep attitude with concern and hope.

The choices that are life-giving and those that are life-denying helps us in seeing the best way ahead with reenergized zeal or power inside. This research will also help readers to understand that education is the most frequent episodic factor of overcoming a class barrier and being assured through invertebrate values, with a study of Philosophical and Sociological aspects of beliefs.

She writes the stories according to every age group so that everybody can enjoy to the fullest. Her mythological stories, children’s stories develop various thoughts and attitudes of life. The values imbibed through her stories are heart touching and can be inculcated in life easily. The life-lessons in her stories and her own experiences, the difference between good and bad etc all is derived through her inspiring tales. Mostly we are not aware about the situations which can lead us, and a person is more focused on success leaving behind morality and accepting hatred, cruelty, harsh behaviour, deceiving others, greediness, disrespecting traditions and following modernity blindly.

Storytelling has been the most effective way of teaching children the art of true living and problem-solving as these stories shows how people faces different challenges of life and overcome various hurdles to achieve their ultimate goals. Stories, in fact, affect our behaviour and shape our society and culture. The articles in Murthy’s books portrays moral values; during conflicts and challenges in life these accounts re-establish values according to the changing society and its culture. Her stories are related to the country, different personalities, cultures and relationships in a family which helps in shaping an individual’s perception towards himself and towards the society. These stories are effective in influencing the way in which the children and adults behave and think because favourite ones are often read repeatedly due to the deep influence felt. Murthy is well known for her tremendous contribution in the field of inspirational and motivational literature in our country. Through her inspiring short stories, narrations and novels which are full of valuable lessons one can develop insights into life and human nature.

India has a rich tradition of story-telling texts such as the *Jataka Tales*, the *Panchatantra* and the *Kathasaritsagara*, which have been enjoyed by different generations of readers as well as listeners. While they are enthralling as tales and narratives, they are priceless as folktales and fables that convey moral truths. According to Murthy, these stories enrich our morals and are the perfect means to introduce the right values to youth or small children. She believes that folk tales are widespread and have been told to generations of children. Making a study of these different world traditions and customs, she noticed that Indian stories mostly portrays gods, boons and bane; many of them also ended up with a happy ending like successfully married and the characters lived happily ever after. On the contrary, western stories focuses on facts and human intelligence over other things, while other stories are full of magic and supernatural elements. She feels that there are various types of inadequacies besides an inadequacy of money. For example, shortcoming of kind-heartedness, tolerance power, caring attitude and regards for others as well as lack of justice, lack of aim, no reliability, no human understanding, only disgrace with less mercy and less loyalty. We find a large number of people seeking for love and understanding, especially the old aged, physically-challenged and the poverty-stricken.

Sudha Murthy challenges human attitudes in many of her stories which teach lessons and at sometimes surprises us at the thinking of people who are educated and wise and can be considered literate while there are uneducated like the villagers in the story *The Old Man and His God* or in the story, *The Day I Stopped Drinking Milk* showing humanity and strong culture is much better in the villagers than the urban people and the educated. She believes that the lessons of modesty can be learnt from these villagers who are not fake like the rich and well-built. She learns a lesson of esteem of giving from a village who refuses to accept her help regarding the children’s daily use things though she accepts a token of love from him of fruit juice throughout the year from him. These
incidents taught her lessons of courtesy and hospitality followed in India. She attains humble admiration and learns to accept the return gift while giving a message to the readers based on human feelings. Murthy depicts another set of human attitudes in the situation where children used to cheat their parents in their old age to trespass their hardly earned savings through the narration of one of the story of an old man and his son who left his father in an old age home to recover his savings. These kinds of stories also depict the values, ignorant people especially the villagers, handles the materialistic world, knowing that the whole world and its components like all five such as the earth, water resources, seasons and other worldly things which are not in the reach of man, so therefore there is no meaning in being materialistic. So there we got a lifetime lesson on sharing valuable non-renewable resources and leaving it after one’s use for the coming generation as these earthly elements are meant for everyone. Interacting with the people in the day to day life, and experiencing these values have submerged Sudha Murthy with the pride of being an Indian inclined back on a rich and diversified culture. While working for the Infosys Foundation and being a teacher, she travelled far and wide within India as well as abroad, meeting many people, young and old, of each category each one of whom, she felt, had augmented her life in some way or the other. She was inspired to pass on these experiences to the younger generation in a hope that these chronicles would inculcate in them the acumen and values that she instituted in them. Her tales are distressing as they reflect the harsh realities of life of the less privileged prompting a person to be thankful for the happy life they are leading. It inspires one to be empathetic to those persons who are not leading a blessed life like us. The vivacity of a lamp can never ignite another lamp unless it continues to choke in its own flame. A teacher is also like a lamp who nurtures a strong attitude to learn, before she can influence others with her ideas. Sudha Murty, whom many of her students regards as an ideal teacher, learnt at an early stage of life that it was an aptitude that could help her to give a new shape to the world. A teacher must not only provide but should also inspire others. If the inspiration dies, it is only knowledge that gets accumulated. The mind is like a garden which has to be nurtured every day with rousing thoughts so that the weeds of bad thoughts and actions can be removed easily.

Sudha Murthy told CNBC-TV18 in an interview: "In life’s journey, we all meet strange people and undergo many experiences that touch us and sometimes even change us. If you have a sensitive mind, you will see your life too in the vast storehouse of stories. For me, it is something very close to my heart.” [1]

Her stories involve a concern for the younger generation who remain bowed on to their laptops and mobiles. She writes about the misuse of phones reminding us of the value of basis in thoughts with technological progress. Many of Murthy’s books represent her outlook which includes a feminine frameset of mind while describing traditional saris, bangles, girly talks at places, household chores, worshipping and many more portentous Indianness and Indian values, yet these books are able to hold men equally like women due to the witty, truthful and pulsating narration influencing readers to seek out simplicity of thoughts and inner beauty of being empathetic with others.

Conclusion

Sudha Murthy’s works helps us to strengthen human values so that we as human beings who are known to be the ornament of God’s creation are able to prove our value over lower living beings by setting civilized goals and achieving them through the right means. We also capture the beauties of nature and humankind that are responsible for the opportunities in life to serve others through. Her works makes one aware of the fact that each new day is a gift, which is given exclusively to us, with its uncountable opportunities to work towards human happiness and satisfaction. These stories helps in calculating, rectifying and reinstating values by changing the attitudes in a society through ethics or values. Perhaps the worst of all, there is a complete lack of sympathetic feeling for one’s companion/mate , which is actually devoid of brotherhood and supporting beliefs. It would not be wrong to say that Sudha Murthy’s books and her writings are dedicated to remove this ‘crisis’ of values.
References


Grotesques under the Look

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Abstract:

Look, carrying the Other’s value and judgment, in Jean-Paul Sartre’s theory, is omnipresent and without determined forms in the world where the Other-as-subject establishes its subjectivity while the being-looked-at descends to the object, feeling the pressure and power brought by the Other, and internalizes its value and judgment. This paper will focus on how look, one particular but inconspicuous motion, plays the important role in shaping the grotesqueness of two of the characters (Wing Biddlebaum in “Hands” and Elmer Cowley in “Queer”) in Sherwood Anderson’s American short story circle Winesburg, Ohio (1919), who share the same common ground that they are imposed the “truth” by the Other through look and words, in order to manifest that look, through an external force, is a non-negligible power; besides the internal force – willful fanaticism, in the formation of grotesqueness which enlists our sympathies.

Key words: look, Jean-Paul Sartre, grotesqueness, Winesburg, Ohio, Sherwood Anderson

Introduction

It seems that all the grotesques in Winesburg, Ohio absorbs one or some other truths and live by them, then twisting them into falsehood on their own initiative when Sherwood Anderson, through a self-caricaturing persona, says in the prologue “The Book of the Grotesque” that “the moment one of the people look one of the truths to himself, called it his truth, and tried to live his life by it, he became a grotesque and the truth he embraced became a falsehood” (Anderson 4, emphasis added). Some critics stand on Anderson’s side stressing the internal force, namely willful fanaticism, which generates grotesques. While critic Irving Howe states his standpoint in his book Sherwood Anderson (1951) that “in the stories themselves grotesqueness is the result of an essentially valid resistance to forces external to its victims” (107), and Geoffrey Harpham illustrates in his article “The Grotesque: First Principles” that the physical condition is not the only criterion of the grotesque, it also depends on “our conventions, our prejudices, our commonplaces, our banalities, our mediocrities” (463). Manifestly, they have taken the external forces into consideration in addition to the internal ones, and usually the external forces, as Ralph Ciancio says, are “brutality, lust, and ignorance, the lack of parental love and excessive parental love” (996). This paper will choose one of the less-focal external forces – look, and pick two typical characters – Wing Biddlebaum in “Hands” and Elmer Cowley in “Queer” to expound how the external force look exerts great influence on the shaping of their grotesqueness.

Mentioning gaze or look, the first name leaping out of our mind may be Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) or Michel Foucault (1926-1984), but it is Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) who first realizes and analyzes the suppressive system of look in the 20th century. Sartre sensed the pressure of relatives’ look when he was a child who was bereaved of his father and lived with his mother and grandparents, which he wrote in his enfant autobiography Les mots (1963) that he had learned to look at himself through others’ eyes and even they were absent, because they left their look, mixing with rays of light (Sartre, 1964: 58). In Sartre’s Being and Nothingness (1956), the look is systematically philosophized. Every man lives in the world where he or she is always in the state of being looked at by the Other and every look does not have any fixed or determined form such as two ocular balls or camera lens. Even if the Other is absent, we are still surrounded by and can perceive the Other’s look through “a rustling of branches, or the sound of a footstep followed by silence, or the slight opening of a shutter, or a light movement of a curtain” (Sartre, 1956: 346). Being looked at by the Other, we will feel ashamed, so it is shame that we recognize ourselves becomes the object which the Other is looking
at and judging. At the same time, the look is not simply a line of sight, but carries the Other’s value and judgment which will be internalized by the object.

Wing Biddlebaum in “Hands” and Elmer Cowley in “Queer” are exactly the objects being looked at by townspeople either in Pennsylvania or in Winesburg, besieged by the Other’s look, imposed the Other’s “truth” and internalizing townspeople’s bias and judgment, which transforms the “truth” into falsehood, themselves into grotesques. Under the Other’s look, Biddlebaum’s and Cowley’s shame attests their acknowledgement of losing their own subjectivity and turning into the object overpowered by the Other, which results in Biddlebaum’s perpetual self-censorship as well as Cowley’s backfired self-proof and nugatory escape.

1. The Perpetual Self-censorship under the Look

Wing Biddlebaum, had once been a teacher in a town of Pennsylvania where his name was Adolph Myers, was an eccentric mystery with a pair of hands “forever active, forever striving to conceal themselves in his pockets or behind his back” (Anderson 7-8) known to the townspeople of Winesburg. Adolph Myers dreamed to be a teacher who can “carry a dream into the young minds” by “caressing the shoulders of the boys, playing about the tousled heads” (11) with his slender expressive hands rather than by words and voice. At that time, he was happy and satisfied at being a teacher much loved by the boys of his school. However, as a consequence of a rumor triggered by a half-witted boy who told his unspeakable dream as facts, ironically turning Adolph Myers’ inspired dreams into some secret and forbidden dreams, “hidden, shadowy doubts” (11) had been rooted in townspeople’s mind which metamorphosed into accusations with more trebling boys being questioned. Now all parents saw Adolph Myers a perverse homosexual and pederast with hatred and disgust in their eyes, and they beat him, kicked him and intended to hang him with a rope in one evening. Adolph Myers screamed and ran away into the darkness, becoming Wing Biddlebaum living in the periphery of Winesburg, alone with his dream.

Nevertheless, the nightmare did not end. Wing Biddlebaum began to be over-conscious of his hands, even though he did not understand what had happened at that time, but he felt it was his hands’ fault. He always moved his hands nervously about, rubbed his hands together, concealed his hands, closed his fists and beat with them, and all these self-punishments made him more comfortable, because it demonstrates his atonement and lets him feel less sinful. Whereas “the hands [always] alarmed their owner” (8), so whenever he saw his hands, he realized with fear and shame that he was the object looked at by others with aversion and detestation though he had left the townspeople of Pennsylvania. The look always follows him and alienates all kinds of possibilities in his life from him, namely, he cannot change himself who in other’s eyes is a pervert. “The alienation of [himself], which is the act of being-looked-at, involves the alienation of the world which [he] organize[s]” (Sartre, 1956: 353), therefore, the world where he lives is broken too, which results in his refusal to recognize that he was “a part of the life of the town where he had lived for twenty years” (Anderson 6).

Wing Biddlebaum’s deliberate isolation is one of the reflections that he wants to escape others’ look and alleviate his guilt for his hands, but he cannot repress his dream – being a teacher who imbues his students with dream like Socrates, which was presented in his pictorial portrayal of his dream:

In the picture men lived again in a kind of pastoral golden age. Across a green open country came clean-limbed young men, some afoot, some mounted upon horses. In crowds the young men came to gather about the feet of an old man who sat beneath a tree in a tiny garden and who talked to them. (9)

Especially facing George Willard, the only one coming close to him, Wing Biddlebaum was hopeless before his emotion, totally inspired and forgot the hands. “Slowly they stole forth and lay upon George Willard’s shoulders […]and caress the boy” (9-10), and immediately fear struck him and made him “thrust his hands deep into his trousers pockets” (10) with his convulsive body and tearful eyes, and
he hurried to home leaving George Willard confused. Whereas George felt perplexed, Wing Biddlebaum had his moment of self-discovery (Murphy 239) and self-censorship. Fear and shame are the two original reactions when the individual is aware of the Other’s look and the fact he or she is in the state of being looked at (Sartre, 1956: 387). Wing Biddlebaum will strongly sense others’ look so long as he hopes that George Willard will come and spend evening with him or he caresses the boy with the hands, so fear catches him, overcomes him and urges him to obey the saloonkeeper Henry Bradford’s stern warning – “keep your hands to yourself” (Anderson 12).

Wing Biddlebaum’s self-censorship is not only embodied by his strange movement and autosadistic punishment of his hands, but by the last frightful image of him who picked up the bread crumbs off the floor, “carrying them to his mouth one by one with unbelievable rapidity” (13), which was a display of the “compulsive symptomatic act” of a penitent (qtd. in Elledge 14). Wing Biddlebaum still longed for the presence of the boy, but he was so overwhelmed by others’ look and their judgment that he was afraid to be evicted out of the town again or experience the “lynching” once more. It seems that the only thing he can do is confession and penitence like a priest whose fingers “going swiftly through decade after decade of his rosary” (Anderson 13). Here “decade after decade” represents both the “decade” of ten beads of the rosary and the period of ten years, which strengthens the perpetuation of Wing Biddlebaum’s suffering and penance.

The irony of Wing Biddlebaum, it seems to me, lies in the foolish townspeople in Pennsylvania who misread the dreamlike words of a half-witted boy for the truth and his passive and demoralizing reception of the “truth” imposed by those fools through look and language.

2. The Fruitless Self-proof under the Look

Wing Biddlebaum is the being-looked-at who has internalized the Other’s bias and values obediently and forever lives in self-censorship and penitence, while Elmer Cowley, the main character in ““Queer’”, though also besieged by the Other’s look and imposed the other’s “truth”, takes action to prove himself not a queer and wants to break others’ judgment, but he does not conquer the Other’s look, ending in an ironic and nugatory escape.

Ebenezer Cowley, Elmer Cowley’s father who owned an “indescribable” (178) store which was located with a wagon shop and its horse barn, was a tall and lean merchant “looked unwashed” (178), always wearing a long Prince Alert coat in aged-brown color and with grease spots, once a wedding garment. The Cowley & Son’s store, in the eye of townspeople, was a strange one that “sold everything and nothing” (178), which stressed the young storekeeper Elmer Cowley who burst a blood vessel and drove a Jewish traveling salesman who thought Elmer Cowley was crazy out of the store by using a revolver as a threat, screaming “we’re through being fools here! […] We ain’t going to keep on being queer and have folks staring and listening” (180). Elmer Cowley’s outburst shows that he has been deeply influenced by others’ look carrying judgment so that the mere presence of George Willard “stand[s] for something in the young merchant’s mind” (181) and makes him outrageous and shameful so as to make his face blush and his hands tremble.

Elmer Cowley hoped that his father would understand him and realize the situation they have been trapped in – “we’ve been queer long enough” (180), but his father looked at him with the same uncertain stare when he treated the traveling man, which indicates that in his father’s eyes, Elmer Cowley is also a queer. Failed to get his father’s approval and understanding, Elmer Cowley went out declaring aloud “I will not be queer – one to be looked at and listened to” (181), and wanted to find someone to tell. However, the listener Mook, a half-witted old fellow who once employed by his father, was not interested in and obviously different to what Elmer Cowley had said. Whether Elmer Cowley earnestly talked about his parents’ queerness and his determination not to “be stared at any longer” (184), or shouted excitedly about how clearly, he knew their situation, or furiously declared that “I won’t stand it. […] I’m not made to stand it” (184), the old fellow only responded him with the dull face. But when Elmer Cowley ran out of the wood, Mook said to his animals that Elmer was crazy and declared as what Emler’s father had said, “I’ll be washed and ironed and starched” (185).
In order to prove he was not queer, Elmer Cowley found George Willard who typified the town and represented the spirit of the town, to show his normality, but he failed to declare his determination not to be queer and was settled upon the sense of defeat, because he was afraid of George Willard’s look which reminded him the townspeople’s look and judgment while he was facing him. His self-proof was a failure in front of George Willard, but he came up with another way to “challenge him, challenge all of Winesburg through him” (187), that was running away from Winesburg to Cleveland in front of George Willard, where he thought he would not be indistinguishable and queer when he lost himself in the crowds, he would make friends and begin to have a meaningful life as others do. However, the Other’s look will not vanish because of their absence, and “the fact of the Other is incontestable” (Sartre, 1956: 367), therefore, Elmer Cowley can never ever escape from the Other’s look and he will absorb the judgment and values carried by the Other’s look, namely, he is forever a queer, a grotesque. Ironically, Elmer Cowley thought this time he would let George Willard know his determination and normality, but his tongue lost control once again and mumbled half incoherently, “I’ll be washed and ironed. I’ll be washed and ironed and starched” (188). Apparently, Elmer Cowley is still in the same circle which his father and the old fellow Mook are trapped in, where they can change their appearance by wearing renewed clothes which have been “washed and ironed and starched” but these cannot change who they really are in the Other’s eyes—queers and grotesques.

In the last scene, Elmer Cowley’s queerness is completely unfolded through his hysterical hitting of George Willard “blow after blow on the breast, the neck, the mouth” (188) until the young reporter falls down on the platform half unconscious and half stunned, which for Elmer Cowley is a hallmark of victory with pride emerging up in his heart because he deems that he has beaten down George Willard, the representative of the townspeople who look at him as a queer, so that he has conquered all the look and wicked judgments, and most importantly, proven that he is not so queer. With the vainglorious triumph and pride, Elmer Cowley got on the train without a penny, starting his doomed-to-return journey. However, “the Other’s look hides his eyes; he seems to go in front of them” (Sartre, 1956: 346-7, original emphasis), therefore, under the Other’s look, Elmer Cowley has chosen the wrong way to overcome it – self-deceitful escape.

**Conclusion**

Wing Biddlebaum and Elmer Cowley, two of the victimized innocents of *Winesburg, Ohio*, are besieged by the Other’s look and clutch the “truth” or revelation penetrated in the look which shapes their grotesqueness and queerness. The passive reaction of Wing Biddlebaum and the worthless struggle of Elmer Cowley indicate their vulnerability and weakness under the Other’s look, as Sartre says that the instinctive reaction when hearing the branches crackling is not that someone is there; “it is that I am vulnerable, […] that I can not in any ease escape from the space in which I am without defense – in short, that I am seen” (Sartre, 1956: 347, original emphasis). The real tragedy of Wing Biddlebaum and Elmer Cowley is not their wilful fanaticism to those “truths” in spite of the dehumanizing effects this fanaticism begets, but lies in the external forces, especially the great pressure from others’ look.

Being looked at by the Other-as-subject, Wing Biddlebaum and Elmer Cowley feel so ashamed and fearful as to flee away, through which they can get rid of the look. However, being looked at is not only “an abstract truth aimed at across the concrete presence of an object” in their world, but it is a “concrete, daily relation” which at each moment they experience (345). So they cannot dodge the look and the value and judgment infiltrated into the look because of the Other’s facticity (in Sartre’s word), gradually internalized by them. They are in danger, because they are becoming what in others’ eyes rather than keeping what they real are, and this danger is “not an accident but the permanent structure” (358) of being-looked-at. In a nutshell, the grotesqueness of Wing Biddlebaum and Elmer Cowley is the outcome of the Other’s look.

Geoffrey Harpham states in his article “The Grotesque: First Principles” that “for an object to be grotesque, it must arouse three responses. Laughter and astonishment are two; either disgust or horror
is the third” (463), whereas there may be the fourth one – sympathy, because no one is born to be a grotesque. There must be some external stimuli triggering the switch on in their inner world, so that they are, to some extent, forced to degenerate to grotesqueness whose, in Ihab Hassan’s words, “inwardness [have] gone sour” (Hassan 50-1).

Notes

1. In his “The Theme of Sublimation in Anderson’s Winesburg, Ohio,” Modern Fiction Studies 13 (1967), 237-46, George D. Murphy classifies the majority of the grotesque in Winesburg, Ohio into four distinct types on the basis of their responses to sexual emotion, that is, from the internal evidence to prove their grotesqueness. Malcolm Cowley attributes the twisted fate of the grotesques to “their inability to express themselves”, therefore, they all become “emotional cripples” in his Introduction to Winesbug, Ohio (New York: Viking, 1969). Glen A. Love also focuses on the silence and crippling inner world of these grotesques in her article “Winesburg, Ohio and the Rhetoric of Silence,” American Literature 40 (1968), 38-57.

2. Lacan puts forward the gaze through his mirror phase to demonstrate the establishment of subjectivity which is based on a virtual image in the mirror, and later he proposes “gaze” officially in a seminar and this time gaze is from the object instead of the subject. Foucault’s gaze is more associated with and penetrated with power.

3. That is the contingent connection between the Other and an object-being. (Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness, New York: Washington Square Press, 1956, 370.)
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Re-exploring the Village and society through Religion in Bengali-Muslim context: A Study of Lalsalu(Tree Without Roots) by Syed Waliullah.

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Abstract

A community is a social category of people who share common culture, common language or dialect, a common religion, a common norm, practices, customs and history. Harmony holds firmly together the various relationships of ethnic groups or institution in a detailed manner through the bonds of contrived structures, norms and values and religious belief. The term religion is also known as a social psychological condition. Not to mention, it serves a crucial role in controlling the belief system and cultural and social practice in a community. The chosen text is Lalsalu(Tree without Roots) by Syed Waliullah which was written before the partition of India and was published after it. The patriarchal power of the Bengali Muslim society of the 20th century has been represented by Majid. As the novel has showed us, the political, religious and social order of its making onto the community are imposed by patriarchal paradigms. Any challenge to such order is mercilessly counteracted. Consequently, the protagonist of the novel in his clever dutiful role of a religious and holy man with aids from the patriarchal superstructures is able to create hegemony in Mahabbatpur and capitalizes the religious faith of the poor villagers by establishing his spiritual monopoly. Thus, the hegemony in various levels, such as religion, gender, and class are betrayed in the text and forms the matrix of the study.

Key words: Religion, Community, Patriarchy, Hegemony.

Introduction

Village as a category is associated with a whole lot of other social categories like community, society, people with their unique culture and tradition. If we look at the etymology of “village”, we could see that the origin of the word is traced back to Latin word ‘Villa’ meaning ‘country house’ and then in the late 14th century as a part of Late middle English the word was first quoted and used as “houses and other buildings in a group or an inhabited place larger than a hamlet but smaller than a town”. So the term Village is associated with Home and its people, the community to be more precise. And with community come their tradition and rituals, their festivals and celebrations, language and other modes of expression, the economic and social condition, imbricated with caste discrimination and religion and the way it controls their modes of expression and everyday life.

If we speak about villages of India, religions not only have been serving as the foundation of our culture but have had huge effect on Indian political affairs and the social order. India is characterized by more ethnic and religious groups than most other countries of the world. Harmony holds firmly together the various relationships of ethnic groups or institution in a detailed manner through the bonds of contrived structures, norms and values. According to Emile Durkheim “Religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred thing which unite in to one single moral community.” However, harmony and unity do not mean uniformity which implies similarity; unity may be born out of similarity. In Macionis John’s definition, “ethnos in the narrow meaning of word in the most general form can be defined as a historically formed community of the people possessing common relatively stable, specific features of culture as well being aware of their unity and difference from their communities”. India is an ethnological museum. Religious aspect is one the most important and influential in human social life. But the point that is very much noticeable is that religion is probably

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The most powerful instrument of social control. If we are to reclassify the Indian traditions and the complex model of Indo-Islamic formation, then we have to capture the nuances of Indian Islam and rework the paradigm of the ‘great’ and ‘little’ traditions. For as Dipesh Chakrabarty says with regard to Bengali literary Nationalist culture that emerged in the Nineteenth Century and intensified in the wake of Swadeshi Movement:

“There is a fundamental problem in the history of this modern Bengali nationality – the fact that this nationalist construction of home is a Hindu home. It is not that the Muslim did not share any of this language . . . but Hindu nationalism had created a sense of home that combined the sacred with the beautiful. And even though, this sense of home embodies notions of the sacred, it was not intolerant of Muslims as such. The Muslim – that is, the non-Muslim league Muslim, the Muslim who did not demand Pakistan – had a place in it. But the home was still a Hindu home; its sense of the sacred was constructed through an idiom that was recognizably Hindu.”

The case of Bengali-Muslims presents itself, in this context, as being somewhat unique as it both conform to and deviate from the general pattern of development in south-Asian Islam. The emergence of a sharper, stronger sense of a collective Muslim identity and its close and direct bearings on the cultural growth are matters of common concern among the students of cultural studies of South Asian Islam identity. The Bengal phenomenon does not, however, reveal a uniform and unidirectional search for an exclusive Islamic identity. The Bengal Muslim search for a collective identity was clearly caught between the two opposite pulls of a local geographical Bengali culture and of an extra-territorial Islamic ideology. Indeed, a close analysis of the Muslim-Bengali literature in the late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century reveals, however, unmistakable tensions and vacillations and even clear conflicts in Bengal Muslim’s self-perceptions and self-statements, uncertainties that one may also detect in the complex and dissimilar patterns of modern Muslim conditions in Bengal. It would be unrealistic though, to take the issue of religion completely out of the equation. Bengali Muslims have been trying to construct a synthesis of their identity for over a hundred years now. During the partition of 1947, when the East part of Bengal became Bangladesh, they created an identity on the premise of excluding “Hindu India” as the other. They were Muslims then. Then came a time when being Muslim was not enough to hold the homogeneity of Pakistan. They found themselves under yet another colonial rule. The dream of a free Bengal, ‘Shonar Bangla’ (Golden Bengal) Bangladesh was in the making. Finally, they broke free in 1971, this time their identity was primarily constructed on the premise of excluding “Muslim Pakistan” and thus they became “secular Bangladesh”. The story is, however, a continuing one.

The text that is chosen for this particular study is Lalsalu (Tree Without Roots) by Syed Waliullah.

**Theme of the Text in Reference**

Before Syed Waliullah (1922-1971) Lalsalu (1948), the history of novels of Bangladesh was not very significant. Based on the novel Lalsalu (tree without Roots) written by Syed Waliullah and published in 1948, is perhaps the most significant novel about the rural Muslim community of East Bengal (Bangladesh). The brief storyline is;

In a remote agrarian village, suddenly a haggard-looking Mullah named Majid appears. He cleans up an old dilapidated grave and by declaring it as the shrine of a famous Pir (a holy man) begins to worship it. The villagers, of course, have no clue who the holy man was, and though it is a hoax, gradually give in and begin to believe in the myth. The mystery of the grave, the red fabric spread over
its oval shape, the glowing candles and the Quranic chants that Majid recites beside the grave; create such an aura in the ambience that the villagers, mostly simple peasants, completely succumb to Majid's spell. They start to bring rice and money as offerings to the “holy shrine”. The shrine, through all these years, supplies Majid not only financial independence but psychological control over the people as well. From a vagabond desperado, he becomes a man well rooted in society. He marries Rahima, a not-so-young but hard-working peasant woman who though robustly built, remains a docile wife. But as Majid's wealth and power increase he feels the need of a younger wife. He marries Jamila, a teenage girl who has no fear either for the grave or for Majid himself. Majid vulnerable stays smitten to his youthful sexy wife and slowly loses his tranquility and the myth about the 'holy' grave becomes threatened. Jamila, inadvertently, becomes the nemesis for Majid. And Mother Nature, in the form of a deluge, finally strikes as Majid oversteps the boundary of humanity.

**The Original Author and His Times**

**Syed Waliullah** (August 15, 1922 – October 10, 1971) was a Bangladeshi novelist, short-story writer and playwright. He was notable for his debut novel, *Lalsalu* (translated in English with the title "Tree Without Roots"). He was awarded Bangla Academy Literary Award (1961), Ekushey Padak(1984) and Bangladesh National Film for Best Story (2001).

*Lalshalu* was written before the partition of India and was published after that historic event. Right before the partition when there arose a high voice in favor of an independent state for the Muslims, Waliullah was trying to detect the falsity in pseudo-religious dogmas and practices, which voiced against freethinking and education. It is also worthy to mention that as the settlement of Pakistan was on the basis of religious rights, *Lalshalu* could not draw the attention of the Bangla Muslim literature. Only after the second edition of it in 1960 *Lalshalu* began to be popular. It is possibly the most significant novel about the rural Muslim community of East Bengal (Bangladesh).

**Deconstruction of the Novel and the Relevance of the Study**

In *Lalshalu*, Syed Waliullah has portrayed the traditional superstitious Muslim society of Bangla through the story of Majid and the ancient tomb covered with a lal (red) shalu (cotton fabric). Majid, an outsider of the village Mohabbatpur, arrives one day and announces that the uncared-for tomb is of a great priest of high honor which causes a sort of fear among the populace of the village and thus taking after the responsibility of looking after the tomb, Majid begins his establishment for livelihood. Whenever there appears any sign of obstruction on the way of Majid's existence, he creates a circle of fear to mitigate the village people. Sometimes his existence is endangered from his own conscience also.

The patriarchal power of the Bengali Muslim society of the 20th century has been represented by Majid. As the novel has showed us, the political, religious and social order of its making onto the community are imposed by patriarchal paradigms. Any challenge to such order is mercilessly counteracted. Consequently the protagonist of the novel in his clever dutiful role of a religious and holy man with aids from the patriarchal superstructures is able to create hegemony in Mahabbatpur, whereas his wives continue their subalternity. Majid marries twice: first the widow, Rahima who is ‘wide hipped, strong and beautiful’; and then, the young, lively and curious one, Jamila. Rahima and Jamila invoke the memory of the prophet's two wives. In the post-Hijri period of his life the Prophet too married two women, viz. Sawda and Ayesha: the elderly Sawda was suitable to take care of the family and the younger Ayesha remained under their care. Nonetheless, such parallelism appears only to be the
novelist’s motif to highlight his analysis of the political context in which religion was being used to force a division on people who were otherwise not bothered by differences. The agenda of re-appropriating the existing patriarchal religious hegemony to launch a counter-offensive, exemplifying competitive patriarchy is represented by Majid’s intention of offering ‘divine’ service to this community. Thereafter, Mahabbatpur becomes a site of contesting patriarchal practices where them, first pushed already to the corner and afterwards marginalized, are not allowed to speak but only to be spoken for or be represented by.

In the name of religious belief, Majid has tried to grab whatever he needs. From financial assurance, he once upon a time proceeds to satiate his subconscious desire also. As a result, Rahima comes in his house as his wife but after some years he feels that the single wife is not enough for him. He begins to visualize the physical features of Hasunir Ma who helps Rahima in her household chores or of the wife of Byapari. As a consequence, we get the arrival of Jamila as Majid’s second wife. When most of the people of the village fail to earn the minimal livelihood, no sort of want can touch Majid. Women, however, remain irrelevant in this debate. Notably, this incident takes place to diffuse the tragic overtone of the forced divorce between Khalek Byapari, the richest man in the village and his first wife Amina for her alleged ‘infertility.’ In reality Majid had started to yearn for her and so he manipulated this divorce solely based on his voluntary verdict. Majid declared her as ‘fallen’ and therefore unfit as Byapari’s wife. Amina was forced to leave her own family. This event caused instigation in several cases where the husbands on grounds of suspected ‘chastity deserted their supposedly ‘infertile’ wives. These manipulations were implemented amidst formidable silence and with calculated precision. Majid as a self-proclaimed religious leader had imposed certain codes of conduct onto the community. Yet, his second wife, Jamila seriously confronts this order and threatens Majid so much that she is physically stifled and left to die. Nevertheless, even in her death she threatens Majid’s authority - the feet of her dead body was perched vandalizing the sanctum sanctorum of Majid’s place of worship. Patriarchal violence seems to be at a loss and somewhat embarrassed when confronted with such silent yet visible defiance.

The fear that Majid created since his emergence in the village continues till the end of the novel. Whenever Majid feels necessity, he sharpens that sword of fear creating different spells. Regarding the traditional practices and beliefs of the villagers, Majid preaches of his own keeping pace with the holy books. The incident in which Maid compelled an elderly boy and his father to be circumcised contributes hugely in Majid’s enterprise. When Akhas Ali tries to set up a school in the village, Majid bravely meets the challenge and establishes his opinion that a mosque is far more essential. Two cases that make him perplexed are the arrival of Peer Shahib in a neighboring village and the apparently anti-religious behavior of Jamila. Due to the appearance of the Peer Shahib Majid falls in a sort of footless situation which instigates him to tackle the perilous situation at a great risk. For that turn Majid survives but what does he do regarding Jamila?

At first Jamila seemed to Majid a soft lump though from Jamila’s part he was not the same because on the day before marriage Majid goes to have a look at his would-be-wife, he seemed as the father of the future groom to Jamila. Moreover, the days he comes to his house, Rahima seems to her as the mother of the groom. Through these humorous references, Waliullah has depicted the tragedy of Muslim Bangla. After some days of the marriage, Majid discovers that Jamila is not that much submissive, she does not possess any fear in the name of religion; she is stubborn and does whatever she considers better; she denies all the shackles that Majid wants to give her. To exhort his influence on her, one night he locks her in the tomb-shade. The night becomes stormy, as there is storm is Majid’s
own soul. After the storm when he opens the entrance of the tomb-shade, he discovers the unconscious body of Jamila, lying flat on back, having no cloths on her chest; and touching the tomb with her feet.

Subsequently, Mahabbatpur turns out to be a place of disputed patriarchal exercises whereas Akkas Ali is the agent of the postcolonial society endowed with modern education, and urban polish. Their interests collide around the dispute over the contradictory proposal to build a mosque for the spiritual upgradation in Mahabbatpur and a secular English school (though there were two maqtabs). Majid obtains better support among the villagers in favor of a mosque and defeats Akkas on basis of faith and religious sentiment.

Majid was often portrayed as a modern-hero by Waliullah. He has got the mental conflict, the consciousness and the existential crisis of a modern man. He earns the reader’s sympathy even though he is a fake religious guru. After he has been long fighting from his childhood with paucity, starvation and uncertainty, he arrives at Mahabbatpur. He never had any home of his own. He has always dreamt of a home, wife and economic stability. But his fate before here never supported him to have a smooth and well-off life. Majid is not a bizarre hero instead, a person who uses religious superstition to stretch his roots among the ordinary villagers. Slowly he becomes powerful, authoritative, prominent and controlling. He does not only have the benefit of financial steadiness but also takes pleasure of being authoritative and apparently reliable. This new taste makes him the slave of his self-created sham identity. His divergence as a modern man is representative of the social conflicts which is going through transition of social order and the new rootless existence which is the gift of modernization and so called development of the post Independent and post-colonial timeframe which has been captured by Waliullah.

Waliullah has created a fictional village Mahabbatpur, as the theatre for the doings of the fortune-hunting Majeed who has transformed into a shrine the hitherto neglected grave of an unknown person about whose identity he knows nothing but whom he declares to be a saint that has visited Majeed in a dream. The village is almost mythical; it is without connection with the world outside; Life here is elemental. Majeed is a veritable colonialist and an active missionary, two rolled into one. He plants fear into the hearts of the innocent peasants, makes them feel guilty for their neglect of the patron saint. He becomes the ruler and seeks to transform the simple peasants, almost pagans in their lifestyle, into devout Muslims. But in spite of all this the author does not make him the villain of the piece. He is as lonely as the shrine he has created and with time he himself has become the slave of his own creation. He is nostalgic; he feels for his childhood home which he has left and tries to strike roots in a land where he has never been before. Having no sharer of his secrets he often resorts to memory and recollections of his past days and past life where he was nobody, a victim of poverty and misfortune. And how he preyed upon the simple rural folk by exploiting religion, becoming the self-appointed guardian of a mazar which he claims is that of a saint. Majeed could leave his shrine for his safety but he did not because his identity has no meaning without the shrine. He mingles his past and present, his happiness and sadness, he is a modern character:

That wilderness day when I first came to this village how hungry I was! I used to have nothing that time, neither owned any land, home, nor wife and cattle. And now I am the protector of the mazar. I get money, I reside contentedly, and I demand the people’s admiration. Of course, I have changed but, thanks be to God, for the better. I have no cause to be sad (Waliullah 76).

Now, it is not only his material subsistence but also his values, belief-system that have to to live on. Nevertheless, he is deeply conscious of the fact that the mazar is a sham and pointless entity,
he seizes this purposelessness which can only make his future existence significant. Alternatively, it is
Majid’s image and personality which insists his realization to build a significance and worth which can
sustain his mature and continued survival in Mahabbatpur. It is his survival which comes first of all,
even his ethics. Even he tells himself: “If, I make a living, at the same time, is there something immoral
in that? After all one must live. And I live to spread the word of God” (waliullah 12). Seen in that way,
Majeed is a representative of coarse deprived pitiable Bangladeshi country people who hunt for their
existence in self-constructed sacred identity. As a substitute of their ruthless poverty, they must exist
but for the survival they need to have some kind of ethics to embrace or to turn their life consequential.
In the words of the narrator of the novel:

> Perhaps the reason there are so many white tupees in this part of the world is that
> the land cannot feed the men. Little food means more religion. God said: cover your
> heads when you pray to me, for this is the mark of the god-fearing man... There
> are more tupees than heads of cattle, more tupees than sheaves of rice (Waliullah 5).

It is also somewhere true that the past memories of Majeed does not give him pleasure, they
are mostly the source of fear. He is afraid of his past or rather going to back to the Past. Actually, he
does not have any identity without the shrine. Maybe the shrine is a sham but it is the only point to
continue his life. Though, Majeed knows that his return may bring his life at risk, he decides to uphold
his value or essence as his identity will not have any meaning (here value or power) without his
essence. As a result his existence at a definite end of life without his worth (essence) is also futile. An
unease or fright of being defeated his core or belief is the cause behind this. As an alternative to any
Pir, it is flood or natural calamity that brings worry back inside Majeed to smash his self-constructed
worth:

> “It is tricky for one to know whether one has sinned, and to what degree, Majeed
told himself. Except I do identify that I am not terrified for the reason of my
misdeeds. My fright is of having to return to where I began” (Waliullah, 134).

Most likely it is the motive why Majeed chooses to put his life at jeopardy with the optimism
of retaining all his material accomplishment he has achieved in Mahabbatpur. Perhaps he doubts his
past poor powerless life. Now he knows that both of his past and present lives are meaningless but with
he has chosen his present life as more important. Having said that it is equally true Majeed is not an
absurd hero but a person who uses religious superstition to extend his sources amidst the ordinary
village dwellers. Slowly he turns out to be prominent, authoritative and controlling. He does not only
takes pleasure in financial steadiness but also enjoys being reliable. This new experience makes him
the slave of his self-crafted fraud character that he constructed for himself. His reappearance is a pick
of giving in towards his own dignity.

**Conclusion**

This literary piece forms a testimonial or memory-text that deals with the construction of the
Muslim subjectivities in times of the partition of Bengal and right after that and the questions around
religion, faith, the belief-system, the complex collaboration of poverty and religion especially the lower
caste, the rural community. Texts that deals with these wide-ranging issues, written over a long period
of time, try to reconstruct the lives of individuals and communities, marginal or elite, whose memories
of trauma and displacement had dissociated them from their own life stories. The less visible and
delayed effects of displacement and violence are seen in the family and community spaces that these
texts foreground. They give an added dimension to a set of micro-events, often unspeakable, within the
partition and lay bare the processes of how literature transforms the actual into the apocryphal and the mythical.

Finally, the word ‘Lalsalu’ means ‘red cloth’ which generally is used on a religious shrine. This title in Bengali itself serves as a symbol of religious impact on the narrative. Although, the English translated version of the text does not retain the same title, it reflects the same storyline employing the ‘shrine’ as a significant motif that is used in the whole narrative. It becomes the symbol which represents the religion and its overwhelming influence into the minds of the simple rustic people. It also stands out as a symbol of power which was acquired by Majid in order to dictate the commoners in Mahabbatpur. Needless to say, the same motif served as an instrument of fear exploited by the name of religion or religious faith by Majid to control their lives and ensure his survival in the village.
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Ill-Literacy: A Study of the Lack of Communicative Competence among Middle School Students of Vernacular Medium Schools of West Bengal, India

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Abstract:

Middle school in India includes fifth to eighth graders (10-14 years), the second phase in the Compulsory Education System that aims at providing free education to all 6 to 14 year olds. In course of my interaction with many such middle schoolers it came to my notice that many of those attending the various vernacular medium schools (Bengali or Hindi medium) in the state of West Bengal, India show an alarmingly low Communicative Competence/ Skills, which led me to conduct a test in two such schools, located in the suburban or semi-rural areas of the state. This paper presents a study based on the test and tries to assess factors responsible for such poor Communicative Competence/ Skills noticed in a significant number of students. The study, though not fully conclusive, found a remarkably poor first language/ L1 (here Bengali) as well second language/ L2 (here English) competence among the students. The aim, therefore, is to understand whether such communicative incompetence can thwart the high ideal of a fully literate society, and thus produce an ill-literate section within the next generation, with irrevocable professional and personal handicaps. The study involved 135 students (65 girls and 70 boys) of two Vernacular (Bengali) Medium Schools located in a semi-rural area of West Bengal.

Introduction:

UNESCO’s official website https://en.unesco.org states that “Beyond its conventional concept as a set of reading, writing and counting skills, literacy (italics mine) is now understood as a means of identification, understanding, interpretation, creation, and communication in an increasingly digital, text-mediated, information-rich and fast-changing world”. Principle emphasis is given on those aspects of being literate that are relevant to the requirements of this rushing digital world, among which communication is central. Steven Wilson and Christina Sabee (2003) noted that the importance laid on the study of communicative competence by many scholars is the outcome of some ‘tacit beliefs’ like: “(a) within any situation, not all things that can be said and done are equally competent; (b) success in personal and professional relationships depends, in no small part, on communicative competence; and (c) most people display incompetence in at least a few situations, and a smaller number are judged incompetent across many situations.” These three beliefs are integral to the understanding of the importance of communication in a world like ours. India, the world’s largest democracy, upholds the motto of Education for All. Free compulsory education is provided by the Government to all children between 6 to 14 years. The numbers related to the education scenario of the country are staggering. To give one example: a total number of 11,02,726 candidates appeared in the Madhyamik/ Secondary examination (under the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education or WBBSE) in 2018 in the state of West Bengal (WB) alone, among whom 6,21,087 were girls. The passing percentage was 85.49, that is 8,99,564 candidates. In the same year, a total number of 8.09 lakh candidates appeared in the Higher Secondary examination (under the West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education or WBCHSE), out of which 6,63,516 number of students passed the examination, that is a 83.75% of the total. So when this small-scale study was conducted in two schools of an unknown semi-urban district of West Bengal, with middle school students studying in the vernacular medium (i.e. Bangla), the objective was to assess not only their communicative competence, but also to understand the intent and outcomes of a literacy programme. The question addressed here is how the current education structure makes these millions
of students industry ready, in fact, life ready. A system of education that still heavily relies on the reading, writing and counting capabilities of the stakeholder, end examinations and marks, the gap between what is taught and what is received, what is intended and what is acquired needs to be determined.

Methods & Materials:

Since the study aimed at examining the existent system of education in government run schools, the test conducted was modelled on the curriculum and question pattern followed in the stipulated curriculum. It must be noted here that communicative competence as an umbrella term (as coined by Dell Hymes in 1966), encompasses multiple other components, such as linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, strategic and actional etc. But due to a lack of time and manpower no interview module could be incorporated. 135 students (65 girls and 70 boys) took a written test of 50 marks, without any prior notice, comprising of L1 and L2 reading and writing skill assessment questions. The students assessed studied in grades VI to VIII in vernacular medium (here Bangla) schools. Keeping that in perspective, the L2/ English questions were of either elementary or lower intermediate level, while L1 questions were all intermediate level. All 135 students underwent the same written test, with only different L1 and L2 reading comprehension passages for class VI. The test paper was a combination of both objective and subjective questions. The test paper included two comprehension passages in L1 and L2 respectively (Appendix 1), writing tasks, two in L1 and one in L2, other objective questions on L1 grammar, syntax and L2 vocabulary (Appendix 2). All questions were modelled on the Kendriya Vidyalaya (affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Examination) Admission Test papers, with necessary moderation in their difficulty level for maintaining parity with the West Bengal Council of Secondary Education (WBCHSE) Bangla and English syllabi for classes VI to VIII.

Any student could score a maximum of 50 marks and since the test conducted was bilingual, the maximum marks allotted in L1 section was 22, while in L2 it was 24. The remaining 4 marks comprised of four Aptitude questions. The final report maintained some parameters for assessment. These parameters primarily took into account the different factors associated with linguistic competency like: grammar, syntax, spellings, reading comprehension, writing efficiency, and vocabulary. The following is the list of scoring criteria followed:

For L1 questions:

i. Only complete/ full sentences have been considered for full marks. In case of one word or phrase answers 50% of the actual has been penalized.

ii. No spelling error (except for words with complex consonant clusters) has been considered.

iii. Plain Yes/ No answers have been disqualified, unless the question has specifically asked to answer in yes or no.

iv. Multiple answers for one question (in sentence arrangement) have been considered as Bangla can use multiple syntactical orders for one sentence, without changing meaning.

v. In the writing section, sentences that are complete but erroneous (grammatically) have been marked full.

For L2 questions:

i. Students giving one word/ phrase answers have been marked full

ii. Spelling errors have been mostly overlooked, while in some instances 50% marks has been deducted (that is, if the word is monosyllabic or elementary level).

iii. In case of Proper Nouns like names of parents/ school/ teacher etc., full marks have been penalized.

iv. Faulty syntax and grammar has been overlooked, unless the sentence is simple.
Results and Discussion:

The study chose to assess students studying in middle school level (VI to VIII) assuming that-

i. all/ most of the 135 students completed their primary education before the time of the test, i.e. they have acquired the desired linguistic and analytical faculties suitable for their age

ii. they should exhibit a desired level of grammatical, syntactical and lexical understanding of the languages they have been studying since primary classes

iii. they can analyze the instructions given before each section/ question and thereby, answer them according to the requirement, as accurately as possible

iv. they are able to comprehend a given passage in either language to answer the questions as per instructions provided

v. they can use grammatically and syntactically correct sentences (as desirable at their level) in logically arranged paragraphs

vi. finally, a majority should show a minimum understanding of the two languages that they have been studying (the markers of which here are a 50% score in L1 i.e. 11 on 22 and 35% score in L2 i.e. 8 on 24, respectively), through their reading and writing skills.

Since any student could score a maximum of 50 marks, students are divided into 5 levels on the basis of the total marks obtained by them. The graph below shows the number of students (orange bar representing boys, pink representing girls) vis-a-vis the total marks obtained by them in the different levels. Note that each level represents a particular range of marks, like 0-10, 11-20, 21-30, 31-40 and 41-50.

![Total Marks Obtained](image)

The final test scores show that 50 out of 65 girl students and 51 out of 70 boy students scored less than 50% marks in the L1 section of the test. 33 out of 65 girls and 27 out of 70 boys attempted and answered at least one comprehension question correctly in the L1 section, while only 18 and 6 students (girls and boys respectively) attempted and correctly answered at least one question in the L2 section. Though overall 62% students attempted either one or both L1 writing tasks (indicative of an overall performance, not of accuracy), only 10% students attempted the L2 writing task. 69% students showed comfort in their use of L1 grammar and proper syntax, but almost no student used complete and grammatically or syntactically correct L2 sentences to answer questions. Almost all students could associate words with words/objects or words with colours in L2 section. Proper Noun spelling errors in writing names of parents/ school/ teacher/ residential locality can be seen among 53% students.
Additionally, 40% of the total students used Bangla in place of English to complete the personal information section. When asked to identify Bangla vowels and consonant clusters from 2 given sentences from the comprehension passage/s, almost no student could answer correctly.

The figures betray some key facts associated with these students’ skills and competence. While linguistic competence is no longer regarded as the sole factor affecting a person’s communication abilities, it indeed is that one factor that determines whether a person will learn at least one language (L1) to use in reading, writing and speaking, i.e. communicating verbally. In L2 they were asked to write some sentences about her/his favorite teacher in school. The fact that only 10% students could use grammatically and syntactically ordered sentences for writing a very short paragraph is a tell-tale sign that the students’ initiation cum training into L2/ English has remained ineffective. The L1 writing tasks required the students to write 5 sentences (each) about i. her/his family, ii. her/his favourite sports. Though 62% students attempted either or both L1 writing tasks, very few could write 5 logically connected meaningful sentences on both topics. This underlines a student’s lack of ability to select, sequence, and arrange words and structures to achieve a unified message. Inability to use their mother-tongue in writing, logically and grammatically, is indicative of a low understanding of the language. The Bangla vocabulary used in writing is very basic and repetitive in most of the instances. There is no way of examining their vocabulary in English as there are very few answers to consider.

Conclusions:

According to the Handbook of Communication Competence “The ability of people to reach their goals in social life depends to a large extent on their communicative competence.” (p. 36) This was the very idea that propelled me to undertake this study. And like any other such study/research work, this one too is neither all-encompassing nor entirely conclusive. Since this study did not incorporate any interview or questionnaire, some aspects of communicative competence (e.g. sociolinguistic or strategic) cannot be commented on simply on the basis of the outcomes of this study. Moreover, out of 439 secondary schools only in the district of Howrah, WB, sampling only 135 students of 2 schools cannot provide an all-conclusive data. Any person’s ability to use a language comes from her/his understanding of the primary rules of a language. Using the language in her/his verbal (written or oral) communication demands a strategic execution of those rules in accordance with the context, situation, person and requirement. India, especially the state of WB, suffers from the serious ailment of unemployment among educated graduates. One recent FICCI report says that the cause behind such alarmingly high percentage of unemployment among graduated youths is a skill gap, which also includes their poor communication skills, other than a major gap between what is taught and what is demanded. The numbers mentioned in the introduction are evocative enough, as a majority of these students will opt for a conventional undergraduate study, where a majority will be products of the system of free and compulsory education. To bridge a gap this wide, the point to ponder is how to reimagine education for the future of the nation.

Acknowledgement:

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References:


Appendix 1 Comprehension

1. Class VI- L1

ii. Financial Capital of India is…………………………

i. India is…………………………………...

Complete the sentences

i. India is…………………………………...

ii. Financial Capital of India is…………………………………...

iii. Most of the people use Hindi in India. Yes or NO?…………………………………...
4. Class VII & VIII- L2

A bus is a large wheeled vehicle meant to carry many passengers along with the driver. It is larger than a car. The name is a shortened version of omnibus, which means "for everyone" in Latin. Buses used to be called omnibuses, but people now simply call them "buses". Buses are an important part of public transport in places all over the world. Many people who do not have cars, use buses to get around. Buses make it easy for them to get to where they want to go. A place where people wait for a local bus is called a bus stop. A building where people wait for a long distance bus or where many buses meet is called a bus station. There are many types of bus around the world. Complete the sentences:

i. Omnibus is....................

ii. We get into a bus at....................

iii. Are bus station and bus stop same?....................

Appendix 3

Sentence arrangement- L1:

i. দিকে আকাশের আমার ভাতের ভালো মনটা হয়ে যায়....................

ii. আজীকে আমার গুরু নাতের।....................

iii. খরগোষ্ঠে গেল বন্যার হাজার বেঁধে বাড়ি হাজার।....................

Grammar & Vocabulary- L2:

31. Most of the people use Hindi in India. Yes or NO?.................................................................

32. MATCH THE WORDS IN COLOUR "A" WITH HOSE IN COLUMN "B"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>&quot;A&quot;</th>
<th>&quot;B&quot;</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WATCH</td>
<td>PROBLEMS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRIFCASE</td>
<td>TRAVEL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BUS</td>
<td>MOTHER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MATHEMATICS</td>
<td>WORK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEAR</td>
<td>TIME</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOVE</td>
<td>DARKNESS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

33. WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE COLOUR?.................................................................

34. WHAT COLOUR IS YOUR PEN?.................................................................

35. WHAT ARE YOU DOING NOW?.................................................................

36. VIBGYOR MEANS: VIOLET-INDIGO-BLUE-GREEN-YELLOW-ORANGE-RED

37. CAN YOU NAME A FRUIT OR FLOWER FOR EACH COLOUR?

   a. VIOLET((বেড়ী)).......................... INDIGO (আসবাবি).......................... BLUE
        (বীল).......................... GREEN (বাসুকি)..........................

   b. YELLOW (বালু).......................... ORANGE (কমলা)..........................

   c. RED (লাল)..........................