

# Ideas



# Ideas

*A Journal of Literature Arts and Culture*

**Volume 6**

**2020-2021**

**ISSN: 2413-1814**



## Ideas

A Research Journal of the Institute of Advanced Studies

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*A Journal of Literature Arts and Culture*

**Volume 6**

**2020-2021**

**ISSN 2413-1814**

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Web: <http://cell-englishliterarylounge.com>

Frequency: Annually

Current Volume: 6/2020-2021

Printed by:

#### **SLM Printers**

242/A, Fakirapool,

Motijheel, Dhaka-1000

Published by:

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©: **Ideas - Institute of Advanced Studies, Dhaka,  
Bangladesh**

Price: BDT 500, Rs. 500, US\$ 10 & CAD 8

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*Ideas*

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It is with great pride, enthusiasm, and anticipation that we invite you to read the fourth issue of *Ideas*. We are very happy to see the journal's gradual recognition in the national as well as in the international realm. The 6th Volume (2020-2021) of *Ideas* contains articles by a wide range of scholars from different corners of the world writing on topics related to language, literature and cultural studies highlighting the inter- and cross-disciplinary nature of the journal.

*Ideas* strives to attract and engage an international readership that is primarily academic. University libraries and individual academics are the primary target group for the journal. However, the journal seeks to attract professional audiences as well. The journal includes up-to-date, high-quality, and original contributions - research papers, reviews, and syntheses as well as book and conference reviews -for disseminating new knowledge. *Ideas* remains dedicated to providing space for fresh researchers and promising academics.

With **Institute of Advanced Studies'** continued support in improving its editorial platforms we aim for even higher standards in all aspects of the journal's management and operations. Any papers that you wish to submit, either individually or jointly, are much appreciated and will make a substantial contribution to the development and success of *Ideas*. If you are uncertain about the suitability of your work for *Ideas* or have any other questions concerning the journal, please do not hesitate to make contact (using the email address below).

We look forward to working with all of you as we continue to make this Journal of Literature, Arts and Culture a success and we welcome your submissions, as well as feedback as authors, readers, and reviewers of the journal.

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Best wishes and thank you in advance for your contribution to the Journal of Institute of Advanced Studies.



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# The Reactive Mode in Presenting Shakespeare

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**B**ased on an idea of Jonathan Bate, I have tried to say in this paper that Shakespeare's plays have been read, performed and filmed from a reaction which issues from a judgmental sense in which the past is always viewed by the present. In the scope of this paper the present spreads from the Restoration to the period as late as early 21<sup>st</sup> century, while obviously, the past constitutes the age of Shakespeare. The reactions embodying the performance of Shakespeare's plays from Davenant to Garrick to Kemble to Hugh Quarshie have been informed by moral judgment as well as by gender and racial concerns. So, I have focused on *Macbeth* to show how staging the eponymous hero presented a set of difficulties to Davenant, Garrick and Kemble alike, and how they all have tackled the problem by resorting to the reactive mode, that is judging the events in the play of *Macbeth* from a moral perspective. In all three productions by each of the three actor-managers mentioned above, Macbeth appears to be a repentant hero rather than a tragic hero, which he is in Shakespeare.

This is the first contention of my essay, and the second one is informed by the transition of the English stage from the one-sex theatre to the two-sex theatre, and I have argued that though this process opened the career for the female actors, it also took away the simple stage pleasure derived from the use of the device of transvestism, on which Shakespeare capitalized so much.

The third contention of my essay is concerned with the staging of *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice*, that is, with Othello and Shylock to be more proper. I brought up Hugh Quarshie's view of *Othello*, based on a generalized racist argument, for discussion against Edelman's reading of Shylock, done from a non-generalized perspective, to say that this type of contrary views does fertilize our understanding of Shakespeare.

The reactive mode in presenting Shakespeare is an idea forwarded by Jonathan Bate in his essay, "The Romantic Age," included in a book, titled *Shakespeare: An Illustrated Stage History*, edited by himself and Russell Jackson. In that essay, Bate maintains that the actor-managers from David Garrick to John Kemble, that is, from the eighteenth century to the Romantic Age produced Shakespearean plays on the stage from a reactive mode of

action. What Bate means by this is that to Shakespeare and his fellow dramatists, the character was realized through action, but to the later generations of actor-managers character was defined through reaction based on reflection, thus approving of some kind of poetic justice. Bate attributes the reason to the development of two necessary disciplines with the advent of the eighteenth century—the novel, with a lot of emphasis on character study, and later, a disciplined approach to human psychology. Bate gives one example to make the notion clear. As Macbeth nears the end of his life, and as it dawns on him that the witches’ prophecies are false, he still decides to fight on till death with ‘harness [armour] on our back’ (*Macbeth*, 5.5.55).<sup>1</sup> He gets engaged in a fierce duel with Macduff without feeling any moral compunction. So, the character of Macbeth is established as one in whom regret has no place. But on the other hand, Garrick revised Shakespeare’s ending by adding a speech that ends with ‘I sink—Oh!—my soul is lost forever! / Oh!’ (then Macbeth dies).<sup>2</sup> Garrick thus moralizes Shakespeare in a concrete pronouncement which he felt necessary to add to clarify that Macbeth dies with a feeling of damnation for his past action. That is poetic justice so convincingly denied by Shakespeare.

The reactive idea, however, in my view, can be extended to include multiple kinds of approaches to Shakespeare. Bate has excluded Sir William Davenant of the Restoration period from his group of reactive actor-managers, because he was not an actor as much as he was a manager, but he can be also judged as having responded to Shakespeare by a set of reactions, which we can categorize as (1) the royal prerogatives imposed on the theatre activity, and the elitist moral drawn thereby, (2) the textual concerns—the size of the playtexts and their language, and (3) the stage concerns that deal with the transition from the open door theatre to the closed door theatre on the one hand, and the transition from one-sex theatre to two-sex theatre on

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<sup>1</sup> For all quotations from Shakespeare’s texts in this essay the edition followed is *William Shakespeare: Complete Works*, eds. Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen (Hampshire: MacMillan, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Michael Dobson, “Improving on the Original: Actresses and Adaptations,” in *Shakespeare: An Illustrated Stage History*, eds. Jonathan Bate and Russell Jackson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 92-111. But Garrick’s line is quoted by Peter Holland, in his essay, “The Age of Garrick” from the same volume, at page 87.

the other. The reactive approach may also include racist concerns, and in this respect I will treat two responses as relevant for our topic, one provided by Hugh Quarshie, a prominent Ghana-born British Shakespearian actor of the present time, who discusses *Othello* as having been written by Shakespeare from racist prejudices, and the other written by Charles Edelman, a Shakespeare scholar from Australia, who defends Shylock from a pro-Semitic premise. In conclusion, I would say that the reactive response does lead to two kinds of approaches: the first one is equivalent to how the New Historicists reconstruct literature by culling bits and pieces of evidence to give shape to a whole nearly conforming to the original conditions in which a particular play was created, or as expressed better by Greenblatt in his first line of the book, *Shakespearean Negotiations* that he desires to speak with the dead (Greenblatt 1), and the second approach is, presumably like Coleridge's, to find one's own shadow in Shakespeare, which is tantamount to the postcolonial reading to extract one's own socio-political agenda from the text. To clarify this last point we can refer to one of the earliest translations of Shakespeare in Hindi. In 1888, *The Merchant of Venice* was translated by 'Ayra', meaning a lady, with the title, *Benis Nagar ka Byopari*. Sir Edwin Arnold, an orientalist, wrote a preface to the book suggesting that the translator herself could feel the same way as does the Prince of Morocco in the play: "Mislike me not for my complexion, / The shadowy livery of the burnished sun, / To whom I am a neighbour and near bred" (2.1.1-2). (Trivedi 16)

Our subcontinental approach to Shakespeare mainly constitutes in reading, studying, teaching, dramatizing, translating and adapting him, the way Carlyle envisaged it to be the case when he made the distinction between the British Empire (he called it the Indian Empire), which would one day end, and Shakespeare, which would continue the legacy of the Empire long after it would be expired. (Trivedi 16) We do not essentially present or re-present him under any authoritarian bindings. We, of course, feel that Othello, Shylock or such characters, defined as 'the other' in postcolonial terminology, are akin to our postcolonial rebellious sensibility and we might like to stage them more often than not, but we do not probably make any distinction between presenting a Macbeth and a King Lear, because we take them as Shakespeare's iconic characters and portray them from a generalized perspective as such. But such was not the case for the English actor-managers for nearly two hundred years, from the Restoration to the Romantic Age. They definitely viewed presenting Macbeth, a regicide, on the stage a more challenging undertaking in the time of a reigning monarch than presenting King Lear.

We have already mentioned Bate as explaining the reactive approach by referring to the play, *Macbeth*, more particularly to its last scene. And this is the scene that we will see how Davenant, Garrick and Kemble: the three major exponents of Shakespeare on the English Stage from three different generations have given the same treatment—a morally biased ending suitable for them, but absent in Shakespeare.

## I

Sir William Davenant (1608-68) expressed his reaction in two ways. He wanted to uphold the cause of the monarchy, and he was adamant to contemporize Shakespeare. He was a great stage innovator, and when he and Thomas Killigrew were given a royal patent by King Charles II on 21 August 1660, he set up a theatre at the Lincoln's Inn Fields auditorium, which Samuel Pepys noted as 'very fine and magnificent' (2 July 1661). (Dobson 46) He introduced the proscenium arches and 'scenes' or picture stage, and a space for 'discovery' (Dobson 50), thus giving a three dimensional perspective to the stage. The other theatre managed by Killigrew was at Clark Market (later to be shifted to Theatre Royale, Drury Lane), and both theatres were close to the royal palace of Whitehall, and Charles used to visit them regularly. Thus the public playhouses became 'public expressions of royal magnificence'. (Dobson 50)

Davenant then made adaptations of Shakespeare's plays with an eye to the King. He produced *The Law against Lovers* in 1662. It was an adaptation of *Measure for Measure* attempting to draw comparison between Angelo, as the ruler, with Oliver Cromwell of the Interregnum period, and the Duke who returns from self-exile is compared with the return of Charles II from his banishment.

Two of his most successful adapted plays were *The Tempest* and *Macbeth*. In *The Tempest; or, The Enchanted Island*, co-authored with John Dryden and staged in 1667 by the Duke of York's Company, the parallelism between Prospero, the banished Duke recovering his throne, and King Charles II, the restored king was established.

At the beginning of the Restoration period, Shakespeare was not the most popular playwright to revive. Ben Johnson's works or those of Beaumont and Fletcher were more popular than his plays. Shakespeare's excessive fondness for pun and elaborate metaphors and other linguistic paradoxes made him an outdated playwright to the Restoration playgoers.

Even John Dryden, one of Shakespeare's greatest admirers, said in 1679 that 'the tongue in general is so much refined since Shakespeare's time, that many of his words, and more of his phrases, are scarce intelligible . . . and



his whole style is so pestered with figurative expressions, that it is as affected as it is obscure'.<sup>3</sup> In short the high society of London was not much given to liking Shakespeare.

Davenant, however, would not give up. He had already made the Bard popular by introducing more rehearsal time to acting, providing 'de'cor, music, and scenic effects, and then revising Shakespeare's language to make him a contemporary. In 1661, he staged *Hamlet* by cutting many scenes and changing many lines to 'suit Restoration tastes'. (Dobson 50) Thus Fortinbras's march with the army in Act IV is cut out, and, more importantly, he changed the line 'To grunt and sweat under a weary life' in the 'To be, or not to be' soliloquy to 'To groan and sweat under a weary life'. (Dobson 50) The Restoration audience would not resent a Prince's use of the word, 'sweat', but would not accept 'grunt'. (Dobson 50) The line, 'sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought' simply becomes 'Shews sick and pale with thought'. (Dobson 52)

After his success with *The Tempest*, Davenant produced *Macbeth* in 1664 in the newly built theatre at the Dorset Garden, with Thomas Betterton (1635-1710), the most brilliant actor of the age, in the lead role. *Macbeth* was a great spectacle on the stage with a lavish mise-en-scene, that is, arrangement of scenes, lighting (candles), etc. "The 'Scenes' and 'Machines'" as remembered by the company's prompter, John Downes, "included not only 'Flyings for the Witches' (who spent much of the play either singing, dancing, or dangling from ropes) but a cloud on which Hecate descended from the sky, a cavern for the apparition scene which disappeared beneath the stage and two separate trapdoors for the banquet scene—Banquo's ghost at first 'descends' through one, to Macbeth's relief, but shortly afterwards 'The Ghost of Banquo rises at his feet.'" (Dobson 53) Pepys, who otherwise did not fancy Shakespeare's plays, liked this play and saw it eight times in less than four years, and commented that "[it] appears a

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<sup>3</sup> Dobson, p. 50. And also my own experience as a translator of Shakespeare can bear testimony to it. Here I refer to my note in the translation of *Romeo and Juliet* published recently. "He made you for a highway to my bed / But I, a maid, die maiden-widowed" (3.2.134-35). রোমিও এ্যান্ড জুলিয়েট নাটকটি শেক্সপিয়ারের প্রথমদিককার নাটক বিধায় এখানে শব্দের বিভিন্ন প্রকরণ এবং শব্দগুচ্ছের বিভিন্ন ইঙ্গিতবহ গূঢ়ার্থ তিনি আবিষ্কারের পর আবিষ্কার করছিলেন। সে জন্য এ নাটকে পান বা দ্বিত্ব-অর্থযুক্ত শব্দ প্রচুর, যা অনুবাদের সময় লুপ্ত হয়ে যাবার আশংকা থাকে। যেমন এখানে made বা তৈরি করার সঙ্গে maid বা কুমারী নারীর উচ্চারণগত মিল থেকে দ্বিত্ব অর্থের যে ব্যঞ্জনার সৃষ্টি করা হয়েছে, তা বাংলা অনুবাদে পরিবেশন করা সম্ভব হয় নি। (মোহিত উল আলম, অনুবাদ: শেক্সপিয়ার: রোমান ট্র্যাজেডি: রোমিও এ্যান্ড জুলিয়েট (ঢাকা: অনুপম প্রকাশনী, ২০১৩)।

most excellent play in all respects . . . one of the best plays for a stage, and variety of dancing and music, that ever I saw.”(Dobson 54)

As it would be understood no Shakespearean production can ever be made without the politics of the time in which it is produced. Davenant, therefore, portrays Macbeth as somehow resembling Cromwell, and Malcolm as the banished Charles II. In doing so, Davenant cuts out the scene (4.3.) in which Malcolm tries to falsely convince Macduff that he would even be a worse ruler than Macbeth.

In respect of revision, Davenant alters the following lines of Shakespeare:

“Will all great Neptune’s ocean wash this blood  
Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather  
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,  
Making the green one red (2.2.58-61)

to the following:

“ . . . can the Sea afford  
Water enough to wash away the stains?  
No, they would sooner add a tincture to  
The Sea, and turn the green into a red.” (In Davenant’s adaptation of *Macbeth*, 18-19)

Taking note of such prosaic alterations as ‘The multitudinous seas incarnadine’ into ‘add a tincture to / The Sea’, we can say that Davenant rescued Shakespeare from near oblivion but he also killed him.

For the sake of decorum, Davenant has his Macbeth avoid being informal in front of his servants. So instead of showing his anger with this line, “The devil damn thee black, thou cream-faced loon!” (5.3.11), Macbeth gently says, “Now, Friend, what means thy change of Countenance?” (Dobson 54). In keeping with this decorum, goes out the entire Porter Scene, as it was thought to be too lowly for the audience’s status.

While Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* leaves us in a moral quandary as not to be able to form our minds regarding Macbeth, whether he is to be castigated or appreciated, Davenant’s Restoration Macbeth, as we earlier noted, fights the ‘emblematic duel’, (Dobson 56) with Macduff and dies on stage, attributing the cause of his fall to his overvaulting ambition: “Farewell vain World, and what’s most vain in it, Ambition.” (Dobson 56)

## II

It was as Richard III that David Garrick (1717-1779) first played in a Shakespearian role, on 19 October 1741 at Goodman's Fields in London. Thomas Davies, the prompter of the company, commented that "Mr. Garrick shone forth like a theatrical Newton; he threw new light on elocution and action." (Peter Holland, "The Age of Garrick," in *Shakespeare: An Illustrated Stage History*, p. 70) Like the generation before and generations after, the *Richard III* David Garrick performed in was not Shakespeare's original text, but Colley Cibber's version, "altered from Shakespeare, and cut for the Theatre-Royal, Drury-Lane." (Holland 71) Many painters of the day had produced paintings of him as Richard III, but it was William Hogarth's painting of the famous tent scene (1746) that made him immortal. An oil painting by Nathaniel Dance done in 1771 shows the moment when Richard/Garrick shouts, "A Horse! A Horse! My kingdom for a horse!" (Holland 71)

Garrick brought naturalism to acting, mixed with a great amount of tears and body gestures and voice modulations, and commenting on his role as Lear in 1758, Joseph Pittard commented that when Lear/Garrick goes mad, it is done so gradually that "You scarce see where he first begins, and yet find he is mad before *Kent* says, 'I fear'd 'twould come to this; his Wits are gone'." (Holland 83)

Garrick's famous role was as Hamlet played in a new version in December 1772, which had the fifth act reduced to only sixty lines from 800, and gone were the grave diggers, the burial of Ophelia and the duel between Hamlet and Laertes. The famous moment in it was 'his shocked reaction to the appearance of his father's ghost' and his hair standing on end at the terror of the sight, produced with the help of a special wig that used hydraulics to blow the hair. (Holland 73)

Garrick first appeared as Macbeth in 1744. At that time Davenant's version of *Macbeth* was used, with which Garrick was not happy. During that time Shakespearian scholarship was on the rise (Holland 71), and the editing of his texts became a more careful job, and Garrick wanted to take advantage of it. So he used the well-researched playtext by Lewis Theobald in 1740. But Garrick reworked on it and produced a version which still retained some changes by Davenant. Garrick included many songs, but the Porter scene had to be excised, so had to be the killing of Macduff's son or sons, as on-stage child murder could not be shown, and the scene in which Malcolm fakely presents himself as a tyrant to Macduff is also cut out. Garrick's Macbeth was still a moral one like that

of Davenant, whose “single line for the dying Macbeth, . . . was ‘Farewell, vain world, and what’s most vain in it, Ambition,’ but ‘the extent of the horror’ shown by Garrick, ‘and the minute depiction of the processes of death was wholly new’.” (Holland 88)

Garrick’s acting, punctuated by frequent pauses at critical moments—as at the dagger-in-the-air scene, or throwing a fixed look on Banquo’s ghost—was criticized, and contrasted with the ‘restless’ (Holland 71) style of James Quinn (Holland 71)<sup>4</sup> at the Covent Garden, but supported by the brilliant acting of Hannah Pritchard as Lady Macbeth, Garrick could realize his vision of marrying his acting with the naturalness that was to be found in the original Shakespearean text.

Though Garrick worked on numerous versions of adapted texts, his aim was to restore Shakespeare as much as possible. But coming to Macbeth’s dying speech, he did not only retain Davenant’s single line moral, quoted earlier but also made him ‘contemplate eternal damnation’. (Holland 87)

Garrick’s ending moral poem is this:

‘Tis done! The scene of life will quickly close.  
Ambition’s vain, delusive dreams are fled,  
And now I wake to darkness, guilt and horror.  
I cannot bear it! My soul is clogged with blood.  
I cannot rise! I dare not ask for mercy.  
It is too late, hell drags me down. I sink,  
I sink—Oh!—my soul is lost forever!  
Oh! [Dies.] (Holland 87)

A Macbeth made to speak like a Claudius! The poetic justice, so much valued by his friend Johnson that the bad be punished and the good be rewarded has been highlighted here. Garrick, to give another example of his cultural appropriation, makes Catherine in *The Taming of the Shrew*, but *Catherine and Petrucchio* in his version, speak this line in a reconciling mood: ‘Nay then I’m all unworthy of thy love, / And look with blushes on my former self.’ And Holland retorts, ‘Shakespeare’s Kate could never have blushed’. (Holland 80)

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<sup>4</sup> “Quin’s traditional style of delivery, rolling out ‘his heroics with an air of dignified indifference’”, (Holland), p. 71.

### III

As we come to John Kemble (1757-1823), we can see him taking the same approach to the last scene of *Macbeth*, as were taken by Davenant and Garrick before him. By that time the French Revolution had already taken place and Robespierre & Co. had committed regicide in France, so representing a king-killer on the stage in a sympathetic light was a challenge for him. Here again, as Bate suggests, the reactive mode of acting that accommodated moral reflection came to assist Kemble, as he did not only retain the ‘one-line farewell to ambition’ given by Davenant, but also presented a ‘slightly compressed version of Garrick’s speech:

‘Tis done! The scene of life will quickly close.  
Ambition’s vain delusive dreams are fled,  
And now I wake to darkness, guilt and horror.—  
I cannot rise:--I dare not ask for mercy—  
It is too late;--hell drags me down;--I sink,  
I sink;--my soul is lost for ever!—Oh!—Oh!—‘ (Holland 80)

It is noticeable that Kemble has omitted the line “I cannot bear it! My soul is clogged with blood,” possibly because that smacks too obviously of the religious association against which Kemble wants to highlight the political significance of Macbeth’s falling owing to king-killing rather than soul-killing.

### IV

In respect of stage conventions, we have noted the introduction of the proscenium arches, which made picture-stage or perspective scenery possible to be put in place. Davenant also used the discovery scene behind the proscenium arch and the forestage open for delivering soliloquies and asides. That was a technical development that actually started with the functioning of the Blackfriars from 1608 by Shakespeare’s King’s Men, for which he wrote the play *Coriolanus* to be purposely used for the private theatre stage.

The other major development with the indoor public playhouse was for women to enter the acting world. A spectator’s quizzical expression can be noted over this transition:

“I come, unknown to any of the rest,  
To tell you news; I saw the lady dresses!  
The woman plays today, mistake me not,  
No man in gown, or page in petticoat . . .” (Dobson 48)

This reaction was shown to a performance of *Othello* at Clarke Market on 8 December 1660, and the lady actor indicated was probably Anne Marshall as Desdemona, possibly the first actress on the English stage.

The arrival of the women on the stage got encouraged by a patent passed by Charles I allowing women to participate in the court masques. (Dobson 49) Thereby, from then onwards the English stage became a two-sex stage. And Charles II while signing the patent for Thomas Killigrew added that ‘we do likewise permit and give leave that all women’s parts be acted in either of the said two companies for the time to come may be performed by women.’ (Dobson 49)

So there appeared on the stage, starting with Anne Marshall as Desdemona, followed by such great performers over the next two hundred years as Lady Betterton (Betterton’s wife), Anne Bracegirdle (their adopted daughter), Hannah Pritchard, Sarah Siddons (John Kemble’s older sister), Eliza O’Neill, Ellen Terry, etc. Nell Gwyn, the gifted comedienne, became Charles’s one of the many mistresses. Lady Betterton was sometime insane, for which it is supposed that she could do Lady Macbeth perfectly. Hannah Pritchard was taller than Garrick, and they paired as Macbeths inducing an amused feeling among the audience. Sarah Siddons introduced the empathetic acting, while Eliza O’Neill pleased the audience in her role as Juliet by acting naturally.

But more importantly, there had arisen a conceptual difference with the female roles done by boy actors on the Elizabethan stage and women playing the female roles at the subsequent times. It is because for Shakespeare the disguise device or transvestism was not only a means to an end, but also an end in itself, which provided him the scope to exploit the transitional process as a potential part of the theme.

Janet Dillon comments in her essay, “Shakespeare and the English Stage Comedy”, that ‘while Neronis and other pre-Shakespearean heroines such as Greene’s *Dorothea* disguise themselves in male attire in order to achieve their ends (or critically speaking further the plot), Lyly and Shakespeare are more interested in pausing to experiment with what crossdressing feels like, what its implications are, and how the audience

might position themselves psychically and emotionally to view it. (Dutton and Howard 11)

We will soon take up Hugh Quarshie's study of *Othello*, but here we quote a passage from him that elaborates on what we have broached above about the loss of a potential dramatic technique when theatre transitioned from the one-sex performance to the two-sex performance: "Clearly, there are moments when the observance of conventions natural to an Elizabethan actor creates difficulties for the modern actor and audience. It seems to me, for example, that a female role played by a young boy, and seen by an audience that knows he's a young boy impersonating a woman, has a significance quite different from the same role played by a woman. The actor can step in and out of character, a little like the pantomime dame: a male performer commenting wryly on the popular conventions of femininity. But the actress, I suggest, is obliged to play with irony, as when Portia in *Julius Caesar* is made to say: 'Ay me! How weak a thing / The heart of woman is!'" (2.4.41-2). (Quarshie 11-12)

The very in-between state of existence in being a hermaphrodite was what Shakespeare exploited as a dramatic tool. We will give two examples to clarify what it means.

In *The Merchant of Venice* when Jessica is running out of her father's house dressed as a boy she feels comfortable for it is being night, so they cannot see her wearing a boy's dress, probably wearing short pants thus exposing her legs: 'Here, catch this casket, it is worth the pains. / I am glad it's night you do not look on me' (2.6.34-5). Here the point is that the original Jessica was a boy-turned-girl and then-turned boy again. He must have pretended to feel embarrassed as a girl to walk out into a boy's dress, and the night time therefore was helping her (him) to hide that embarrassment.<sup>5</sup> Another example of in-betweenness is the famous utterance by Cleopatra, when she is apprehensive of the intention of Caesar and believes that Caesar wants to capture her in order to put her on

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<sup>5</sup> The second suggestion, a stage fact not related to this issue, is that through the utterance of the word 'night' Jessica has helped the audience to imagine the scene as taking place in the night, which was an effective stage instruction to be materialized on the bare open stage of the Globe in the daylight.

public display in Rome as his prime achievement. She asks her maids, Charmian and Iras whether they want to be boy'd<sup>6</sup> in Rome: "Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness / I'th' posture of a whore" (5.2.260-61), by which she means the tension created due to the fact of having to play both the sexes by one person—the boy actor to play the urchin playing the queen.

Two more reactions may be mentioned here to have an idea about the problematization of the theme when women assumed the female roles. I would like to mention the famous painting of Ophelia done by John Everett Millais in 1852, which is one of the most popular Pre-Raphaelite paintings, but which has been criticized by Elaine Showalter, in her essay, "Representing Ophelia: Women, Madness, and the Responsibilities of Feminist Criticism," as being "cruelly indifferent to the woman's death." (Drakakis 287) While Showalter praises Ellen Terry for her role as Ophelia in a Henry Irving production in 1878 as she brought her out of the Ophelias appearing as lunatic patients in the clinic and portrayed her in 'feminist terms'—'a consistent psychological study in sexual intimidation, a girl terrified of her father, of her lover, and of life itself' (Showalter 289), Ellen Terry herself, however, in her notebook wrote about Ophelia that "Her brain, her soul, and her body are pathetically weak" (Tobin 60), which may slightly question Showalter's understanding of her (Terry's) role as Ophelia.

On the other hand, the cross-dressing reversed was successfully implemented by the French actress Sarah Bernhardt who played as Hamlet in 1887 at the age of fifty-three, and said that a female actress indeed was ideal for the prince as she "can combine the light carriage of youth with the mature thought of a man." (Tobin 58)

## V

If Ophelia was stereotyped into a clinical patient over the centuries, which was very different from how Shakespeare drew her, then there are other characters which are also a subject of popular myths rather than how Shakespeare drew them. Othello and Shylock are major examples.

As was said earlier, we will do this part of discussion as the last segment of our essay:

First one is by Hugh Quarshie, who in his paper, "Hesitations on

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<sup>6</sup> 'boy'd': this is the only example in the English Language where the word 'boy' is used as a verb.



Othello,” delivered as Hudson Strode Lectures on Race and Class, and later on distributed worldwide as “Second Thoughts About *Othello*” as International Shakespeare Association Occasional Paper No. 7 held that Shakespeare wrote *Othello* by resorting to racial prejudices of the time and made him do the wife killing because he was a Moor with which Barbarism was naturally associated in the Elizabethan imagination. Quarshie refers to the visit of Abel el-Ouahed ben Messaoud Anoun Mohammed and his entourage (sixteen of them) to Queen Elizabeth’s court in 1600-01 . . . by way of confirming that “the popular views of the Moors as Barbarians, conflate[d] the idea of the uncivilized savage with the actual native of the Barbary Coast.” (Quarshie 10) Interestingly enough, Charles Edelman, whose essay, “Which is the Jew that Shakespeare Knew?: Shylock on the Elizabethan Stage,” we will take up for comment in a while, has referred exactly to this same visit by the Moor, whose portrait hangs in the Shakespeare Institute at Stratford-upon-Avon, as an evidence of the English queen’s monetary concerns preceding her racial concerns. (*Shakespeare Survey* 52: 102)

His contention is that “in adapting and elaborating Cinthio’s story about a jealous, uxoricidal Moor, Shakespeare was endorsing a racist convention’. (Quarshie 3) And his second contention is that performance interpretation and textual criticism has added to the racial dimension rather than deflate it: ‘performance conventions and conventional interpretations have further reinforced racist views’. (Quarshie 9)

Criticizing such critics as Bradley, Anthony Storr, Norman Sanders and Kenneth Tynan, Quarshie maintains that they all have finally subscribed to the racist view that ‘Othello behaves as he does because he’s black’. (Quarshie 23)

Being afraid of sharing the racist views latent in the play, Quarshie had refrained from taking that part as ever and recommends that a black actor can only play Othello if the text is rewritten from a non-racist position. While he suggests a formula how that can be done, he ends the essay by quipping that it won’t be a Shakespearean text then: ‘But, you may say, that’s another *Othello*, not Shakespeare’s. That’s rather the point, isn’t it?’ (Quarshie 23)

## VI

Charles Edelman’s essay on Shylock is quite the opposite to what has been said by Quarshie about Othello. Edelman tries to argue that though it is supposed that Shakespeare created Shylock as a Jewish villain in order

to feed the popular expectations, a close reading of the play shows that he did not mean him to be a villain, rather he wanted to present him as a tragic character.

This essay has sprung from the observation that actors starting with Charles Macklin, followed by Edmund Kean, Henry Irving and Laurence Olivier in the modern time, have portrayed Shylock as a tragic character that goes against the vein of having to see Shylock as a villainous Jew like Barabas of Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*. Though in Shakespeare's time the case of Dr. Lopez, a converted Jew-Christian, executed after being suspected as a conspirator against the life of the queen, had shaped into a strong anti-Semitic feeling in England, nowhere in the play, *Merchant of Venice*, has this been alluded to, neither has any reference being made to Shylock being associated with 'Christ-killers, sorcerers, ritual murderers, crucifiers of children, or host-desecrators'. (Edelman 101)

That is, what Quarshie thinks about Othello, Edelman thinks the opposite about Shylock--he does whatever he does because he is Shylock, not because he is a Jew. On the count of usury, Edelman frees Shylock by establishing the fact that the word 'usury' is never mentioned in the play, and secondly, historically, there were Christian usurers too, including Shakespeare's father, John Shakespeare. (Edelman 105)

Edelman's last point is to do with a stage convention. To portray Shylock in a sympathetic light, the speech that comes in the way is his utterance: "How like a fawning publican he looks. / I hate him for he is a Christian . . ." (1.3.39-40). That is, Shylock is a Christian-hater. This speech is either produced on the stage as an aside, which indirectly proves Shylock to be in unholy alliance with the Devil, or as a soliloquy, to reflect on his inner agonies. According to Edelman, this difficulty of producing the speech in presence of Bassanio has arisen from the obstruction created by the proscenium arch, which creates unwarranted divisions between delivery locations on the stage. Whereas on the open stage of the Globe theatre it was possible for Shylock to produce the lines even in the presence of Bassanio without letting him hear it. That form of rendering between a soliloquy and an aside is not possible on a stage with the proscenium arch.

The difference between Quarshie's and Edelman's views is that the former reads *Othello* from a generalized perspective, while the latter understands *The Merchant of Venice* from a non-generalized paradigm.

That is, if we view Shylock from Quarshie's point of view, Shakespeare would surely be considered as having portrayed him from a racist paradigm, and on the other hand, if *Othello* is read from Edelman's critical angle, Shakespeare would become a non-racist playwright.

This is nothing new to say that Shakespeare would be interpreted differently within and beyond the boundaries of the ages and societies, as Cassius says in *Julius Caesar*: "How many ages hence / Shall this our lofty scene be acted over, / In stages unborn and accents yet unknown" (3.1.121-123), but the point in constant conflict is to attempt to recreate Shakespeare as he had lived and written, performed and transacted on the one hand, as modern playtexts (the Norton, the Evans Shakespeare Editions, for example) do, and to acclimatize him in one's own conditions, as Davenant, Garrick (in spite of his attempt to re-establish Shakespeare in the original form), Kemble, and the thousands of actors, directors and film makers are trying to do, with the risk of misinterpretation and misconceived adaptation.

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# Sucharita's Position in Rabindranath Tagore's *Gora*

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This article focuses on the position of Sucharita, one of the main female characters in Rabindranath's *Gora*, written and serialized between 1907 and 1909. When critics laud Sucharita's intellectual ability and critical faculty, they overlook her conformity to the nationalistic construction of a modern woman. After his one-month imprisonment, when *Gora* returns home, he realizes for the first time the necessity of including women in the nationalistic mission. The omniscient narrator describes *Gora*'s feelings about Sucharita, "The womanhood of India was revealed to him in the figure of Sucharita, and he regarded her as the manifestation of all that was sweet and pure, loving and virtuous in the homes of his Motherland" (Tagore, *Gora* 272). In the narrative language, Sucharita becomes the "incarnation of the grace which shone upon India's children, served the sick, consoled the afflicted, and consecrated with love even the most insignificant" (*Gora* 272; emphasis added). She becomes the embodiment "of the power which never forsakes the meanest of us in our sorrows and misfortunes, which never despises us, and although entitled to worship offers its devotion to even the most unworthy amongst us" (*Gora* 272; emphasis added). Her praise continues: she represents a dedicated person whose "skillful and beautiful hands put the seal of sacrifice on all our works. ..." (*Gora* 272; emphasis added). Conforming to the discourse of nationalism as we found, the narration here fixes some attributes—such as love, devotion, providing consolation, and sacrifice—as the virtues of a woman. Though these qualities are worthy of admiration, by essentializing these particularly to be feminine, the narrative decides and restricts the activities and space of women. It may seem that the text elevates the woman to the position of a deity ("incarnation"), but it is a deity whose functions are predetermined and limited to those of healer and nurturer. Through *Gora*, the narrator here expects Sucharita to perform the tasks of sacrificing self, nursing the

distressed, and loving the downtrodden. Sucharita is not choosing her actions; rather, being a woman, she is expected to accomplish the actions that Gora determines for her. Thus, a woman may receive a sanctified position being "consecrated with love," but must suffer the restraint of subjectivity within the frame of the expected or imposed essentialized feminine image. Very disturbingly Rabindranath personally approves the division of space and action based on gender (Azad 116-27). In the poem "Sonara Bandhana," Rabindranath addresses the woman as "gnhalakshmi" ("The Goddess of Home") who is deeply tied with the virtues of "sneha" ("affection"), "prem" ("love"), "karuna" ("pity"), and "sheba" ("providing service") (Rabindra-racanabali 3: 26- 27). Analyzed in this context, it clearly shows that Rabindranath articulates his notion about specific gender through the narration and character of Gora and thus plays the role of an accomplice to specify women's function. Later, we will again find that Rabindranath's fictional voice in Gora fails to conceal his subjective views on gender and thus loses objectivity. In some places in the novel, Gora shows Rabindranath's tendency to view women with the values traditionally imposed on women. For example, Gora invites Sucharita, "For my India, as a man, I can only work and if necessary die, but who, except you, can light the lamp of welcome to her? If you stand aloof the service of India can never be beautiful" (Gora 313-14). In the duties required to form a nation, the role of the man is that of a worker, an active agent, who can choose to lay down his life. But the woman's role is decorative and symbolic. Her contribution includes passively "welcome [ing]" or receiving the country, holding out a lamp and beautifying the nation. It reminds us of the cultural role of women to make a home graceful. We can also sense that Gora's invitation reflects Rabindranath's vision about the grihalakshmi. But the woman's proposed activity of welcoming and ornamenting the land appears to be indolent and unassertive compared to the man's commitment to work and even, if necessary, to die for the nation. The third-person narrator sketches Sucharita in images of shade and silence. Apparently, the image patterns reflect a New Woman's modesty and gentle demeanor. For example, in chapter 20, while listening to Haran's reading of an English article, Sucharita shades "her eyes from the glare of the lamp with a palm-leaf fan" (Gora 98). In the same chapter, when Gora is engaged in debate with Haran, "Sucharita was gazing at Gora from behind the shelter of her fan ..." (Gora 99). Here the fan is not merely an object to protect Sucharita's eyes from the light. It is also a screen behind which Sucharita can keep modest distance from direct eye contact

with the gaze of a male, such as Haran or Gora. But Sucharita's placement behind the shadow of a fan denotes her diffidence. She is attracted to Gora's charismatic personality but she is under the "shelter" of the fan. She cannot come forward to have an open look at Gora. While indicating her bashful nature, the narrative voice ensures her self-resignation: "If she had been conscious that she was staring at Gora she would doubtless have felt ashamed, but she was utterly oblivious of herself" (Gora 99). Sucharita, whom critics praise for her critical faculty, becomes unobservant of her own opinion. She engrosses herself so much in the charm of Gora's oratory that she is "oblivious" or "aatmablsmrta" to her own presence. One might argue that this is the beginning of Sucharita's love for Gora. But, in my view, this is also the beginning of Sucharita's self-effacement under the supposedly feminine attributes of modesty and love. It is not merely Sucharita's intelligence, earned through her education and Western learning from Paresh Babu, that Gora admires; rather he is also impressed that Western influence, through education and public socialization, and though imparting her with keen intelligence, fails to make her undomesticated. In chapter 20 when the text describes Gora's observation of Sucharita, the implied narrative voice seems to share Gora's elation at finding a perfect embodiment of the feminine virtues: Where was the least trace of the immodest forwardness which he [Gora] had always associated with educated girls? No doubt her [Sucharita's] expression was one of bright intelligence, but how beautifully softened it was by her modest shyness. Her brow was pure and stainless like a glimpse of autumn sky: her lips were silent, but how like a tender bud with the soft curves of the unspoken word (Gora 101). The quotation here records the removal of Gora's misconception about educated woman. Through Gora's new realization, the implied narrator imparts the message that the educated New Woman does not mean to be arrogant. The New Woman also possesses delicate traits such as modesty and softness or in other words, *hridayasampad* as Rabindranath has described elsewhere. But paradoxically, through the praise of an essentialized feminine virtue (modesty), the narrator impedes the operation of Sucharita's selfhood, for she has no voice besides the voice of Gora. Her lips are silent with the "unspoken word," "anuchchaiita katha".<sup>8</sup> If her silent lips indicate her humility, they also characterize her unassertiveness. Indeed, the qualities that the narration, impelled by Gora and also Rabindranath, picks out for fulsome praise themselves exemplify the passivity they impose upon Sucharita. The appreciation of Sucharita's feminine virtues in the text conforms to the

patriarchal ideology of ascribing fixed or pliable attributes to a woman. The image of Sucharita's silence recurs in the narration repeatedly. A list of examples can be drawn: "When Gora saw that Sucharita listened to him without attempting to make any answer his mind was filled with compassion ..." (Gora 295). "As with these parting words he [Gora] left the room the very air seemed to tremble for a long time after he had gone, and Sucharita remained sitting motionless like a statue" (Gora 301). "She [Sucharita] merely suffered in silence without finding any remedy" (Gora 312). "For a long time she sat with her hands in her lap, still and silent like an image in a picture" (Gora 317). "Sucharita made no reply to this, but that she was ready to rely upon him to the full was manifest even in her silence" (Gora 330). This series of quotations emphasizing Sucharita's silence may reflect her calm and composed nature, but in most cases her silence preceded by Gora's long and powerful speeches implies her unchallenging and sometimes compliant spirit. I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter that the narrative device of this novel demotes the major woman characters to subordinate status. As I show in the following and in next sections, sometimes the equivocal meanings of words and situational irony in the story demonstrate the working of discriminating gender politics in the text. Another of Rabindranath's novels—*The Home and the World*, which is my concern in the next chapter—also bears words and images, the uncertain meanings of which expose the heroine to an ambiguous, often subjugated position. Moreover, we also see in this chapter that in other places the description or representation of woman in the text manifests her yielding and vulnerable image. It is obvious that Sucharita's company enlarges Gora's views, especially about women's role in the national space. However, ironically, the novel presents Sucharita as a passive listener to Gora's preaching. When Gora discusses religious and national topics with her, Sucharita's reaction is mostly inquiring—receptive but rarely argumentative. The narration describes her in these words: "Sucharita listened with bowed head, her heart palpitating to find Gora addressing her specially, with such great eagerness" (Gora 103). Elsewhere, "Sucharita remained lost in thought awhile, and finding her silent, Gora went on...(Gora 104). Apparently, the image of her bowed head (*natamukh* implies both the concentration of her thoughts to Gora's words and also the expected modesty of a "*bhadramahila*" ("respectable woman"; Chatterjee 628) before a male stranger. But, with her "bowed head" and obliviousness of self, surely she appears to the readers to be intellectually defenseless before Gora's eloquent spirit. The image of her



bowed head also recurs later in the novel. In some examples, Sucharita's bowed head seems to denote her loyalty, obedience, or dissatisfaction. But as we will see, it conveys other meanings as well. The readers find Sucharita "listening with her head bowed" (Gora 296) to Gora's enthusiastic speeches about patriotism and immediately asking him for direction of her action. Here the gesture of a bowed head apparently shows her loyalty to the leader of a patriotic mission. In another example, on hearing Gora's support for idol worshipping, Sucharita "did not answer, but remained with head bent low" (Gora 311). As a Brahmo girl, Sucharita does not believe in the idol worship that Gora's Hindu practice requires. The meaning of her silence and bowed head is here a humble gesture of her dissenting belief about religious practice. But the readers do not find her expressing her objection in strong terms or even verbally. In both examples, Sucharita's loyal and humble gesture of a bowed head also shows her acceptance of Gora's authority over her. Of all the women Sucharita employs her intellectual faculty the most. In an example we are told, "These were not words [Gora's words] which Sucharita could be expected fully to understand, but the first tide of impending realisation sets in strongly, and the realisation that life is not confined within the bonds of family or sect overwhelmed her with a painful force" (Gora 104). The unidentified narrator exposes Sucharita to a wider intellectual domain beyond the teachings of her father, Paresch Babu, or her potential husband, Haran Babu. She also begins to develop her intellectual capacity with her new "realisation." But she fails to swim in the "first tide of impending realisation;" rather, its "painful force" submerges her. Again, in the narrator's view, Sucharita loses agency. Looking closely at the semantic choices of the narration, it is evident that Rabindranath's narrative device presents Gora before the end of the novel not only as an enthusiastic nationalist, but also as a strong male subduing this intelligent and educated New Woman, Sucharita. For instance, in chapter 23, the unidentified narrator is sympathetic to her confused intellectual state, but gives her no defense to overcome it. Failing to resist the living spirit of Gora's words associated with the "power of faith" (Gora 122), Sucharita succumbs to him emotionally. The narrator asks rhetorically, "How could she have the heart to raise her hand against him [Gora] in rejection?" (Gora 122). The remark is meant to indicate Sucharita's love for Gora, which begins to bloom at this point in the novel. Nevertheless through this question, the narrative voice welcomes Gora's authority over Sucharita. It establishes the restriction imposed by Gora's influential speeches on Sucharita's heart and hands, the organs of her

individual thought and action. Sucharita's life choices are influenced by male opinions. Some critics, such as Sarada and Bimanbehari Majumdar, find her to be a silent rebel, especially in her refusal to meet Kailash, the potential groom selected by her aunt. But for the most part the influential men in her life control her choices. Her rebellion is fragile before Gora and Paresh Babu. Initially, Gora's militancy creates repugnance in Sucharita thus indicating some degree of independence. But very soon, being overwhelmed by his verbal fervor, she turns away from many of her lifelong beliefs. After having intellectual discussions with Gora about country and religion, Sucharita begins to change her own views. The text notes Sucharita's exclamation to herself: "'How insignificant my life has been,' she felt. 'What I thought of as certain up to now has become full of doubt; what I have been doing every day seems meaningless'" (Gora 119). It is noteworthy that Sucharita chooses the passive position for herself. Sucharita feels secure with Gora, as expressed by her acceptance of him as her "guru" or master (Gora 335). Sucharita is willing to serve the nation, but the shape of her work depends on Gora's instruction. The narrative records, "She felt that Gora ought, at such a time, to come to her and give her his commands, and show her the way" (Gora 358-59). She willingly accepts her position as a subordinate needing direction. Overwhelmed by Gora's preaching of Hindu nationalism, she comes out of her long-practiced Brahmo faith and confesses to her foster-father, Paresh Babu, "Look here, father, I tell you the truth when I say that I am really a Hindu, though before this I could never have got myself to acknowledge it. Now I say, without any hesitation, and even with emphasis, that I am a Hindu!" (Gora 354-55). Upon Paresh Babu's inquiry about her new faith, Sucharita informs him that she "read widely on this subject and had many discussions on it" (Gora 355). But her information sources are actually interviews with Gora and articles written and supplied by him. A most unsettling part of the narration regarding Sucharita's religious transformation from Brahmoism to Hinduism is the implied narrator's indeterminate attitude toward nationalism. Gora's view of religion-based nationalism is the narrator's object of criticism. But the narrative device does not direct any indictment to Sucharita's conversion when she embraces Gora's philosophy. We can see the course of Sucharita's religious conversion in two ways. First, Sucharita's conversion exhibits conflict between the Brahmo and Hindu faiths, Western and Eastern ideas, and tradition and modernity on the evolving stage of Indian nationalism. In this view, the sequence of her progress— her initial repugnance toward Hindu

idolatry, her emerging consciousness about India's heritage as gradually awakened by Gora's preaching, her acceptance of the Hindu faith, her simultaneous acknowledgement to Brahmo Paresch Babu as her father, and finally her approval of Binoy and Lolita's inter-communal wedding—traces a balancing between multiple faiths in a common space. Second, her journey records mental confusion, indecisiveness, and intellectual dependence of an educated woman who, unlike Harimohini and Barodasundari, ought to have deeper critical faculties. In the following paragraphs, I discuss the latter interpretation of Sucharita's journey through some extracts. Gora's arguments in favour of the Hindu caste system begin to alter Sucharita's repulsive feeling about Hinduism and, until Paresch Babu shows her a counter-rationale, she undergoes tremendous inner turmoil. The omniscient voice reports, "As Paresch Babu was speaking, she felt for the time relieved of her internal conflict.... It was for the same reason that she now felt this restless desire in her heart to be constantly taking shelter under Paresch Babu's wing, as she had done when a child" (Gora 121). Sucharita here seems to find temporary mental relief through a healthy discussion with Paresch Babu about Gora's views. Like a "child" she learns from her father about differing views. But unconsciously, she is inclined to be "relieved" by Paresch Babu's fatherly assurance; she is relying on Paresch Babu's intellectual support. In seeking intellectual shelter, the suggestion presented is that of a child, associating her with helplessness and dependency and thus reinforcing the view of Sucharita's intellectual subjection. Another example of Sucharita's marginalization in the text is evident in her decision to marry the Brahmo fanatic, Haran Babu, while she is in a stage of spiritual vacillation. In the story the readers see her exercising her own will to choose her groom, but the decision itself is presented in an objectionable way. She seeks to shift her dependence from Paresch Babu to Haran Babu by "clutching at any support for setting at rest her distracted condition" (Gora 127) and "shap[ing] her life according to his [Haran's] ideas" (Gora 128). She is again presented as a weak, unstable human being, groping for support and strength outside of herself and her own faculties. After Sucharita becomes familiar with Gora's ideas, "the conflict which was taking place, at every step, between the habits and customs which had their roots in her very childhood, and the new life towards which Gora was drawing her," as we are told, "made her restless" (Gora 311). The choice of the word "restless" ("asthīr") reveals the inner anxiety that she undergoes because of this spiritual conflict. However, "restless" also connotes unsteadiness and inconsistency, mirroring

Sucharita's failure to show any firm belief of her own. Later, when Sucharita takes Gora as her master and echoes his teachings to Paresh Babu, she cannot maintain her own stand rationally. Rather, her responses to Paresh Babu's inquiry into the drawbacks of Hindu society are emotional: "'I understand nothing about that,' said Sucharita in a pained voice. 'If this is true, that to-day all are forsaking it [Hindu society], then at such a time I at least will not forsake it [Hindu society]. Because we are children of this unfortunate time we must all the more stand by our society in its distress'" (Gora 357). Sucharita, who has already crossed the long road of spiritual tension and finally accepted the Hindu faith, recognizes herself as a child of restless times. By the word "child," she may mean the intellectual helplessness of an individual in a transitional time in history, but like a "child," she also acts unreasonably here. Indeed, like a child, she claims to "understand nothing" of Paresh Babu's rational refutations of her positions. After she offers herself in response to Gora's appeal to work for India, "she asked herself why Gora had not put her to the test, and called her to undertake some well-nigh impossible task—in the whole of his party was there a single man who could, like herself, sacrifice everything so easily?" (Gora 359). Apparently the narration describes a woman's eager desire to be involved in work for her nation. Nevertheless, there is a disturbing implication here. While "sacrifice" conveys the dedicated nature of Sucharita's patriotism, it also has the connotation of renouncement. Thus through this word, she is associated with the effacement of herself. Rather than actively choosing how to channel and prove her patriotic dedication, she is prepared to surrender her active agency through a "test" that she passively receives to prove her ability. In the narrator's presentation, Sucharita's patriotism is to be approved rather than proved. To summarize, diction such as "restless," "internal conflict," "child," "clutching support," "understanding nothing," and "distracted condition" in the extracts presented here reflect not only the conflict between the Hindu and the Brahmo faiths, but also identify a New Woman's mental turbulence, her intellectual subjection to an influential man, and, finally, the surrender of herself. Sucharita has received a liberal education but she is not allowed in the narrative to exercise self-determination that comes with that education. She is in a dilemma until she chooses among options presented by males, whether the option is Paresh Babu's affectionate teaching, Haran Babu's wedding proposal, or Gora's masculine appeal to rethink India. Words such as "sacrifice," "self-forgetfulness," "disciple," and "devotion" are used to reflect Sucharita's

character throughout the text. Nationalistic discourse may celebrate a character like Sucharita for these essentialized feminine virtues and, within its framework, a New Woman is allowed to be more educated, enlightened, and rational than women of lower classes or of the previous generations, such as the working girl, Lachmi, or the deprived widow, Harimohini. However the material changes effected by education cannot erode the spiritual characteristics expected from her. Ultimately, independent power lies with the male in the ideology of male-dominated nationalistic discourse (which ideology Gora and Rabindranath's narrative device share in complicity), which constructs this spiritual image of the woman and denies her autonomy. That is why Gora can be certain that Sucharita expects his "summons" (Gora 376).

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# Imagination is What Gives Shape to Reality: An Overview of Wallace Stevens' poetry

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## **Abstract:**

Wallace Stevens, a twentieth century American poet, is celebrated for a particular sort of abstract quality in his poems that, arguably, originates in an ingenuous interplay of imagination and reality. The relation between imagination and reality, in Stevens' poems, is very complex. Stevens' views towards and perception of the relation between imagination and reality are often contrary to what is conventionally thought of. To Stevens, reality can be either factual or invented in the imagination. He appears to be a severe critic of factual reality and to be inclined towards a perception that reality is what is imagined. He emphasises the fact that reality can be represented, and even produced, by imagination. This paper tends to examine the complex relation between imagination and reality through a study of his most representative poems. Furthermore, the paper intends to state that imagination and reality are not two opposite poles; rather they are always in an essential interplay.

**Keywords:** Imagination, reality, abstraction, epistemology, multi-perspectivism, fragmentation, trans-creation

The core concern in Wallace Stevens' poetry seems to be a sorting out of the complex structure of reality. Throughout his writing career, he has professed the imaginative perception of reality. To him, the relation between imagination and reality is, in a sense, a relation between thought and thing, to be more specific, a relation between the perceiving mind and the object perceived. Most of his representative poems contain the fact that imagination and reality are not counterparts; rather they can be in a harmonious interplay. This reality-imagination complex keeps Stevens and his poems engaged. It is the conflict between the moonlit imagination of the night and the sunlit reality of the day that draws attention of this modernist poet. The reference to the imagination-reality complex is a persistent issue in Stevens' poems. But Stevens does never put one on the other. He, rather, continuously and emphatically, states the inseparability of the two. To pour this fact in words, Christopher McGowan writes thus in his well-known book *The Twentieth*

*Century American Poetry* “Stevens took no firm position on the final relationship of the two; his poems, instead, explore propositions and suppositions about the balance, more playfully in his earlier poems, and more meditatively in his mature works” (McGowan 42). It will be, therefore, dangerously misleading to try to singly define the relation and relative statuses of imagination and reality.

The external reality does not mean anything to Wallace Stevens until it comes in contact with imagination. “What we see is what we think” (CP 459), writes Stevens. It is imagination that orders and shapes reality. Stevens does not have anything to do with an alien, extraneous reality. Reality, for Stevens, is not a static object. It is, rather, an ever changing fact. It is the act of the beholder to make sense of the existing objects he is beholding. To make sense of the world, therefore, is a perpetual act of imagination. In this regard, few lines of the famous poem, “The Idea of Order at Key West”, included in Stevens’ famous collection of poems named *Ideas of Order*, can be mentioned here:

Oh! Blessed rage for order, pale Ramon,  
The maker’s rage to order words of the sea,  
Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starred,  
And of ourselves and of our origins,  
In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds. (CP 130)

In the aforementioned lines, the poet refers to a kind of rage that tends to find order in, and make sense of, the things that are outside our mind. The poet is, most probably, of the view that through such a rage reality can come into being. Few lines of the poem “Another weeping woman” can be relevant too. Stevens writes thus –

The magnificent cause of being,  
The imagination, the one reality  
In this imagined world. (CP 25)

For Stevens, to make sense of the world is to construct a worldview through an active exercise of the imagination. It is not a mechanical task; rather it is a passionate engagement in finding order and meaning. Stevens writes in his essay “Imagination as Value”, included in *The Necessary Angel* that imagination is the mechanism by which we unconsciously conceptualise the normal patterns of life, and reason is the mechanism by which we consciously conceptualise. And poetry is a re-creation of reality by the imagination, and this re-creation is a complex work.

Wallace Stevens defines poetry in his poems. To him, poetry is a fiction created by the imagination. Stevens sees this fiction as the supreme fiction which seems to capture, if only for a moment, something actual and real.

For Wallace Stevens, the world is, like poetry, also supreme fiction since he does not have any belief in the given reality. The poet's reality is a subjective reality. With the supreme power of imagination he can re-create the reality. This fact has been proclaimed in his well celebrated poem "Angel Surrounded by Paysans" included in *The Auroras of Autumn*:

I am the angel of reality,  
  
Seen for a moment standing in the door.  
  
.....  
I am the necessary angel of earth,  
Since, in my sight, you see the earth again,  
Cleared of its stiff and stubborn, man-locked set,  
And, in my hearing, you hear its tragic drone  
Rise liquidly in liquid lingerings,  
Like watery words awash;(CP 496-7)

Wallace Stevens, thus, declares himself as a "necessary angel" who is supposed to create a necessary fiction, which, as he asserts in one of his poems, is the supreme fiction too. Moreover, to him, the world is also a fiction since it does not have any meaning in itself unless anyone makes of a meaning out of it applying his imaginative perception. Stevens, therefore, seems to acclaim that life consists not of facts, but of fictions. Everything is re-created by the perceiving mind. As such, poetry appears to be a wilful belief to him.

Wallace Stevens had a bent to philosophising things and happenings too. His poems are way too much informed and defined by his philosophising the reality around. His poems contain, to say, an epistemological query. Considering Stevens as a speculative poet, David Baker in his essay, "Feeling Thinking", writes "when one speculates, one takes or aims at a stance, and goes purposefully in search of the end of that stance. This shows Stevens as an epistemologist. He shares with philosophers a questioning: what do we know, and how do we know what we know?"

Wallace Stevens, in most of his poems, deals with the fundamental problem of epistemology, that is, the relation between thought and things. In this regard, professor Simon Critchley, writes in his wonderful book, *Things Merely Are: Philosophy in the Poetry of Wallace Stevens* that the poetry of

Wallace Stevens “allows us to recast what is arguably the fundamental concern of philosophy, namely the relation between thought and things or mind and world...the basic problem of epistemology.” (Chritchley 4). In most of his poems, he deals with the philosophical questions like, “How is knowledge possible?” and “How knowledge can be gained through our experiences?” And he often comes up with propositions and attempts to answer these questions in his poems. For example, in one of his most representative poems “The Idea of Order at Key West”, he writes:

And when she sang, the sea,  
Whatever self it had, became the self  
That was her song, for she was the maker. Then we,  
As we beheld her striding there alone,  
Knew that there never was a world for her  
Except the one she sang and, singing, made. (CP 129-30)

The aforementioned poem contains the idea that there is no given reality or external world for human being except the one that is constructed by his/her experience of it. So, the reality is constructed by one's perception of it. And to perceive the reality imagination is instrumental. A title of his poem, “What We See is What We Think” can be stated as the gist of his philosophical position regarding the imagination-reality complex. To Stevens, thought figures forth the thing. More specifically, imagination orders and shapes, defines and determines reality.

Stevens is an abstractionist in his philosophical ideas. The manifestation of his philosophical concepts in his poetry is also very abstract. A careful and meditative reading of his poems make us think of him as neither a realist nor an idealist as he never denies the material existence of the world, nor does he believe that it is possible to gain any certain knowledge of it. For him, poetry, besides being a supreme fiction, is the lone possible way to know the world. It is the sole way to gain knowledge of the world. Thus, it is a kind of philosophy in its own way. Edward Ragg in his *Wallace Stevens and the Aesthetics of Abstraction* writes, ‘abstraction indicates neither the failure of the poet to adhere to reality nor the imagination's wilful distortion of reality, but a creative process where the idea of poetry inspires realized poems. (Ragg 59)

Though poetry helps us to recreate the reality, it suffers from the need of words to express the reality. Unhesitatingly, Stevens comes to say that poetry is the imagination of life and that poetry imitates the mind in the act of finding what will suffice. By understanding this ceaseless act of finding what will be sufficient, the poet recognises the universal fluctuation, which

is a result of the reality-imagination complex and is the locus of Stevens' poetry.

In an attempt to define poetry, Stevens writes in the title poem of arguably his most famous collection of poems *The Man with the Blue Guitar*:

Poetry is the subject of poem,  
From this the poem issues and  
To this returns. Between the two,  
Between issue and return, there is  
An absence in reality (CP 176)

This view of poetry of Stevens appears to determine the peculiar nature of his poetry. With such a view of poetry, Stevens also appears to be an heir to French poet Rimbaud, for whom, as for few other twentieth century English poets, "poetry is the subject of poem" from which the poem issues and to which it returns, and between this issuance and return there is an absence in, and eclipse of, reality. Most of Stevens' poems deal, directly or indirectly, with poetry, with what constitutes the poems and how it is constituted. Stevens contemplated this in his 1936 lecture at Harvard University titled "The Irrational Element in Poetry", and came to assert that one is always writing about two things at the same time in poetry — one is "the true subject" and the other is "the poetry of the subject".

Between these two things, Stevens adds, there is a kind of unending tensions. The emphasis, for Stevens, is, however, on the poetry of the subject, not the poetry itself. He, in fact, appears to never try to reproduce reality as a realist would like to do. In abandoning the realist tendency in poetry, Stevens is not alone; rather he shares this inclination with a number of poets writing in the first half of the twentieth century. "Abandoning this tendency" writes Angus J. Cleghorn in his book, *Wallace Stevens' poetics: The Neglected Rhetoric* (2000), "to transparently copy the external world allows a new multi-perspectivism in his poetry" (page 7). This very multi-perspectivism, the ability and tendency to see things from different possible perspectives, is one of the most important characteristic features of Stevens' poetry. According to Cleghorn, the multi-perspectivism is a by-product of the imagination-reality complex and it, eventually, results in a type of poetry where nature becomes a fragmented space and reality becomes an imagined, felt phenomenon. Multi-perspectivism, which might have been an outcome of the social-political complex of the early twentieth century, connects Stevens with the current that is modern poetry.

Fragmentation and an assertion of fragmentation are a reliable way to characterise modern poetry. Fragmentation, to put it in other words, is generated by a fading away of faith in the past. Representative of the twentieth century English poetry, Stevens' poems mark them by a sense of distrust on, and dissociation with, the past. For this modernist poet, past system of belief is no longer effective to understand or interpret the present world. Unlike some of his contemporaries who look back to past religions, myths and legends for meaning, Stevens rarely looks at the past for meaning or for solace. He finds neither consolation nor enlightenment in past mythologies, religious traditions, national narratives and cultural histories. To him, adherence to the past is a kind of threat to the mind seeking to relate itself to the present. Susan Wetson succinctly writes in *Wallace Stevens: An Introduction to the Poetry* (1977) that Stevens strives to "clear away all that intervenes between the perceiving mind and the world perceived presently" (Wetson 61).

Freedom is, for Stevens, the freedom from the past, from a longing for the past. Knowing this, the poet appears to take his farewell from everything that the past holds and everything with which the past makes one long for it. In the opening poem "Farewell to Florida" of his second collection, *Ideas of Order*, Stevens says about this farewell. In the romantic poem, Florida, a place, has turned to be a past for him like the gods and myths. The poet bids farewell to the past saying:

.....The moon  
Is at the mast-head and the past is dead.  
Her mind will never speak to me again.  
I am free. (CP 117)

In another farewell-poem, "Waving Adieu, Adieu, Adieu", Stevens represents the same view, though this time, of men's world. He writes thus:

In a world without heaven to follow, the stops  
Would be endings, more poignant than partings. (CP 127)

Stevens is content neither with the "lucid souvenir of the past" nor with the "airy dream of the future" (CP 132). Only the present, the harsh and fragmented yet palpable present, can satisfy the poet, and the poet, indeed, sings of the here and now.

To avoid surrendering to the past, Stevens prescribes the name of a unique quality, that is, nobility. If anything has nobility, it is supposed to be uncrowned by myths and gods. Stevens declares nobility to be an important characteristic of imagination. So, whoever, be he/she a poet or an artist, possesses this quality will be able to be a great creator as reality is reproduced by imagination and without nobility the power of imagination is impossible.

It is necessary to guard ourselves against what Stevens calls the pressure of the past. Stevens seems to say that we should resist the past so much so that it cannot overwhelm, deceive, distract or rule us. In this regard, Stevens writes in one of his well-known poems "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour":

This is, therefore, the in tensest rendezvous.  
It is in that thought that we collect ourselves,  
Out of all the indifferences, into one thing:

Within a single thing, a single shawl  
Wrapped tightly round us, since we are poor, a warmth,  
A light, a power, the miraculous influence.

Here, now, we forget each other and ourselves.  
We feel the obscurity of an order, a whole,  
A knowledge, that which arranged the rendezvous.

Within its vital boundary, in the mind. (CP 524)

To get rid of the past and its pressure on the perceiving mind, the mind has to be satisfied with the "obscurity of an order, a whole". Standing in a Godless world and faced with a world with an obscure order, we have to take refuge in imagination.

In a situation as such, where there is no past, we are left with the present. But what is present? What constitutes the present? Some of Stevens' most representative poems answer these questions. Stevens, as we know, is a poet of the world and, to him, the world is a poem that he creates constantly. As a determined poet in a Godless world, he knows that nothing past or outside the here and now can, or should, be the subject of poetry. He knows that in poetry he is to "uncrumple this much-crumpled thing" (CP 13). His understanding of life and world and their nature is, to say, poetically, philosophically too to a great extent, precise. In his first volume of poems, *Harmonium*, we get him commenting on life, love and the earth in his famous poem "Le Monocle de Mon Oncle". He writes about life thus:

This luscious and impeccable fruit of life  
Falls, it appears, of its own weight to earth. (CP 14)  
About the earth he says:  
The honey of heaven may or may not come  
But that of earth both comes and goes at once. (CP 15)  
He speaks of love as:  
I behold, in love,  
An ancient aspect touching a new mind.  
It comes, it blooms, it bears its fruit and dies. (CP 16)

In these comments on life, earth and love we get a sense of dissolution. If all of these are prone to an early decay, we have to arrange a new shelter. To Stevens, the shelter is imagination. Only imagination can guard us, the modern people, from the vicissitudes of life, love and world. In this regard, he says in his poem "Fabliau of Florida":

Fill your black hull  
With white moon light. (CP 23)

Here the word moonlight stands for imagination to Stevens. He is of the belief that "the magnificent cause of being" is the imagination. Stevens incessantly emphasises the fact that there is no help before reality, except imagination. As a poet of "imagination" he knows that imagination is the most prominent and the most abstract thing we know of. In this regard he writes in the third part of the poem "The Comedian as the Letter C":

The book of moonlight is not written yet. (CP 33)

For Stevens, to reiterate, "moonlight" stands for imagination. Stevens takes the responsibility on his shoulder to write that "book of moonlight" and thus endeavours to reproduce, and thereby reconstruct, reality. The world, this book maps and charts, is the inn of self. Stevens writes in one of his most representative poems, "Tea at the Palaz of Hoon" thus:

I was the world in which I walked, and what I saw  
Or heard or felt came not but from myself;



And there I found myself more truly and more strange. (CP 65)

It is already known that for Stevens reality is a subjective reality where the reflecting subject creates the reality with his perception. It can be argued that his poetry is a record of happenings that happen within. Helen Vendler, in her book, *Wallace Stevens: Words Chosen Out of Desire*, (1984) writes precisely that for Stevens “the interior world of perception, emotion and intellectual construction has always seemed the locus of reality. The volatility of the inner world is precisely the volatility of the lyric” (Vendler, P6). Wallace Stevens is a poet of the inn of self. His “self” declares the disappearance of gods, disappearance of any “mythic mind” (CP67). Such a declaration is in his famous poem “Sunday Morning”:

There is not any haunt of prophesy,  
Nor any old chimera of the grave,  
Neither the golden underground, nor isle  
Melodious, where spirits gat them home,  
Nor visionary south, nor cloudy palm  
Remote on heaven's hill, that has endured  
As April's green endures; (CP68)

In a godless world all the responsibility falls upon men. But, mortal men, writes Stevens in the same poem “know well the heavenly fellowship/ of men that perish” (CP 68). So, men fall in a very helpless condition. In “Sunday Morning” Stevens gives a picture of the present world devoid of gods where men live in:

We live in an old chaos of the sun,  
Or old dependency of day and night,  
Or island solitude, unsponsored, free,  
Of that wide water, inescapable.  
Deer walk upon our mountains, and the quail  
Whistle about us their spontaneous cries;  
Sweet berries ripen in the wilderness;  
And, in the isolation of the sky,  
At evening, casual flocks of pigeons make  
Ambiguous undulations as they sink,  
Downward to darkness, on extended wings. (CP 70)

The “chaos of sun” concisely summarises the chaotic condition of the present world where gods are no more, everything is redefined and is always open to be so. In such a condition, Stevens craves for imagination which has the power that God possesses to create. In a world where gods are no more, imagination is the sole power which man can depend on. With its power of creativity imagination can shape, almost produce, reality. Stevens, in his often cited poem “Find Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour” writes in this regard:

We say God and the imagination are one...  
How high that highest candle lights the dark.  
Out of this same light, out of the central mind,  
We make a dwelling in the evening air,  
In which being there together is enough.

Human perception, by the help of imagination, can represent reality, even diverse versions of it because of, what I earlier said, the multi-perspectivism which renders reality vulnerable to different interpretations and representations. That is why reality is never same to different people. In fact, “one of Stevens’ most persistent contention is”, writes Alan Perils in *Wallace Stevens: A World of Transforming Shapes*, “that in the realm of human perception, the world’s shape is only as constant as the mind that shapes it” (Perils 22).

The concept of different realities or different perceptions of reality lies at the heart of Stevens’ famous poem “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Bird”. As the title suggests, a black bird is seen from thirteen perspectives and with every perspective the bird seems to change as if it were not the same bird. Here, most relevantly, he also alludes to the momentariness of reality. It is interesting enough that, in this poem, nothing but a sight is described and an insight is implicated that life is a construct, not a given reality. In the famous book *Poets of Reality* (1965), Hillies Miller writes that Stevens’ poetry is “an attempt to explore the endlessly variable perspectives from which reality can be viewed by the imagination” (Miller 225). For Stevens everything, including poetry, is but the meeting point of imagination and reality.

The poem “The Idea of Order at Key West” in the volume *Ideas of Order* is worth noting for its celebration of imagination. This is a metaphorical poem. Here the speaker, who is a singer, has a symbolic significance. The singer symbolises imagination. The singer sings among “the meaningless plunging of water and the wind” (CP 129); as imagination works among the meaningless ensemble of reality. For imagination, as for the singer also, there is no given world; rather they construct theirs.

Another significant poem for its celebration of imagination is the title poem of the volume *The Man with the Blue Guitar*. This is a long poem in thirty three parts. The poem is a commentary on the construction of poetry. To put it in other words, it tells about the construction of reality. In the poem, there is a reference to a man with a blue guitar where the man is metaphorical to the poet and the guitar symbolises the imagination. About the guitar, Stevens says-

..... “Things as they are

Are changed upon the blue guitar.” (CP 165)

The blue guitar can, like imagination, transform and transcreate, whatever comes to it. And the reality is an outcome of such transformation and transcreation. Here, Stevens, with a surrealistic impetus, draws the way the blue guitar transforms. The poet writes-

Slow the ivy on the stones

Becomes the stones. Women become

The cities, children becomes the fields

And men in waves become the sea. (CP 170)

It seems that, for Stevens, poetry is the “imaginative transcript” of a mind feeling reality in its momentariness. The concept of fleeting moments takes a great importance in Stevens’ poetry. His poetry appears to claim that reality consists of moments or mind perceives it momentarily.

“Notes towards a Supreme Fiction” is another important poem where the poet has dealt with the imagination-reality complex. As the title suggests, the poem deals with the “Supreme Fiction” and through this concept it endeavours to sort out the conflict between imagination and reality. The poem has three named parts. The first part is subtitled “It Must be Abstract” where he suggests an ephebe or a practicing poet that-

You must become an ignorant man again

And see the sun again with an ignorant eye

And see it clearly in the idea of it. (CP 380)

So, if the ephebe can see things with an ignorant eye leaving the glasses of conventional ideas, he will be able to create, to write poems. And the poems that spring under the impression of the first idea is necessarily abstract, since the first idea is free from all the conventional or imposed ideas. So, such a poem, then, will contain the following qualities:

The poem refreshes life so that we share,  
For a moment, the first idea . . . It satisfies  
Belief in an immaculate beginning

And sends us, winged by an unconscious will,  
To an immaculate end.(CP 382)

This refreshment is a result of the poetic fiction created by a willing meditation. In the second part, titled “It Must Change”, Stevens leaves a question for the readers. The question is “Does the poet evade us?” The whole corpus of Stevens’ poetry contains the answer. Being celebrated for the abstract quality of his poetry is answer enough to this question. In the last part, titled as “It Must Give Pleasure”, Stevens summarises the poet’s situation thus-

.....there is a war between the mind  
And sky, between thought and day and night. It is  
For that the poet is always in the sun,  
Patches the moon together in his room  
To his Virgilian cadences, up down,  
Up down. It is a war that never ends. (CP 407)

The war between day and night, the sun and the moon, more emphatically, between reality and imagination never ends. To Stevens, moon represents imagination and sun represents reality. And his focus throughout his life was on the war between the two, on the shaky but working balance between the two.

“Angel Surrounded by Paysans”, another beautiful poem, clears what Stevens as a poet is and what his point is:

....I am the necessary angel of earth,  
Since, in my sight, you see the earth again,  
Cleared of its stiff and stubborn, man-locked set,  
And, in my hearing, you hear its tragic drone  
Rise liquidly in liquid lingerings,  
Like watery words awash; like meanings said  
By repetition of half-meanings. (CP 496)

That reality cannot be found in outside world and that it is created by the imagination of the beholder is what Stevens steadfastly comes to say. Epistemologically speaking, Stevens takes his point of departure from the empiricists and asserts that the perceiving mind is where external reality is created for the mind and that the world and reality-in-itself, independent of a perceiving mind, mean little. Unless the mind moulds reality and until imagination absorbs it and attaches meaning to it, reality is nothing. Poetry is, for Stevens, a process of signification where reality is created and constructed by imagination.

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# **Unveiling the Eternal Mystery of Good and Evil in *Lord of the Flies*: A Psychoanalysis from Rumi's Perspective**

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## **Abstract**

This study is an attempt to provide a psychoanalysis of characters depicted in *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding from the perspective of Rumi's philosophy of Sufism. Rumi as a famous Sufi thinker has given a distinctive analysis of human soul from the standpoint of Islam which believes that the devil or satan is not an external agent, but an entity that resides in the human soul. In *Lord of the Flies* Golding has presented the realistic picture of good and evil in human mind through the actions of the little boys who unconsciously behave just like the adults. Here all the main characters of the novel have been analyzed thoroughly by the psychological approach to portray their inherent goodness and badness thus connecting Rumi's ideas of human soul with Golding's. The study reveals that some of the characters are angelic and some are wicked and villainous where some characters represent the existence of both good and evil in their minds.

**Keywords: goodness, evil, human soul, psychoanalysis**

## **Introduction**

**L**ord of the Flies is undoubtedly the best known work of William Golding which reflects societal breakdown. Human nature works as a catalyst behind this collective collapse. The author delves deep into the goodness and evil which are ingrained in human beings and unveils the mystery of human nature with great dexterity and leaves the readers in awe. It is interesting to notice that the novel starts with such innocent mood and atmosphere that the readers cannot think of any sin's presence there. Nevertheless, it is eventually proved that goodness and evil spring from the same origin and

even it is difficult to separate them. As Peter Green states it: “it is man who creates his own hell, his own devils; the evil is in him” (84).

Lord of the Flies portrays an accurate picture of goodness and evil in human nature. “In Lord of the Flies Golding shows us that this evil must be accepted, not ignored, and we can’t pass the buck to the society or to anyone or anything else” (George 172). In this novel Golding takes his utmost effort to show human’s innate inclination to commit evil in an environment where everything happens without any rules and regulations. It is the corroboration of an Islamic idea that ego is the man’s sensuality or evil from within. However, restriction of natural instinct varies from person to person. This novel exposes a combination of characters who try to reject the evil and who turn into the evil. Golding believes that man inhibits his beastie within disciplined atmosphere. So, he selects the island as setting where he can put his characters secluded from society that is governed by law and order. He lets children free to guide by their natural instincts. At the beginning they hunt to live; but gradually the taste of it makes them live for hunting. Their impulse to commit evil as well as defend goodness can be best explored when they are given in a situation in which they struggle against both inner and outer nature. The two leaders of the island Jack and Ralph in Lord of the Flies represent different styles of leading. Jack exhibits tyranny. On the contrary, Ralph’s motive is to establish law and democracy. Golding’s intent is to create two groups by Ralph and Jack who represent purity and darkness of the soul. He splits other characters following either Jack or Ralph according to the development of the plot. The novel achieves attention of everyone through its power to deal with human psychology in a realistic way. Society or political systems are thought to be responsible for the evils that are being accomplished in the world. Therefore, Golding feels the urge to bring forth the truth that “evil is inherent in man, not in society or political system” (George and Raju 174). Man is unaware of this terrifying force that Golding insists to be recognized and restricted. This study attempts to find a connection between Golding’s psychoanalysis and Rumi’s concept of human soul by analyzing all prominent characters of *Lord of the Flies*.

### **Rumi’s view of good and evil**

Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi (1207-1273 AD) was a renowned Sufi saint of the 13th century. Though he was a Muslim thinker, nevertheless he is accepted and acclaimed throughout the present world as a universal philosopher who preaches love and humanity regardless of religion and cultural barriers. Rumi’s psychoanalysis has a distinctive quality as it depends mainly on the principle of human’s relationship with God. In Rumi’s view, creatures are of three types. First one is angel like who possesses pure intelligence. Second one is just the opposite. These are the poor beasts who are completely occupied with lust and do not have the knowledge to protect and prohibit



them. Third one is poor man who is the coalescence of intellect and sensuality (qtd in Moris 5). All human beings fall into these categories. They are either angels or demons. In between lives the third group-the struggling common man. Rumi states: "The angel possesses knowledge; the beast occupies brute ignorance; struggling between the two is man's" (qtd in Moris 5). So, conflict resides in man forever. One whose knowledge defeats his brutality is higher than the angels. In contrast, if his beastie overcomes his intelligence he is lower than the beast. According to Rumi, man is a rare combination of angel and animal, intellect and sensuality, spirit and matter ( Sahin 22). The person who cherishes the angel is able to dominate the animal part of his soul and thus able to uphold the intellect over his sensuality. Everyone needs to take a spiritual journey to gradually remove the animalistic part of his heart and being connected with God. It is the human soul where God resides. Rumi says: "The heart is nothing but the sea of light - the place of the vision of God" (qtd in Shahin 15).

### **Reflection of Rumi's conception of soul in major characters of the novel**

We find the conflict in human nature in *Lord of the Flies* which shows a miniature of the real world. Every character in this novel typifies a major category of adult human being. Each of them goes through a transformation and in almost all of the cases it is for the worst. However, this transformation is not something that happens instantly. They are to encounter conflict of good and evil within themselves and finally lost to the temptation of evil. Everyone's transition differs from one another. Some changes to a great extent whereas some for a little just like the real adult world. Rumi's view can be adapted here to analyze the conflict of the characters of the novel. We find both angel like and beast like characters as well as some children struggling between the two. The characters show exactly the same characteristics which are similar to Rumi's view. It is important to examine each character to understand their journey of transformation.

#### **Simon**

Among all the characters, Simon falls into the first category of Rumi's view on creatures. According to Rumi, "the best kind of disciple is he who guesses what his master wants and immediately carries it out and serves him" (qtd in Shahin 51). Simon is an epitome of goodness in the novel. In *Lord of the Flies*, Golding never involves Simon in evil. He is presented as an angel like figure. None helps Ralph to build shelters except Simon as Ralph says, "all day I've been working with Simon. No one else. They're off bathing, or eating, or playing" (Golding 55). He realizes Ralph's leadership power and wishes him to be the chief over Jack. His inner goodness and

humanity stop him to be a part of the hunting group of Jack. We feel his love for littluns when he finds the fruits for them that are unreachable: “found for them the fruit they could not reach, pulled off the choicest from up in the foliage, passed them back down to the endless, outstretched hands” (Golding 138). He stands up for Piggy who is regularly ridiculed by the others for his lack of physical strength. He harks back others that Piggy contributes to set fire by serving his glasses and gives a message that not all contributions are purely physical. He says: “We used [Piggy’s] specs ---He helped that way” (Golding 56). When Jack is vicious towards piggy Simon protects him and brings back those glasses. He wanders off into the forest to enjoy being “utterly alone” (Golding 67). He never thinks of a beast as a living creature that lives in the forest. He tries on several occasions to make others understand that there is no beast in the island. Simon has the voice of visionary who has courage to know where the fear is coming from. He is skeptic about the beast of air and he climbs the mountain to disclose the evil though there is chance to lose his life. Like a prophet he gets the message from God who in the novel is presented as the lord of the flies. Through his conversation with the lord of the flies he realizes that beast is nowhere except in their heart: “You know, didn’t you? I’m part of you?/ Close, close, close! I’m the reason why it’s no go?/ Why things are what they are?” (Golding 177). Thus for Golding Simon “is a saint, mystic and clairvoyant” (Green 83). But we must remember that Simon’s insight is confined to himself and he loses his own existence in an attempt to communicate it to others. To unfold the true identity of beastie he rushes to the boys who are chanting in frenzy. As insanity on hunting leads them consider Simon as a beast, his murder is inevitable. They make use of their bare hands and teeth to tear at Simon’s flesh and beat him to ensure his death: “There were no words, and no movements but the tearing of teeth and claws” (Golding 188). The violence leads us to meet the brink of tragedy. This proves that all the characters are subordinate to the beast as their intelligence yields to brutality. However, When Simon’s body is carried out to the sea; the imagery provides us an imagination of tranquility. Death makes Simon a novel creation as Golding describes his slow disappearance: “softly, surrounded by a fringe of bright, inquisitive creatures, itself a silver shape beneath the steadfast constellation, Simon’s bright body moved out towards the open sea” (190).

## Piggy

Piggy is another vital character in *Lord of the Flies* as he possesses both intellect and rationalism. He is a promoter to set up a civil society on the island. He is a follower of rules, which becomes clear as he reiteratedly does things and talks about his aunt’s orders. The way he talks about the tea time shows his consciousness of society’s order. He realizes very soon that

without adults the boys are in danger of becoming uncultured and they are badly in need of rules, leadership, and organization. When Jack argues with him, Piggy refutes: "How can you expect to be rescued if you don't put first things first and act proper?" (Golding 57). He thinks for goodness of all: "Which is better -- to be a pack of painted Indians like you are, or to be sensible like Ralph is? Which is better -- to have rules and agree, or to hunt and kill? Which is better, law and rescue, or hunting and breaking things up?" (Golding 221). Nobody pays any heed to his words because he belongs to lower class. Again, they ridicule him for his appearance as he is quite fat than other boys. Without glasses he is vulnerable. Piggy's physical weakness does not allow him to be skilled enough to be chief. So, he uses Ralph as a medium to apply his intellect. He acts as Ralph's consultant. He is the first who holds the conch that helps Ralph to collect the scattered boys: "I got the conch, you just listen! The first thing we ought to have done was made shelters down there by the beach" (Golding 23). As a boy of intellect he does not believe in beast. He has the capability to realize that it is the human being not the beast which is a matter of danger. He declares: "I know there isn't a beast -- not with claws and all that, I mean -- but I know there isn't no fear, either -- Unless we get frightened of people" (Golding 50). Piggy is not superstitious like other boys who adore their new god- the Lord of the Flies. All these evidences prove Piggy as the voice of reason. Once he departs, the reason also disappears from the island. He passes away along with the conch which splinters into "a thousand white fragments and ceased to exist" (Golding 222). Although Piggy in most cases is governed by intelligence he cannot defeat his lust fully. He cannot resist himself from attending the hunter's feast in which Simon is killed due to curiosity and hunger (Oruc 5). He is also lured by inherent human cruelty and becomes a murderer of Simon. Though Ralph confesses to participate in the murder of Simon, Piggy lies to himself about his guilt and declares: "That's right. We were on the outside. We never done nothing, we never seen nothing" (Golding 194). Piggy is a perfect example of common man who possesses both goodness and wickedness within himself. In many of his poetry Rumi talks about ego or the carnal self also called 'nafs' as a veil which prevents man from knowing his true nature and thus making him unable to attain the ultimate union with God. He said in Diwan, "We have been in heaven, we have been friends of the angels; Thither, sire, let us return, for that is our country" (qtd in Chittick 79). Piggy is not capable of controlling his nature and behavior which is typical of common people. Many a time he surrenders under his carnal self and does things which are wrong. Piggy uses his rationality in doing necessary things for survival; however, he is unable to use it when time comes to show his humanity. Even he deceptively interprets Simon's death as an accident: "It was an accident -- that's what it was. And accident -- Coming in the dark--he hadn't no business crawling like that out of the dark" (Golding 193-194). Simon's killing is not an accident, and Piggy

falls into the next target. This appalling effort on his part makes him ruthless and selfish. Piggy's downfall as a human being is more remarkable for his innate intelligence and judgmental power.

## **Ralph**

While talking about the nature of man, Rumi talks about the 'Universal Man' who, according to him, is the perfect human being and who represents the goodness of the soul at its best. Chittick talks about Rumi's Universal Man like this: "All the Divine Qualities are contained within him and integrated together in such a way that they are neither confused nor separated, and yet he transcends all particular and determined modes of existence" (50). In the novel Ralph is the Universal Man. He is kind in nature and "there was a mildness about his mouth and eyes that proclaimed no devil"(Golding 15). In the earlier part of the novel he is elected as the chief. He is the first who blows the conch which is the symbol of order. He is committed to the law of civilization as he opines to have some rules on the island. As a true leader he declares: "We can't have everybody talking at once. / We'll have to have 'hands up' like at school"(Golding 43). While others are initially busy with enjoyment, Ralph is concerned with building huts and mostly finding the chance of being rescued. He selects the place for meeting and combines his intellect with Piggy's. Like Piggy he is not a believer of superstitions and thinks those as obstructions of their survival. He behaves as a natural leader. To investigate the castle Rock Ralph is the one who goes in front alone. While other boys are terrified viewing the dead paratrooper on the mountain, Ralph proceeds with sagacity. We experience Ralph's sense of responsibility when he ensures that Piggy will take care of the littluns in his absence. However, Ralph's power and influence over other works for a short period of time. His position turns down with the rise of Jack. As the group steadily yields to savage instinct, most of the boys except Piggy depart from Ralph's group for Jack's one. Ralph gets frustrated as most of the boys avoid his governance. He realizes the 'wearisomeness' of life on the island. As his 'lawful world' begins to disappear his insecure mind compels him to utter: "I'm frightened of us."(Golding 174). At the beginning of the novel Ralph fails to comprehend why the other boys devote themselves to bloodlust. The hunters' chanting is offensive and unpleasant to him. As the novel advances, however, Ralph realizes that barbarism is present inside all the boys. Ralph is adamant not to allow this barbarity overpowers him. However, Like Piggy, Ralph cannot overthrow his brutality all the time. Like Piggy he also attends the hunter's feast that leads Simon to death. Though unlike Piggy he soon starts to feel guilty for it and considers it as a murder, he is weak enough to allow Piggy to convince him that it is not their liability. It proves that Ralph too is falling into savagery. He laughs at Piggy or Simon in a manner that demonstrates his capability of hurting others. He has the ability to take

action to beat Jack yet “he does nothing and thinks to give up being chief” (Li and Wu 120). His passivity facilitates Jack becoming more aggressive. Yet, he is the last boy who stays away from being an absolute savage. His innocence turns into experience through the loss of Piggy, his true friend which makes him cry: “Ralph wept for the end of innocence, the darkness of man's heart, and the fall through the air of the true, wise friend called Piggy”(Golding 248).Ralph's conflict shows a goodness of human nature and also a spineless nature. This can be seen in adult world as well where people with potential do not take up the lead because of their fear and eventually give up their moral codes.

## **Jack**

Jack in this novel personifies the horror of inhumanity. He has insatiable lust for power and violence. He has strong convincing power and is able to spread viciousness among other boys of the group. It is surprising to see how skillfully he takes the control from Ralph and attracts the boys to his vicious attempts. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the boys already had an evil streak in their nature and that is why Jack's task becomes easier. Humans always have unavoidable attractions for evil and feel an urge to follow the wrong path. According to Rumi, there is a coexistence of good and evil within human soul. In his view humans are half angel and half beast. If our rationality and consciousness overcome our sensuality and carnal self, we become higher than the angels. But if our ‘nafs’ or sensuality gets power over our rational and spiritual sense we descend to the level of the beast. Rumi says: “The angel is saved through knowledge, / The animal-- through ignorance. / Between the two struggle the people of this world” (Shahin 22). In the novel Jack typifies the ‘nafs’ or the sensuality and everything negative that comes with it. With his evil actions he successfully brings out the darkest aspect of his peers' heart. Since the opening of the novel, Jack craves for power beyond all things. It is humiliating for him to follow Ralph as a leader. In behavior, he is the reverse of Ralph. Near the beginning, Jack possesses the sense of modesty that society implanted in him. Indeed, he was the “head boy” of the choirs at school (Golding 17). When he comes across a pig for the first time, he is not capable to kill it. But, soon hunting becomes his passion and he dedicates himself to the job. Again, hunting promotes the savagery he inherits that leads him to be “ape-like” (Golding 201). It is Jack who begins conflict on the island by dominating the group and avoiding the rules made by Ralph. He does not pay any heed to the conch rules because he tries to escape from the social conditioning. That is why he feels no urgency to keep the fire going or concentrate on the survival of the group. According to Rumi's philosophy, “as long as man remains attached to what is transitory-- the ego and the world-- he is far from God” (Chittick 83). In the novel Jack personifies the darkness of human heart. His thoughts and

acts are symbolic of human greed and violence. Through this character, the author unquestionably shocks the readers as nobody expects children to be aggressive and vicious. Interestingly, people are also not expected to be brutal, still so many violent acts happen constantly around the world. In the same way, the children's world cannot be free from heinous acts. This novel is actually a miniature of the adult social world. We can perceive every child as a representative of the real world. Like Ralph, Jack has inherent leadership qualities. But he uses this quality to create anarchy and chaos on the island. This reflects the fact that even in the real adult world violent and heartless people can take control. It is undoubtedly true that Jack is intelligent and he uses his acumen along with his strength. For example, in chapter two, he uses Piggy's specs as a tool to start fire. Here, piggy's specs can be seen as a symbol of intellect and civilization which is burned by Jack for a practical purpose. This is a very common practice in the real world where intellectual capabilities are subjugated by physical strength. The practical examples are everywhere. Though our religion teaches us to be kind to weaker ones, people do not practice the instruction in reality. Similarly, the children were of course taught about ethics and morality in school, however, they were not able to use their moral ethics in real life. Jack is certainly the extreme example of evil, nevertheless, it cannot be ignored that other children supported him in his decisions. Likewise, adult people are also greatly influenced by evil traits and they succumb to the power of evil in them. Thus, we can see it is very important to connect the children's world to that of the grown-ups. Otherwise, we will not be able to realize the message Golding wanted to convey the readers.

## Roger

According to Rumi, evil is the willful rejection of the attributes of God and an attempt to defy the divine commands of God. The person who follows the evil path gets connected with Satan- the ultimate evil soul who represents negative qualities like anger, pride, envy, disobedience and spiritual blindness. An evil person uses fear and doubt to spread sadness and anarchy. (Shahin 48) Roger is portrayed as an antagonist in *Lord of the Flies*. He is the most sadistic, and distorted boy on the island. Golding describes him as: "a slight, furtive boy whom no one knew, who kept to himself with avoidance and secrecy" (22). Early in the play we find his sense of civilization as he suggests for voting to choose a leader. But soon it disappears. When the boys start falling down into savagery, he reveals his real heartless nature. In reality, people cover their brutality under the musk of civilization but whenever it is taken away from them, they lose all the control and become more uncivilized than before. The same thing happens with Roger. He has lost all the conditioning of civilization through uniting with Jack's chorus. While Jack wants to be leader to exercise power, Roger wants to achieve

power to harm people. He serves as Jack's lieutenant and does all the mischiefs like hurting the children by throwing sand in their eyes and throwing rocks at them. By making him doing childish destructions like mashing the littluns' sandcastles, Golding presents him as a model of the destructive people of the adult world who like to hurt others without any vivid reason. With time Roger turns to be more destructive which becomes clear in the second victorious pig hunt. After slaughtering one of the sow's different piglets, he goes on with brutally afflicting her. He appears to be *a terror to the others* and rolls a rock down on Piggy to kill him and destroys the conch- the only symbol of civilization on the island. In the final hunt, we face his harsh brutality when he sharpens a stick to stake Ralph's head. His evil mind believes in the existence of the beast on the island and intends to present Ralph's head as a sacrifice to the beast. In the novel Roger is the manifestation of pure evil and to many critics he appears to be worse than Jack in many ways.

## **Conclusion**

Rumi's Sufism mainly discusses the ways in which the human soul can be with God. A man's life is thus seen as an endless struggle to be with the Supreme Being. According to Rumi, while God creates both good and evil, He only approves of the good. The divine command to man is to do good and the divine prohibition is against evil (Shahin 48). The similar analogy is found in *Lord of the Flies* where Golding shows us a dark picture of our heart along with the enlightened phase of humanity. Here all of the characters display distinct psychological aspects of the human mind where both goodness and evil reside. As human our aim should be to cherish goodness and avoid the evil. Rumi's philosophy claims that goodness or righteousness exists in our soul and being good or evil is just a choice. In the same way, Golding proves that beast resides nowhere but within the soul of humans. No society is bad in itself. It is the defective human nature that makes the defective society (George 178). Simon is unable to unfold the children the truth but Golding leaves us enlightened by showing that the inner goodness is the prime way to save the world. Nothing is more complex than the inherent evil of mankind. Beast is a part of man. It is he who by choice can create beauty or bestiality. Golding's message is to ignore evil within us as Rumi says: "God turns you from one feeling to another and teaches by means of opposites, so that you will have two wings to fly, not one" (qtd in Shahin 17). So, *Lord of the Flies* can be seen as an allegory that links the children's behavior to the basic human nature. Here the author expresses the idea that human beings are inherently wicked. Moreover, everyone wears a mask of civilization. They are civilized because of the pressure from society, however this is not something innate and the evil frequently comes over and takes hold. Rumi's philosophy is

characteristically optimistic as it believes that after the lifelong struggle a man is able to reach his ultimate goal. In the novel, Golding proves that everything can be corrupted by the sinfulness of the human heart. But like Rumi he also gives us an indication that in the end it is goodness that wins over every evil.

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# Claudius: A Machiavellian Treatment by Shakespeare

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## Abstract

Shakespeare creates a great variety of characters in his plays. His characters take resort to various means, right or wrong, in order to defend their own interests. Claudius, a shrewd character in the play of *Hamlet*, hits upon different strategic plans to secure himself as well as to sustain his stability as a king. Claudius' plans are in line with that of Niccolo Machiavelli, Italian politician, who describes subtle, cunning and sometimes deceitful methods a statesman should use to become successful. The author went through the play thoroughly and observed the character closely. The article focuses on Claudius as a character that follows a politician's deceitful methods described by Machiavelli in his political work *Prince*. Just as Machiavelli prioritizes the interest of the state, so Claudius prioritizes his security and power. In his plan no other interest is taken into consideration. Even in lieu of blood he wishes to be in power. In all his means he is too crafty and cunning to be guessed. From the very beginning to the end, he is double folded. He becomes far more outlined only because of the Machiavellian means he employs in favour of his interest.

**Keywords:** Shakespeare's characters, Machiavelli, Claudius in *Hamlet*, Shakespeare's Kings, *Prince* by Machiavelli

## (I) Introduction

Claudius in *Hamlet* is a king threatened with the risk of his life and security. His nephew Hamlet, whose father he murdered, is a living threat to him. So, he is to devise multifarious strategic means to remove away his enemy Hamlet as well as to secure his stability. He wants to be successful tactfully—tactfully in that though master mind, he keeps him behind. Just as Machiavelli's diplomatic plans help him to make his state advanced, but they are ultimately 'unethical' (Karim, p.331), so Claudius' means are apparently justifiable, finally immoral. Everywhere—in winning his brother's wife Gertrude, motivating Hamlet to forget his dead father, keeping Hamlet away from him, separating Ophelia from Hamlet, instigating Laertes against Hamlet, sheltering Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in his

palace, arranging fencing-match between Hamlet and Laertes—the only instrument he uses is deceit, and this is the very instrument to which a Machiavellian politician is inclined to spread his kingdom and to rule over other nations.

## **(II) Analysis**

Claudius is inclined to intrigue and crooked-dealing. He wins the heart of the Queen mainly by the ‘witchcraft of his wit’. Hamlet is extremely rude to him, but never does he show any annoyance or resentment to him. He is rather ingratiating in manner, and speaks to him softly. Not only that whenever Hamlet meets him, he keeps his face smiling. He, thus, actually deceives Hamlet to identify him as his enemy.

Hamlet is shocked at the death of his father. He keeps mourning this death. As a father-loving son, it is very difficult for him to shake off all the memories of his father. He puts on a black gown as a sign of sad mood. As his too much devotion to his dead father may lead him to take revenge upon his father’s murderers, Claudius here plays tricks to make him forget his dead father by reminding him of the universal norm that no one is immortal, everybody must die:

Thou know’st ’tis common: all that lives must die. (Act I, Scene ii)

Claudius takes Hamlet to be a living threat to him. He wants to remove him away or to have him killed. On this occasion, he hits upon several plans. Firstly, he motivates Hamlet to go to England on the pretext of bringing some due revenue from the king there. With a letter Rosencrantz and Guildenstern along with Hamlet are sent to England. On the way Hamlet manages to open the letter and finds that it carries an instruction to kill him immediately after it is handed over to the addressee:

By letters congruing to that effect,

The present death of Hamlet. Do it, England; (Act IV, Scene iv)

Secondly, Claudius tries to entrap Hamlet by instigating Laertes— brother of Ophelia who fell in love with Hamlet but could not be united with him because of his indifference towards her—against Hamlet. Hamlet and Laertes, as Claudius plots, compete with one another in a fencing-match in which Laertes is supposed to hit Hamlet with a venomous and pointed

sword. It is actually a plan to kill Hamlet by slow poisoning. It is a clear eye-wash where none can blame Claudius for Hamlet's death, as if, he died while performing in the match.

Thirdly, Claudius makes an attempt to manage Hamlet to drink from a cup of poison. It is his alternative plan to kill Hamlet. The fencing-match between Hamlet and Laertes is going on. Claudius, Hamlet's mother and Horatio were amongst the others present at the audience. The special guests among the audience including Hamlet's mother, were provided with cups of special drinks. Claudius has already instructed Laertes to drink from a particular cup when he becomes tired of fencing. The cup in front of Hamlet's mother contains poison, but she does not know it. Claudius thinks this means to be very effective, because Hamlet, being tired and following Laertes, will also drink from a cup, naturally from the cup in front of his mother. Claudius has here a Machiavellian schemer's facility to adjust his plot to present circumstances. If Hamlet thus died by drinking from the poisonous cup, no one could trace the real killer behind.

Claudius plots crime after crime in order to gain what he wants. He observes his surroundings closely. He is 'quick-witted and adroit' (Lall, p.169) in giving plausible argument and explanation in favour of his interest. He kills his brother but publicizes it in the form that he died by snake-biting while taking rest in the orchard after lunch.

Claudius is surpassingly vivid in his soliloquies. In the set-piece speeches he comments on the wider range of actions and it reflects him so complicated that our critical response can never cope with them (Peck and Coyle, p. 103). As Claudius has a surprising power to explore the complex nature of the whole situation in which he and his surroundings are, and as he takes wide ranging issues into account, he beguiles people easily.

Claudius is soft-spoken. The way he speaks to Hamlet is itself a cheating. Hamlet is shocked at his father's death. He is with a heavy heart and keeps mourning. In such a situation Claudius deceives Hamlet by pacifying him with false promises that if he leads a normal life taking off all his sorrows, he will be nominated as the next in succession to the throne:

You are the most immediate to our throne. (Act I, Scene ii)

that to feel so sad over the death of his father is an offence against heaven:

But to persever  
In obstinate condolment is a course  
Of impious stubbornness, 'tis unmanly grief,  
It shows a will most incorrect to heaven. (Act I, Scene ii)

that Hamlet commits an offence against his dead father by feeling so grief-stricken:

... 'tis a fault to heaven  
A fault against the dead. (Act I, Scene ii)

'The awareness of inevitable disorder of experience' is seen at its most developed form in Claudius (Peck and Coyle, p. 105). There travels a malicious and spiteful gossip throughout the country against him and the Queen. In order to escape the unexpected consequence of this gossip, he negotiates with the Queen and tries to devise a means so that the gossip fails to hit them like a bullet which misses its target and hits the air which is insubstantial and unconquerable:

As level as the common to his bank,  
Transports his poison'd shot, may miss our name  
And hit the woundless air. (Act IV, Scene ii)

Claudius is also crafty in accommodating Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in the palace. Outwardly, these two school-fellows of Hamlet are supposed to accompany him as he is grief-stricken, but they are actually employed to collect information from Hamlet and to pass them to Claudius.

Claudius is 'indefinably alert' (Legouis and Cazamian, p.438) and explores the complex reality of social and political order. He ponders over the wider significance of action. Stability is his ideal, but because of Hamlet the reality is a coming disorder (Peck and Coyle, p. 105). By murdering his brother and developing an incestuous relationship with the dead brother's wife Gertrude, he breaks the established social restraint and commits an evil. In him now arises the very worst face of human beings, but he masks the vicious face with smiling:

O villain, villain, smiling damned villain! (Act I, Scene v)

Hamlet bears the brunt of Claudius' bestial and brutal passions, which develops a pursuit of vengeance in Hamlet, and creates a moral confusion. As a result, Hamlet procrastinates whether or not to answer evil with evil (Gray, p.245).

Claudius is a clever schemer. He lies using language skillfully. He knows that any change in the government may ignite civil unrest and he might run into risk ("An Analysis of Claudius, Hamlet's Uncle—Shakespeare online"). He then hits upon another plan using the death of Hamlet's father. It is this death that he uses to create a sense of national solidarity:

...our whole kingdom  
To be contracted in one brow of woe.(Act I, Scene ii)

He believes that the end justifies the means. He sacrifices humanity to gain success. To kill Hamlet is his target, but he wants to do so tactfully. He plots lots of ways to avoid the killing of Hamlet with his own hands. Though his sneaky and manipulative ways finally causes the death of Hamlet whom he pretends to love very much, he is out of scene. He is so cunning that in order to fulfill his target he explains the same issue—patricide—from two totally different dimensions. Hamlet as well as Laertes has lost their fathers. Both are shocked. But the former he manipulates to forget his father's memory because, he knows, if the former's father is fresh in people's mind, they may raise questions into the matter, and may seek investigation, which may finally unmask him, and the country people might point fingers at him as a killer of his brother. In short, he forbids Hamlet to be so sad over his father's death. He also says that if Hamlet keeps mourning the death so deeply, he will be regarded as a young man with no patience. But the latter he motivates to take revenge without any delay. He tries to make the latter outrageous by telling him that he must take revenge upon his father's murderer if he loved his father genuinely. This very motivation to Laertes is in favour of his interest. He tells him that it is Hamlet who killed his father Polonius. He is here extremely strategic—he wants to have Hamlet, his enemy, murdered by Laertes.

Claudius is disguised. As a king, he is the symbol of honesty, justice, purity and power. But the reality is different. When the façade of good is taken away, we begin to see his cruel, vicious, murderous and deceitful side. A false sense of honest and civilized life exists in him. But the way he grasps

his gaining proves the existence of overwhelming evil in human nature (Peck and Coyle, p. 52). He must materialize the dreadful action of murdering Hamlet, but not with his own hand, with the hand of Laertes whom he tells that he will not murder Hamlet himself, because he does not want Hamlet's mother to feel pain. What a disguised answer!

Claudius uses a clever argument so that he can strengthen Laertes' resolve to take revenge upon his father's murderer Hamlet. Claudius has no doubt that Laertes loved his father Polonius. But he says that love is created by circumstances and diminishes with the passage of time. In this regard he uses a metaphor. He compares love to the flame of a candle. This flame is sustained by a wick in the candle. But the higher the flame burns, the faster it consumes the wick, and finally turns the wick into snuff. In order to keep the flame burning and looking bright, the snuff is removed very soon. Nothing, says Claudius, remains at the same level of goodness. Anything good excessively dies in its own excess. He goes on to say that one should implement immediately what one wishes to do. The more we delay to put our wishes into action, the weaker our wish becomes, and finally the wish gets extinguished like the candle flame and our action remains undone. So might be the case with Laertes. If he delays to take revenge, his very wish to take revenge, like the flame at its highest degree, may diminish. One's awareness unaccompanied by performance is harmful because in such a circumstance, the awareness weakens the moral perceptions:

Not that I think you did not love your father.  
But that I know love is begun by time.  
... ..  
There lives within the very flame of love  
A kind of wick or snuff that will abate it.  
And nothing is at a like goodness still,  
For goodness growing to a pleurisy,  
Dies in his own too-much. That we would do,  
We should do when we would; for this 'would' changes  
And hath abatements and delays as many  
As there are tongues, are hands, are accidents;  
... ..  
That hurts by easing. (Act IV, Scene vii)

Claudius quickly turns Hamlet's father's funeral into celebration. His love for Gertrude is sincere but it may also be a means to win the throne away from Hamlet ("Claudius Character Analysis in *Hamlet*"). His hasty marriage with Gertrude is a weapon to prevent Hamlet from doing anything mischievous and harmful to him, because he is equally dear to his mother who he is forbidden by the ghost of his father to do any harm to:

But how somever thou pursuest this act,  
Taint not thy mind nor let thy soul contrive  
Against thy mother aught. Leave her to heaven,  
And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge  
To prick and sting. (Act I, Scene v)

### **(III) Conclusion**

Claudius becomes but a Machiavellian King when he follows the maxim that to gain is all whether by honest or dishonest means. With this very Machiavellian deceiving trait, Claudius restricts 'liberal humanist notion' (Habib, p.763). Through this Machiavellian King in *Hamlet*, Shakespeare shares with us his 'insights and feelings' (Morsey, p.31) into the darker side of human beings.

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# Trapped Between Myth, Memory and Reality: Narrativizing the Sundarbans

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## **Abstract**

This article discusses select literary representations of the Sundarbans— its topographical/geographical specificities, historical contexts and socio-cultural singularities— from the perspectives of two authors, namely Amitav Ghosh and Niranjana Mondal, who are widely divergent from each other in style, approach and narrative pattern. In spite of their very different socio-cultural backgrounds and very distinctive tales of association with the Sundarbans, their writings nevertheless show a sincere attempt to delve deep into the life and struggles of the local commoners pitted against poverty, illiteracy, socio-economic disadvantages and the arbitrary whims of nature. Surrounded on all sides by rivers and the dense mangrove forests, a life punctuated by frequent cyclonic storms and devastating tidal waves—the ‘subaltern’ population of the region have put their lives at stake to earn a living for their families. Literally, with tigers and other beasts of prey on the shore and crocodiles and sharks on the rivers stalking their movements all the time, it is a hopeless battle that these people continue to fight day in and day out. This article intends to show how this life is permeated by myths, legends, cultural uniqueness and individual/collective memory which in turn seep into the narratives under discussion. This rather interesting context of nature and its intrusion into human life leading to a world of heritage, myth and memory is explored in these fictional pieces. This article attempts to analyse the mode of representation and narrativisation of this unique relationship.

**Keywords:** Folk culture, myth, memory, insider/outsider, margin/periphery, poverty, struggle for existence

Ideas Vol. 6 : 2020-2021 ISSN 2413-1814

It should make people understand that they don't need machines to enjoy themselves in a fulfilling manner. That's one of the great heresies of the late twentieth century: that you can't enjoy yourself without a machine. Or without a golf course, or something like that. You only need, other people, and, your own tongues and somewhere which is sufficiently warm and comfortable that you're not particularly conscious of it, to make a completely fulfilling evening...

Stories are about connection with nature. And all of that is completely against the current of civilisation now, perhaps particularly since the industrial revolution—the feeling that machines give us freedom. (53-54)

“Informant Disavowal and the Interpretation of Storytelling Revival”

**Simon Heywood**

Nature and human life have all along been intricately related to each other. And the closer the relation the more fertile is the human imagination. The whole bulk of folk tales, tribal stories, lore, myths and legends from the deeper recesses of the oceanic islands, snow-clad mountains or from the turbulent nomadic life from across the deserts or the dense mangrove forests on the river estuary testifies to the close interdependence of nature, human creativity and the narrative—real as well as imagined. Life in the Sundarbans has long been shrouded in mystery. The fierce natural attributes of the dense mangrove forests covering the large delta region of the estuary of the Ganga, the Brahmaputra and the Meghna rivers spanning across West Bengal and Bangladesh constitute a singular phenomenon of the Indian subcontinent.

A rhythm of life punctuated by the cycle of the surging tides of the seas and the cyclonic storms, the invading salt water being kept at bay by the man-made embankments, the human beings cohabiting the same islands with wild creatures and insects, the intricate pattern of narrow waterways crisscrossing through shrubbery, jungles and sandy isles—these have conditioned the life and livelihood of the area in a way that is both unique and awe-inspiring. Living in close proximity to untamed nature in its wild exuberance where nature ambivalently does sustain and destroy human life and hope—the folk

traditions and culture of the region have taken to myths and lore where caste, class, creed and religion merge. In the face of a power greatly superior to the limited manoeuvrings of the tiny humans, man-made hierarchies seem to dissolve. Distinctions that appear insurmountable in the metropolitan culture disintegrate into nothingness as the instinct for survival prevails as does the realisation of the worth of human life in the face of certain death.

This paper deals with Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* and a host of short stories by Niranjan Mondal entitled *Badabaner Padabali* ('The Mangrove Lore') in order to capture the varied perspectives on the life and the lore of the Sundarbans. It focuses on how memory is intermingled in the collective reminiscence of the traditional lore and choric songs, the sonorous recitation of the narrative of the miracles of *Banbibi* and *Shajangoli*. Amitav Ghosh's novel looks into this life from the perspective of two 'outsiders'—one American cetologist of Indian origin and a Delhi-based interpreter—the two of them visiting the Sundarbans for very different reasons. Whereas Piya is a complete 'outsider' from the U.S. with just a remote memory of her now-deceased Bengali mother, Kanai has a short childhood memory of spending some time at Lucibari. If for Piya this is the exploration of new territory, it revives old memory in Kanai, particularly through the reading of the diary of Nirmal. But in between are Kusum, Fokir, Moyna, Horen, Nilima and Nirmal. The mainstream life at Lucibari, a village among the isles marginalises the 'outsiders' who continuously crave to fit in. Neither Piya's foreign air nor the self-importance of Kanai is able to impress the locals as they continue to carry out their daily struggle.

*Until you behold it for yourself, it is almost impossible to believe that here, interposed between the sea and the plains of Bengal, lies an immen searchipela go of islands. But that is what it is: an archipelago, stretching for almost two hundred miles, from the Hooghly River in West Bengal to the shores of the Meghna in Bangladesh...*

*The rivers' channels are spread across the land like a fine-mesh net, creating a terrain where the boundaries between land and water are always mutating, always unpredictable...When these channels meet, it is often in clusters of four, five or even six: at these confluences, the water stretches to the far edges of the landscape and the forest dwindles into a distant rumor to land, echoing back from the horizon. In the language of the place, such a*

*confluence is spoken of as a mohona — an oddly seductive word, wrapped in many layers of beguilement. (14)*

More at home is Nilima, the beloved *Mashima* of Lucibari, who along with her husband Nirmal had started the Badabon Trust dedicated to support and uplift the local society. The women self-help group, the hospital, the school all these provide a sense of direction and a feeling of achievement amidst the otherwise gloomy threat of an omnipotent eccentric nature. But the illusion is dispelled as a storm overtakes Piya and Kanai as they start an adventurous boat-trip in search of dolphins.

Fokir dies, being caught in the cyclone, but Piya survives. Kanai, being shocked and peeved off after encountering fear in its crudest form at Gorjontola, decides to leave for Delhi. But interestingly enough, much of what they wanted to preserve is obliterated. Piya loses all her notes and data on the river dolphins that she had been collecting meticulously over days. And the notebook of Nirmal addressed to Kanai is washed away by the tide as he makes a desperate attempt to reach shore amidst the storm. But the experience of life at the tide country (*bhatir desh*) infuses in both of them a new understanding of human existence that is not necessarily selfish, impersonal or materialistic.

It is in this context that memory plays a key role. Kanai decides that through his own writings he would imaginatively reconstruct the world of Nirmal's lost notebook, the latter's narration on *Marichjhapi* and its fate. And Piya can trace back the intricate route of her boat journeys with Fokir in search of Orcaella (dolphins) through her GPS-enabled tracking device attached to a monitor as if "Fokir and his boat" were "writing a log of their journeys and locking it away in the stars" (384). For Piya it is how modern technology has saved a crucial amount of data on Orcaella from being lost forever; for Nilima, however, it is Fokir leaving behind his earned and inherited knowledge of the nooks and corners of the Sundarbans for posterity.

In her new project on the Gangetic dolphins Piya finds a means of uniting her passion for the Irrawaddy dolphins that Fokir had shown her near *Gorjontola* with the social work of *mashima*. They decide to name the project after Fokir. Fokir's wife Moyna, earlier somewhat sceptical about Piya, finds in the latter a good friend and a sympathetic benefactor. Both Piya and Kanai find a new and enriching vocation in life. By extension, the

erstwhile ‘outsiders’ find a ‘home’ in this land of rivers, forests and creeks. The myths and legends of the place that seemed mere unreal stories to them so far create a surreal presence in their minds. They realise that memory and imagination can bring around the sceptic to faith, the disbeliever to conviction. It is this connection that makes Lucibari a ‘home’ to them.

The poverty-stricken Horen teaches Kanai the true meaning of love. The impoverished fisherman Fokir wins over Piya with his honesty and selflessness. The eerie silence of the midnight in the forest, the entangled roots of the mangrove projecting into the water, the roar of the tiger trapped in a village cattle-shed, the flash of the hungry jaws of the shark about to tear off Piya’s hand, the terror at the sudden sighting of the fresh pugmarks of a tiger on the muddy riverbank, the rhythmic twinkling of the fireflies on a distant island, the school of dolphins circling the boat, the cooked crab that Fokir offers Piya at dinner on the boat or the homemade food that Moyna brings for Kanai in spite of her busy schedule as a nurse at the hospital – set the tune of understanding among strangers and between man and nature.

Two refrains continue to reverberate through the whole of the novel. The first is the *Marichjhapi* experience of Nirmal gradually overpowering the consciousness of Kanai through his written narrative. The other is the lore of *Banbibibi* and *Dakkhin Rai* that the unlettered Fakir can recite from memory. It is *Bonbibir Johuranama* that unites Nirmal’s recorded reminiscences with the experience of Piya and Kanai, as does the poetry of Rilke, written in a very different society and time, but undergoing a radical metamorphosis as it seeps through the consciousness of Nirmal or the voice of Kanai. Just the way Piya is astonished to see the co-existence of Marxism and poetry in Nirmal the visionary, Kanai too is astonished to see the matter-of-fact and ambitious Moyna’s devotion to her husband, the ‘irresponsible’ and childishly reckless Fokir.

The short stories of Niranjan Mondal, on the other hand, detail with extensive meticulousness the lives of the common people of the Sundarbans—the honey-collectors and the fishermen, the crab-catchers and the shrimp-hunters. Growing up in dire poverty amidst these tiny isles periodically submerged in the tidal waves, the dense mangroves and the gushing rivers — the people here are both daring and fatalistic. With sensibilities attuned to the sights and sounds of nature the children grow up to the reality of a fatherless home, early marriage and an early introduction to the pains and

trials of providing for a family. The fierce jungles allure the young and the hopeful with dreams of a better life. But their dreams are most often terminated in frightening death on land or water. And it underlines the fact that man here, in spite of his best efforts to civilise the wilderness, is nothing more than an intruder into the habitat of tigers, snakes, crocodiles and sharks.

The story of the fisher and crab-catcher Fakir of Ghosh's novel is no different from that of Nagen, Tapan, Khokan or Rakhal of Mondal's tales. The human-nature relation at the mangrove forest is ambivalently harmonious and combative. At the core, it is an intricate tale of love and hate, of fierce struggle and ultimate subjugation. The singularity lies in their perception of life, tolerance and silent mutual understanding in the face of a no-win situation. They have accepted a pre-ordained defeat.

That is why the women embrace pre-mature widowhood when their men-folk are out in the forests or the rivers. This periodic wiping out of the symbols of marital bliss is an externalisation of the continuous apprehension in which they are forced to live their life. In a way it also prepares their mind for the ironic but inevitable truth that life and death co-exist in this world. And the faster that one moves in the heady pace of life, the closer the person comes to death. "Gherparar Bidhabara" ("The Widows of Gherpara") is a tale of a group of women who lost their men-folk early in life and with young children at home are fighting poverty. Subala, Sabita, Shibi's wife and Hari's mother venture out in the rivers to fish and to catch crabs but ill-luck follows them like a dark shadow. Still they keep faith in *Ma Banbibi* who proclaims: "In this land of eighteen ebb-tide I am the Mother/ When you call upon me all the dangers disappear" (82). Hari's mother falls prey to a crocodile leaving behind her young son Hari, now an orphan. The story narrates the suffering of these women who continue to be exploited by men in power and with money. But fierce nature, too, thwarts their attempt at gaining agency and unleashes its power on men and women alike.

Same is the fate of Nakul (in "Badabaner Moulera", the Honey-collectors of the Mangrove Forest) as he accompanied Paran, Nagen and Basu to collect honey from the deeper recesses of the forest. After the back-breaking work through the day as they are fast asleep in their boat, a tiger swims across the river to pick Nakul up from the men sleeping side by side. Even his last heartrending cry fails to waken his friends on the boat who sleep through the

night like dead men. The poverty that drove Nakul to this dangerous life farther deepens with his death as the forest snatches away the only earning member of a large family of women and children. And Rakhal (in “Badabaner Bagdamara” or The Shrimp-catchers of the Mangrove Forest”) goes shrimp-catching in the river *Raimangal*. But his golden dreams of a better future are cruelly torn away by the sharp teeth of a shark:

When he was brought onto the shore it was found that a shark had torn away lumps of flesh from below his knee. The sandbank flooded with blood. These saltwater sharks were so ferocious and their teeth so sharp that one couldn't gauge the danger at first when attacked. Rakhal, too, couldn't fathom it. Rakhal's wife was sorting shrimplets attentively. As Jata called her she came running and tumbled down on Rakhal: “Oh God! How could you do this to me? How could you ruin my life like this?”

By then, the blood of Rakhal had coloured the saltwater red as if it was the festival of colours, *holi*. But the suffering and devastation of these poor, victimised, subaltern people did not shatter the golden sun, nor did its golden fragments drop down and get scattered amidst the saltwater of *Raimangal*. (101, *translation mine*)

Each of these stories unravels one or the other aspect of the fear and the ferocity, the struggle and the hopelessness, the utmost poverty and the unique beauty of a life and livelihood that defies all traditional definition. The life of warm intimacy shared by the fishermen, the honey-collectors, the soothsayers and the crab-hunters of the area opens up the possibility of a free and honest interaction. And the plight of this helpless, downtrodden, exploited population continues to float in the intricately woven network of rivers and water bodies and the evergreen forests of *geoa*, *garanandgarjan* trees.

The reach and range of these stories is wide. From the boatmen of the rivers, the fortune-tellers, the astrologers, the river pirates and even the forest officers and guard—people from all the walks of the Sundarban life feature in these tales of trials and privation. Full of references of the folk deities and their worship rituals, age-old lore, *mantras*, *palagans* and folk

performances—these stories remind us of a zest for life that overcomes death. In “River, Forest and Life” (*Jal Jangol Jiban*) Horen has a long discussion with the Range officer Anadibabu about the life of the common people of the islands, their faith, belief and superstitions:

In response to Horen, the Ranger said, “Yes, that’s true. The names that the honey-collectors and the soothsayers have given to these islands of the forests are not the names by which their official records are maintained. There are some discrepancies there. Then again, myths of supernatural occurrences pervade many of these islands. For example, at Netidhopani island there are signs and symbols of affluent and ancient human habitation. For example, cobbled roads and very ancient temples. Here, there is an ancient temple of *Banbibi* and the door of the temple is firmly bolted from inside. Still, every evening’ you can hear a puja going on inside with the sounds of conches, bells and cymbals. The honey-collectors and the wood-cutters would tell you so. A plethora of such absurd tales of spirits and ghosts can be heard from the honey-collectors. (109, *translation mine*)

The tale of the boatman Pochen or Pochen *Patoni* (in “Ishwar Patonir Kheya” or ‘The Boat of Ishwar Patoni’) gives the reader an impression of the continuous struggle against poverty and depression that these people have to encounter. Sitting in his ramshackle boat, damaged beyond repair *Pochen* thinks of *Netai Majhi* who was heartbroken when his boat was lost in a cyclone and then one day went missing. *Netai* was a “*Majhi*” in the true sense of the term who carried people across the river even in storms and cyclones, against every odd.

A fine symbolic overtone is invested in the title of the tale that reminds one of Ishwari Patoni’s chance encounter with Goddess Annapurna in *Annadamangal Kavya* whom he helped cross the river and was blessed by her in turn. But no such divine intervention saves the life and happiness of the boatmen of the Sundarbans. They face humiliation, ignominy at home and in the society, and to crown all, are exploited and even tricked by the passengers:

In the ebb-tide slowly the boat came to shore at the sandbank of Hentalbari.



The man thrust fifty paise to Pochen's hand and got off. Pochen spoke up, "Look here, this is not the boat of Netai *majhi*. I can't carry passengers for free. Give me fifty paise more. I, too, have wife and children to feed." Still the man got off at the sandbank without paying any more money. An annoyed Pochen shouted, "This is unjust to pay less. You'll never be ferried across the river of this life, I'm telling you."

(43, *translation mine*)

Lives of subaltern people have found expression in literature variously over the years. The whole movement towards providing a voice to the silent, marginalised multitudes has found its expression more and more in the writings of the regional language authors. Those who are denied the voice to speak, the agency to effectively take a stand and protest, the ability to bargain in the globalised market place have found visibility in the writings of authors and social activists who have volunteered to take up their causes. The narratives on the lives of the people of the Sundarbans remind us again of those oft-quoted words of Homi K. Bhabha from his celebrated *The Location of Culture* where he talks of the majoritarian neglect of the power and the culture of the marginal and the peripheral. The common, poor, tolerant multitudes of the Sundarbans, too, need a voice to protest and assert their rights to an equal standard of living:

I do not mean in any sense to glorify margins and peripheries. However, I do want to make graphic what it means to survive, to produce, to labor and to create, within a world-system whose major economic impulses and cultural investments are pointed in a direction away from you, your country or your people. Such neglect can be a deeply negating experience, oppressive and exclusionary, and it spurs you to resist the polarities of power and prejudice, to reach beyond and behind the invidious narratives of center and periphery. (*Preface xi*)

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## Dr Baisali Hui

### A short bio-note

Dr Baisali Hui is Professor of English at the University of Kalyani. She did her doctoral research on Indian Partition writing, and was trained in the study of Linguistics and English language teaching at CIEFL, currently English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad. She has presented papers and chaired sessions at several national and international conferences including RELC Singapore, Bangladesh and the University of Vienna, Austria. She has published articles in national and international journals on both literature and language. She has been engaged in post-Ph.D. research (2009-2012) at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study (IIAS), Shimla, a UGC Inter-University Centre for higher research in the humanities.

# **Alienation in the Historical Perspective: The Origin and the Cause**

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## **Abstract:**

Even though the term ‘alienation’ is one of the most outstanding features of this era, it is not very definite what it specifically connotes. ‘Alienation’, according to the *Encyclopedia Britannica* is “the state of feeling estranged or separated from one’s milieu, work, products of work, or self” (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2017). Life nowadays is commonly characterized in terms of ‘alienation’. It is observed that there is almost no aspect of present-day life, which has not been discussed in terms of ‘alienation’. The sociologists use alienation in many different connections. They use the term in Sociology and Social Sciences in terms of alienation from others, from work and from society. Hegel’s and Marx’s discussions of ‘alienation’ are of considerable significance and they establish the background of a good deal of the contemporary ideas on ‘alienation’. This qualitative article, therefore, is an attempt to present a detailed analysis of ‘Alienation’ with a view to explaining this term, and how and when it appears and its connection to psychology, philosophy, sociology, Marxism, and existentialism briefly.

**Keywords:** Alienation, origin, Hegel, Marx, Sociology

Even though the term ‘alienation’ is one of the most outstanding features of this era, it is not very definite what it specifically connotes. One has to consult extensively on Hegel, Marx, Fromm and other thinkers to comprehend the complex implications of the term. The various connections in which the term has been used are restricted to include only a few meanings and applications among which most important refers to a disparity between one’s society/ Nature and one’s spiritual interests or welfare.

Life, nowadays is commonly characterized in terms of ‘alienation’. Reference is constantly made to it in connection with the growth of triviality in interpersonal relations, the impeding of personal development, the

widespread existence of obsessed personality traits, the absence of a sense of meaning in life, the uncertain relationship between man and Nature and the ‘disappearance’ of god. There is almost no aspect of contemporary life, which has not been discussed in terms of ‘alienation’.

## Defining the Term Alienation

‘Alienation’, according to the *Encyclopedia Britannica* is “the state of feeling estranged or separated from one’s milieu, work, products of work, or self” (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2017). However, it asserts that:

The idea of alienation remains an ambiguous concept with elusive meanings, the following variants being most common: (1) powerlessness, the feeling that one’s destiny is not under one’s own control but is determined by external agents, fate, luck, or institutional arrangements, (2) meaninglessness, referring either to the lack of comprehensibility or consistent meaning in any domain of action (such as world affairs or interpersonal relations) or to a generalized sense of purposelessness in life, (3) normlessness, the lack of commitment to shared social conventions of behavior (hence widespread deviance, distrust, unrestrained individual competition, and the like), (4) cultural estrangement, the sense of removal from established values in society (as, for example, in intellectual or students rebellions against conventional institutions), (5) social isolation, the sense of loneliness or exclusion in social relations (as, for example, among minority group members), and (6) self-estrangement, perhaps the most difficult to define and in a sense the master theme, the understanding that in one way or another the individual is out of touch with himself (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2017).

This classification serves as a rough guide only, since radically different conceptions developed within these categories, though the experience of being powerless and the sense of self-estrangement remained persistent features.

*The New Encyclopedia of Philosophy* treats the term in a slightly more special sense: The term ‘alienation’ (estrangement) has many different meanings in everyday life, in science and in philosophy; most of them can be

regarded as modifications of one broad meaning which is suggested by the etymology and the morphology of the word – the meaning in which alienation is the act, or result of the act, through which something, or somebody becomes (or has become) alien (or strange) to something, or somebody else (Edwards, 1967, pp. 76-78).

This Encyclopedia also emphasizes that contemporary interpretations differ according to the way the writer chooses to understand and define the term. Some authors want the concept applied both to human, as well as, non-human entities, for instance, to God, world, and Nature; but most insist that it applies only to Man, and even here, it can refer only to individuals and not to society as a whole. In fact, ‘alienation’ for these authors is the non-adjustment of the individual to the society in which he lives. Still, some maintain that even a society can be alienated, or ‘sick’. And, therefore, failure to adapt to such a situation cannot help categorize an individual alienated.

Therefore, “Alienation” in current parlance is a port-manteau word, over-used in fact, to communicate disenchantment of all hues and variety, for, dissatisfaction, healthy or unhealthy, is at the root of all modernisms, post or ante.

The word ‘alienation’ is consequential to a perpetually felt threat and menace from the ‘Nature’ and/or ‘other’, and is the prime experience, but in case of Western playwright Beckett, such an interpretation would seem a misapplication. This is because what Beckett institutes on the proscenium from the very start is a universal human predicament, existence in Beckett’s perspective being aborted, apparently meaningless and futile. Therefore, there is nothing to be alienated from; the Beckett experience is uni-polar; it is an existential impasse from its inception in which a human being is neither a character in the traditional sense nor a conglomerate in its Pirandellian (characteristic of the works of Luigi Pirandello (1867-1936), Italian dramatist and poet; especially describing drama in which actors become inseparable and indistinct from the characters that they play) variety. Therefore, what is instituted on stage is a manifestation of nothing. The human condition is ‘there’ on stage, which is in a perpetual swing.

But, for Ahmad, the Eastern playwright, it is very different. As the people of this region have not undergone the crisis similar to Western people and because of following different belief, Ahmad depicts alienation and

absurdity of different kind which is recognized and acquainted to the people of this part of the world – Ahmad shows the powerlessness of the people before the powerful Mother Nature or the natural forces and, the feeling that one's destiny is not under one's own control but is determined by external agents and/or by Nature. In Ahmad's write ups, the characters continuously felt threat and menace from the outward world -the 'Nature'.

Life, nowadays is commonly characterized in terms of 'alienation'. Yet, in spite of the term's recognition, few people have a detailed idea of precisely what does it mean. 'Alienation' is a term that most people realize in terms of their acquaintance with the writings of certain philosophers, psychologists and sociologists whose use of the term are most significant. In reality, it is largely through the influence of these and other recent authors that the term has come to have whatever meaning it has today.

Hegel's and Marx's discussions of 'alienation' are of considerable significance and they establish the background of a good deal of the contemporary ideas on 'alienation'. It seems to a number of contemporary social scientists who have attempted to generalize about the way term 'alienation' functions, that, however different the contexts in which it is employed may be, its various uses still share a number of common features. Arnold Kaufman, for example, offers the following general analysis:

To claim that a person is alienated is to claim that his relation to something else has certain features, which result in avoidable discontent or loss of satisfaction (Kaufman, 1965, p.143).

Lewis Feuer suggests, "the word alienation is used to describe the subjective tone of self- destructive experience" and states:

"Alienation is used to convey the emotional tone which accompanies any behavior in which the person is compelled to act self-destructively" (Feuer, 1962, p.132).

Kenneth Keniston opines that "most usages of 'alienation' share the assumption that some relationship or connection that once existed that is 'natural', desirable, or good has been lost" (Keniston, 1965, p.390).

From the linguistic point of view, and long before Hegel and Marx, an important use of 'alienation' which goes back to Middle English and has its

roots in Latin usage, is in connection with the state of unconsciousness and loss of one's mental powers.

## **Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831)**

It is in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) that Hegel for the first time used the term 'alienation' systematically in anything like the special ways in which it is used today. He provides an adequate discussion of 'alienation' and 'self-alienated spirit' in that book. Hegel is directly concerned with the theme of 'alienation' when he attempts to trace the entire development of the human spirit. He is less interested in accurate chronology than in what might be termed the "logical" development implicit in man's history. Hegel holds that the world in which man lives is largely a world he himself has created. Social, political, and cultural institutions constitute what he refers to as 'the social substance'. As a product of the human spirit, Hegel considers it to be essentially 'spiritual':

This world is a spiritual reality; it is essentially the fusion of individuality with being. This its existence is the work of self-consciousness, but likewise an actuality immediately present and alien to it (Hegel, 1967, p. 509).

This suggests that a spiritual nature is conveyed to everything created by human activity. Hegel even goes so far to suggest that the entire phenomenal world is 'spiritual':

Consciousness [...] must have taken up a relation to the object in all its aspects and phases, and have grasped its meaning from the point of view of each of them. This totality of indeterminate characteristics makes the object per se or inherently a spiritual reality (Hegel, 1967, p. 790).

The whole of his discussion of 'alienation' occurs in a section on 'Culture and its Realm of Actual Reality', which is precisely the world of social substance.

Hegel regards this social substance as the objectification of the human spirit, in which spirit finds the objective form that is essential to its actualization.

Thus, he speaks of it as ‘objective spirit’. It is the very nature of spirit to be objective and universal.

Hegel’s concept of the nature of man underlies his use of the term ‘alienation’ and ‘self-alienation’. To Hegel, man’s nature is twofold, individuality and universality. He objects strongly to the view that the nature of man consists only in ‘individuality’ and, therefore he attaches great importance to ‘universality’. He speaks of human consciousness that universality is its ‘essence’:

Self-consciousness ... only has real existence so far as it alienates itself from itself. By doing so, it puts itself in the position of something universal, and this its universality is its validity ... and is its actuality ... its claim to be valid rests on its having made itself ... conform to what is universal (Hegel, 1967, p. 514).

The idea Hegel wishes to convey is that the social substance is common to the whole of the people and, therefore, transcends the individuality of the individual. If the individual is to achieve the universal, he must make himself ‘conformable’ to it, and live in accordance with it. Hegel considers unity with the social substance essential for man to attain universality as his essential nature.

It is this clash of individuality and universality, which is termed as ‘alienation’ by Hegel. Richard Schacht strongly argues that Hegel uses the term ‘alienation’ in two different ways. He uses it to refer to a separation between the individual and the social substance or ‘self-alienation’ between one’s actual condition and essential nature. He also uses it to refer to “a surrender or sacrifice of particularity and willfulness to attain unity” (Keniston, 1965, p.35).

In the first sense, ‘alienation’ involves separation, strangeness, something becoming alien. When the person ceases to identify with the social substance and comes to limit himself to his own particular person, he then views the substance as something external and opposed to him. It has become ‘alien’ or ‘alienated’.

It is observed that Hegel uses ‘alienation’, in this sense, in connection with the ‘emergence’ of an awareness of the ‘otherness’ of something. It must have ‘become’ alien to him after a period in which he was at one with it. It is



also noted that it is the social substance when the same lack of unity exists. The two modes of expression are complementary. When the individual ceases to be at one with the social substance, Hegel contends, he loses his universality, and “therein alienates (himself) from (his) inner nature and arrives at the extreme discordance with (himself)” (Hegel, 1967, p. 535). He thus becomes self-alienated. Self-alienation is used to refer to a separation or discrepancy between actual condition and essential nature.

The second sense of alienation that Hegel explains derives from the notion – held by Hobbes (1588-1679) and Rousseau (1712 - 1778) and other social contract philosophers of the surrender or transfer of a right to another. It is something deliberate and involves a conscious relinquishing or surrender with the intention of attaining a desired end: namely unity with the social substance. Alienation in this sense is, in fact, for Hegel, a means to overcome ‘alienation’ in the former sense and to eliminate the gulf that had separated him from the social substance, and, consequently, to attain universality: “The power of the individual consists in conforming (himself) to that substance, i.e. in emptying (or relinquishing) his self and thus establishing (himself) as objectively existing substance” (Hegel, 1967, p. 517).

For Hegel, the social substance is not only the creation of spirit, but its objectification as well. This means that the social substance is spirit in objectified form. From this it follows that when the social substance is alienated from the individual, it is objectified spirit that is alienated from him, or, to put it another way, it is the individual’s own true self-objectification that is alienated from him.

There is an entire section in the *Phenomenology* (1945, in English 1962) entitled “self-alienated Spirit”, in which he describes the spirit as self-alienated when there is a discordant relation between the individual and social substance. When the social substance is alienated from the individual, spirit is divided within itself; and it is between its divided aspects that this relation of alienation holds. In short, spirit is self-alienated. When one considers the fruitfulness of Hegel’s use of the term ‘alienation’, one is confronted with the question of his reason for using it in two distinct senses. It is in fact confusing to say a person who is at one with the social substance arid of a person who is not, that each has “alienated his self”. Hegel’s twofold use creates confusion, but this does not detract from the usefulness of the term. Hegel’s use of the term to mean separation between the

individual and the social substance is not new, for it had previously been used to convey the idea of separation between individuals and between men and God. Hegel's innovation in his use of the term is that he applied it to the discordant relation between the individual and the non-personal social substance. But where Hegel seems less persuasive is when he speaks of an essential nature of man implicit in his use of self-alienation to refer to a separation or disparity between a person's actual condition and his essential "inner" nature. This obviously presupposes that he has such an essential nature. There are many who, in fact do not consider man to have such a definite and describable thing as 'essential nature'. It may be that Hegel's conception of man's essential nature is not completely satisfactory, or is questionable; but he is most convincing about his basic point that man's spiritual life involves both distinct individuality and participation in a social and cultural community.

## **Karl Marx (1818- 1883)**

Hegel's basic concept of man's capacity for spiritual life was severely attacked by Marx in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1932), (*Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* of 1844 (also referred to as *The Paris Manuscripts*) are a series of notes written between April and August 1844 by Karl Marx. Not published by Marx during his lifetime, they were first released in 1932 (by researchers in the Soviet Union) which revealed a previously unknown side of him that of the passionate 'humanist', concerned with the issue of man's self-realization. From the start, Marx charges Hegel with over abstraction of his concept of alienation, "The distinctive forms of alienation which are manifested are only different forms of consciousness and self-consciousness" (Marx, 1963, p.202). They are "merely the thought of alienation, its abstract and hence vacuous and unreal expression" (Marx, 1963, p.215). Marx wanted to bring to earth Hegel's transcendental abstractions, which misrepresent the "real, corporeal man, with his feet firmly planted on the sordid ground, inhaling and exhaling all the powers of nature" (Marx, 1963, p.206). The human product, which Marx calls 'alienated' from the individual under certain conditions is not, the 'social substance' as it had been for Hegel, it is the product of the individual's labor. This is the first crucial step Marx takes to reduce Hegel's 'too abstract' (as Marx thought) account of 'alienation' to its concrete materialistic form. Marx is adapting Hegel's concept of the alienation of the social substance in terms of the objectification of personality in the product of the individual's labor. It is important to remember that Marx does not call the product

alienated from its producer merely because in it his labor becomes an object, as Hegel does, but he explicitly states that it is alienated from its producer only when “the object sets itself against him as an alien and hostile force”. Marx adds “The alienation of the worker in his labor becomes an object, assumes an external existence, but that it exists independently, outside himself, and alien to him, and that it stands opposed to him” (Marx, 1963, p.222). Thus, Marx distinguishes clearly between externalization and the alienation of the product.

The actual source of its hostility lies in the powers, which govern it, in the other man for whom it is produced. If my product is related to me, Marx argues, as an alien and hostile object, this must be because it belongs to someone who is alien to me. Its alienation from me must be attributed to my surrender of it to another person. Here, Hegel’s two aspects or senses of alienation have come together. The alienated product is separated from its producer because he has surrendered it to another. In Marx the separation is the result of the surrender; whereas; in Hegel the separation of the individual from the social substance is overcome through the surrender of the individual to the social substance.

Not only the product of labor but also labor itself is described by Marx as alienated. The major part of his discussion of alienation in the first manuscript bears the title ‘Alienated Labor’. He argues that labor becomes alienated when it ceases to reflect one’s own personality and interests:

What constitutes the alienation of labor? First, that the work is external to the worker, that it is not part of his nature; and that, consequently, he does not fulfill himself in his work but denies himself, has a feeling of misery rather than well-being, does not develop freely his mental and physical energies but is physically exhausted and mentally debased (Marx, 1963, pp.124-125).

A man’s labor is truly his own labor, for Marx, only when it is ‘spontaneous’, and ‘free and self-directed activity’.

According to Marx, the alienation of product and labor has the direct consequence that “man is alienated from other man” (Marx, 1963, p.129). The alienation from other man is to be understood by Marx as involving a complete absence of fellow feeling and antagonism based on a feeling of rivalry and self-centeredness” (Marx, 1963, pp. 22-26).

The expression ‘self-alienation’ is used by Marx to characterize the alienation of labor. The point he wishes to stress is that a man’s labor is his life, and his product is his life-objectified; and that, therefore, when they are alienated from him. When his personal physical, and spiritual energy as manifested in his productive activity or labor, is subjected to the direction of another, his very life is no longer his own. He is, therefore, ‘self-alienated’.

Self –alienation is used by Marx also to refer to one’s separation from one’s true human self, or essential nature. ‘Alienated labor’, he states, “alienation from man his own body, external nature, his mental life and his human life” (Marx, 1963, p. 129).

## **Erich Fromm (1900 -1980)**

Erich Fromm has had a great deal to do with the dissemination of the term ‘alienation’. He was much influenced by Marx’s *Early Manuscripts* (1932) and incorporated them in his book *Marx’s Concept of Man* (1961). The problem of alienation has been a constant theme in his write ups starting with *The Fear of Freedom* (1941). Indeed, it is the central issue in one of his significant books, *The Sane Society* (1955), where he says:

I have chosen the concept of alienation as the central point from which I am going to develop the analysis of the contemporary social character (Fromm, 1990 p.110).

In this book, Fromm speaks of alienation as though it were a single phenomenon and uses it to characterize certain possible relations of a person to nature, other man, his society and himself.

Concerning man’s relations to nature, Fromm never spells out precisely what he means by ‘nature’. Sometimes it would appear to refer to purely physical life. At other times it seems to mean something like man’s natural environment; where one would need to exist in unity with it as he is an integral functioning part within it. This ambiguity makes it difficult to comprehend what it precisely is that man is alienated from.

The essence of the concept of alienation, according to Fromm, is that others have become alien to man. An alienated person is “out of touch with any other person” (Fromm, 1990 p.120). Fromm speaks of alienation from others

in connection with the lack of ‘harmony’. In this context, a man is alienated who fails to relate himself to others.

Fromm often speaks of our society and culture as alienated. He speaks of alienation in modern society rather than from it. When Fromm says that society is alienated, he means that it tends to make individuals alienated from their work, their production, from themselves and from nature. Fromm follows Marx in tracing the source of man’s alienation to the contemporary socioeconomic structure. Generally speaking, Fromm is strongly opposed to unity with society. Contrary to what Hegel holds, it is precisely the person who is completely at one with society. Contrary to what Hegel holds, it is precisely the person who is completely at one with society whom Fromm calls alienated: “we all conform as much or more than people in an intensely authoritarian society would” (Fromm, 1990 p.138). This is the height of alienation from oneself. Fromm complains that modern man “suffers from a defect of spontaneity and individuality which may seem incurable” (Fromm, 1990 p.24), and he argues that man can realize his ‘self’ only if he abandons conformity to society and recovers his individuality.

Perhaps the most important of these separations is that of the individual from himself. When Fromm says that the ‘alienated person’ is ‘out of touch with himself’ he seems to mean that ‘alienation from one-self’ consists of something like the loss or lack of individuality or spontaneity. “By alienation is meant a mode of experience in which the person experiences himself as alien [to himself]” (Fromm, 1990 p.120).

Not only does Fromm understand ‘alienation’ in terms of man’s relations to nature, to others, to society and to himself, but also uses it in a variety of other contexts as well, Fromm’s weakness is that he uses the term so freely that the results are not very illuminating.

## **Karen Horney (1885 -1952)**

The expression ‘alienation from self’ is in vogue in the writings of a number of psychoanalysts, particularly those under the influence of Karen Horney, Horney distinguishes between two types or dimensions of the ‘self’: the ‘actual self’ and the ‘real self’:

I would distinguish the actual or empirical self from the idealized self on the one hand, and the real self from the idealized self on the other. The actual self is an all-inclusive term for everything that a person is at a given time... The real self... is the 'original' force toward individual growth and fulfillment, with which we may again achieve full identification when freed of the crippling shackles of neurosis (Horney, 1950, p.158).

The 'actual self' is further characterized in terms of ones 'feelings, wishes, beliefs, and energies' and also his past. The 'real self', on the other hand, is to be conceived as 'that most alive center of ourselves', which "engenders the spontaneity of feelings" and "is the source of spontaneous interest and energies" (Horney, 1950, pp.156-57). Having distinguished these two types or dimensions of "self", Horney then introduces two types of 'alienation from the actual self' and 'alienation from the real self'.

"Alienation from the actual self" is said to consist of the "dimming of all of what a person actually is or has, including even his connection of his present life with his past" (Horney, 1950, p.156). According to Horney, the self-alienated person:

Talks about his most intimate personal life experiences. Yet they have lost their personal meaning. And just as he may talk about himself without 'being in it', so he may work, be with friends, take a walk ...without being in it. His relation to himself has become impersonal; so has his relation to his whole life" (Horney, 1950, p.161).

'Alienation from the real self' involves ceasing to be animated by the energies springing from his 'real self' which is characterized as 'that most alive centre of ourselves ... the source of spontaneity of feelings ... the original force toward individual growth and fulfillment'. To be alienated from the real self is to be cut off or deprived of access to this source of energy. The difference between the two types of 'alienation from the self' is indeed too slight. Of the former type, she says:

"It is the loss of the feeling of being an active determining force in his own life. It is the loss of feeling himself as an organic whole. These in turn indicate an alienation from that most alive centre of

ourselves which I have suggested calling the real self”(Horney, 1950, p.157).

The failure to be ‘an active determining force in one’s own life’ seems to differ very slightly from the failure to develop ‘a spontaneous individual self’, which is characteristic of ‘alienation from the real self’.

In spite of the fact that Karen Horney’s notion of the ‘real self’ and the differentiations she attempts are not sufficiently clear, her use of the term ‘alienation’ does not become meaningless. She is considerably more selective in her use of the term than Erich Fromm is.

## **Modern Sociology**

In recent years in the field of sociology and social sciences, ‘alienation’ has proved a heuristically fruitful concept. Though very few generalizations can be concerning the way the concept of alienation is understood by social scientists, yet they do not use it in any of the major contexts in which Fromm or Horney do. Many sociologists understand alienation precisely in terms of some forms of separation of the individual from some aspect of society. In Fromm, conformity to society goes hand in hand with alienation. Sociologists differ from Hegel, Marx and Fromm in another respect. For almost all sociologist’s alienation is a psychological state of an individual. It is conceived solely in terms of the presence of certain attitudes and feelings. The question of an essential nature of man does not even arise.

The use of ‘alienation’ in connection with some form of separation of the individual from some writers do use the term in connection with the phenomena of ‘powerlessness’ and ‘meaninglessness’. In addition, the use of the term in connection with separation from other people has long been a common one. The sociologists use alienation in many different connections. They use the term in Sociology and Social Sciences in terms of alienation from others, from work and from society.

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# ***Rappaccini's Daughter: A Study from Existential Feminism***

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## **Abstract**

This paper is an attempt to study *Rappaccini's Daughter* by Nathanael Hawthorne from the perspective of existential feminism advocated by Simone de Beauvoir who defines women as “other” and insignificant part of human race and is very critical about the position of women in society. Being influenced by Existentialism which emphasizes on the meaninglessness of human existence, Beauvoir identified the life of women as more difficult, challenging and meaningless than men. This study focuses on the existential struggle of Beatrice to find her place in the masculine world and trace her development as a human being in the course of the story. Beatrice as a woman fights to get recognition as a human being. She is deprived and tormented but still struggles to find her place. In this study the attempt has been to analyze Beatrice's plight from the viewpoint of existential feminism. Here Beatrice stands as a representative of all the suffering women deprived from their rights whom Beauvoir wants to rise up and claim their position.

**Keywords:** Existentialism, feminism, despair, subordination, freedom

**R***appaccini's daughter* by Nathanael Hawthorne has been the focus of many literary ideas from the very beginning of its publication. A number of critical perspectives have been applied on it since then to analyze and appreciate this well-known short story. Critics like Millington (1989) and Nina Baym (1982) tried to criticize *Rappaccini's Daughter* from the perspective of radical feminism. They tried to prove Beatrice's death as a result of the dominant patriarchal society. Others, like Rosenberry (1960) and Uroff (1972) tried to examine the story with the lenses of ecocriticism. They found connection between Rappaccini's control of Beatrice with the attempt of humans to control and perfect nature. Poststructuralist literary approach to *Rappaccini's Daughter* was advocated by Roy Male (1957), Martin (2006) and Abramson (2011) who tried to analyze the story from the perspective of duality of goodness and evil. Not much research has been done to analyze Beatrice's plight in the story from existential feminism. This

paper attempts to view Beatrice as an existential character who suffers endlessly in a hostile patriarchal world.

In Wikipedia, existentialism is defined as a philosophical trait that aims to define human existence which is considered as meaningless. (Existentialism) It sees humans as free –responsible for everything that happen in their life. Soren Kierkegaard is the father of existentialism who with deep religious value tried to define existential anxiety. In Kierkegaard the singularity of existence comes to light at the moment of conflict between ethics and religious faith. (Existentialism) This philosophy later got popularity and new dimension with the work of philosophers like, Federic Nietzsche, Albert Camus and Jean Paul Sartre. Feminism on the other hand is a movement that attempts to provide equal social, political and economic power to women. As a movement it involves different sociopolitical and cultural theories that wants equal rights for women. These two literary ideas combine together and create existential feminism. Existential feminism is a later development of existential philosophy. It started with the French novelist Simone de Beauvoir who was very much influenced by her contemporary existential philosophy and literary trends (Quinan). Due to her personal involvement with Jean Paul Sartre – the most famous of existential writers, Beauvoir was concerned with the notion of meaninglessness of human life with all its anxiety, despair and struggle. As a woman she realized that this struggle for survival in a world of adversity is much more difficult for a woman than a man. She uses existentialism to discover and investigate the causes and history of women's suppression and oppression. In her books like *The Second Sex* and *Facts and Myths* Beauvoir comes up with a strong feminist expression that directly attacks male supremacy by declaring that women must not depend on men for their survival and existence. (Silverio 18). In 1949, Beauvoir gave her notion that gender difference is not natural rather it is created artificially and declares, "one is not born, but rather becomes, woman" She personally believed that the masculine world makes the struggle of a woman seem less important and insignificant. Beauvoir declares that if a woman wants to free herself, then she must aspire to rich high, to break the rules of the society. Only then she can get what she wants- the ultimate freedom. Beauvoir defines the position of women as, "Woman is the negative, to such a point that any determination is imputed to her as a limitation, without reciprocity" Beauvoir points out that in this masculine world, women are always dependent on men and their status is never equal. When men enjoy higher position in the job market and earn more money, women usually adjust themselves with less prestigious job and less salary. Existentialist feminism advocates that women are free to choose their ways of life, but must suffer the anxiety associated with this freedom. Women who are bold enough to endure isolation and rejection can actually enjoy the true freedom. Thus existentialist feminism establishes the

fact that women are the creation of the social and cultural ideology and they have the status of being other, the opposite of everything that men have. Because of all these dynamic ideas, it is generally agreed that with Beauvoir's existentialist feminism starts the second wave of feminism in the literary world. (Silverio16)

Nathaniel Hawthorne was quite gender conscious in his writings which makes him different from other writers of his age. His works are peopled with characters like Hester, Georgianna, Miriam, and Zenobia who are generally considered the most well developed female characters in the history of English literature. Most of Hawthorne's female characters are portrayed as suppressed in the male dominated world. But in the course of the story most of them fight back. Beatrice from *Rappaccini's Daughter* is such a character with all her intelligence and strength of mind. The whole story takes place in an Italian city named Padua. The young Giovanni Guasconti's arrives in Padua as a medical student and starts to live in a building once occupied by ancient family. Giovanni was overwhelmed by the dismal and gloomy atmosphere of the apartment until he beholds a peculiar but well-kept garden near the apartment. Beatrice quickly draws his attention whom he first sees in the garden nurturing flowers. Tension builds up in Giovanni's mind when he discovers of Beatrice's being poisonous. He is so fascinated by Beatrice's beauty that he shortly discovers a secret entrance to the garden and starts courting her. We later come to know that Rappaccini is the owner of this garden who is renowned of cultivating different poisonous flowers and experimenting with them. Then we meet Baglioni the mentor of Giovanni who is jealous of Rappaccini's fame as a doctor. Baglioni cleverly plans to use Giovanni against Rappaccini and take revenge on him. In the course of the story Giovanni also gets infected with the poisonous flowers of Rappaccini's garden. Baglioni gives Giovanni an antidote promising his (Giovanni) and Beatrice's quick recovery. Beatrice drinks the antidote first and dies immediately declaring her disgust towards the men for their irresponsibility and callousness. Hawthorne was not a declared feminist and when he created Beatrice his aim was not to make her the representative of the suppressed feminine world. But a thorough analysis of the story is able to establish Beatrice as a towering figure with courage, bravery and integrity. In this paper the aim is to identify Beatrice's plight with Beauvoir's existential feminism. Here Beatrice is not an individual character, but she represents all the suppressed and tormented women of the world who in an attempt to find their rightful position sacrifice their life. Her life mirrors the existential anxiety of women who find themselves as other, or a minority group marginalized and oppressed in the all dominating masculine world.

According to existential feminism women are always under male gaze. A woman's first realization of herself of being an object of sex happens because of it. It is a continual process that encompasses all her life

(Beauvoir 12). In *Rappaccini's Daughter* Giovanni watches Beatrice secretly from his window. He is fascinated with the beauty of Beatrice who remains unconscious until Giovanni makes himself visible to her. Before that Beatrice had no idea of being watched. To Giovanni, she is only an object of sex- a woman with a beautiful body. While describing her first appearance, Giovanni focuses on only her physical beauty and attractiveness. There is never an indication of her having a beautiful mind or intellect. The lines go on like this "the figure of a young girl, arrayed with as much richness of taste as the most splendid of the flowers, beautiful as the day, and with a bloom so deep and vivid that one shade more would have been too much. She looked redundant with life, health, and energy; all of which attributes were bound down and compressed, as it were, and girdled tensely, in their luxuriance, by her virgin zone" (Hawthorne 3). According to existential feminism, a woman's struggle for survival intensifies if men perceive her as only a body- not a combination of both body and soul. A woman never sees her body with her own gaze since the gaze of male is spread all over. She never learns to see herself as an independent human being as she is always controlled in the name of protection and safety by men. While man sees his body as strong and naturally connected with everything positive, he considers female body as something negative and inadequate. Beauvoir presents this as, "he grasps his body as a direct and normal link with the world that he believes he apprehends in all objectivity, whereas he considers woman's body an obstacle, a prison, burdened by everything that particularizes it" (25). In *Rappaccini's Daughter*, Beatrice doesn't have the freedom or space to take any decision of her own. She is made poisonous by her father to facilitate his experiments on poisonous plants and doesn't bother to think about her opinion. In order to fulfill his selfish desire, Rappaccini separates his daughter from the entire world and in the name of giving power actually takes off all of her power to lead a normal life. The other two men also ruin her in their attempt to control her. Freedom and space are the two basic rights that Beauvoir has advocated in her description of women and their existence in the society. As these are not given to Beatrice, she suffers, struggles and finally sets free through her death.

According to existentialist feminism the root cause of women's oppression is of women having the status of other. It is a term invented by men to categorize women as opposite sex, as group who are different from them both physically and psychologically. Beauvoir asserts as women are defined as "other" by men, they have little opportunity to progress through their actions. Beauvoir tries to find the status of women from a man's perspective by declaring, "Woman? Very simple, say the fanciers of simple formulas: she is a womb, an ovary: she is a female – this word is sufficient to define her" (3). Historically women are destined to be inferior. Men have always been considered as supreme, conqueror, master of all the forces of the world including women. According to Janet Boles, "Primarily due to

one's biology, women's oppression consists of being denied transcendence and subjectivity." (qtd. in Existentialist feminism 1) In *Rappaccini's Daughter*, Beatrice is the "other" - the opposite sex who is the target of all the negative aspects of masculine world. As a woman she has no right to claim herself a part of it and needs to follow a strict course of conduct designed by men. She is subjected to male domination and authority which deprives her from exploring her desires, needs and expectations. Beatrice lives in an adverse masculine world filled with males who with a jealous eye observe and scrutinize all of her actions. Her life spins around the boundary of her father's garden eager to break free and join the outer world. Her naïve exclamation on Giovanni's description of his hometown clearly indicates her lack of experience with the outer world. She is the obedient daughter eager to help her father in his scientific experiments. Surprisingly, there is never a show of love from Rappaccini's part to his daughter nor he ever says or does things that might please her. In reality, his love for science is greater than his love for his daughter. In spite of that Beatrice never stops loving and caring for her father. It happens because being a woman Beatrice's existence doesn't signify anything to her father. She 'doesn't possess an identity but lives just as a shadow of Rappaccini. Existential feminism identifies this kind of father daughter relationship with that of master and slave. Beauvoir with the help of Darwinism tried to define the masculine behavior as, "men, by their natures, conquer and master their environments. Women's role in this respect is also relegated to that of "Other." Women are not active participants in battle, but find their place before and after. There is utility in each role, however; biology makes man incidental to the species: his role is to "remodel" the earth, while women are tasked with "tending" (64). Rappaccini abuses his daughter, deprives her of having a normal life and destroys her every chance of being happy. No one objects or questions him as in a patriarchal society a dominating father is not a rarity. Apart from Rappaccini, the other two men also take an active role to harm Beatrice. Giovanni's preoccupation with determining the real nature of his lover leaves Beatrice even more vulnerable. He taunts her emphatically whenever he gets any chance. He is enchanted by her overwhelming beauty but suspicious of her unusual behavior with the poisonous plants. His analytical mind frustrates him and identifies Beatrice as a being whom he cannot understand and apprehend. It is difficult to identify Pietro Baglioni's motive behind his hatred towards Beatrice. The only reason that he can think of behind this hatred is his fear of Beatrice's chance of taking his chair in the university and being intellectually superior than him. In a patriarchal society a woman with extraordinary talent is always perceived as a threat to male authority and is instantly silenced to restore the male privilege over female. Baglioni's accusation is proven wrong with Beatrice's plain declaration, "Do people say that I am skilled in my father's science of plants? . . . No; though I have grown up among these flowers, I know no more of them than their hues

and perfume; and sometimes, methinks I would fain rid myself of even that small knowledge. " (Hawthorn 11) In a patriarchal society women are generally perceived as vulnerable in the face of trouble and are misused to fulfill a man's desire. Men frequently oppress and dominate women in the name of male supremacy which in turn creates social inequality. In the story Baglioni does the same thing. He plans to kill Beatrice to secure his position in the university and also to maintain his superiority as a man. Here Giovanni and Baglioni's actions can be interpreted from the point of gender relationship in a patriarchal society. Both of them lack the thing that Beatrice has- intellectual superiority and a pure soul. In an attempt to overcome their inferiority complex they destroy her. Giovanni cannot love Beatrice wholeheartedly as his male ego fears Beatrice's superior spirituality which he cannot accept. In a society in which men are always associated with power, reason and activity and women with passivity and powerlessness, it is difficult for men like Giovanni and Baglioni to accept Beatrice for what she is.

According to existentialist feminism a woman is always comfortable with nature and natural surroundings where there are no men to watch and control her. Felicity Joseph in his article "Becoming a woman: Simone de Beauvoir on Female Embodiment" says that Beauvoir thinks:

There are situations in which young women can be comfortable in their bodies- indeed, not only comfortable, but joyous and proud. Consider a girl who enjoys walking in the fields and woods, feeling a profound connection to nature. She has a great sense of happiness and freedom in her body which she doesn't feel in a social environment. In nature there are no males to gaze upon her, there are no mothers to criticize her. She no longer sees herself through other's eyes, and thus is finally free to define her body for herself.

In *Rappaccini's Daughter*, we always meet Beatrice in the garden. She feels happy to tend the flowers and even addresses the shrub as her sister. Hawthorne presents a beautiful picture of the scene when Beatrice addresses the flowers as, "yes, my sister, my splendor, it shall be Beatrice's task to nurse and serve thee; and thou shalt reward her with thy kisses and perfumed breath, which to her is as the breath of life" (17). But even in the midst of natural surrounding she can't escape from male gaze. Giovanni watches her secretly from his apartment and scrutinize her beauty and personality. He tries to figure out the mystery of her being toxic by observing her actions with insects and by throwing out fresh flowers toward her. In his mind he is continually pondering over, "What is this being? Beautiful shall I call her, or inexpressibly terrible" (Hawthorne 6)? Thus, even after staying close to nature she fails to hide herself from the scrutiny of a male observation. It may happen as the garden is not naturally created but is carefully cultivated



by Rappaccini with poisonous flowers. Here Beatrice is not free to define her body to herself and enjoy freedom. Both Rappaccini and Giovanni corrupts her body- one by poisoning her and other by trying to cure her. Thus the test of freedom and happiness is always beyond her reach.

According to existential feminism woman needs not depend on men for her survival. A woman needs to find her inner spirit to fulfil her goal of equal rights. (Sangamitra18) All woman must exalt their inner power of warrior spirit and the ultimate sense of happiness is found when they get solution through their natural instinct. Existentialist feminism declares that women must not depend on men to get their freedom. They must fight by themselves. They need to use their internal strength to shine and achieve their goal -that is to have a rightful place of their own in the society. "If woman seems to be the inessential which never becomes the essential, it is because she herself fails to bring about this change." (Simone de Beauvoir 4) Beatrice is Hawthorne's one of the strongest and spirited female characters. She is an independent woman who fights to free herself from the mistreatment of dominant men. She tries to change her life by loving Giovanni and thus going out from the grasp of her father. She quickly understands that Giovanni's attraction for her is only on physical level and attempts to save his spirituality. It is her death that transforms her status from a victim to a martyr. Her death is not a meaningless surrender to the patriarchal power of the society, but an attempt to set free herself from it. In a patriarchal society woman who suffers endlessly under male domination sometimes start to react against it through revolt and withdrawal. It is at this moment that women appear to be more courageous and strong because now nothing can stop them from gaining the thing that they want. This comes out more clearly in Beatrice's final words. Before her death she declares, "I would fain have been loved, not feared", thus proving herself as a victimized woman who has never experienced true love and affection from anyone. She takes her last breath after accusing Giovanni for his mistreatment and misperception of her. Her tormented speech goes on like this, "Farewell, Giovanni! Thy words of hatred are like lead within my heart – but they, too, will fall away as I ascend. Oh, was there, not from the first, more poison in thy nature than in mine?" (Hawthorne 20). She asks the ultimate existential question as to whether there are more evil in men than women as it is the men who are responsible for her being poisonous and her untimely death. Here she declares the desire of every woman for freedom and acceptance. She proves her father wrong who thought that he was able to save her (Beatrice) from the harms of the society by isolating and making her poisonous. She finds the real meaning of her life her in death. She decides to drink the antidote in spite of its being dangerous in an attempt to establish herself as a woman of free spirit in front of her father. At the same time the immature Giovanni gets a lifelong lesson from her- the lesson of

thinking beyond physical level and considering a woman more than just an object of sexual desire.

According to existentialist feminism, there is always a sense of anxiety in the part of men for their female counterparts. As men are habituated in seeing women as only an object of sexual pleasure, anything intellectual or different from the preconceived view creates confusion and imbalance in the masculine world. Beauvoir says, "Some men dread feminine competition." (8) She complains that men suffer from inferiority complex when they see women as their competitors and added further, "indeed no one is more arrogant towards women, more aggressive or scornful, than the man who is anxious about his virility." (34) In *Rappaccini's Daughter*, Giovanni falls in love with Beatrice at first sight. He is greatly charmed with her physical beauty but fears of being in possession of her. He craves to be with her but spites her poisonous body and wants to be away from her. Giovanni's anxiety comes out more clearly in Elder who states, "The dark view would send Giovanni out of the influence of the unintelligible power; the bright view would encourage him to see Beatrice in daylight may give him a chance to appreciate her true spiritual self. But enjoying the mixture of love and horror was sure to create an infernal blaze." (96) Giovanni is never at peace as his mind continuously wars on whether to love Beatrice or to hate her. Hawthorne picturizes this dilemma as: "It was not love, although her rich beauty was a madness to him; nor horror, even while he fancied spirit to be imbued with the same baneful essence that seemed to pervade her physical frame; but a wild offspring of both love and horror that had each parent in it, and burned like one and shivered like the other." (7) When things go right he never fails to bestow his love for her. But when the situation is worse he withdraws his love in an instance. Frequently we hear him utter despicable words like "poisonous thing" (Hawthorne 18) and accusing her of being "ugly, loathsome and deadly creature". (Hawthorne 18) His frustration gets worse when he himself becomes poisonous like her. Beatrice tries to defend herself and prove her innocence though Giovanni is not in the state of realizing it. Giovanni's declared attempt to cure Beatrice from being poisonous can be interpreted as his desperation to remodel her into the image of a perfect woman whom he fantasizes- an image that excludes everything extraordinary and unique. Existential feminism identifies this male anxiety over female superiority as something inseparable and permanent as Beauvoir declares, "she is called 'the sex', by which is meant that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex – absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute – she is the Other." (3) Giovanni dreams to have sexual intercourse with Beatrice, idealizes her beauty but is unwilling to be under her influence because as a man he must not lose his authority to a woman. We cannot blame Giovanni

for having this kind of attitude as this has been a historically and socially accepted norm for centuries that cannot be changed easily.

J. Mahon once said, “women can exercise their freedom, but only within a universe which has been constructed before them, and without taking cognizance of their wishes. In the case of women, they have no option but to submit to the laws, the gods, the customs, and the truths which males alone have devised.” (47) In a world where human existence is perceived as meaningless, a woman goes through manifold difficulties to survive here. Beauvoir’s existentialist feminism recognizes it as an inevitable fate of every woman. Nevertheless, it also believes that a woman can certainly come out of all the negative forces and enjoy a life of recognition and fulfillment. In *Rappaccini's Daughter*, Beatrice gets this fulfilment. She gets to know the actual meaning of her life. The journey she took was full of existential anxiety which at first made her vulnerable but later gave her power to fight back. Her death is certainly the result of her existential struggle, her attempt to get a place in the masculine world. Through her death she becomes complete and an independent woman who is disillusioned about the cruelty of the world. Thus Beatrice appears to be a perfect example of an existentialist character.

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# **Reception of Postcolonial Literature in the West: Ethno-Racial Issues**

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## **Abstract**

In the case of evaluation and reception of postcolonial literatures in the West, racial and ethnic affiliations of the writers seem to be remaining a major determinant. Many western reviewers and critics often consider postcolonial writers' ethno-racial backgrounds as crucial for judging strengths and weaknesses of their texts and as integral to understanding the meaning and value of the same. They tend to identify postcolonial writers as "ethnic" writers and award them with a representative status of their respective ethnicities. They locate postcolonial texts in minority/regional literary traditions and treat them as portrayals of lives of various ethnic communities rather than of common human experiences of family, love, labour, relationship, or individual's negotiating a life under pressures in a global setting. We argue that such identification of postcolonial writers and such critical appraisal of their texts are problematic as they bespeak essentially discriminatory practices in the existing western critical/interpretative system and reception of literature. The present paper shows how western reviewers and critics manipulate postcolonial writers' ethno-racial backgrounds as a major tool in a bid to ascribe cultural "authenticity" to their texts and thereby placing their texts into minority literary traditions instead of a global one, and accentuating anthropological curiosities rather than aesthetic standards of postcolonial writings.

**Keywords:** Postcolonial Writing, Reception of Literature, Exoticity, Ethno-Racial Backgrounds, Authenticity, Representation

At the threshold of the new millennium, the promotion and review of one of the high profile novels, Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, made it apparent that the novel's mainstream- popularity and critical acclaim were, to use James Procter's thoughts, "undeniably bound up with issues of race and ethnicity" (111) – as substantiated both by the subject matter of the novel and the concomitant interest in the figure of the author. Similarly, Mark Stein contends that the figure of Smith is often invoked "as a yardstick for assessing new talent" (175) in terms of literary quality and the issue of representativeness. Three years later, in 2003, when Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* was released, she was heralded as the "new Zadie Smith" and her novel has since been reviewed in certain ways that allude to the structuring motif of *White Teeth*. These critical responses from the West tend to place the narratives of both the writers in what Kobena Mercer formulates as the "burden of representation" (65) whereby postcolonial writers are positioned as representatives of their respective ethnicities and are therefore expected to address the concerns of the same. Such identification/pigeonholing of postcolonial writers and such assumptions or critical appraisals of their texts are deeply problematic as they testify to the fundamental inequality, racism, stereotyping and so on in the prevalent western scholarship, critical interpretative system and the overall reception of literatures. The present paper will probe into the fact that how western reviewers and critics generally use postcolonial writers' ethno-racial backgrounds as a major tool in a bid to attribute cultural authenticity to their texts, and thus they place such texts into minority literary traditions instead of a global literary tradition and emphasise exoticity, and thereby commercial viability, rather than the aesthetic or "universal" quality of postcolonial literatures.

As indicated above, while critiquing postcolonial literatures, many western reviewers and critics often regard postcolonial writers' ethno-racial background as sort of a yardstick or apparatus for critical assessment of their texts and as something fundamental to the assigning of meanings and values to them. They often judge postcolonial writers as merely members of particular racial/ethnic/regional/national groups. Postcolonial writers, for example, are described as African-American authors, or authors of Bangladeshi descent residing in Britain, or authors born in India but raised in Britain, and the likes. They endorse postcolonial writers as ethno-racial insiders with authentic ethnic knowledge or firsthand experiences of their originary cultures. They often establish links between the biography or lived experiences of postcolonial writers and their fictional characters, particularly the protagonists or the narrators. They point out that postcolonial writers and

their characters share similar social, cultural, regional or national backgrounds. Postcolonial narratives are, therefore, framed as manifestations of postcolonial writers' unique ethno-racial subject positions because their insights and personal experiences are believed to have been transferred onto the pages of their books. As such, the narratives are deemed as autobiographical or at least quasi- autobiographical. Again, many western critics and reviewers put emphasis on the "exotic" settings of stories instead of the depictions of individual experiences. For that, they look for extended descriptions of socio-historical and cultural backgrounds of the exotic locales. They appreciate postcolonial writers for their unique ability to truthfully portray such socio-historical and cultural nuances once again emphasising authors' insider-knowledge or firsthand experiences. Postcolonial texts are thus practically treated as authentic social, historical or cultural documents rather than standard aesthetic and imaginative interventions in the pressing social debates or even outcomes of proper literary practices or creative exercises. Accordingly, postcolonial writers are primarily received as literary and cultural ambassadors or, to use Meenakshi Mukherjee's phrase, "interpreters and authentic voices" (178) of their countries of origin rather than creative writers per se.

The question of authenticity of postcolonial texts, thus determined, is highly problematic because it is based on a reductive assumption or conceptualisation: writers' capacity/authority as ethno-racial insiders and writers as representing their "own" community. There are critics who believe that authenticity is not an intrinsic quality rather it is manufactured as a marketing strategy. Graham Huggan argues, "authenticity is valued for its attachment to the material contexts of lived experience even as it is so palpably the decontextualization of the commodified artifact that enables it to become marketably authentic" (158). For Ana María Sánchez-Arce, the concept of authenticity is problematic because "an object remains 'authentic' as long as it performs the task it is supposed to and loses its 'authenticity' as soon as it stops functioning in an expected way" (139). But a literary text does not have a stable set of meanings. It continues to generate meanings either for its symbolic capacity to stimulate a wide variety of interpretations or for the social context of its reception. For Wendy Griswold, the meaning of a cultural text is fabrication, humanly made and remade, rather than simply residing in the cultural work itself (1080). He intends fabrication to signify that "meaning is woven from the warp of the cultural work and the woof of those human presuppositions that are evoked by the context in which the cultural discourse takes place" (1080). Besides, one needs to

remember the multiplicity of readerships in terms of locations, cultural backgrounds and life experiences. Readers with vastly different cultural backgrounds and life-experiences perceive and interpret the same text differently. In other words, a literary piece strikes many readers in many ways and says different things to them over time and space. It may emerge worthy and creditable to one group of people at one point of time while unworthy and inauthentic to others at the same time or vice versa.

Postcolonial writers' ethno-racial affiliations become a platform that western publishers and literary editors use in the promotional campaigns of postcolonial texts, with a view to increasing their sales. They dub postcolonial texts as authentic ethnic documents as they understand there has been a niche market in the West for fictional representation of exotic ethnicities that carry a stamp of authenticity based upon some preconceived understanding of the East. Arundhati Roy can very well be a case in point. Roy is presented to the international readership as a "home-grown" writer but one who partakes of a cosmopolitan moment, and her debut novel *The God of Small Things* (1997) is promoted and marketed in the West as sort of an autobiography of a phenomenal, beautiful Indian woman. Jan McGirk, for instance, states, "Beautiful, outspoken and unconventional Roy, 37, represents the spirit of the new India unfettered by ... claustrophobic traditions" (19). The marketing strategy of the novel involves, as part of the package, glossy photographs of Roy with a photogenic exotic face, wispy tendrils of hair framing eyes that gaze dreamily, beckoning readers to open and enter the world of the novel. One publicity poster for the novel, as Saadia Toor narrates, "has a four-foot image of Roy's face, beneath which is the caption "Set to be publishing sensation of the year", leaving much ambiguity as to whether the referent is Roy or her book, which is not mentioned even by name" (13). Roy's ethno-racial information is disseminated in such way that no assessment of the novel, as Anuradha Marwah puts it, "is possible without references to [her] life and no review considered complete without her photograph" (65).

Numerous criticisms maintain that postcolonial literatures get sold and read in the West since they correspond to ethnographically curious western readers' expectations. Unless Monica Ali and Vikram Chandra, as Pramod K. Nayar writes, "supply the West's perception of Bangladesh or India, they will not be treated as 'authentic'" (22) and hence they will not work commercially. It seems that, as Fareena Alam puts it, "only 'ethnic' writers carry a burden of 'representation' whether they want to or not" (*The Burden of Representation*). Any deviation with regard to western readers'



desired narratives from postcolonial writers will endanger the reception and thereby the sale of their texts. But on the other hand, as Alam states, western readers and critics do not criticise Nick Hornby for failing to represent the true London in his comic treatments of North London angst or polo players do not complain that Jilly Cooper has not captured the reality of their lives (The Burden of Representation). In a somewhat similar vein, Richard Dyer in his study on whiteness argues that “as long as race is something only applied to non-white peoples, as long as white people are not racially seen and named, they/we function as a human norm. Other people are raced, we are just people” (1). Western writers like T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, Sylvia Plath, Ezra Pound, Seamus Heaney, Vladimir Nobokov, Milan Kundera, or Gunter Grass are hardly mentioned as ethnic writers and their works are not identified as authentic ethnic documents rather they are hailed first and foremost as works of art dealing with a universal human condition; their works are valued, very deserving of course, for their complexity, their literariness and their originality.

To clarify the role of ethno-racial backgrounds in the case of (western) evaluation and reception of postcolonial literatures, the politics around Monica Ali's fiction can also be cited at this point. Ali is still iconised as the trademark “*Brick Lane* writer” in the western literary establishment, although she has a set of other equally brilliant novels to her credit namely *Alentejo Blue* (2006), *In the Kitchen* (2009) and *Untold Story* (2011) that accommodate diverse characters, themes, settings and genres. Ali's post-*Brick Lane* novels elicit rather poor reviews and cold reception, arguably not because of their lesser literary merit but because of their author's appropriating “non-ethnic” materials, challenging the reader-expectations in the West from her as an ethnic writer. Her debut novel *Brick Lane* narrates the story of Nazneen, an 18 years old Bangladeshi young girl, who journeys from the familiarity of rural Bangladesh to an unfamiliar life in East London as a result of an arranged marriage to a “frog-faced” Chanu, twice her age. At first, Nazneen depends entirely on her husband who has already been in that foreign country for long fifteen years. Gradually, she learns English and becomes able to tackle challenges of growing, to use Jhumpa Lahiri's phrase, in an “unaccustomed earth”, in her new home. It is towards the end of the novel that she achieves a measure of self-autonomy, or social and economic independence. Accordingly, she could choose to live a life of her own in London than to return to Bangladesh with her husband as well as to deny the marriage proposal of her young lover Karim. Soon after the publication of *Brick Lane*, rave critical reviews, published in globally

renowned newspapers and magazines, appreciated the novel for its perceived “empirical exploration” into the Bangladeshi community back home and within diaspora, and for its celebration of an inclusive multicultural Britain. The novel wins the 2003 W. H. Smith People’s Choice Award and finds itself on the shortlists of the 2003 Booker Prize and many other important literary awards. The novel has been adapted into a film of the same name in 2006 that eventually receives BAFTA nominations for both the lead actress and director. Ali thus becomes “an instant sensation, the darling of multicultural circles and the white publishing industry” (Akhter 96). Even before the actual public appearance of the novel’s complete volume, Ali was hailed by *Granta Magazine* as one of the “Twenty Best Young British Novelists”; this was done on the basis of the publication only of the fifth chapter – “Dinner with Dr. Azad” – of the novel in April 2003.

That the instant success of *Brick Lane* centers round its “news value” to the ethnographically curious western readers about the colourful Bangladeshi population residing in the eponymous lane becomes apparent when the rather reverse reception of Ali’s post-*Brick Lane* novels is taken into consideration. Ali makes a noteworthy move from writing “sari and curry” family sagas with her second novel *Alentejo Blue* that showcases her versatility and hints at the breadth and diversity of her interests and thereby resisting the ghettoisation of ethnic writers. *Alentejo Blue* is a slow-paced, elegant series of vignettes rather than a well-orchestrated novel narrated from multiple perspectives of expatriates, tourists, locals and vacationers of varying ages and conditions. The narrative is set amidst the cork oak forests of the southern Portuguese region known as Alentejo, in an imaginary and unspoiled village, Mamarrosa. It deals with human conditions, more specifically, human failures in life to which people across the globe can easily connect, but it remains commercially unsuccessful and does not receive warm responses or accolades from readers in the West. Sean O’Brien describes the novel as one that “seems strangely modular, relying on the reader’s consent to a kind of shorthand which recalls the empty ‘issues’ and mechanical gravitas of soap opera” and that this will “stand in the way of the book’s popularity” (Without purpose in Portugal). Andrew Riemer finds Ali as an outsider to the white landscape of Alentejo and suggests that “she could have written what many – perhaps even her publishers – might have expected of her: another tale of Asian immigrant life in contemporary Britain”. Riemer’s statement blatantly dismisses Ali’s writerly “right to write” anything beyond immigrant experiences or her own community.

After the “failure” of *Alentejo Blue* to engage readers or the Market, Ali returns with her third novel, *In the Kitchen* that apparently corresponds to reader-expectations in the West by mapping migrant experiences, albeit from an unconventional perspective that takes in white male focalisation: a play on the “genre fiction” and the portrayal of mainly African and Eastern European migrant communities culturally and linguistically different not only from that of Britain’s but also from that of Ali’s. The novel depicts the daily hustle and bustle of the multicultural kitchen staffs in a well-known London hotel, the Imperial; some of the staffs unlawfully live in Britain, and as one knows, the world of illegal workers is generally considered as sort of a perfect breeding ground for crimes. Though the novel shares many patterns and motifs of the subgenre of crime fiction, it gradually transcends the common plot of a crime fiction to expose the hidden face of today’s British multiethnic, globalised society plagued by human trafficking, forced prostitution, enslavement, gender discrimination and so on. By unveiling the proliferation of such underground yet lucrative forms of crimes in the twenty-first century globalised world, it makes readers reflect, among other things, on issues of moral responsibility and collective guilt. Still the novel fails to draw the attention of mainstream western readership. Christopher Taylor argues that the “sociological musings are only very cursorily dramatised, being plonked in the mouths of mostly one-note characters: the social Darwinian businessman, the cynically charming MP, the deterministic Russian, the man of working-class rectitude” and the “dialogue is often clumsily expository” (If you can’t stand). Carol Birch finds certain characters as “little more than mouthpieces” and the novel as “too long”, the writing as “inconsistent, with a surfeit of cliché” (Heat and lust) while others join the chorus to contend that the novel fails as a crime fiction, and is overcooked; even the protagonist Gabriel Lightfoot is argued to be portrayed as a deeply unlikeable person and a flawed character.

Ali’s fourth novel *Untold Story* once again marks a stark deviation from the intensely flavoured “takeaway tales” about her community. The novel offers a hypothesis of the princess of Wales Diana’s survival of the 1997 car crash in Paris and provides her with an alternative life: faking her own death and living in anonymity in the Midwestern American town of Kensington through the fictional princess Lydia Snaresbrook. Lydia buys a house there with a pool and secures a job at a kennel. She befriends a triad of American girls and dates a nice guy. Imagining an obscure life for Lydia, the novel embodies an eternal human longing: to escape harsh realities, and gain an independent, carefree life. It also exposes the futility of a life that

perpetually remains in the limelight, and under the pressures of being a celebrity. Perhaps with a view to attaining an impressive global reach of the novel, Ali caters to the taste of the general readership in the West by incorporating the plot of a popular subgenre of the thriller. Specially, in order to satisfy the American readers, she provides them with a princess, and publishes the novel there! But all of these fail to make this *Untold Story* an international success; it had to face a cold reception. Joanna Briscoe describes the novel as “an ill-advised, debatably insensitive – indeed, almost unworkable – project”. Interestingly then, Michiko Kakutani opines that the novel, at first glance, is “quite a departure from the subject matter” of *Brick Lane*, yet by turning “the fictional character, based on Diana” into a British expatriate Lydia hiding in a small American town, “Ali is able to address some of the same questions of identity and exile that animated her earlier work” (*Imagining a Secret Life*). Ali is thus “never allowed to come out of the shadow of *Brick Lane*, the spectre of her debut novel is eternally invoked almost as the ‘code of conduct’ for her to keep her within the ‘rightful’ track of writing” (Akhter 108-9).

Many postcolonial writers, of course, find the label “ethnic writer” too limiting; they make attempts to disrupt the notion of writers being merely representatives of particular communities and articulating merely ethnic point of view while producing creative pieces. In fact, they continue producing such literatures that often move beyond non-western race and ethnicity and that take protagonists from communities different from authors’ or that experiment with the genre fiction. Again, they refuse to identify themselves or being identified as merely ethnic writers also because such labels segregate, isolate and “hyphenate” them from the global writerly community, and because such tags relegate them to the margins of global literary practices and discourses. Obviously, they prefer to be identified and recognised as writers proper; thus they deliberately strive, as Dave Gunning argues, “to fracture those links between the persona and biography of the author and the content and form of the text that may restrict ethical, storytelling potential” (779). For example, Zadie Smith defends herself against the tendency of the western literati to locate her novel into a black literary tradition, which she thinks reduces her to the role of spokesperson on issues of race and ethnicity. She asks western readers and critics, “Do you go to Don DeLillo and say, “He doesn’t represent middle class white people enough”? ... No. You give him complete freedom. Why would you limit writers of any ethnicity or gender to be a sex or class politician and give freedom to white writers to write about absolutely anybody?” (qtd. in Procter

102). Similarly, Monica Ali resists the tendency to fix writers in ethnic identity slots; she contends, “Of course, any literary endeavour must be judged on the work alone. It stands or falls on its own merits regardless of the colour, gender and so on of the author. A male author does not need ‘permission’ to write about a female character, a white author does not transgress in taking a black protagonist” (Where I’m coming from).

To wind up our discussion so far, let us reiterate that using ethno-racial affiliations of postcolonial writers as a major yardstick for the evaluation and reception of their texts by the western literati is problematic because, as James Procter claims, to “reduce writers to the role of representatives who are expected to delegate, or speak on behalf of a particular community, is to curb their artistic freedom” (102). Similarly, Salman Rushdie asserts that literature “is not in the business of copyrighting certain themes for certain groups”; it is rather “self-validating”, and “a book is not justified by its author’s worthiness to write it, but by the quality of what has been written” (14-15). Indeed, putting restrictions on writers regarding what to write and what not to write may induce them to withdraw from literary practices with full creative energy or from confronting issues of global or large-scale significance. If writers are not permitted to write about communities different from their own ethno-racial backgrounds, their writings will generally be confined to a series of memoirs, semi-autobiographical first-person narratives. Again, the tendency of western critics and reviewers to locate Postcolonial Writing into a minority literary tradition is indicative of some flawed assumptions: that such texts are only locally engaged, context-specific or politically motivated and so they cannot transcend ethnic/racial limits; that postcolonial literatures can never attain high aesthetic standards a proper piece of literature should reach and of course, they lack “universality” as they fail to address the conditions and concerns of wider humanity or to connect with the emotional universe of all irrespective of their gender, generations and geographical/cultural locations. The tendency thus seems to characterise, or rather stigmatise, postcolonial literatures as mere socio-historical and cultural narratives/documents rather than products of literary creativity and imaginations; to be precise, this amounts to a blatant dismissal of postcolonial literatures as primarily works of art. Therefore, this kind of reading, as we argue here, goes against the standard ethics of receiving and critiquing a literary piece; this is indeed unjust and biased. The propensity for consigning postcolonial literatures to the lesser position – in terms of aesthetic quality and universality in relation to the western literary canons –

only serves to perpetuate the western supremacy over anything non-western, the origin of which, perhaps, is to be traced in the colonial binarist construction of the Self and the Other.

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# Online Learning during COVID-19 Epidemic in Bangladesh: Rural Background Undergraduate Students' Struggle

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## **Abstract:**

This paper aims at exploring the problems that the undergraduate students from rural background of Bangladesh are facing during the recent trend of online classes due to the attack of COVID-19. For the purpose of this qualitative study, seven undergraduate students of a public university of Bangladesh were interviewed through a semi- structured interview. The findings of the study show that the rural background undergraduate students are not being able to take whole advantage of online learning due to lack of resources, unavailability of internet connection and a number of other socio-economic reasons. This paper argues that online learning cannot be expected to be effective leaving behind a large number of students. Therefore the paper suggests that equal access to learning resources; uninterrupted internet connection at lower price and an accessible LMS can help to enhance online learning during COVID-19crisis.

**Keywords:** online learning, rural background, public university, COVID-19

## **Introduction:**

The effectiveness of online learning has emerged as a ‘burning question’ during the recent socio- economic, cultural and health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the recent data provided by UNESCO, globally, 1.2 billion learners, which is 68% of total enrolled learners, are affected due to the closure of educational institutions in 143 countries. Being no exception, more than 40 million students across the

country are affected as all the educational institutions of Bangladesh have remained closed since 17<sup>th</sup> March (Uddin, 2020). The closure has been extended to August 31, 2020. In this context, the University Grants Commission (UGC) announced that ‘all public and private universities must ensure online classes’ (Alamgir, 2020). UGC sources said that only 63 universities out of 151 have started online classes, of them, only two or three are public universities, and the rest are private (Alamgir, 2020). However, in the socio- economic context of Bangladesh, ensuring online learning for all the learners at tertiary level is difficult, especially for the public university students. Majority of the students at different public universities of Bangladesh come from the rural areas. With the closure of all educational institutions, they had to go back to their respective villages, where they are bound to stay until the university reopens. Now, where the Universities have started taking the classes through online, a number of challenges have come before the rural background students.

### **Significance of the Study:**

Recently, all the physical classrooms all around the world have been shifted to virtual classes due to the attack of COVID-19, which has caused a major change in the education system. An effective and timely alternative way of continuing classes during this COVID-19 epidemic is online learning. To ensure getting the best outcome of this effort, the obstacles related to it should be sorted out. This paper is of significant importance as it finds out those problems that the rural undergraduate students are facing in this case. It also suggests a number of practical measures that can be taken to make the learning effective for all. Thus, this study can be of utmost interest to the stakeholders, policy makers and others related to the academia to get idea about the present circumstances of learning situation of the rural students. It will thus help to mitigate the obstacles and to implement sufficient measures in ensuring a better teaching learning environment for all. This study is also relevant even once the epidemic is over, because the necessity of online learning is undeniable in post- COVID world.

### **Objectives and Research Questions:**

The purpose of this study is to find out the challenges that the rural background students of Bangladesh are facing in participating the online classes during this pandemic. Accordingly, this paper aims to provide some discussions and implications for stakeholders and policymakers to fortify online learning.

For the purpose of the study, the following research questions were identified:

1. What are the learning challenges faced by the rural background undergraduate students of Bangladesh in participating the online classes during COVID-19 epidemic?
2. How can online learning be improved in the context of COVID-19 pandemic?

### **Literature Review:**

This section of the paper discusses the relevance of online learning, the benefits of it and also the effectiveness of online learning in the socio-economic context of Bangladesh.

According to Ikbal and Shama (2020), 1.59 billion students worldwide, and 1.2 million university students in Bangladesh are facing a study gap due to the pandemic. The situation is so dire that UNESCO has called it an "unprecedented education emergency" (Ikbal & Shama, 2020). However, learning cannot stop for any such cause and an alternative of continuing learning is to switch to online learning. According to a recent survey conducted by UNESCO, 61 countries have implemented measures related to distance learning, teaching being undertaken remotely and on digital platforms ("Education during COVID-19", 2020).

Online learning, which is also known as learning through web or giving instructions through computer assistance, has been practiced widely in the recent years. Nichols (2003:01, as mentioned in Ullah, Khan and Khan, 2017, p. 63-64) stated that "online learning is a set of integration of various types of technologies solely for the purpose of promoting education. Online learning is a broad term, which provides complete description of various types of online learning adopting the modern Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)". "Online learning aims to seek changes in the pattern of whole academic process" (Asabere, 2012 as mentioned in Ullah et al., 2017, p.63). In simple words, Information and Communication Technology, e.g. computer, smartphone, internet, and other modern technology are used for conducting teaching learning activities during online learning.

Online learning is thought as a savior in such cases because, in this age of advanced communication, the advantages of online learning are many. Shahidullah and Chowdhury (2020) list the following benefits of online learning:

flexible schedule and environment; independence of place and time; saving in on-campus housing; independence of transportation hassles and expenses; student-centered learning according to the learner's convenience and timeline; equal opportunities for all students- introverts and extroverts alike; improving technical skills through the use of LMS; freedom from campus buildings or fixed learning resources; access to many free courses like Massive Online Open Course (MOOCs) and modules from anywhere in the world; access to lectures from world- famous experts in the discipline; supplementing in- class learning; finishing a semester strong and on time and independent learning and time management ( Shahidullah & Chowdhury, 2020, Para 2).

A statistics provided by the World Bank mentions that only 10% of countries had digital learning capabilities that contain having online materials available even outside the classroom ("Education during COVID-19",2020). The success of online learning, however, depends on a number of factors including access to the resources, bandwidth issue and attitude of the learners towards online learning. Mahmud and Gope (2009) mention that being a representative of least developed countries, Bangladesh does not have enough technological facilities to implement e- learning. Mahmud and Gope (2009) found the following challenges of implementing E-learning at tertiary level in Bangladesh:

- a. Scarcity of ICT resources and infrastructure
- b. Internet connectivity and bandwidth issue
- c. Difficulty in engaging learners online
- d. Lack of confidence in using computers
- e. Poor competencies in English
- f. Lack of awareness
- g. Unwillingness to change learning environment
- h. Ethically harmful internet contents
- i. Load shedding of electricity
- j. Software privacy problem

However, online learning requires facilities and infrastructure at the universities, a robust data infrastructure at the national level, and computing devices as well as sufficient and affordable data services for the students (Ikbal & Shama, 2020). In a recent study conducted on African students, Dube (2020) finds out that unavailability of network in rural areas, shortage of devices for online learning, closure of internet cafes, lack of computer skills of some rural teachers and expensive data rates are among the major obstacles of online learning for rural background students during COVID-19.

According to “Education during COVID-19” (2020) these three requirements are mandatory to appropriately switch to online learning:

- a. access to the internet;
- b. the right technology, and
- c. the skills needed to use the technology.

Considering all the above mentioned factors, the effectiveness of online learning in the socio- economic context of Bangladesh needs to be investigated. In Bangladesh, at university level, most of the students of public universities come from poor and middle class family; they may not have internet access due to their financial crisis. On the other hand, the scenery of private universities is different as most of the students there are from economically solvent families. So, they can avail internet access easily (Islam, 2020).

In a recent survey conducted among 695 students from the private and public universities of Bangladesh, Ikbal & Shama (2020) found that: a digital divide exists among students, and universities do not have sufficient resources. When asked about computing devices, less than one-third responded that they have a computer, which is essential at the university level to write assignments and submit them. While 34% of the students use mobile data only, 78% of the students responded that they consider the price of data to be too high, and a whopping 92% indicated that they would like to have cheaper data and desired government intervention (Ikbal & Shama, 2020).

### **Methodology:**

The target population of this study is the public university students of Bangladesh. Seven undergraduate students of a public university of Bangladesh, who were staying at remote villages during the closure of the university, were selected as respondents for this qualitative study. Background information about the participants was collected using a form which covered their present location, the details about device and network accessibility, and other socio- economic crisis. The participants were aged 19 to 21, among them four were female participants and three were male.

Characteristics of the participants:

No.	Pseudonym	Age	Location	Academic Year
1.	Asha	19	Jaflong, Sylhet	2019-2020
2.	Maria	19	Gaibandha	2019-2020
3.	Yeasmin	19	Atpara, Netrokona	2019-2020
4.	Tanveer	21	Hajipara, Sunamgonj	2018-2019
5.	Rayhan	20	Bianibazar, Sylhet	2018-2019
6.	Taslina	20	Madan, Netrokona	2018-2019
7.	Masum	19	Shibchar, Madaripur	2019-2020

The participants were informed about the research purpose and assured that pseudonyms would be used. It was also maintained that data collected would only be used for academic purposes. All data collected were then coded and categorized for analysis.

### **Results and Discussion:**

For the purpose of this present paper, all the participants were interviewed in detail through a semi- structured interview. As the study was conducted during the COVID-19 epidemic, the participants were contacted through face book messenger. Based on the analysis of the data collected, the first section of the findings addresses the problems faced by the rural learners, and then in the next section, it presents possible solutions to ensure that online learning processes continue effectively during the COVID-19 crisis.

### **Challenges faced by rural learners:**

#### **1. Difficulty with device:**

Online learning can be implemented properly only if both the teachers and the students are well equipped with the facilities of modern technology. A smart phone or a computer with good internet connection is necessary for online classes. Over 95% students in many European countries have a computer at home for working purpose reports OECD based on data from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) (“Education during COVID-19”,2020). The ratio is much lower in the developing countries like Bangladesh. During the COVID-19 crisis most of the teachers are using zoom or Google classroom as online learning platform. For that the students also need to have a computer or at least a smart phone that supports these features. Unlike other students from urban background, majority of the students from rural background do not have laptop of their own. While some others have smartphones, still there are some who do not have any such devices.

When asked about the availability of device, a participant of the study, Masum said:

I use a button phone. As my father is a farmer. So he will not be able to buy a smart phone for me in this pandemic situation. Though I try join online classes another person’s device. Unfortunately, this cannot be possible every time.

Another participant Asha added: ‘My phone does not support the zoom app. After trying many times, I could not turn on the app. It is not possible for me to buy a new phone during this epidemic’.

In rural context, it is assumed that most of the families do not have capability to provide a computer or at least a smartphone to the student. The situation gets worse if a family has more than one student attending online classes. In most of the cases, a rural learner even does not have a quiet place to study or attend an online class. As all the cyber cafes are closed, they also cannot go outside for alternative supports in joining online classes.

## **2. Interruption in Internet Connectivity:**

Only 18% of the population in the country is using the internet says a report by the International Telecommunications Union (Hoq, 2018). However, this number is more than 50% according to government data. In less than a decade, though the growth in internet use is noteworthy, there still exists a 'digital divide' between the rural and urban population regarding accessibility to internet. For online learning, uninterrupted internet connection is mandatory. It gets hard for the students to join the class and download the necessary materials of online learning if the internet connection is slow. In Bangladesh, most of the villages do not have broadband connection. Students have to solely depend on mobile data. All the participants of this study use only mobile data and almost all of them had problem with network connection.

Yeasmin said: 'Here sometimes I face too much network problem. And unfortunately the problem happen more during the class time. Most of the time I can't hear the class clearly.'

Taslima added: 'There is not access of network in my room, so when I attend class I go outside to get more access of internet connection.'

Internet problem is more acute than accessibility to device. The students, who are staying at the remote corners of the country, such as at the hill tracks, haor areas, char areas and in the islands are mostly deprived of good internet connection.

## **3. Expensive Internet:**

Among three South Asian nations- India, Sri Lanka (\$0.87) and Bangladesh, Bangladesh charges the highest (\$0.99) for one gigabyte of mobile data a recent report by cable.co.uk- a UK-based website that compares global internet pricing (Jasim & Sajid, 2020). It is getting costlier for those using mobile phone data as the government has raised supplementary duty on mobile phone services to 15 % from 10% in the 2020-2021 budgets. The mobile phone operators say the cost of using their services will in effect rise by a staggering 33.25% in total, including 15 % VAT, 1% surcharge, 15%

duty and other taxes (“Budget spike in mobile phone”,2020). As the students living in villages have to depend on mobile data only, and as many of them have to bear their own expenses, it gets hard for them to afford.

Asha said: ‘I buy 3 gigabyte pack for 3 days which price is 60tk.’

Tanveer said: ‘I don’t have access to Wi-Fi. I use mobile data. Each class have need 400-500 mb. I can afford it but sometimes it is difficult to afford’.

Masum added: ‘I use a data pack for a week and it’s cost 49 tk. I can afford it for some time but not regularly’.

A majority of the public university students who come from rural areas of Bangladesh are not from solvent families, that is why, they earn for their own expenses. During COVID-19 epidemic, many of the students have lost their income source, which was tuition. In this situation, spending extra money on mobile data adds to their hardship. “Another survey by the Chittagong University of Engineering and Technology has discovered that 40 percent of their students have no capacity to buy internet packages” (Jasim & Sajid, 2020).

#### **4. Lack of Technological knowledge:**

The universities had to switch to online learning in a situation when they could not provide any formal training to the teachers and students regarding the use of helpful technologies in conducting online classes. Both teachers and students are having difficulty in getting used to the tech trends of the online classrooms. Again, most of the students of public universities who are from rural background, throughout their life had less access to the modern gadgets and therefore have lack of technological knowledge. The students who have not used a computer of their own and hardly have a smartphone, struggle with the recent tech trend.

Maria said: ‘I have tried to join the class for whole class time but couldn’t connect. I can’t understand why this mishap happening with me?’

Some of the students have problems downloading pdf files. In some cases when the students are asked to submit their assignments online, they are in real trouble. In my observation, even many university teachers are reluctant to use Power Point Presentation (PPT) and multimedia for teaching says Shariful Islam, an assistant professor at a public university (Islam, 2020).

#### **5. Recent flood:**

Flooding in Bangladesh continues to grow more severe, with about 3.3million people currently affected. According to the reports of official authorities, as of 25<sup>th</sup> July, across 21 districts of the country around 732,000 people are waterlogged. Jamalpur and Sunamganj are the worst affected



districts 2.4 million people are reportedly affected, and over 548,000 families had their homes flooded or water logged ("Bangladesh: Floods and Landslides", 2020). The students who are staying in those areas find it challenging to attend classes during this crisis moment. Tanveer said:

I have faced natural calamity since 28<sup>th</sup> of the last month. My area is flooded. The floods have been raging since the 28<sup>th</sup> of the last month. There is a lot of possibility of water rising in the house which is hindering my studies.

Another participant from a remote village of Madaripur district informs: 'Our family is facing with the flood. Our house is full of water all around. The shop is far away from our house so we can't go out to buy necessary things.'

The students, who are staying at flood affected areas, are fighting against the dual monsters, flood and epidemic. Joining online classes or continuing studies seem to be a challenge for them.

#### **6. Load Shedding of Electricity:**

Unless there is enough power supply, participating in online classes gets difficult. The load shedding problem has been solved to a great extent in the recent years. However, during the monsoon, especially when there is heavy rainfall or storm outside, load shedding is obvious. Only people from villages know the reality of uninterrupted power connection.

Rayhan said: 'It is rainy season, we face problems with electricity and network connection most often.'

#### **7. Socio-economic crisis in the family:**

A second year student, Taslima said:

Because of home quarantine, without two of my siblings we all are staying at home. There are my parents, 5 brother, 2 sisters in law and their children. Sometimes other relatives also visit our house which badly cut off my studies. I share my room with my mother and her health condition is not good at all. For this, all the time I can not able to study effectively.

Masum also complained that 'this online classes are creating mental and financial pressures' for him and his family. He adds that 'I can't buy a device for my financial problem. I can't join classes regularly and can't collect materials that's why I can't carry on my studies. It's create my mental pressure'.

Maria added that there had been an attack of COVID-19 in the family and the whole family has moved to her grandparents' place. There is no environment of studies in the house, we are all panicked.

There is no single mode of life that has not been affected by this COVID-19. There is the fear of an invisible enemy. Students have lost their tuitions while some of the families are affected by flood. Public university students are also worried about completing their graduation in time. In such a situation, continuing studies is a big challenge for the rural background students.

### **Refining Online Education during the pandemic:**

Besides mentioning the challenges faced by the rural background students in participating online classes, this paper also suggests some ways to enhance online learning during this pandemic. These suggestions are relevant even after the pandemic is over as online learning has been emerged as an important alternative in the present time. These suggestions are made based on the responses of the participants and also on the available recent studies related to this topic.

#### **1. Providing loans for buying devices:**

It was found in the present study that not all the students have a computer of their own or a smartphone to join online classes. In a recent survey conducted by the University Grants Commission, it was found that 87% of students have smart- phones. This number is even less for the students who are from rural lower income families. Continuing online classes was chose to give students access to learning even in the hardest crisis. So, it is not expected that a large number of students are lagging behind due to lack of access to the learning resources. In this case, students who do not have their own devices to join the classes, can be provided with loans in minimum interest rate so that they can have their own device, at the same time, government does not have to spend extra on this.

#### **2. Cheap data rate:**

The findings of the present study show that all the participants complained about interruption in internet connection and high price of mobile data. The major obstacles for a good number of university students from rural and remote areas and from poor financial backgrounds in participating online classes are poor or no internet connection and high- cost mobile data (Jasim & Sajid,2020). Only possible solution is to give them access to cheap rate uninterrupted internet accessibility. The education minister has already assured that the government has already started negotiating with the telecom

operators in this respect to facilitate the students at cheap data rate. If the telecom operators are made to offer any special package in cheap rate only for the students, then the students would have been more encouraged to join the classes. Moreover, the accessibility to cheap data rate in every corner of the country is a promise of digital Bangladesh.

### **3. Accessible LMS:**

Language Management System or LMS is an online learning platform that offers standard features for teachers and students to enhance teaching learning during online classes. In most of the public universities, Google Classroom or Zoom has been chosen as online learning platform, the features of which are not familiar to the students with limited computer knowledge. Above all, this practice has been started without proper training to teachers and students. However, an accessible learning platform, that is familiar and does not require high data rate, can be used to enhance online learning during this crisis. Facebook messenger can be an alternative option here as almost all the students have access to messenger, which does not require high mobile data. At the same time, a smartphone is not mandatory in this case. In a recent study, Hasan & Munni (2020) have recommended that a designated Facebook Group can be used for enhancing teaching learning activities during the crisis moment of COVID-19.

### **Limitations of the Study:**

The present study is a qualitative study and therefore the number of the participants is limited. As this study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, students and teachers could not be contacted in person for further information about the topic. Again, the study looks into the challenges only from the viewpoints of the students, if the teachers could have been interviewed, this study would have been more effective. The present study, however, leads to further research with the viewpoints of teachers and other stakeholders in consideration. Including a large number of participants from different educational level can show a broader picture of the circumstances.

### **Conclusion:**

Switching to online learning was a dire need of the crisis moment to continue learning. The necessity and effectiveness of online learning in such situation is undeniable. However, from viewpoint of the equal rights of education to, the circumstances of the public university students who are from rural and poor financial background should be taken into consideration in this respect. The present study highlights the challenges that the rural background public university students are facing in participating online classes during this COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the findings of the study,

this paper recommends providing loans to the poor students to buy devices, to provide cheap data rate for students only and also to adopt an accessible LMS to improve online learning during this COVID-19 pandemic.

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# Board Examinations in Bangladesh: Some Social Stereotypes and Their Negative Effects on Students

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## Abstract

In Bangladesh, much social importance is attached to public examinations and their results, especially to that of Primary School Certificate (PSC), Junior School Certificate (JSC), Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and Higher Secondary School Certificate (HSC) examinations which are locally known as board examinations. This paper examines the social stereotypes formed around these four examinations, and their negative effects on the examinees. A survey done on 70 examinees showed that most people here stereotype only an A+ holder as a good student. Many participants reported being pressurized by family, being taunted and disgraced, having disappointments, losing interest in study and so on for not achieving the expected grades. Interestingly, none denied the importance of these exams. In light of the findings, this paper implies that our outlook towards board examinations should be changed so that examinees feel less pressure and examinations at the elementary and junior levels should be taken lightly.

**Keywords:** Board examinations, Bangladesh, social stereotypes, negative effects, students' mentality

## Introduction

There is no student in the world who has not gone through examinations of some sort. Taking exams is a very common experience for students all over the world. In formal education, “an examination or test is an assessment planned to measure the exam taker’s knowledge, attitude, skill or commitment to a cause” (Rahman, 2019, p.158). Examinations, especially high stakes examinations are quite prevalent throughout Asia (Amin and Greenwood, 2018).

When it comes to a South Asian country like Bangladesh, examinations are of great importance for its academic and social engagements (Amin and Greenwood, 2018). Here, as soon as a little boy or girl becomes a student and starts going to schools, he/she is introduced to

examination systems. Examinations are quite frequent here too with lots of class tests, assignments, mid-term exams, year final exams and so on. Although all examinations are given importance here, public examinations are given the most importance (Dundar, Béteille, & Deolalikar, 2014). There are many public examinations in Bangladesh, but this paper will deal with four particular ones which are locally referred to as board examinations.

In Bangladesh, a student has to go through four mandatory public examinations namely, Primary School Certificate (PSC), Junior School Certificate (JSC), Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examinations (Education Boards Bangladesh). These nationwide exams are locally known as board examinations as these exams are administered under different regional education boards. However, if we look at the outer world, we will see that many countries are negating and banning examinations at elementary and junior levels as the timeless method to test a student (Dundar, Béteille, & Deolalikar, 2014).

Many researchers (Cheng, 1998; Ferman, 2004; Saif, 2006) have pointed out the negative impact of tests on students. Unfortunately, in Bangladesh, not many people question the negative effects of examinations on the mental and physical health of students. But, if we look around, we can clearly see that whereas some examiners are applauded for cutting a good figure in the board examinations, others are scold, taunted and mentally and/or physically tortured by family members or teachers for not acquiring the expected grade (Ahmed, 2020). This is because; there are many social stereotypes and stigma attached to these exams. Although a number of studies look at the education system in Bangladesh, not many look at the negative effects of exams on the students. In this regard, this paper examines the social stereotypes formed around these exams and the negative effects of those stereotypes on the examinees.

## **Board Examination System in Bangladesh**

The history of Bangladesh's education system goes back to the British period, but with time, it saw many changes (Rahman, Hamzah, Mohd and M. Rahman, 2010). Now, the education system of Bangladesh is divided into three levels (Rahman, 2019). These levels are-

- (i) Primary level (Grade I to V)
- (ii) Secondary level (grade VI to XII) and
- (iii) Tertiary level

Here, students mainly choose from two types of schools: English medium or Bangla medium. In Bangla medium education, from primary to higher secondary level, students have to go through four board examinations. The first in the hierarchy is the Primary School Certificate (PSC) at 5<sup>th</sup> grade. After that, they face Junior School Certificate (JSC) at 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Then comes



the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) at 10<sup>th</sup> grade and the last one is the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) at 12<sup>th</sup> grade. PSC has been administered annually since 2010 by the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, Directorate of Primary Education in public and private schools (Central Data Catalogue, UNESCO). JSC was also introduced for the first time in 2010 and since then it is administered by the region-based Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education (Rahman, 2019). SSC and HSC examinations were introduced in the years 2001 and 2003 respectively and these two examinations are also administered by the Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education (Education Boards Bangladesh, 2019).

Currently, there are nine Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education in Bangladesh which are located at the divisional headquarters (Education Boards Bangladesh, 2019). These boards are responsible for conducting JSC, SSC, and HSC. These nine regional boards are-

1. Barisal Education Board for Barisal Division
2. Chittagong Education Board for Chittagong Division
3. Comilla Education Board for Comilla Division
4. Dhaka Education Board for Dhaka Division
5. Dinajpur Education Board for Rangpur Division
6. Jessore Education Board for Khulna Division
7. Mymensingh Education Board for Mymensingh Division
8. Rajshahi Education Board for Rajshahi Division
9. Sylhet Education Board for Sylhet Division

There are two alternative education boards too. These are Bangladesh Technical Education Board and Bangladesh Madrasah Education Board (Education Boards Bangladesh, 2019). It is to be noted here that generally PSC and JSC are considered low stake examinations whereas SSC and HSC are considered High stake examinations in our country. The results of these examinations are published on the basis of marks scored (a letter grading system) by the candidates. A candidate securing eighty per cent marks gets Grade Point Average (GPA) 5, in other words, Grade A+ in the examination. A candidate scoring marks between 70-79% is awarded GPA 4, 60-69% GPA is awarded 3.5, 50-59% is awarded GPA 3, 40-49% is awarded GPA 2 and 33 to 39% of marks is awarded GPA 1 (Doha, 2015).

## **Literature review**

All over the world, there are many studies that show the negative effects of high-stake public examinations on students. Amin and Greenwood (2018) in their paper titled “The examination system in Bangladesh and its impact: on curriculum, students, teachers and society” show two narratives where we can see the sad plight of two board examinees. The first narrative is that of Priya who is an SSC examinee. Her story shows the excessive reliance on guide books. In this paper, Amin and Greenwood (2018) show how the

current exam-oriented education system in Bangladesh is changing students' mentality towards study which is evident in Priya's saying "Our teacher suggested the Nobodut Guide. There are many model tests in it. Our teacher selects which ones will be important and teaches us accordingly." (p.6)

The second narrative of Eva who is a PSC examinee shows that she is afraid to give the examination in a new school and is seen getting fainted in the exam hall. As Amin and Greenwood (2018) show, even in the day of result, she hid herself for the fear of cutting a bad result. However, the story took a new turn when she, fortunately, graded higher than her expectation. Thus, the narrative ends on happy notes with Eva's family and relatives applauding her for her result. Her story shows excessive reliance on attending coaching classes as Eva had to attend classes at three coaching centers. In her words, "Everyone from my class will attend private tuition with Mr. Rahman Sir, If I don't go, he will not let me pass in the examination." (p.7) This two narratives clearly show the stereotypical behavior of society and the negative effects on students.

Madaus (1991) opines that there are several important effects of national examinations on students. He stresses that till date, the discussion regarding these effects has been one sided as the proponents of these national examinations highlight only the positive effects. He says, "Harmful effects, particularly on low achieving students have not received the attention they deserve." (p.226)

Kirkpatrick and Zang (2011) in their study discuss the negative backwash effect of exam-oriented education on students in China. They point out anxiety and stress in the students for passing a number of high stake examinations and suggest that "moderate pressure to excel in school, when paired with deemphasizing high-stakes testing, better motivates students and improves student success and psychological health, both in terms of academic success and also a productive adulthood" (p.36). Undoubtedly, this suggestion is well applicable for our country too.

Schmitz (2011) also talks about the negative backwash effect of exam-oriented education on students. He points out that focusing only on exams, often comes at the cost of students losing their imaginations and creativities. Mohammed, Halilu, and Muhammad (2017) talk about the negative effects of exam anxiety on the academic performance of students in Northwest University, Kano State, Nigeria and show how both male and female students equally feel the exam pressure.

Ahmed (2019) writes about the counter-productive and perverse consequences of too many public exams in Bangladesh since 2010. He points out a surge of private coaching, commercial guidebooks, rote memorization, desperation for guessing questions, cheating in exams, question leaks, incentive for authorities to show high pass rates and so on as the effects. (Education Watch Report 2014, as cited in Ahmed, 2019).

So, it is obvious that too many public exams can affect students negatively. But, what about the causes? Not many people question the negative, stereotypical behaviors and treatment that they get from family, friends, relatives, teachers and others in the society. Thus, this paper tries to put light on that issue.

### **Methodology**

The study utilized the quantitative method in data collection and data analysis processes. For data collection, an original survey questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was developed. The questionnaire included 35 statements based on Likert scale. These statements were developed based on common recurring themes regarding the negative effects of examination as can be found in different news reports. The survey was conducted on 70 students of East West University. All the participants were from the undergraduate level. They were chosen based on purposive sampling as the study required only those students who have taken part in all the four board examinations namely Primary School Certificate (PSC), Junior School Certificate (JSC), Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC). The data collection was done in the university campus through questionnaires. Data was analyzed manually and using Microsoft Excel to figure out percentages for each of the responses of the participants for each of the question.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The research has found a number of stereotypes that people in our society hold regarding board examinations. The following table no. 1 shows the findings (statements have been re-numbered here according to theme) regarding these stereotypes followed by the discussion.

Table 1: Stereotypes regarding board examinations

	Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	I think PSC, JSC, SSC and HSC examinations are very important	26%	41%	2.98%	26%	1.49%
2	My family/friends/relatives and others think that these examinations are very important	38%	49%	5.97 %	0%	0%

3	My family/friends/relatives/ teachers think only an A+ (GPA 5) holder is a good student	42.85%	40%	2.85%	8.57%	5.71%
4	My family/friends/relatives/ teachers think I am not a very good student because I did not get A+	20.5%	34.28%	11.42%	17.14%	8.57%
5	My family/friends/relatives/ teachers think I will not do well in future studies and will not have a good job for my bad result	20.5%	37.14%	11.42%	17.14%	5.71%
6	I was and/or am underestimated for my bad results and my opinion is not given much importance	34.28%	40%	0%	8.57%	17.14%
7	My family/ teachers tried to change the grade by challenging the result	14.28%	34.28%	2.85%	20%	28.57%
8	My family/friends/relatives/ teachers think prayers, blessing and luck play a great role in getting a good grade	37.14%	42.85%	14.28%	5.71%	0%
9	My family/relatives consulted Pir or Fakir/ visited Mazar and so on for my good result	14.28%	11.42%	5.71%	37.14%	28.57%
10	Doa Mahfil and other prayer programs were arranged in my schools and colleges	37.14%	25.71%	2.85%	17.14%	17.14%
11	My family/friends/relatives/ teachers wished	28.57%	31.42%	5.71%	37.14%	28.57%

	me with tokens like Horlicks/exam materials/dress/money etc. before my exams					
	My					
1	family/friends/relatives/teachers think that	22.85%	42.85%	17.14%	5.71%	8.57%
2	I would have more chance of getting A+ with having more coaching classes, private tutoring and reading more guide books			14%		
	My family got me					
1	admitted to different	34.28%	28.57%	5.71%	17.14%	11.42%
3	coaching centers for good results			1%		

Findings show that both examinees (Strongly Agree 26% and Agree 41%) and their family/friends/relatives/teachers (Strongly Agree 38% and Agree 49%) put much importance on board examinations. A large number of 42.85% participants strongly agreed and 40% agreed that their family/friends/relatives/teachers think only an A+ (GPA 5) holder is a good student. Because of their stereotypical belief, parents invest a lot (as much as they can) in tutoring the examinees by home tutors and coaching classes which is clear in 34.28% strongly agreeing and 28.57% agreeing. People are also found to rely much on blessings and prayers, and even educational institutions organize prayer congregations. Interestingly, it was found that some people (14.28% strongly agreed, 11.42% agreed) even take help of Pir (Persian for spiritual guide), Fakirs (Sufi holy Muslim man or woman), Sadhu (Holy spiritual people) and such people or visit Mazars to pray for good results. The study found that more than 50% participants (20.5% strongly agreed and 34.28% agreed) are not valued as good students as they did not secure any A+ in the board examinations. Moreover, their family/friends/relatives/teachers think and believe (20.5% Strongly agreed and 37.14% agreed) that they will not do well in future studies and will not have a good job for their bad results.

Obviously, these stereotypes have much to do with our religious and cultural beliefs, and most of these are for the betterment of these examinees. However, what is wrong, is the other side of the coin. This stereotypical significance of board examinations has many negative side effects for students. The following table no. 2 shows the negative effects of these stereotypes on the physical and mental health of students.

Table 2: Negative effects of board examinations on students.

	Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	I always felt pressure giving these examinations	61%	26.86%	0%	1.49%	2.98%
2	I felt more pressure in giving PSC compared to the other exams as I was younger than	40%	48.57%	0%	8.57%	2.85%
3	I felt pressure studying and preparing for these examinations	60%	28.57%	2.85%	2.85%	5.71%
4	I felt pressure attending coaching classes and/or private tutoring	54.28%	34%	5.71%	2.85%	2.85%
5	I studied guide books more than text books	11%	28.57%	5.71%	48.57%	5.71%
6	I felt jealous of my peers who got better grades than me	20%	57.14%	0%	17%	5.71%
7	I did not enjoy studying for these examinations	42.85%	31.42%	2.85%	22.85%	0%
8	I paid more focus on memorizing than learning	42.85%	34.28%	5.71%	8.57%	8.57%
9	I felt depressed for not achieving expected grade	54.28%	34.28%	5.71%	0%	5.71%
10	I attempted to hurt myself for not doing well in these examinations	17.14%	14.28%	0%	42.85%	22.85%
11	I attempted suicide for not getting expected grade	11.42%	2.85%	2.85%	45.71%	37.14%
12	My family/friends/teachers treated me badly for not doing well in these exams	14.28%	37.14%	8.57%	14.28%	25.71%
13	I was verbally abused (taunted/ scold etc.) for not doing well	17.14%	40%	5.71%	17.14%	20%
14	I was physically abused (beaten/slapped etc.) for not doing well.	5.71%	5.71%	0%	31.42%	57.14%

1	I adopted unfair means					
5	(cheating of some sort) in	8.57%	5.71%	5.71%	8.57%	57.14%
	the exams to get better					
	grades					
1	I collected and solved					
6	leaked questions of these	14.28%	17.14%	5.71%	8.57%	48.57%
	exams					
1	I was provided with leaked					
7	question by my	11.42%	17.14%	11.42%	28.57%	31.42%
	family/friends/relatives/					
	teachers					
1	I supplied leaked question					
8	to my friends/others to help	5.72%	0%	0%	45.71%	48.57%
	them					
1	I was and/or am compared					
9	to others who did better	42.85%	40%	2.85%	11.42%	2.85%
	than me and judged for not					
	doing good enough					
2	I was and/or am					
0	underestimated for my bad	34.28%	40%	0%	8.57%	17.14%
	results and my opinion is					
	not given much importance					
2	I feel low and do not feel					
1	confident because I have	31.42%	28.57%	5.71%	20%	11.42%
	low GPA in these exams					

The long list of negative effects clearly shows how examinees of board examinations have to struggle. The research found that more than 80% students (61% strongly agreed, and 26.86% agreed) feel pressure giving these examinations. 54.28% strongly agreed and 34% agreed that they are pressurized to attend coaching classes and home tutoring. As assumed, it was found that students (40% strongly agreed and 48.57% agreed) felt more pressure in giving PSC compared to the other exams because of their young age. Also, these examinations are changing students' outlook towards study as the research shows that many (11% strongly agreed and 28.57% agreed) focus more on guide books than text books. These examinations are also promoting memorization which is evident in 42.85% strongly agreeing and 34.28% agreeing. Also, these exams are promoting peer pressure which is evident in 20% strongly agreeing and 57.14% agreeing that they feel jealous of their peers who did well in board exams. It was found that many (34.28% strongly agreed and 40% agreed) are underestimated for their bad results. So, for achieving good grades, some (8.57% strongly agreed and 5.71% agreed) take help of unfair means in exam halls and another 14.28% strongly agreed and 17.14% agreed that they took help of leaked questions. However, when they fail to meet the expectations, they are abused both verbally (17.14%

strongly agreed and 40% agreed) and physically (5.71% strongly agreed and 5.71% agreed). The research found that 17.14% strongly agreed and 14.28% agreed that they attempted to hurt themselves for not doing well in these examinations. Perhaps, the most shocking finding is that 11.42% strongly agreed and another 2.85% agreed to have attempted suicide for not getting expected grade.

## Conclusion

As the study found out, board examinations are, undoubtedly, of great importance to people as the results of these exams are quite necessary for future studies and career. Everyone expects good grades and the good grade is nothing less than an A+. A golden A+ is even better! A low grade is quite a disqualification that no examinee, their family, or well-wishers want. However, this importance that people put on board examinations are causing more negative effects on students than positive effects.

Obviously, these examinees are taken better care so that they can do their best in these exams. Parents are found to spend a lot of money for this purpose. When their children are meeting their expectations, they are having immediate celebrations, distribution of sweets among relatives, friends and teachers, and exchanges of gifts and so on. But, those who fail, or cut a bad figure, often plunge deep into depression and some receive derogatory, insulting comments from their parents, relatives and/or teachers. This underachievement becomes a social shame for them and as the study found out, some students actually go to the extreme verge of committing suicide.

However, the issue is quite deeper than what meets the eye. A very controversial example was reported in *The Daily Star* where it said that a student died by jumping from a building after learning that he had failed in the S.S.C. examination, but when the script was re-examined, it was found that he had passed and an error had been made by the head examiner in assessing the script (Amin and Greenwood, 2018). Although the study found that many (14.28% strongly agree and 34.28% agree) challenge the grade formally, not many grades change and it eventually creates pressure on the students' psychology.

As the study found out, almost none deny the importance of these exams. Therefore, the paper implies that we, as members of the society, should change our outlook towards board examinations so that examinees feel less pressure and can concentrate on their studies and learning than only getting a good grade. Also, we should take examinations at the elementary and junior levels lightly to lessen pressure on the students.

To conclude, the study has some limitations as the sample size is not quite large and the study focuses only on quantitative data. Hence, further research is definitely needed to get more insights into the qualitative data, going deep into the minds of the examinees so that proper measures can be taken before too much damage is done.



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## **Appendix 1**

### **Questionnaire**

Dear students,

This survey seeks your kind participation to find out your perceptions regarding Primary School Certificate (PSC), Junior School Certificate (JSC), Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and Higher Secondary School Certificate (HSC) examinations. Be assured that all responses will be kept confidential. Kindly answer all the questions. Thank you!

Regards,

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#### **Part A**

- 1) Mention your gender-
  - a) Male      b) Female
- 2) Write down your obtained GPA in each of examinations-
  - a) Primary School Certificate (PSC)-
  - b) Junior School Certificate (JSC)-
  - c) Secondary School Certificate (SSC)-
  - d) Higher Secondary School Certificate (HSC) –

## Part B

**\*Kindly put a tick (✓) mark beside your response.**

	Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
		5	4	3	2	1
1	I think PSC, JSC, SSC and HSC examinations are very important					
2	My family/friends/relatives and others think that these examinations are very important					
3	I always felt pressure giving these examinations					
4	I felt pressure to get a good grade to fulfill everyone's expectations					
5	I felt more pressure in giving PSC compared to the other exams as I was younger than					
6	I felt pressure studying and preparing for these examinations					
7	I felt pressure attending coaching classes and/or private tutoring					
8	I studied guide books more than text books					
9	I felt jealous of my peers who got better grades than me					
10	I did not enjoy studying for these examinations					
11	I paid more focus on memorizing than learning					
12	I felt depressed for not achieving expected grade					
13	I attempted to hurt myself for not doing well in these examinations					
14	I attempted suicide for not getting expected grade					
15	My family/ teachers tried to change the grade by challenging the result					

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16	My family/friends/teachers appreciated and applauded me for doing well in these exams					
17	My family/friends/teachers treated me badly for not doing well in these exams					
18	I was verbally abused (taunted/ scold etc.) for not doing well					
19	I was physically abused (beaten/slapped etc.) for not doing well.					
20	I adopted unfair means (cheating of some sort) in the exams to get better grades					
21	I collected and solved leaked questions of these exams					
22	I was provided with leaked question by my family/friends/relatives/ teachers					
23	I supplied leaked question to my friends/others to help them					
24	I was and/or am compared to others who did better than me and judged for not doing good enough					
25	I was and/or am underestimated for my bad results and my opinion is not given much importance					
26	My family/friends/relatives/ teachers think only an A+ (GPA 5) holder is a good student					
27	My family/friends/relatives/ teachers think I am not a very good student because I did not get A+					
28	My family/friends/relatives/ teachers think I will not do well in future studies and will not have a good job for my bad result					
29	My family/friends/relatives/ teachers think prayers, blessing and luck play a great role in getting a good grade					

30	I feel low and do not feel confident because I have low GPA in these exams					
31	My family/relatives consulted Pir or Fakir/ visited Mazar and so on for my good result					
32	My family/friends/relatives/ teachers wished me with tokens like Horlicks/exam materials/dress/money etc. before my exams					
33	My family/friends/relatives/teachers think that I would have more chance of getting A+ with having more coaching classes, private tutoring and reading more guide books					
34	My family got me admitted to different coaching centers for good results					
35	Doa Mahfil and other prayer programs were arranged in my schools and colleges					

Thank you very much for your co-operation!

# Assessment of Learning-Grading Nexus in the Context of Bangladesh

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## Abstract

Education is the pre-condition for ‘learning’ to create human knowledge, values and skills to meet society’s workforce while grading measures the learning and performance of learners. Learning is possible even without grading but without learning, grading is meaningless. Thus, learning is independent and grading is dependent. The common psychology of Bangladeshi students seems to prefer grading to learning. These circumstances allow the researchers to initiate the study to assess the learning-gradingnexus from the perspective of educational ideology with a view to evaluating the roles and relations of the two variables in setting the goal of education. The present study is qualitative and exploratory in nature, employing content analysis method to gather information from secondary data sources including books, journal articles, research reports, different websites etc. Findings of the research highlights that real learning brings both good grading and success; but learning for grading may apparently mark a student as a high achiever, but ultimately s/he suffers and become embarrassed for her/his high grading but lack of success. So the study proposes ‘Yes’ to grading for leaning and ‘No’ to learning for grading.

***Keywords: Education, learning, grading, nexus, goal***

## 1. Introduction

The goal of education is to impart “real cultivation of mind” which Newman in his *The Idea of a University*” defines as “the intellect ... properly trained and formed to have a connected view or grasp of things” (Newman,197). Therefore, building up the capacity of learners to *think critically and productively* remains at the centre of Newman’s philosophy of education. However, the goal of education, as generally understood, is to provide students with a comprehensive knowledge of life and of the world, with an understanding of the general philosophies and ideals, norms and

values, advanced use of science and technology, etc. of the society they live in. It encourages students to become efficient in the learning process and direct their learning in their own individual and flexible ways. But the reality in the present context of Bangladesh is that an increasing tendency of most guardians, parents and even teachers - is to urge their children to run after high grades. Of course, grading is necessary, as a measuring tool to scale students' achievement of learning, but the tool should, indeed, not be the goal of education. But grades have become so for many people nowadays in Bangladesh. The present study, therefore, attempts to assess the needs, importance and overall 'Learning-Grading' nexus exploring the theories developed on learning and grading.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

Students of Bangladesh receive advice from parents, guardians and teachers to struggle for getting good grades in public examinations, e.g. Primary Education Completion (PEC), Junior School Certificate (JSC), Secondary School Certificate (SSC), Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examinations, admission tests, language tests and the like. It happens especially when students face admission tests to get into higher educational institutions. Due to giving extreme importance to grades, learning has fallen victim to negligence. As a result, lots of students with higher grades have already been reported to have failed to achieve minimum qualifying marks in different competitive exams, which show the futility of grading without learning. In such a case, to judge students' learning simply by their grades - resembles to judge a book by its cover. 'Learning' and 'grading' are two major concerns in relation to education. In the present world, especially in the context of Bangladesh, there has grown a common conception/ misconception among the mass people that grades are the real reflection of a learner's education or competence. There prevails a culture of considering 'grades' as the symbol of a student's status of merit, proficiency and eligibility and overall quality as an academic role player. This is how the ideological stand tends to endorse a kind of education system where getting *good grades* has become the prime focus of the students, their parents and teachers as well. In these circumstances, people's passion for achieving grades may allow any researcher to question – "Is Bangladesh being motivated to be a part of a consumerist society?" The study has, therefore, been initiated to assess the Learning-Grading nexus from the perspective of educational ideology in the



context of Bangladesh, with a view to evaluating the real roles and relations of the two variables in becoming the goal of education.

## **1.2 General Objective**

The general objective of the study was “to assess the learning and grading nexus from the perspective of the educational ideology in the context of Bangladesh”.

### **1.2.1 Specific Objectives**

The specific objectives of the study were:

- to review the goal of education in the process (es) of learning and grading,
- to analytically study the debate over learning and grading to obtain general understanding of both of them and their inter-relation,
- to draw inferences with a view to enhancing the process of education through a healthy co-existence of learning and grading.

## **1.3 Research Questions**

The study addressed the following research questions:

- a) What are the purposes of education?
- b) What are the real nature of ‘learning’ and ‘grading’ and their inter-relationship in the process of imparting education?
- c) What are the educational ideologies of students, teachers and mass people of Bangladesh? Should we accept or deny ‘Grading’ for the successful completion of ‘Learning’?
- d) What measures should be taken to develop standard of education through a healthy co-existence of learning and grading?

## **2. Methodology**

Since the present study attempts to find answers to the research questions which are qualitative and exploratory in nature, the data collection methods and analysis techniques were used from qualitative research perspective. Content Analysis method was mainly employed to gather information from secondary data sources - which include books, journal articles, research reports, different websites, etc.

2.1 The Conceptual Framework

Education is the pre-condition for ‘learning’ to be imparted and ‘grading’ to be occurred. Learning aims at creating human knowledge, values and skills to meet society’s workforce while grading measures the learning, performance, progress and improvement of learners and guarantees if they are good or bad. Learning is possible and valuable even if grading is not conducted, but without learning there is no chance and value of grading at all. Thus, learning is independent and grading is dependent. On the other hand, without grading, students’ merit and occurrence of learning cannot be measured. However, education must be learning centred and not grading-centred though grading is essential an educational system. The most common psychology of Bangladesh seems to be drifting into a besetting danger by giving more importance to grading than learning. So, there remains the need of finding out student-friendly ‘grading for learning’ approach to replace the conventional approach - ‘grading of learning’.

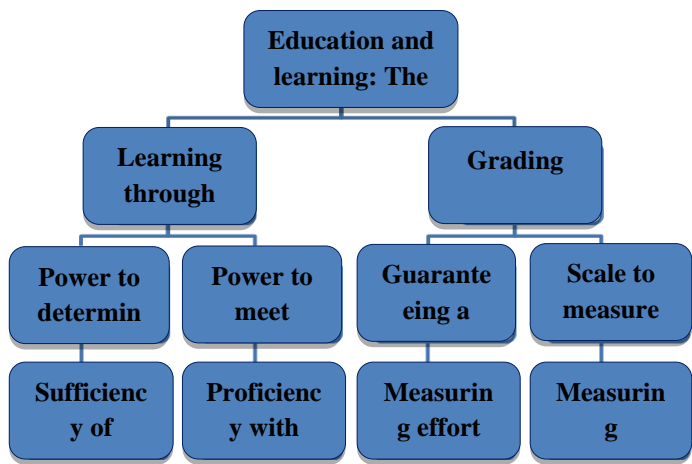


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study (part -1)

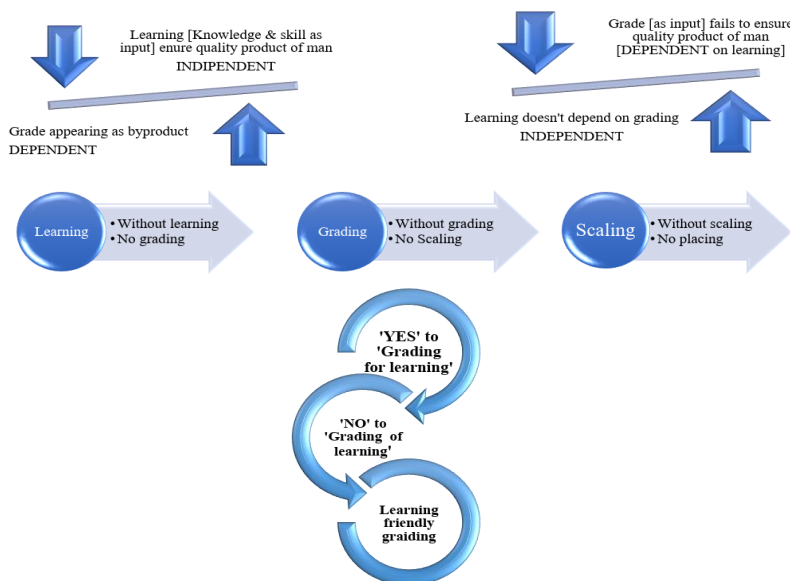


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework of the Study (part -2)

### 3Literature Review

*The Idea of a University* illustrated and Defined by Newman is a famous advocacy for “education” as the principal purpose of a university. Newman, considers education as the ‘Philosophy of Science’ i.e. ‘Liberal Knowledge’ or ‘Philosophical Knowledge’ and sees “the end of University Education,” as “a comprehensive view of truth in all its branches, of the relations of science to science, their mutual bearings, and their respective values” (Newman, 187). *To Newman, ‘Learning’* is the tool or “power of discriminating between truth and falsehood”, the capacity of learners “of arranging things according to their real value” and capability to see things- “as they are” what he calls the “real cultivation of mind ... properly trained and formed to have a connected view or grasp of things” (Ibid.) which is an echo of John F Kennedy’s voice - “the goal of education is the advancement of knowledge and the dissemination of truth” (BrainyQuote n. d.). However, the century old debate regarding learning and grading nexus has, though, still remained unsettled, several newer and different concepts about education’s goal have been evolving around the globe.

**Regarding the goal of education, Noam Chomsky in his “Purpose of Education” remarks - “Education is really aimed at helping students get to the point where they can learn on their own... .” (26).**

**On the other hand,** Conner in “The New Social Learning: A Guide to Transforming Organizations through Social Media” says, “We define learning as the transformative process of taking in information that, when internalized and mixed with what we have experienced, changes what we know and builds on what we can do. It’s based on input, process, and reflection. It is what changes us” (29).

*In this regard, Smith’s view in his “Learning how to learn: Applied theory for adults” is worthy to mention in which he calls learning a product, or a process or a function:*

“It has been suggested that the term learning defies precise definition because it is put to multiple uses. Learning is used to refer to (1) the acquisition and mastery of what is already known about something, (2) the extension and clarification of meaning of one’s experience, or (3) an organized, intentional process of testing ideas relevant to problems. In other words, it is used to describe a product, a process, or a function” (Smith, 86).

Knowles’ “The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species” suggests learning to be – “The process of adults gaining knowledge and expertise” (90). At present, in Bangladesh as well as in other parts of the world, ‘grading’ has become a greater expectation than ‘learning’ from education. This has happened to learners, parents and even teachers. However, grading is, “. . . a system of classifying or ranking something on a particular scale” (Lexico n. d.). By Collins, it is called “. . . the act of classifying something on a scale by quality, rank, size, or progression, etc.” in his *Grading*.(Collins, 89). So, grading is the scale to measure students’ levels of achievement. Conventionally, grading is practiced to categorize learners using: letters (generally ‘A’ to ‘F’), a range (e.g. 1 to 5) and as a percentage of a total number.

A striking problem of grading is that it guarantees whether a student is good or not good on the basis of an answer script produced in one or two hours, with no judgment over the totality of the student’s performances at other times in other situations. And, according to Bursuck, as it is cited in “The Fairness of Report Card Grading Adaptations: What Do Students With and

Without Learning Disabilities Think?”, there are also confusions about if grading is helpful since there might be a different result if a student may take a modified version of the test, with fewer different output modalities (Bursuck, et al. 99). Teachers would most likely be unable to use a standard rubric to grade the adapted test, and would likely need to adjust questions, acceptable answers, and the weights given to correct responses (Ibid.).

Davidson (2009) says-

"I can't think of a more meaningless, superficial, cynical way to evaluate learning than by assigning a grade. It turns learning into a class competition as to how do I snag the highest grade for the least amount of work? But learning should be a deep pleasure, setting up for a lifetime of curiosity. That's opposite to learning and curiosity and is a waste of my time. There has to be a better way...."

Cathy stresses in her “The Rewired Brain: The Deep Structure of Thinking for the Information Age”,

that she is not abandoning the role of grading but “Right now, we have an educational system that encourages ‘teaching to the test.’ That’s dreadful as a learning philosophy and a total waste of precious learning time and opportunities in the digital age” (79).

However, the general purposes of grading system have been marked by Bursuck, et al. (Ibid.) that grading attempts to assess:

“how much effort was put forth when completing assignments, how much progress has been made on the general curriculum; how independently the work was completed; how much improvement was made since the last marking period; how performance compares to that of other students; how much progress was made on individual level, how well the student worked with classmates; what courses the student should take in the future”.

So, there are certain roles and also relationships between learning and grading. Ideal educationists believe that the supreme purpose of education is to impart learning to gain liberal knowledge and the modern pragmatists emphasize education’s realistic value to enhance man’s useful knowledge and develop skills to meet the needs of social workforce. But none of the idealist or pragmatist groups emphasize grading as the chief concern of education. Yet, with all negative and positive impacts, the importance of

grading is undeniable in view of the fact that it is not possible to scale the students' performance and achievements of learning until the learners are graded. And so, the century old debate has on learning-grading issue has continued with no obvious aim to settle which one of the two is the major concern of education, so things still remain unsettled.

So, from the above discussion, it may be summed up that there is the need of a humble assemblage of both sufficiency of knowledge (liberal knowledge) and proficiency of skill (useful knowledge) - two chief factors with learning to bring positive changes among learners. The study is, therefore, inquisitive to explore real functions, nature and values of learning and grading and compare their relative dependency.

## **4Discussion**

### **4.1Education, Knowledge and Learning**

Education, knowledge and learning are essentially inter-related. Liew, Anthony, in "Understanding Data, Information, Knowledge And Their Inter-Relationships", says that Education is not an accident; it is rather something that occurs in human mind through processes of learning (Liew,117). Learning is a series of processes through which data, information and knowledge respectively enter into humans (Ibid.):

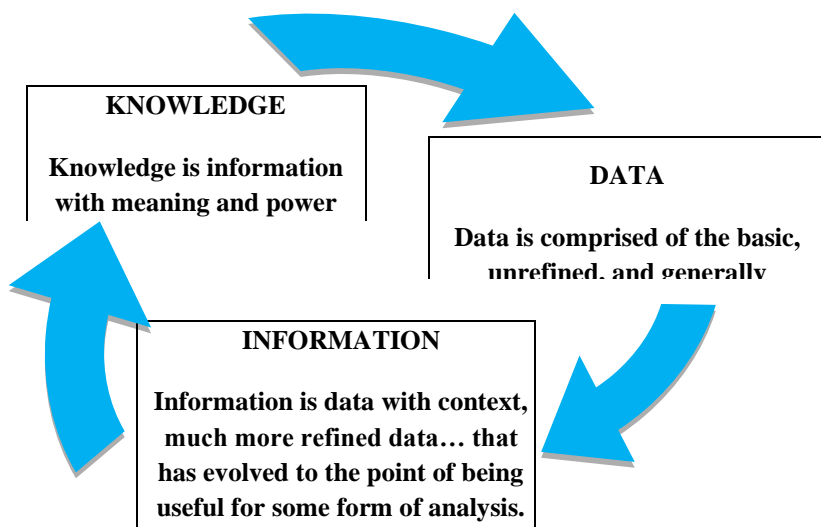


Figure 3: Inter-relationship of Data, Information and Knowledge

Education occurs in man's mind through synthesizing data, information and knowledge. Knowledge is collected, analysed, processed and idealized with norms, values, ethics etc. and now learners are enabled to materialize the knowledge with due usefulness. So, education occurs into the *Homo Sapiens* and changes its mental nature, gives shapes to the character and personality and produce humankind (Newman, Ibid., 73). Thus with education, the mankind is neither biased, nor fanatic, rather rational and gentle in nature, creative in tendency, useful and fit to reality and professional to his words and actions (Ibid.). And so, learning may be simultaneously liberal and useful which is the vehicle or medium through which education enters into mankind.

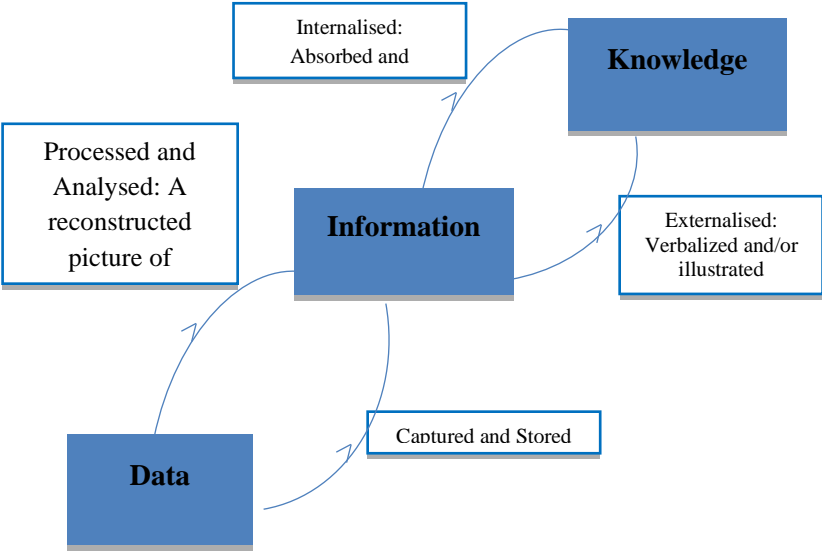


Figure 4: Formation of Knowledge (Liew 2007, Ibid)

#### 4.2Grading

Grading or assessment, as Clark defines in the “Competition for Grades and Graduate-Student Performance”, is used to evaluate, communicate, motivate, and get feedback (Clark, 169). In competition, grading plays a pivotal role. Moors and Moors, in their “Classroom social climate and student absences and grades” mentioned that grading scale serves as a yardstick for students to measure one’s performance which then could be compared to compete with themselves, with fellow students or with schools...etc. and so, grading is used by the teachers as a tool to assess the level of students’ understanding (Moos and Moors, 118). But based on the grading methods, the student’s way of approach to the learning differs. There are negative aspects for grading too. Obtaining lower grades (in competition) could lead students to demotivate and result in absenteeism (Ibid.).

Pollo way and others in their paper “Classroom Grading: A National Survey of Policies”, maintained that grading is, indeed, a complex topic that involves philosophical, pedagogical, and pragmatic issues (Polloway et al., 111). They say, “We all have our own ideas. Our perceptions of grading practices are influenced largely by our own experiences. Scott Jaschik, in his study “Imagining College without Grades” opined that children get higher grades, we gather satisfaction with the grading system of our local school but



if our own children have received lower grades, we have a different mind-set” (Jaschik, 91). Grading systems remain controversial and fervently debated today (Ibid.).

Alfie Kohn, mentioned of one of his students Claire in essay “The Case Against Grades” in which the student said-“I remember the first time that a grading rubric was attached to a piece of my writing....Suddenly all the joy was taken away. I was writing for a grade — I was no longer exploring for me. I want to get that back. Will I ever get that back?” Some argue grades are psychologically harmful (Ibid). For Michel Foucault, as mentioned in “A supravagheashi a pedepsi”, the school is only a component of the area of disciplinary power, and assessment is only one of its instruments (Foucault, 129). Thus, if we talk about grades and grading, we should refer to their ability to create conformity.

### **4.3 Learning-Grading Nexus**

#### **4.3.1 Dependency and Independency of the Variables**

Shachin Tendulkar, being asked by Sourav Ganguli in a TV programme as to how he scored a hundred of centuries, said: “I did never intend to score a century but always had the intention to give the best of mine to every match I played and centuries came by virtue” (*Dadagiri 2018*). What the little master meant by his words is that the grade or position as a cricketer he, now, belongs to was not the goal of his sportsmanship; rather the goal was always set to ensure the best use of his learning and talent. Tendulkar’s statement, indeed shows that the hundredth of hundreds of runs (grade) simply appears as byproduct if learning (talented skill) work productively. So, the study attempts to see whether grade depends on effectiveness of learning or learning depends on grading or not.

On an average, more than 80% students who sought admission in the Dhaka University (DU) over the past three years-2011, 2012 and 2013, had failed to get the required passing marks in the admission tests.

The DU admission test results for the 2013-14 academic session show that out of 217,247 candidates in five units, 175,346 (81%) students failed to obtain the minimum passing marks. The failure rate was 83% in the 2012-13 academic session, and 81% in the 2011-12 academic session (Zayeeef 2014).

DU Admission Seekers	
Session	Failed
2013-14	81%
2012-13	83%
2011-12	81%

Table no. 1. Percentage of failing in admission test at DU.  
(Sources: “Dhaka Tribune”, February 22, 2014)

The above information demonstrates that in spite of being outstanding, grading fails to work. It is 81% of total candidates. More than 81% students didn't lack grading but lacked learning and couldn't reach the goal. So, here the inference can be drawn that to get success (i.e. here, chance of getting admitted to a good institution) depends on 'learning' but doesn't depend on 'grading'. Another inference is that without ensuring true learning, mere grading is futile.

On the other hand, there are examples of great number of people who, without getting good grades at school, college or university levels, earned sufficient learning of their own and brought not only personal success, rather paradigm shifts for civilization. Albert Einstein did flunk the entrance exam to the Zurich Polytechnic at age 16, when he failed the language, botany and zoology sections ([History.com](http://History.com)). Walter Sullivan, in his essay, “Einstein Revealed as Brilliant in Youth” mentioned- The essay Einstein wrote for this exam was “full of errors” (Sullivan, 84) which was published in The New York Times.

Rabindranath Tagore, Kazi Nazrul Islam, Bill Gates, Julian Assange, Mark Zuckerberg, P.B Shelley, Stephen Spielberg and so many people greatly lacked grading but never lagged behind in pushing the whole civilization forward. So, here the inference can be drawn that to get success true 'learning' is independent; it does not require 'grading' at all to reach goal. Thomas Alva Edison's teacher said, “He was too stupid to learn anything”. In answering to a reporter about how he felt the very time when he failed 1000 times in inventing light bulb, Edison said, “I didn't fail 1000 times. The light, bulb was an invention with 1000 steps” (But They Did Not Give Up n. d.).

Learning-grading relation is analogous to fire and smoke relationship. If fire is ensured, smoke appears as a by-product. In the like manner, if learning is

ensured, grading appears as a by-product - because grades depend on learning, but learning does not depend on grading.

### **4.3.2 Indispensability of Grading**

It has already been discussed that in spite of negative aspects, grading serves as a yardstick to scale students' learning and grading is one of the instruments available to an institution to assess its learners' base and depth and height of understanding. Grading is, therefore, indispensable. It is not without purpose.

### **4.4 Choice of Techniques or Methods/ Approaches**

Teachers should carefully select the techniques / methods / approaches of assessment. They should choose student-friendly and learning-centered techniques/ methods/ approaches of assessment e.g. Marzano's Formative Assessment or Student-centered Approach of Grading, or Moffet and Wagner's Standard-based Grading Approach, or Base-line Self Evaluation Approach are examples of moderate approaches that can be applied.

Jeanetta Miller in his article **“High School Edition: Urbana” held the view that** the general goal of formative assessment is to collect detailed information that can be used to improve instruction and student learning while it's happening (Miller, 73). What makes an assessment “formative” is not the design of a test, technique, or self-evaluation, per se, but the way it is used—i.e., to inform in-process teaching and learning modifications (Ibid.).

Studies suggest standards-based grading (SBG) is based upon three principles. First, grades must have meaning. Indicators, marks and/or letters should provide students and parents with information related to their strengths and weaknesses, separating out non-academic behaviours. Second, it incorporates multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate their understanding based on feedback. Ian Beatty's view published in the article “Standards-based Grading in Introductory University Physics”, the final principle of standards-based grading is separating academic indicators from extraneous factors such as homework completion and extra credit (Beatty, 113).

O'Connor, in “How to Grade for Learning” said-

“Overemphasis of grades and faulty grading practices have detrimental effects on student achievement, motivation, and self-concept... Faulty grading also damages the interpersonal relationship on which good teaching

and effective learning depend. This problem occurs at least partly because of teachers' dual roles as coach and judge" (112).

The author also mentioned, "Teachers must not see grades as weapons of control, but rather use grading as a professional exercise to enhance learning." (Ibid)

In a standard-based grading system, students receive a score on their achievement of each standard. However, for ensuring the effectiveness of this system, clear standards are needed for students' learning and well-defined learning standards should be communicated. Base-line Self - evaluation Approach (a baseline assessment) provides a critical reference point for assessing changes and impact, as it establishes a basis for comparing the situation before and after an intervention of the campaign. Baseline assessments should serve as a benchmark for examining what changes is triggered by the intervention (Ibid.).

According to many educators, grading does not encourage students to learn but rather to avoid getting bad grades. Grades play on students' fears of punishment or shame, or their desire to outcompete their peers, instead of stimulating their interest for learning new things. In the research work titled "Action Research on the Effect of Descriptive and Evaluative Feedback Order on Student Learning in a Specialized Mathematics and Science Secondary School" Butler cited in Chua that parents and even many teachers are unaware that research has demonstrated score reporting undermines the learning gains and test performance, especially for lower achievers (Butler 1988, cited in Chua et al., 98). Again, Ory and Ryan cited in Chua that grading seems to emphasize more on "how well" than on "how to improve" (Ory and Ryan in Chua et al. 189). According to Butler (cited in Chua et al., Ibid. 76), a focus on grades and grades plus comments generally has an undermining effect on both the learning interest and performance of students. Providing grades and scores can be a main distracter for effective written feedback as students fail to read, digest, and act upon the descriptive written feedback that accompanies grades or scores because they focus directly on the performance result.

Grading must be based on appropriate assessment procedures i.e. fruitful, useful and accurate testing while testing itself should possess reliability and validity. Conventionally and practically in Bangladesh, people joining as teachers start teaching, testing, assessing and finally grading their students even before knowing how to conduct the procedures and when testing is executed without appropriate methodology, there remains the sheer chance for the test result or grading to be biased and erroneous.

#### **4.5 Domination of A<sup>+</sup> Culture in the Grading based Education System of Bangladesh**

Students should love to learn and strive for good grades as well but the paradox is that drifting into the A<sup>+</sup> Culture, they cannot feel the point at which they go far beyond the actual goal of learning when their whole motivation gets concentrated on the grade. For example, on May, 2017, Sanjida Islam Nova, the first girl of her class at Bangamata Sheikh Fazilatunnessa Government High School in Uttara, Dhaka, killed herself. According to her family members, she was a talented student and had hopes for joining the air force or the army. She aspired for getting GPA-5 in her SSC examinations, but achieved GPA 4.73. Even though her family members consoled her and gave her mental support and she had the chance to sit for university admission test, Nova took her own life. Nova had displayed apparently no warning signs of suicide such as loss of interest in activities or withdrawal from friends and family. She did, however, experience what many perceive as a 'failure' in their education—not getting a GPA-5 in the SSC exams. So, the question arises, “Is a culture of achieving GPA-5 and Golden A<sup>+</sup> driving students of Bangladesh toward suicide?” The recent ratio of student suicides in the week immediately following SSC results being published seems to suggest so. It is no longer enough to pass in these examinations; students pine for the best possible grades. Failing to reach this, an increasing number of students are killing themselves.

#### **4.6 Over Grading or Over Burden?**

Grading centred attitude of the different private educational institutions push students into dark uncertainty in their existing academic context and future professional career. A practical example may expose the scenario. It was 2007, when one of the researchers was serving as a Lecturer in a private university of Bangladesh at its Rajshahi Campus. Once it was found by him that a group of alumni came in an informal procession and entered the office of the Deputy Registrar of that university. The group of students demanded that their grades should be reassessed. The Deputy Registrar asked whether they felt deprived. They replied in the negative and informed that they were in fact over-graded and all of them got A<sup>+</sup> at under graduate level (Programme: BBA). Now whenever they were facing a job interview they were asked the toughest questions and the interview board expressed their high expectations from the students. But unfortunately, they could not satisfy

the board with good answers and missed jobs. They also had to lose face with due embarrassment. They reported to the Deputy Registrar that when they applied for a low-graded job, they were insulted. They appeared in a board for better jobs and the grade acted as a bottleneck for them and they felt their over grade as nothing but overburden. So they demanded a revision of their grading by lowering down their scores which was not possible ultimately.

#### **4.7 Reliability and Objectivity of Grading**

According to some academics, grading is very subjective and inconsistent. So, the same student may be graded very differently depending on who is grading. Using MCQ style tests may improve the level of objectivity but there is an opinion among many which states that MCQ style tests may be biased against certain types of students.

But should the grading system be completely abolished? In the absence of an alternative and a more humane system acceptable to all, it may not be possible. . Since people do not have any other reliable scale for measuring the learning process, grading cannot be eliminated right now.

#### **4.8 Moral Degradation**

To create morally enriched individuals is the primary purpose of education because they would guide their nation towards development. However, from very early age children of Bangladesh have long been being given the socio-psycho-therapy through aphorism included in their textbook as follows:

“Learn better, Earn better”

**(লেখাপড়া করে যে, গাড়ি ছোড়া চড়ে সে।)**

The aphorism is a clear indicator of the attitude of a nation towards learning. From a very tender age, children are taught that learning is the best way of earning money, owning wealth and becoming rich is the main goal of life. Unfortunately, most people do not like to see education as a method of moral, physical, spiritual and intellectual development. So, the newer generations are continuously vying for certificates bearing high CGPA rather than developing their intellect and morality. This tendency of over-valuing

the GPA has become so common because grades determine the overall social prestige, job security and lifestyle of a person. For this reason, parents, either from their desire of securing a good future for their children or for their own social prestige, want to make sure that their children get the highest possible GPA. This desire is so strong in some people that they are willing to cross any of boundaries to fulfill their wishes.

Grades have thus become a commodity that is sold to the highest bidder. The “question leak culture” has become a very common example of moral degradation which indicates the demand of higher grading in the market. Some people leak for money and some are spending money to buy the leaked question i.e. to buy grade with money. Recently, during almost every public examination like SSC, HSC and even PSC (designed for the little kids of the 5<sup>th</sup> grade-aging from 10-11 years), question leak incidents made headlines of newspapers.

## **5 Findings of the Study**

- a) Education should aim at liberal knowledge and a philosophical outlook on life, and seek for a comprehensive view of truth in all aspects of life.
- b) *Learning*’ is the tool or “power of discriminating between truth and falsehood”, the capacity of learners “of arranging things *according* to their real value” and capability to see things- “as they are” what he calls the “real cultivation of mind ... properly trained and formed to have a connected view or grasp things”.
- c) Teachers, grading the adapted assessment, would most likely be unable to use a standard rubric to grade the adapted test, and would likely need to adjust questions, acceptable answers, and the weights given to correct responses.
- d) Grading is “. . . A system of classifying or ranking something on a particular scale” (en.oxforddictionaries.com.). Right now, we have an educational system that encourages ‘teaching to the test.’ That’s dreadful as a learning philosophy and a total waste of precious learning time and opportunities in the digital age. Grading systems remain controversial and hotly debated today. Some argue grades are psychologically harmful.
- e) Philosophers and ideal educationists believe that the supreme purpose of education is to impart learning to gain liberal knowledge

and the modern pragmatists emphasize on education's realistic value to enhance man's useful knowledge and develop skills to meet the needs of social workforce. But none of the idealist or pragmatist groups emphasizes grading as the chief concern of education. Yet, with all negative and positive impacts, the importance of grading is undeniable in view of the fact that it is not possible to scale the students' performance and achievement of learning until the learners are graded.

- f) The general understanding of learning is drawn that there is the need of a humble assemblage of both sufficiency of knowledge (the liberal knowledge) and proficiency of skill (the useful knowledge) - two chief factors with learning to bring positive changes among learners.
- g) Education, knowledge and learning are essentially inter-related.
- h) In spite of being outstanding, grading fails to work.
- i) Success in getting admitted (to a good institution) depends on 'learning' but doesn't depend on 'grading'.
- j) Without ensuring true learning, mere grading is futile.
- k) There are examples of great number of people who, without getting good grade at school, college or university levels, earned sufficient learning of their own and brought not only personal success, rather paradigm shifts for civilization.
- l) Paradox is that drifting into the A<sup>+</sup> Culture; they cannot feel the point at which they go far beyond the actual goal of learning when their whole motivation gets concentrated on the grade. For example, on May, 2017, Sanjida Islam Nova, the first girl of her class at Bangamata Sheikh Fazilatunnessa Government High School in Uttara, Dhaka, killed herself.
- m) Over grading has become over burden. Children of Bangladesh have long been being given the socio-pchycho-therapy through aphorism included in the textbooks and grades have become a commodity that is sold to the highest bidder.
- n) The "question leak culture" has become a very common example of moral degradation which indicates the demand of higher grading in the market.
- o) According to many educators, grading does not encourage students to learn but rather to avoid getting bad grades.



- p) According to some educators, grading is very subjective and inconsistent. So, the same student may be graded differently depending on who is grading.

## **6. Recommendations**

The study suggests building a general consensus which will guide us through our academic and pedagogic journey. We may not do away with grading, but take the following points in consideration:

- a) Conventional grading system should be replaced by the Productive approach of grading i.e. say 'NO' to the approach of 'grading of learning' and say 'YES' to the approach of 'grading for learning'.
- b) The conventional approach of grading of learning needs to be replaced by the liberal approaches like: all aspects of curriculum should be researched and pretested before the implementation. Curriculum should be designed to promote the positive attitude towards learning, not high grades.
- c) Grading should depend on evaluative feedback providing information about how a student can be more competent.
- d) Criterion-referenced grading system should be introduced and implemented instead of norm-referenced grading system.
- e) A balance between 'Accuracy-based Grading' and 'Effort-based Grading' should be ensured.
- f) Grades should be offered in a way being consistent and concerned with students' content-knowledge and learning advancement.
- g) Accuracy-based grading may be less followed.
- h) Summative assessment should be less encouraged and formative assessment techniques should be increased.

## **7. Conclusion**

Grading is a by-product of learning. If students focus on learning, good grades will come out of their learning. Thus, making the decision to learn, instead of just focusing on the grade, might actually improve a student's grade. Students generally get motivated to learn by knowing that the learning will give short or long-term positive effects on their lives. They also get motivated by things genuinely interesting and get extremely motivated when teachers offer genuine interest in topics. Thus learning takes place well and grading in the real sense becomes possible.

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**Volume 7/2021-2022 / ISSN 2413-1814**

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# UNFATHOMED TREASURES: DIARY OF A CANCER PATIENT

**Dr. Priyanka Vaidya**

*Assistant Professor of English in a Government College,  
Himachal Pradesh , India*

Spring seemed gloomy  
Leaves of breath were falling  
As if Autumn in heart  
But never to bloom again;  
Ah! Never.  
The day  
News came of my death  
Death of moments unlived  
Relationships unloved  
Words unspoken  
Roads untrodden  
Songs unsung  
Kiss unkissed  
Touch untouched.  
Everything wanted to breathe  
Through my heart.  
But my heart died,  
Body became skeleton.  
No gleam in dead eyes.  
All the sighs cried,  
Oh, What I valued was mortal!  
Ego dashed to ground  
Yearned for love,  
Sighed for emancipation  
Enslaved in my dead body.  
My soul felt petrified  
Closed in dark world.  
Rays laughed at my dark self.  
I coloured the walls gloomy.  
Black engulfed all hues  
Tried to outdid  
Dark caverns of my heart  
Closed windows.  
No lamps, no mirror  
Just me, a corpse breathing  
Crawling creatures  
Of graveyard were seen on my disheveled  
A heavy blanket  
On my flimsy body.



Organised things haunted me.  
Relatives came with tearful eyes,  
Distressed gesture  
As if saying advice to a dead.  
No one came with a life.  
Everyone lamented my death  
Before the stopping of breath.  
I opened the dimmed eyes  
But closed the vision.  
Didn't want to discern the gloom.  
Oh! Painful chemotherapy  
Enshrouded existence.  
Why didn't you leave my breath?  
I didn't want to live agonizing life.  
Collected dead insects,  
Reptiles, mosquitoes  
In my dark space  
Before the end of life.  
Oh! Dear, either you will be rotten or burnt  
In these tents of life.  
Body I loved the most  
Left me deserted.

Oh! I was fallen on earth  
To crawl,  
Not to walk, nor to run.  
The body I loved the most  
Deceived me  
Slaughtered me.  
The mirror I adored the most  
Showed my scary figure  
A frightening face  
I broke it well  
Stones of agony.  
Those broken pieces of memories  
Entered my soul  
Pierced me as if I am enslaved  
Not alive anymore.  
Still unfathomed the treasures of life were.

(The poem was composed on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2018 at night in memory of  
Srabonee Mustafiz and read out on 24<sup>th</sup> morning (next day) in the seminar of  
Inter-continental Literary and Cultural Conference held in Indore, India.)