SPHAIRA

JOURNAL OF ARTS AND HUMANITIES

Volume 1 | Issue 1 | June 2025

NETROKONA UNIVERSITY

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Professor Dr. Anichha Parvin
Editor

Faculty of Arts and Humanities
Netrokona University | Netrokona-2400 | Bangladesh

SPHAIRA
JOURNAL OF ARTS AND HUMANITIES
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Published by
Public Relations Office
Netrokona University

Printed by
Dipta Offset & Digital Print
Soshtitola, New Market, Rajshahi

Type Setting
Naimul Haque

Cover Design
Sabyasachi Hazra

Price: BDT 500 / USD 50

p-ISSN: 3106-017X
e-ISSN: 3106-0161

Available at
Faculty of Arts and Humanities
Netrokona University
Netrokona-2400, Bangladesh

Email: sphaira.fah@neu.ac.bd
Web: https://sphaira.neu.ac.bd/

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EDITORIAL

The development of science and technology and the global system based on skills and markets have become more relevant than ever and hence have challenged the contribution of the arts and humanities. Arts and humanities remind us that people and society are not just numbers that can be counted and predicted. With technological advancements, academia cannot escape the responsibility of a liberal and just society. As a result, Netrokona University particularly focuses on supporting research in the arts and humanities.

Sphaira: Journal of Arts and Humanities is particularly interested in research in the arts and humanities. However, its interest is not limited within the boundaries of these disciplines. The journal is particularly enthusiastic about interdisciplinary and emerging research in the arts and humanities. I am positive that aspiration has landed on a viable ground in the current issue.

Greek word 'sphaira', from which the word 'sphere' comes, means something round like a ball, all encompassing. A total of eight research articles have been selected for publication in the first issue of the first volume. It covers diverse topics such as migration and dislocation, aesthetics, political intolerance in literature, historical readings of relationship and revenge, literature, language and pedagogy.

Sphaira is Netrokona University's first academic journal in English language. Honourable Vice-Chancellor Professor Dr. Khandaker Mohammad Ashraful Munim has provided all-round support, patronage, and inspiration in its publication process. I express my sincere gratitude for his visionary leadership and research-oriented encouragement. At the same time, I am grateful to the researchers and essayists who participated in this issue—their thoughts and labour have enriched this issue. I thank the editorial board and my colleagues without whose sincerity and intellectual responsibility this publication would not have been possible.

I firmly believe that *Sphaira* will make its contribution and mark its signature in the field of knowledge practice in the arts and humanities in Bangladesh. The main identity of a university is its research work. I am confident this journal will play a significant role in building the identity of Netrokona University as a distinctly smart university.

Best wishes to all.

Professor Dr. Anichha Parvin
Editor
Sphaira: Journal of Arts and Humanities
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p-ISSN: 3106-017X, e-ISSN: 3106-0161

Hamlet's Wavering between Lex Talionis and Vindicta Mihi: An Analysis of the Mode of Revenge He Pursues

Professor Mohit Ul Alam, PhD*

Abstract

This paper aims to show how the idea of revenge proves so difficult for Hamlet to pursue. The reason is his wavering between two prevalent concepts of homicide, which determine the type of revenge he might choose. On the one hand, it is the old Hammurabi law that stipulates 'an eye for an eye' as a principle of equivalence to be exacted on the offender, which is then incorporated in the Mosaic law. This is very much the principle of lex talionis, or retaliation. On the other hand, in biblical logic, Vindicta Mihi is the Latin phrase that translates to "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Romans 12:19). Hamlet wavers between these two contrary concepts for much of the play, though finally he enforces the lex talionis on Claudius, thus satisfying the demand of his father's Ghost for revenge. The basic difference between these two principles is that in the lex talionis, the responsibility of revenge is thrust upon the individual mortal being, but in the Vindicta Mihi clause revenge is left to God. So, lex talionis is a mortal act and Vindicta Mihi is a divine act. But in another way, Vindicta Mihi may also be seen as providing divine protection to the killer, which I have highlighted in due place.

Lex talionis was not approved by the English court during Elizabeth's time. It was downgraded to private revenge or blood revenge, which was illegal. However, it was a popular theme on the Elizabethan-Jacobean stage. So, the law of lex talionis is discussed here not as a practicing social law, as it might have been, but as a fictional law treated by the dramatists of the time for its enormous dramatic interest. The revenge tragedy was the genre that exploited the dramatic tension between these two treatises.

My discussion follows this pattern. First, I discuss the biblical background of these two principles to provide a historical context.

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Second, I discuss the intellectual atmosphere of Elizabethan England to gain a contemporary perspective on these two. Finally, I discuss the play *Hamlet* within the framework of my essay. Before this, however, I briefly touch upon the play, *The Spanish Tragedy*, to provide a greater understanding of the issue—how Hamlet's mind is troubled by the conflicting position of the lex talionis and the Vindicta Mihi in his pursuit of revenge on Claudius.

Keywords: Hamlet, Lex talionis, Vindicta Mihi, revenge, history

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(1) The Biblical Background

The law of Lex Talionis dates back to Hammurabi, the sixth king of the First Babylonian Dynasty (1792-1750 BCE). He was a lawgiver who proposed 282 laws, of which only a scant few concern lex talionis. LH (the Law of Hammurabi) 196 says, "If a man destroys the eye of another man, they shall destroy his eye." This is the origin of the famous saying, "an eye for an eye." This law, however, was applied only to people of the same rank, an awilu (a free upper-class member). For example, Hamlet's revenge on Claudius would fit with this law, as they are both royal personages. For injuries to slaves, monetary compensation, or wergild, was accepted.

Lex talionis originated in three earlier traditions: the Laws of Ur-Nammu (c. 2100 BCE), the Laws of Lipit-Ishtar (1934-1924 BCE), and the Laws of Eshnunna (1930-1800 BCE).

LH emphasized proportional punishment. The following laws clarify this.

LH#196: If an awilu [free upper-class member] should blind the eye of another awilu, they shall blind his eye.

LH#197: If he should break the bone of another awilu, they should break his bone.

LH# 200: If an awilu should knock out the tooth of another awilu of his own rank, they shall knock out his tooth.

Larry May, in his book *Ancient Legal Thought* (2019), writes about these laws, saying that they were the origin of lex talionis or "an eye for an eye" law: "Here we have what is often referred to as the origin of the lex talionis formulation of an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth."[1]

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1. May, Larry. *Ancient Legal Thought: Equity, Justice, and Humaneness: From Hammurabi and the Pharaohs to Justinian and the Talmud.* Cambridge UP, 2019. P. 153. The phrases in parentheses are his.

The principle of lex talionis is elaborated in other biblical sources. In Leviticus 24:17-21; Deuteronomy 19:61-21; Exodus 21:23b-25, and Genesis (9:5-6), spanning the time from the 13th century BCE to the 6th Century BCE, the following laws are mentioned.

1. If a man strikes another and kills him, he shall surely be killed. The one who strikes an animal and kills it shall make restitution, a life for a life. If a man maims his fellow, as he has done so shall it be done to him, a fracture for a fracture, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, as he maims a man so shall it be done to him. The one who strikes an animal [and kills it] shall make restitution, and the one who strikes a man [and kills him] shall be killed. You shall have one law for both resident alien and citizen, for I am the Lord your God.[2]
2. In the case of killing a person, lex talionis means the killer is killed. The act of punishment must be similar to the offense in the aspects in which the original act was wrong. In a sense, it is a reversal of roles. The original agent of harm becomes the recipient of the same action of the type that constituted the offense.[3]

In Genesis 9:5-6, the significance of human blood is highlighted.

3 But your own lifeblood I will require; of every beast I will require it; of man for his fellow man, I will require human life. Whoever sheds the blood of man by man shall his blood be shed, for in his image did God make man.[4]

Pamela Barmash provides this important insight that man was created in the image of God. So, any attrition of man was an act against God. Thus, human blood was an imperishable divine entity:

> Emphasis is placed on the importance of blood as the life force of the victim: The only way that the spilling of blood can be undone is for the blood of the offender to be spilled as punishment. Moreover, God takes a particular interest in the punishment of homicide. It is an offense against God because the divine image is reflected in human beings, and the elimination of homicide occupies a central place in the re-creation of society after the Deluge.[5]

We now refer to the *Holy Qur'an*, where the concept of lex talionis is found in many verses. And, in this holy book, though vengeance with proportional equivalence is upheld, it is qualified by the scope for mercy. In Surah II, "Al Baqarah", or The Heifer, verse 178, we have the following: "Those who believe / The law of equality / Is prescribed to you / In case of murder: / The free for the free, / The slave for the slave, / The

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2. Larry, 155.
3. Larry, 155.
4. Larry, 155.
5. Barmash, Pamela. *Homicide in the Biblical World.* Cambridge UP, 2005. P. 159.

woman for the woman./ But any remission / Is made by the brother / Of the slain, then grant / Any reasonable demand, / And compensate him / With handsome gratitude. / This is a concession / And a Mercy / From our Lord. / After this whoever / Exceeds the limits / Shall be in grave penalty."[6]

Surah V, "Al Maidah", or The Table Spread says in verse 45: "We ordained therein for them: / 'Life for life, eye for eye, / Nose for nose, ear for ear, / Tooth for tooth, and wounds / Equal for equal. But if / Any one remits the retaliation / By way of charity, it is / An act of atonement for himself. / And if any fail to judge / By (the light of) what God / Hath revealed, they are / (No better than wrongdoers)."

In Surah XVI, "An-Nahl", verse 126, it is stated thus: "And if you do catch them out, / Catch them out no worse/ Than they catch you out: / But if ye show patience, / That is indeed the best (course) / For those who are patient."

In Surah XLII, "Ash-Shu'ara", verse 40, God's love for the merciful is announced: "The recompense for an injury / Is an injury equal thereto / (In degree): but if a person / Forgives and makes reconciliation, / His reward is due / From God: for (God) loveth not those who do / Wrong."

In all the above quotations from the *Holy Qur'an*, we find that lex talionis is accommodated in the Islamic faith as a principle of justice. But it also recommends restraint through proportionality. And it surpasses lex talionis through forgiveness.

In point of disagreement, however, Abdullah Yusuf Ali says that in Surah "Al Baqarah", verse 178, the Arabic word 'qisas' has been translated as 'equality', whereas the word 'retaliation' seems more apt. But Ali defends his translation by saying that in 'equality' there is room for mercy or forgiveness, which may not be found in 'retaliation':

> In order to meet the strict claims of justice, equality is prescribed, with a strong recommendation for mercy and forgiveness. To translate qisas, therefore, by retaliation, is, I think, incorrect. The Latin legal term Lex Talionis may come near it, but even that is modified here. In any case, it is best to avoid technical terms for things that are very different. "Retaliation" in English has a wider meaning, equivalent almost to returning evil for evil, and would apply more fitly to the blood feuds of the Days of Ignorance. Islam says: if you must take a life for a life, at least there should be some measure of equality in it; the killing of

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6. Ali, Abdullah Yusuf, translator. *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary*. Kitab Bhavan, India. First published in India, 1994.

> the slave of a tribe should not involve a blood feud where many free men would be killed; but the law of mercy, where it can be obtained by consent, with reasonable compensation, would be better. . . . One life having been lost, do not waste many lives in retaliation: at most, let the Law take one life under strictly prescribed conditions, and shut the door to private vengeance or tribal retaliation. But if the aggrieved party consents (and this condition of consent is laid down to prevent worse evils), forgiveness and brotherly love is better, and the door of Mercy is kept open.[7]

Having discussed lex talionis at some length, we will now discuss the theological-ethical principle of the Vindicta Mihi.

The reference to Vindicta Mihi appears in Deuteronomy 32:35 and Romans 12:19, and in the latter it says: "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." The idea may have developed from the narrative in Genesis 4:1-16, from the story of Abel and Cain, where an angry God curses Cain for killing his brother. In Genesis 4.12, God says to Cain: "When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth." Cain gets scared and prays to God for mercy. In Genesis 4.13, he expresses his anguish: "And Cain said unto the Lord, My punishment is greater than I can bear." He further repents at 4.14: "Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth, and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me."

At this, God reacted sharply and uttered a message that provides protection for the killers. So, God utters at 4.15: "And the Lord said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark on Cain, lest any finding him should kill him."[8]

Here, God's protection of Cain is suggestive of why Hamlet cannot kill Claudius, because, according to the Vindicta Mihi, revenge is God's prerogative. By implication it means that the killer is perceptively protected.

But on this point, Barmash's comments are relevant, and we would like to quote several passages from her book for further clarification. On the above verse, Genesis 4.15, Pamela Barmash has the following to say:

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7. Ali, 56.
8. *The Holy Bible*, Kings James Version, 2020.

> Divine protection of Cain reflects the anxiety over the appropriate form of punishment for a killer. And the "blood" of Abel is not simply a powerful image invented by a creative author for the tale of Abel and Cain. It is something real that has an existence of its own, and when blood is spilled, serious consequences result.[9]
>
> Cain's impulse to kill is depicted as capricious and powerful, illuminating a theory of sin and personal responsibility. God cautioned Cain: 'Is it not true that whether you are good at being a patient or not, sin is a demon at the door; toward you is its desire, but you control it' (Gen 4:7).[10]

Upon this, Barmash writes:

> The story of Cain and Abel highlights the seriousness by emphasizing the relationship between the brothers and by placing homicide as the first crime by a human being against another human being. Although there is no indication that the most heinous occurrence of homicide is fratricide, the relationship is foregrounded by the emphasis on the fraternal relationship between Cain and Abel: The word "brother" is repeated seven times within the episode, six of which are within the description and aftermath of the murder (Gen 4:2, 8 [twice], 9 [twice], 10, 11).[11]

She further elaborates, "Killing is serious because the harm done cannot be undone. An amount stolen can be repaid. Embarrassment, medical fees, and lost work time can be compensated in case of assault. But Cain's deed leaves behind permanent harm whose repair is difficult. The blood [Barmash used the Greek word for death], of Abel cries out from the ground."[12]

If revenge were allowed on Cain, it would initiate a spiraling cycle of revenge, and then it would continue in mankind, snowballing, to the profound despair of God.

Thus, Barmash says:

> Cain's punishment is mitigated because of the assumption that all who commit homicide are liable to be killed by whomever they meet and, therefore, *killers like Cain need protection.* In biblical law, in fact, the number of people who have the right to kill a killer is severely limited. The statutes on homicide in the Bible give the general impression that there is anxiety over what constitutes appropriate punishment. Indeed, God's protection of a killer in Genesis 4 seems at odds with the heinous nature of the offense committed and the gravity of the punishment, yet as we shall see, it is in consonance with the treatment of the

9. Barmash, 14.
10. Barmash, 15.
11. Barmash, 16-17.
12. Baramash, 17.

> punishment of the killer elsewhere in the Bible, where protections are established for killers.[13]

Thus, private revenge is discouraged because it tends to escalate in a cyclical manner to the great disapproval of God.

(2) The English Background

Of the few dozen revenge tragedies produced during the period, 1590-1610, *Hamlet* occupies that place in the trajectory when the public demand for the blood-curdling tragedies was at its peak, but when a counter-feeling to revenge, seeking blood, was on the rise, too. So, while in the intellectual world private revenge was considered inappropriate, on stage it was paradoxically a popular theme. And, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* uniquely dramatizes the tension.

A few years earlier than *Hamlet* was written (1599-1601), Shakespeare's great contemporary, Francis Bacon, wrote his essay, "Of Revenge" (1597), beginning with this oft-quoted line: "Revenge is a kind of wild justice; which the more man's nature runs to, the more ought law to weed it out."[14] Bacon's anti-private-revenge mindset has been given a broader interpretation by the postmodernist scholar René Girard, who, in his essay "Revenge in 'Hamlet'," adjudges that *Hamlet* is a play against revenge rather than on revenge. Tying Hamlet's wavering to his theory of mimetic desire, Girard says, "Hamlet must receive from someone else, a mimetic model, the impulse which he does not find in himself."[15] What he does not find in himself is the instinct of bloodthirstiness, which is a required quality for an act of homicide. A. C. Bradley explains the cause of Hamlet's inertia as having been connected with his attitude towards his mother:

> The truth is that, though Hamlet hates his uncle and acknowledges the duty of vengeance, his whole heart is never in this feeling or in this task; but his whole heart is in his horror at his mother's fall and in his longing to raise her.[16]

Hamlet is simply unqualified to commit homicide, as his rage is not so much against his uncle as against his mother. Bradley may be moralistic in

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13. Baramash, 18. The italics are mine.
14. Bacon, Francis. *Bacon's Essays: A Selection.* Edited by Sukanta Chaudhury. Oxford UP, 1977. P. 76.
15. Girard, René. "Revenge in 'Hamlet'", www.allshakespeare.com/criticism.php (1-11).
16. Bradley, A. C. *Shakespearean Tragedy.* Third Edition with a new Introduction by John Russell Brown, 1992, p. 116.

his interpretation, but T. S. Eliot also comes to the same conclusion as to why Hamlet spares his uncle in the Prayer Scene (3.3) by resorting to a certain constructional aspect of the plot that he defines as objective correlative, that is a balance between the form (the format of the tragic drama) and content (his disgust at his mother) is lacking:

> Hamlet is up against the difficulty that his disgust is occasioned by his mother, but that his mother is not an adequate equivalent for it; his disgust envelops and exceeds her. It is thus a feeling which he cannot understand; he cannot objectify it, and it therefore remains to poison life and obstruct action.[17]

Before these two scholars' views were offered, however, Sigmund Freud theorized a revolutionary psychoanalytic interpretation, explaining why Hamlet could not but spare his uncle. He based his interpretation on his theory of the Oedipus Complex, which held that a male infant feels physically attracted to his mother and a female infant to her father. When such is the case, the male child views his father as a competitor in his affection for his mother, and thus becomes psychologically hostile to his father. From this perception, Freud applies the theory to explain Hamlet's inability to kill his uncle, as he perceives that Claudius has fulfilled his suppressed desire by removing his father from his mother's life. That is, his uncle has substituted him in materializing his desire for his mother. So, he finds Claudius more in alignment with his thoughts than in antagonism.

> The play is built up on Hamlet's hesitations over fulfilling the task of revenge that is assigned to him... Hamlet is able to do anything—except take vengeance on the man who did away with his father and took that father's place with his mother—the man who shows him the repressed wishes of his own childhood realized. Thus the loathing which should drive him on to revenge is replaced in him by self-reproaches, by scruples of conscience, which remind him that he himself is literally no better than the sinner whom he is to punish.[18]

My argument, to be developed later in this essay, about why Hamlet spares his uncle in the Prayer Scene will dare to supersede the conclusions of these great scholars, and will say that this withdrawal is a concrete, dramatically viable sign of Hamlet's shifting towards the idea of Vindicta Mihi.

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17. Eliot, T. S. "Hamlet and His Problems," in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism.* Methuen & Company Ltd., 1920. P. 101.
18. Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams.* Translated and edited by James Strachey, assisted by Alan Tyson; revised by Angela Richards, Penguin Books (Penguin Books Freud Library), Harmondsworth, 1976, p. 367.

Regarding the practice of blood revenge in primitive European societies, Fredson Bowers opines that it was considered a right by the wounded party. He maps out two chronological forms of vendetta, "First, the barbarous and unrestricted blood-feud among savage races which lack social machinery for the determination of blood-guilt. Second, the personal, restricted vendetta marked by the collective and hereditary punishment."[19]

Revenge is sought to redress a murder, homicide, or manslaughter. Though these terms overlap in meaning, there is a subtle difference among them. Murder is when the act is pre-planned (malice prepense) and committed through cold-blooded execution. Bowers defines it by referring to "Chief Justice Coke, the ultimate authority for Elizabethan law," who "viewed murder as the act of a man of sound memory and of the age of discretion who unlawfully kills another within the realm with malice forethought... ."[20] From this perspective, Claudius's act of killing Hamlet Senior is murder, as it is a case of malice prepense. Bowers also suggests that Claudius's killing of Gertrude is also an act of murder: "Legally, therefore, Claudius in *Hamlet* is guilty of first-degree murder, and not of manslaughter, when Gertrude dies of the poison he has intended for Hamlet."[21] On the other hand, Hamlet's killing of Polonius is an act of manslaughter as he did not intend it. Homicide is broader in terms in that any killing of one individual by another individual is homicide, maybe not with malice prepense. So, every murder is homicide, but not every homicide is murder.

Claudius's killing of King Hamlet is an act of murder because it is deliberate, malice prepense, secret, and motivated by ill-conceived ambition. In the same way, Hamlet's killing of Claudius is murder, though it is done through revenge without legal jurisdiction. As Bowers writes, "Malice is the crux in determining murder, and is implied in the manner of the deed."[22] So, Claudius's killing of King Hamlet is murder, but Hamlet's killing of Claudius is done in the form of private revenge, which had no approval in Elizabethan society. As Bowers writes, "Private blood-

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19. Bowers, Fredson. *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1940, p. 4.
20. Bowers, 8.
21. Bowers, 9.
22. Bowers, 9.

revenge, because it necessarily arose from malice prepense, had no legal place in Elizabethan England."[23]

Bowers categorically mentions Justice Coke again to inform us about the disapproval of private revenge in Elizabethan England: "The Elizabethans were conscious of the earlier periods of lawlessness when revenge was a right, but Coke, speaking formally for the law, terms any and all private revenges 'great misprisons', under no circumstances to be countenanced in the eyes of the courts."[24]

Bowers further explains why Hamlet's revenge falls into the category of private revenge: "Blood-revenge for the murderer of a close relative, therefore, falls in the same legal category as any other murder with malice aforethought. No evidence can be found that Elizabethan law allowed for motive or extenuating circumstances in any murder which was the result of such malice and premeditation as was owned by an avenger of blood."[25]

So, Hamlet's revenge on Claudius would have been adjudged as unlawful if it happened in real life. In Elizabethan England, all murders were punishable by law, thus rendering private revenge redundant. The following quote from Bowers is tale-telling: "Elizabethan law felt itself capable of meting out justice to murderers, and therefore punished an avenger who took justice into his own hands just as heavily as the original murderer."[26] Thus, the old Mosaic law of lex talionis was replaced by the concept of Vindicta Mihi, and Bowers cites authorities such as Daniel Tuvil, Thomas Becon, Francis Bacon, Cleaver, and Bishop Hall, who all spoke against private revenge. Hall predicted for the revenger "a double death of body and soul."[27]

Twenty-seven years after Bowers's book was published, Eleanor Prosser published her seminal book, *Hamlet and Revenge,* where she expresses her surprise that Bradley's supposition that "Shakespeare's audience endorsed blood revenge as an unquestioned duty" was upheld for such a long time, while "several modern scholars—notably Lily Bess Campbell, William Farnham, and Fredson Bowers—have firmly established that spokesmen

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23. Bowers, 10.
24. Bowers, 11.
25. Bowers, 11.
26. Bowers, 11.
27. Bowers, 13.

for Elizabethan orthodoxy unanimously condemned private revenge."[28] As Bowers does, she also refers to many authorities who opposed private revenge during Elizabeth's time, of whom Bacon is referred to in connection with a dueling case:

> As Bacon was later to argue in prosecuting a dueling case, private revenge could lead to quarrels, thence to public tumult, thence to dissension between families, and thence to national quarrels. Since punishment was the prerogative of the State, every possible argument was induced to convince the private citizen that he must leave revenge to God, and thus to the magistrates. His appointed agents.[29]

But this strong campaign against private revenge was proof that the opposite, that is, the Mosaic law of lex talionis, was not discarded altogether. Prosser cites Sir Richard Barckley, who, in 1598, mournfully wrote that there was a growing gap between believing in Vindicta Mihi and practicing it. In practice, it was lex talionis that was found more attractive: "The trueth was never more knowne, and never lesse regarded: never better taught, and never worse followed. . . All praise patience, and yet who resisteth the sweet passion of revenge?"[30]

Then Prosser, to strengthen her argument in favour of Vindicta Mihi, quotes from Thomas Becon:

> Again and again, moralists recognize that they are struggling against a powerful foe, for 'to the nature of man, nothing is more Sweete then the passion of revenge.' The lex talionis has its roots deep in instinct: 'Our corrupt nature, whichever striveth against thy blessed will, seeketh all means possible to be revenged, to requite tooth for tooth and eye for eye, to render evil for evil, when vengeance is thine and thou wilt reward; and by this means we grievously offend thee, and break the order of charity, and the bond of peace.[31]

Prosser mentions Holland, who translated Plutarch's *Morals* in 1603, where Plutarch argued "that man should not be moved to revenge when he sees God deferring punishment."[32] According to Prosser, Holland was attracted by this proposition so much that he said, "This treatise of all others is most excellent, and deserveth to be read and persued over againe

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28. Prosser, Eleanor. *Hamlet and Revenge.* Stanford University Press, 1967. P. 3.
29. Prossser, 5.
30. Prosser, 5.
31. Prosser, 6.
32. Prosser, 6.

in these wretched daies, wherein Epicurisme beareth up the head as high as at any time before."[33]

Explaining why revenge was forbidden in the Scripture, Prosser writes, "Revenge was a reprehensible blasphemy, as the most frequently cited Scriptural text made clear: 'Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.'"[34]

Prosser then quotes from the Ecclesiasticus to establish her argument about the campaign against blood revenge:

> He that seeketh vengeance shall find vengeance of the Lord; and he will surely keep his sins. Forgive thy neighbor the hurt that he hath done to thee: of his own sins? Forgive thy neighbour the hurt that he hath done to thee: so shall thy sins be forgiven thee also, when thou prayest. Should a man bear hatred against man, and desire forgiveness of the Lord? He will shew no mercy to a man that is like himself; and will ask forgiveness of his own sins? If he that is but flesh nourish hatred, and ask pardon of God, who will entreat for his sins?[35]

So far, we have gained an idea of the intellectual background that fertilizes the contention between lex talionis and Vindicta Mihi in *Hamlet*. We want to discuss this connection in full.

About Shakespeare's knowledge and use of the Bible, the following information is worth noting. Ralph Alan Smith, in his book, *Shakespeare the Christian: The Bible in Shakespeare's Plays,* writes:

> I think it is reasonable to guess about 2000 references in the 37 plays. Depending on the exact number, we have an average of about 40 or 50 references to the Bible in each of Shakespeare's plays, though, of course, some plays have more and others fewer references. On average, there would be about 8-10 references per act since plays have five acts.[36]

(3) Revenge in *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Hamlet*

The first tragedy of revenge that makes a significant reference to Vindicta Mihi is *The Spanish Tragedy* (1582-1592) by Thomas Kyd. In a compelling way, it introduces the dilemma between lex talionis and Vindicta Mihi, which will be treated more fully in *Hamlet.* Prosser says that "Echoes of

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33. Prosser, 6.
34. Prosser, 6.
35. Prosser, 7.
36. Smith, Ralph Allan. *Shakespeare the Christian: The Bible in Shakespeare's Plays.* MP3 lectures. 2011, p. 99.

this divine command and promise reverberate throughout Elizabethan literature, and not merely in didactic works. It is heard as a direct quotation in Hieronimo's "*Vindicta Mihi,*" and is paraphrased in John of Gaunt's "God's is the quarrel."[37]

In *The Spanish Tragedy* (1582-1592), after Hieronimo discovers the body of his murdered son, Horatio, he is shown to be in a dilemma between taking revenge on a personal level and waiting for God's action. However, in 3.13.1-5, Hieronimo invokes the 'Vindicta Mihi' concept:

> Vindicta mihi!
> Ay, heaven will be revenged of every ill,
> Nor will they suffer murder unrepaid:
> Then stay, Hieronimo, attend their will,
> For mortal men may not appoint their time.

J. R. Mulryne comments in Fn 1 of his edition that by "Vindicta Mihi Hieronimo quotes the Biblical admonition 'vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord' (Romans 12:19), a statement much used by Elizabethan writers to reserve the execution of vengeance to God."[38]

Before this, in the previous scene (3.12.1 ff), he sought the King's audience to seek justice for his murdered son, "Justice, O, justice to Hieronimo" (3.12.27). But he was dissuaded by Lorenzo, "Back, see'st thou not the king is busy?" (3.12.28).

Thus, 'Vindicta Mihi' fails, and Hieronimo takes recourse to 'lex talionis' by setting the playlet, *Soliman and Perseda*, which he clarifies in this soliloquy:

> Bethink thyself, Hieronimo,
> Recall thy wits, recompt thy former wrongs
> Thou hast received by murder of thy son;
> And lastly, not least, how Isabel,
> Once his mother and thy dearest wife,
> All woe-begone for him, hath slain herself.
> Behooves thee then, Hieronimo, to be revenged.
> The plot is laid of dire revenge:
> On then, Hieronimo, pursue revenge,
> For nothing wants but acting of revenge. (4.3.21-30)

Hieronimo has clearly chosen the lex talionis by imposing human agency in the act of retribution.

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37. Prosser, 6-7.
38. Kyd, Thomas. *The Spanish Tragedy.* Edited by J. R. Mulryne. Ernest Benn, 1970.

The Ghost of Andrea's speech clarifies the position in favour of lex talionis. In self-gratification, he summarizes the murders that have formed a blood pool:

> Ay, now my hopes have end in their effects,
> When blood and sorrow finish my desires:
> Horatio murdered in his father's bower,
> Vild Serberine by Pedringano slain,
> False Pedringano hanged by quaint device,
> Fair Isabella by herself misdone,
> Prince Balthazar by Bel-imperia stabbed,
> The Duke of Castile and his wicked son
> Both done to death by old Hieronimo,
> My Bel-imperia fallen as Dido fell,
> And good Hieronimo slain by himself:
> Ay, these were spectacles to please my soul." (4.5.1-12)

In *Hamlet,* the debate continues. Going against Vindicta Mihi and asking for human intervention, the Ghost commands Hamlet, "Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder" (1.5.25).[39] Knowing that Hamlet was a student at the University of Wittenberg, where liberal studies were pursued, the Ghost was unsure whether Hamlet would be skeptical of his command to take revenge. Then to incite Hamlet's feelings for his dead father, and to convince him about the rightness of revenge, the Ghost presents an elaborately vivid mental graph depicting the effects of the hebenon poison on his body:

> Sleeping within my orchard,
> My custom always in the afternoon,
> Upon my secure hour thy uncle stole
> With juice of cursed hebenon in a vial,
> And in the porches of mine ears did pour
> The leperous distilment, whose effect
> Holds such an enmity with blood of man
> That swift as quicksilver it courses through
> The natural gates and alleys of the body,
> And with a sudden vigour it doth posset
> And curd, like eager droppings into milk,
> The thin and wholesome blood. So did it mine,
> And a most instant tetter bark'd about,

39. All quotations from *Hamlet* are to this edition: *The Arden Shakespeare: Complete Works: Revised Edition.* Edited by Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson and David Scott Kastan. Consultant Editor Harold Jenkins. Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd. London, 1998.

Lazar-like, with vile and loathsome crust
All my smooth body. (1.5.59-73)

Thus, Hamlet is persuaded, that is, conforms himself to the idea of taking revenge in the format of lex talionis, and that is why he takes recourse to putting on an antic disposition, "As I perchance hereafter shall think meet / To put an antic disposition on." (1.5.179-180)

Lex talionis is still harping on his mind when he refers to "bad dreams" (2.2.257) in his chat with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who were prying on him as to know the inner cause of his distraction: "O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell, and count myself a king of infinite space—were it not that I have bad dreams" (2.2.255-257). The bad dreams lead him to redefine man in accordance with the Renaissance duality: "What piece of work is a man . . . How like a god: the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals—and, yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust?" (2.2.305-310). This speech connects with Hamlet's previous speech, where he compared his uncle to a "satyr" (1.2.140). Through this speech, he clarifies that man is basically a beast. He would like to kill a human being when he is reduced to the status of a beast. I believe this perception may be inherent in lex talionis, too.

Like Hieronimo, Hamlet also contemplates using a play-within-the-play, but with a major difference in how they employ the device. In Hieronimo's case, the playlet *Soliman and Perseda* served as an end in itself, helping Hieronimo execute revenge in a lex talionis manner. Even here, he exceeds the law's limit, which requires punishment to be proportional. Hieronimo kills not only his targets but also the Duke of Castile, an innocent person, which goes beyond the lex talionis provision.

But Hamlet wants to use the play as a way to confirm whether the Ghost had told him the truth, "The play's the thing / Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King" (2.2.606-607). So, unlike in *The Spanish Tragedy*, the playlet "The Murder of Gonzago" in *Hamlet* is used as a means to an end—that is, to prove whether Claudius is the killer of his father.

If up to this point in the play, *Hamlet* may be seen as being persuaded by the LH 196, 197, and 200, respectively, with the concept of "an eye for an eye" as dominant even before the playlet is staged, Hamlet, however, seems to be wavering about his present course of action.

In his great soliloquy, "To be, or not to be, that is the question," (3.1.56-89), Hamlet may be seen as giving a polarized version of the antithetical position between lex talionis and Vindicta Mihi. "To be" means "lex

talionis," and "not to be" means "Vindicta Mihi." Or by the twist of reversion, they can also mean the opposite, by which "Vindicta Mihi" will mean "To be," and "lex talionis" will mean "not to be." Whatever way we position the two binary terms, the soliloquy renders Hamlet's position as switching from lex talionis to Vindicta Mihi. The reason he cites for why people do not commit suicide, knowing full well that life on earth is nothing but penury, which is also the burden of the Duke's speech to Claudio in *Measure for Measure*[40], but still people do not their "quietus make / With a bare bodkin" (3.1.75-77) because of the unknowability about the after-world "from whose bourn / No traveller returns" (3.1.79-80). But placed in the conceptual understanding of the Vindicta Mihi, Hamlet's utterances can be reinterpreted as asserting God's will over man's volition, thereby "enterprises of great pitch and moment," (3.1.86-87) by which I want to imply that he means his revenge action or the lex talionis mode of thinking, thus "turn[s] awry / And lose the name of action" (3.1.87-88). So, the soliloquy, from this perspective, will mean that Hamlet has begun to realize that human volition in respect of homicide must be surrendered to the superior or divine power of God.

However, Hamlet's kaleidoscopic mindset does not stop wavering like a pendulum between his earlier belief in lex talionis and his realization of the merit of Vindicta Mihi in the "To be" soliloquy, which has again been focused when he sees the King, after the playlet had confirmed his guilt, at the prayer scene (3.3) that when it was the most appropriate moment for him to realize his revenge from a lex talionis perspective, he thrusts his naked sword not into the back of the kneeling Claudius, but rather back into the scabbard, offering his famous apology, (drastically binned by Bradley as a lame excuse, exposing Hamlet's latent apathy for homicide), where he says killing Claudius at his prayer is like acting as a professional killer, "this is hire and salary, not revenge" (3.3.79). That is, the mortal agent is in force here to execute revenge. Technically speaking, however, Hamlet here is trying to moralize an action, which is basically devoid of

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40. The Duke's speech in *Measure for Measure*:

The Duke to Claudio on the meaninglessness of life in preference over death:

> Be absolute for death: either death or life... / Merely thou art death's fool... / Thy best of rest is sleep; / And that thou oft provok'st, yet grossly fear'st / Thy death, which is no more. (3.1.5,11,17-19)

In this long passage, the Duke is asking Claudio to accept the verdict of law, which equates fornication with death. So, Shakespeare's Duke envisages a law harsher than those suggested by some ancient legal traditions.

any moral from the perspective of the Vindicta Mihi ethos. From this perspective, in response to the question of why he spares Claudius, we can repeat the Lord's saying to Cain that he will be protected so that nobody can kill him: "And the Lord said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark on Cain, lest any finding him should kill him." This can act as a strong message for Hamlet to get deterred from pursuing lex talionis.

Indirectly, what Hamlet is doing here is recognizing the fact that even though Claudius is a homicide-cum-fratricide-cum-regicide, still he will have to leave him to God's protection, that is, Vindicta Mihi, "Vengeance is mine, I'll repay." He wants to kill his uncle at a time when he will be salvation-free, when God's mercy will not work on him: "That has no relish of salvation in't" (3.3.92).

But to seek an opportune moment for an act of homicide is never attainable if Hamlet is obsessed with salvation. Salvation is what only God can give; no mortal being can have the arcane sense of when some form of homicide is granted by God. It is never granted if we understand the spirit of Vindicta Mihi.

In the bedchamber scene (3.4), Hamlet kills Polonius, mistaking him for Claudius ("I took thee for thy better" (3.4.32). This horrible mistake also signifies another thing that conforms with Vindicta Mihi rather than with lex talionis. It suggests that on the mortal plane, confusion like one man killed in place of another is likely to happen more often than not. Hamlet's pursuit of lex talionis thus ends in a fiasco, as it has given birth to another piece of lex talionis, as now Laertes will chase the life of Hamlet. This is why the Lord in Genesis saw to it that Cain's life must be protected, so that on the mortal plane, homicide does not take a repeated pattern. What Jenkins suggested about the bedchamber scene being so crucial to the play, for entitling Hamlet to a double status—being the revenger and now the target of revenge[41]—can be diluted into the interpretation that lex talionis is often an unreliable principle to follow.

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41. Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. Edited by Harold Jenkins, Methuen, 1982. The Arden Shakespeare, Second Series, p. 144:

> ... but the campaign of Laertes brings into the play a second revenge action in which the first revenger appears at the other end. The hero charged with a deed of vengeance now also incurs vengeance. The situation of revenge is revealed as one in which the same man may act both parts; and the paradox of man's dual nature, compound of nobility and baseness, god and beast, repeatedly placed before us...

But then another shift of thought occurs in his mind after watching the "twenty thousand men" (4.4.60) marching to the killing field, as their leader, Fortinbras, is keen on re-occupying a patch of land, which is unworthy of cultivation, but still he would risk all these lives as his ego is struck, "Rightly to be great / Is not to stir without great argument, / But greatly to find quarrel in a straw / When honour's at the stake." (4.4.53-56) From his captain's role, Fortinbras's mission can be defended on patriotic grounds, but reducing his status to that of an individual whose ego is hurt reveals that he is a living example of lex talionis; he seeks revenge, that is, a mortal act against human lives. So, he is a figure to spark the emulative spirit in Hamlet that evokes the lex talionis instinct, "I do not know / Why yet I live to say 'This thing's to do', / Sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means / To do't" (4.4.43-46).

This is surely a lex talionis confirmation of the individual's desire to seek redress through his own effort. But then Shakespeare gives another twist to the plot. The sea voyage to England and the subsequent happenings with the pirates on the ship put Hamlet in another psychological quandary. If the incident of piracy has brought him back to Denmark, then, from a dramatic point of view, this condition has been met: by remaining in Denmark, Hamlet has at least the chance to take physical revenge on Claudius. But Hamlet has been on the track of journeying away from lex talionis and veering towards Vindicta Mihi, especially after the killing of Polonius.

Shakespeare earlier experimented with this concept of life for life in *The Merchant of Venice* (1596-97), and there, as Marc Shell observes, Shylock, the Jew, was unable to show mercy to Antonio, because it was forbidden by the lex talionis rule, where murder could not be recompensed by anything else but life: "You shall accept no ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death; he shall be put to death." (Numbers 35:31)

Shylock has not had anyone killed, for whom he can seek lex talionis punishment. But Marc Shell argues that Shylock's daughter Jessica's running away, her conversion to Christianity and getting married to Christian Lorenzo have made him accept her as dead. So, following lex talionis, he must compensate for his daughter's loss by taking Antonio's life:

> In another defense of his revenge—or rather of his limited retaliation—Shylock depends on an interpretation of the Jewish law of retaliation. For the loss of his

> daughter—his own flesh and blood—he will take the flesh and blood of Antonio.
>
> That Shylock's daughter is now as if dead to Shylock is a crucial 'legal fiction' in the play. Once Shylock adopts it he cannot, according to the Hebraic lex talionis, accept anything other than a death for the loss of her. Nothing but a life can pay for a life. He cannot sell his revenge for money. His heavenly oath is to take life for life.[42]

The sea-journey provides Hamlet with three kinds of insight: One is, as he says to Horatio, "There's a divinity that shapes our ends, / Rough-hew them how we will" (5.2.10-11), which recognizes the will of God that cannot be changed. Though it sounds fatalistic, because of the perception of the creator behind every human move, it rather confirms Hamlet's surrender to God's will—Vindicta Mihi. The second lesson is again a reinforcement of his submission to Vindicta Mihi. As if the divinity that shapes our ends now arouses a spiritual confidence that sweeps aside the concerns that stood in the way of the lawful acquiescence to the act of homicide. He says to Horatio, "Does it not, think thee, stand me now upon– / He that hath kill'd my King, and whor'd my mother, / Popp'd between th'election and my hopes, / Thrown out his angle for my proper life / And with such coz'nage—is't not perfect conscience / To quit him with this arm?" (5.2.62-67)

Kierkegaard would have probably questioned the basis of Hamlet's conviction that, after reading the secret letter on the ship, he came to know about his uncle's intention to get him killed by the English King. So, he did not require a divine excuse to go after the life of his uncle. But this very mysterious assertion about the rightness of homicide is a further assurance that Hamlet derives by shifting his faith from lex talionis to Vindicta Mihi. The third one is his repetition of God's hand in everything that takes place in the natural world. When Horatio asks him to defer the duel to a later time, he replies that it will be meaningless, because "There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow" (5.2.218-219).

Death cannot be avoided, whether it is in response to a ploy set by his villainous opponent or it is naturally coming to him. Today or tomorrow, it will come: "If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come." (5.2.219-221)

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42. Shell, Marc. "The Wether and the Ewe: Verbal Usury in *The Merchant of Venice"* in *Money, Language, and Thought.* University of California Press, Berkley, Los Angeles, London, 1982, p. 61.

Then the final assertion comes: "The readiness is all." (5.2.221).
This readiness is for what? According to the traditional understanding, this means accepting the inevitability of death. But the proposition we have developed means the readiness is to surrender the responsibility for revenge to God. But, is Vindicta Mihi any surer way of seeking justice from the divine? Then, what about the concept of protecting the killers? Or, how long would one wait to see divine justice exacted on the offender? Besides, the circumstances in which Hamlet kills Claudius cannot attest that it is the outcome of Hamlet's relying on God's will to act, but it is rather produced by his reaction on the spur of the moment at the death of his mother from poison mixed by Claudius in the drink originally meant for Hamlet. This is Claudius's second murder in the play, and Hamlet's prompt reaction to Laertes's exposing Claudius as the killer, and killing him by both poison and the sword, can be considered as his abandoning Vindicta Mihi and switching back to lex talionis. Whatever the matter, Hamlet's revenge on Claudius is purely done in the spirit of lex talionis, and not Vindicta Mihi.
Let us therefore put this conclusive act in the manner that though Hamlet initially started the play as having faith in lex talionis, gradually he was attracted by the spirit of Vindicta Mihi, but at the end of the play he again sweeps back to lex talionis. His lex talionis revenge for the murder of his father has been the result of a long, torturous waiting, but his mother's death just took place in front of his eyes, so he kills his uncle (now a double villain) without premeditation, on the spur of the moment, more in the manner of manslaughter than as murder, thus once again proving that in crisis humans are prompted by lex talionis rather than by Vindicta Mihi.

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Sphaira: Journal of Arts and Humanities, Volume 1, Issue 1, June 2025
p-ISSN: 3106-017X, e-ISSN: 3106-0161

Racial and Psychological Persecution of an Undecided Identity: A Study of the Rohingya Crisis in the Memoir of Habiburahman, *First, They Erased Our Name: A Rohingya Speaks*

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Abstract

The Rohingya, a Muslim ethnic minority group living in Myanmar's Rakhine State for centuries, have endured systemic persecution, statelessness, and displacement under successive regimes. Habiburahman's memoir *First, They Erased Our Name: A Rohingya Speaks* provides a harrowing personal account that epitomises the community's collective trauma, loss, and resistance. This paper aims to critically examine the root causes of the Rohingya crisis through sociological, historical, and postcolonial perspectives, employing Edward Said's notion of the "Other," Kimberlé Crenshaw's framework of intersectionality, and Stephen Greenblatt's New Historicism. The study highlights how state policies, Buddhist nationalist fervour, and cultural imperialism intersect to erase Rohingya identity, heritage, and belonging, thereby perpetuating marginalisation and apartheid-like conditions. The analysis, adopting a qualitative and analytical approach, explores racial discrimination, cultural erasure, sexual violence, forced displacement, and the traumatic legacy of these injustices. By situating Habiburahman's narrative alongside broader theoretical discourses and documented evidence, this research underscores how the Rohingya are simultaneously racialised, dehumanised, and politically excluded, rendering them among the most persecuted people globally. It argues that the Rohingya crisis is not merely a humanitarian emergency but also a product of deliberate socio-political engineering rooted in historical anxieties and religious nationalism. Finally, this study contends that preserving Rohingya history and identity through memoirs and scholarly engagement is

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essential to resisting their total erasure and confronting the ongoing "slow genocide" in Myanmar.

Keywords: Rohingya, identity crisis, the 'other', cultural imperialism, trauma

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Introduction

The Book *First, They Erased Our Name: A Rohingya Speaks* is an urgent, moving memoir of the torture, persecution and violence inflicted upon the Rohingya people by the Buddhist nationalists and the security forces of Myanmar, written by Habiburahman, a Rohingya, who had fled his country to avoid the torture, first to neighbouring countries like Thailand and Malaysia, and then to Australia by boat in 2009, along with Sophie Ansel, a French journalist, author and director who met Habib in 2006 while visiting refugee communities in Thailand and Malaysia. Sophie helped Habib, while he was detained in Australia, to write his story and the historical document of the Rohingya persecution in Myanmar. This book narrates the chilling story of the Rohingya people, who are "outlaws" in their own country, devoid of all citizenship and human rights, and living in a state of apartheid and fear. This memoir is sure to become a historical document of the "ethnic cleansing" and "slow genocide" of the Rohingya people, who are facing extinction, for its vigorous description and intensity of feelings.

The Rohingya is an ethnic minority group living in the Arakan (now Rakhine) State of Myanmar for thousands of years (Wade 17), who follow the Sunni tradition of Islam (i.e. Hanafi Mazhab) (Ahmed and Mohiuddin 2). The Rohingya people constitute 68% of the total population of Rakhine State and 4% of the total population of Myanmar (Storai 1), though they are now denied their citizenship and are considered to be "Bengali invaders" or "Bengali terrorists". The history of the Rohingya people can be traced back to the seventh century AD (Myat 16), when they lived in an independent kingdom of Arakan until the Burman king Bodwpaya conquered Arakan in 1785. The Rohingya people, for the first time, came into contact with Islam when several ships wrecked on the coastline of Ramree Island near Sittwe (formerly known as Akyab) with a band of Arab merchants (Arab Muslims) in 788 AD during the reign of King Mhataing Sanday. Many of them, later on, settled down in Arakan,

marrying local women (Ahmed and Mohiuddin 2). The word Arakan is also derived from an Arabic word, "Rukn," which literally means "pillar of Islam." Arakan is the place where the pillars of Islam are followed (Storai 2).

The ancestry of the Rohingya people can be traced to Arab, Moor, Pathan, Moghul, Central Asian, and Indo-Mongolian people who came into contact with the inhabitants of Arakan and settled down in the region for over several centuries (Myat 16). The presence of the Rohingya people is well documented in a survey of Charles Paton after the British conquest of Myanmar in 1825, where he recorded that 60,000 Rakhine Buddhists, 30,000 Rohingya Muslims along with 10,000 other ethnic people were living in Arakan at that time (Rahman et al. 14). After the independence of Myanmar in 1948 from the British colonial rule, the Rohingyas were treated as the native citizens of Myanmar by three successive governments of the country (Rahman 12). For several years after the independence, Rohingyas were elected as members of Pyithu Hluttaw (House of the Representatives). But the situation deteriorated after General Ne Win came to power in Myanmar in 1962, when the identity of the Rohingya people got stuck. In the Citizenship Law of 1982, the Rohingyas were excluded from 135 recognised ethnic groups that constituted the "eight national races." Consequently, the Rohingya people became "stateless" in their own country.

Since then, the Rohingya people have been facing near extinction of their race, ethnicity, and identity in Myanmar, as "Rohingya has become a forbidden word, never to be uttered, sentencing the men and women who bear this name to capital punishment" (Habiburahman and Ansel 68). The government of Myanmar prohibits the use of the word "Rohingya" in the administrative circles and encourages the media not to do so (Myat 18). The word "Rohingya" bears such a testimony that it can bring hellish fervour among the jackals of Buddhist nationalism, and death for the innocent people.

Habiburahman, through his reminiscences of the childhood memories, relates how his people are facing racism, identity crisis and a slow genocide, while living in an "apartheid state," where discrimination, fear, torture, persecution and violence are parts of day-to-day life that throw his people into the fathomless ocean of uncertainty and insecurity, where people are born "stateless" and made "homeless" in turn. This book

narrates the chilling story of how a people is completely denied and how a specific name can become a watermark inscribed on the forehead of the people, who bear it, to throw them into a hell like prison. Throughout the book, we repeatedly observe that Habib's father warns him and his brother and sisters not to use their original identity, the word "Rohingya", to protect themselves from any type of mishap, "You can say that you are a Muslim. But if you say that you are Rohingya, they will lock you away and then kill you" (Habiburahman and Ansel 32). The same fear is echoed through Habib's voice while talking to the professor he is involved with, "Professor, you know, I come from an ethnic group whose name I am not allowed to say" (32).

There are several academic studies, papers and articles that examine the conflicts within Habiburahman's memoir *First, They Erased Our Name: A Rohingya Speaks*, delineating racial, cultural and religious clashes and the subsequent racism, identity crisis and persecution of the Rohingya people. In their paper "The Silencing and Ostracization of Rohingyas: A Study of Habiburahman's Memoir *First, They Erased Our Name: A Rohingya Speaks*," Chakrabarty and Datta look closely at the racial and ethnic discrimination of the Rohingya community, their ostracization and systematic repression that lead to the expulsion of the Rohingya people, as well as how the linguistic imperialism, apartheid and calculated ethnic cleansing make the Rohingya people stateless and 'Homo Sacer' in the hands of the Burmese military (Chakrabarty and Datta 13).

Alok Lamsal, in his article "The Politics of Displacement of Refugees in Habiburahman's Novel *First, They Erased Our Name: A Rohingya Speaks,*" explores different phases of displacement experienced by the refugees in Habiburahman's memoir, and the challenges and insecurities they face at every stage. It also scrutinises "distinct experiences of the refugees as they flee from their homeland, seek refuge in another place or country, and establish lives in foreign lands" and suggests possible solutions to the complications of displacement (Lamsal 1). Lamsal also describes the present situation of the Rohingya people as "a state of exception," where they are subjected to persecution, displacement and exclusion.

Sharma, in his article "The Rohingya Crisis: A Cross-Border Analysis of Habiburahman's *First, They Erased Our Name*", resonates the identity crisis, displacement and resistance of the Rohingya people from different

theoretical lenses, as he observes the Rohingya crisis as a "Sectarian violence between the Rohingya Muslim and Rakhine Buddhist communities" (Sharma 86). He also unravels the intricate layers of the Rohingya experiences of marginalisation, displacement and erasure, and points out how the pains and sufferings of the Rohingya people create a real humanitarian crisis due to the statelessness of the Rohingya refugees.

Despite this exploration, a remarkable gap exists in research focusing on the root causes of the Rohingya crisis, its historical background, socio-political othering, and the traumatic exposure of the Rohingya community. This paper makes an in-depth study of the present-day Rohingya crisis from socio-political and ethno-cultural perspectives, drawing on various theoretical frameworks, like Stephen Greenblatt's New Historicism, Kimberle` Crenshaw's Intersectionality, and Edward Said's concept of the 'Other'. The objective of the study is to find out the root causes of the present-day Rohingya crisis, and the subsequent Rohingya persecution on the foreground of religious, cultural, and socio-political differences. It seeks to depict the tragic consequences of the Rohingya persecution, social and political othering of the Rohingya people, and their traumatic experiences resulting from these conflicts.

To achieve the objectives, this research is conducted using a qualitative and analytical approach. In this study, Habiburahman's memoir *First, They Erased Our Name: A Rohingya Speaks* serves as the primary source. Additionally, various theoretical and historical books, peer-reviewed journal articles, research papers, and reports from international, government, and non-government organisations have been used as secondary sources.

Making an 'Other' of the Rohingya People

Stephen Greenblatt developed a literary and critical approach in the 1980s that came to be known as New Historicism, which focuses on the interplay between literature and history. It asserts that literature and social, political and cultural contexts are interchangeably influenced by one another, while it posits that history is not a singular monolith, rather a field of interaction among power, ideology and different discourses. Greenblatt introduced the term in his book *The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance* in 1982, and examined how individual identities were constructed in the Renaissance within different social and political fabrics. Greenblatt

emphasised the possibility of multiple meanings of a single text, as he asserts: "There is no single, essential, or inherent meaning in a text; meaning is constructed through the interplay of cultural forces and textual strategies" (Greenblatt 68).

In his famous novel *The Shadow Lines* (1988), Amitav Ghosh presents a different perspective on history, as he proposes the idea that personal history is not less important than the history recorded in the national archives of different countries because these official versions of history may, sometimes, be misleading and misguided. On the other hand, the history recorded in one's own imagination and memory is more authentic, since the person is an active participant in the events that become the raw materials of many historical documents later, as memory always serves as a hostage to history. The new historicist perspective in cultural and literary studies emphasises the reciprocal relationship between history and literature, suggesting that examining historical contexts deepens our understanding of literary texts, while analysing those texts simultaneously offers new insights into history. This memoir of Habiburahman appears both as a literary text and as an important historical document. From this perspective, it can be said that though the Myanmar Government and its official versions of history deny the presence of the Rohingya people in their thousand years old abode, this memoir of Habiburahman becomes an indispensable testimony of the Rohingya persecution that is grappling his people for more than half of a century, since the book starts in the early 1980s, after the military dictator came to power with much impunity and describes the suffocations and sufferings of the Rohingya people throughout Myanmar. Discrimination, deprivation and marginalisation of the Rohingya people are reflected in the treatment of Habib and his family as a typical Rohingya Muslim family living in the Rakhine State of Myanmar. Here, for the first time, "a Rohingya speaks up to expose the truth behind this global humanitarian crisis. Through the eyes of a child, we learn about the historic persecution of the Rohingya people and witness the violence Habiburahman endured throughout his life" (Reece qtd. in Habiburahman and Ansel 1).

One of the most influential books of the modern era, along with Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859), Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* (1867-1894) and Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), is Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) that initiated the postcolonial tradition

in the arena of literary criticism. Said observed colonialism as a military-political adventure, and 'Orientalism' as a project and system of thinking that presented the East as a contrasting 'Other' to the West, that is to say, the Orient is Europe's "contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" (Said 2). This means that the East becomes the repository or projection of those aspects of itself that Westerners do not choose to acknowledge (primitive, pagan, undeveloped, and criminal) (Nayar 160). At the same time, paradoxically, the East is seen as a fascinating realm of the exotic, the mystical and the seductive. The West also tends to see the Easterners as homogenous, "the people there being anonymous masses rather than individuals, their actions determined by instinctive emotions (lust, terror, fury, etc.) rather than by conscious choices or decisions. Their emotions and reactions are always determined by racial considerations..." (Barry 195-96). It is because the "European identity was established only because it had the East to contrast itself with. Or: The Orient was integral to the very formation of a European identity" (Nayar 161). According to Said, the West always creates a "binary opposition" between them and the others who do not resemble them.

The case study of the Rohingya crisis reveals this sort of social engineering, stereotypes and derogatory ideas about the Rohingya people in Myanmar, where the Buddhist Bamars and Rakhines create a "binary opposition" among them and the minority Rohingya Muslims. The majority of Bamar and Rakhine are white, Buddhist, Burmese and innocent people, while the Rohingyas are *kalar*, Muslims, "Bengali invaders", and people of "bad blood." This sort of social engineering makes the Rohingya people an 'other' within their society. The Rakhines and the Bamars see the Rohingya people as a race devoid of human quality, and so, they call the Rohingya people "ten per cent", meaning that they are only ten per cent human (Habiburahman and Ansel 100). They see the Rohingyas as extremists and violent, as completely opposite to the innocent Buddhists, as monk Sumangala Thero of Myanmar once said, "... that the Muslims are an inhuman or animal-like race of people who can cut the neck of a living cow" (Lehr 138).

The germs of this ethnic tension and racial difference were planted even before the independence of Myanmar, when the nationalist groups, like the "Young Men's Buddhist Association," that was at the frontline of the anti-colonial movements of 1920s and 1930s, wanted not only to drive away the

British colonisers but also to bring back Buddhism as the core foundation of the newly independent country that would serve as a common point of national solidarity. All this was to include the people of one faith and exclude others very consciously to create a nation of "one voice, one blood" (Wade 32). At that time, the famous anti-colonial slogan was "Amyo, Batha, Thathana", meaning race, language or religion and Sasana, the teachings of the Buddha. As the main ethnic group, the Bamar was a minority in number at that time, and the Indians and the Muslims were the majority. The Bamars feared that they would be exterminated even after independence. So, from the fear of being trodden down by the foreigners, the nationalist Buddhists wanted to get rid of the Muslims, as "the imams and their followers were the new colonisers, doing their own way what had nearly been achieved by the imperial power long before" (Wade 31).

During the Second World War, Japan invaded Myanmar and took control of it in 1942. The Buddhists supported Japan, and the British were supported by the Rohingya Muslims to regain their power. The Rohingyas were promised by the British authority that they would be given the mandate to form an independent State. But when, at the end of the Second World War, Japan was driven away from Myanmar by the British soldiers with the help of the Rohingyas, the British authority could not keep their words about the formation of an autonomous state for the Rohingyas, which threw them into a limbo (Myat 17). The hostility between the Muslims and the Buddhists heightened. Things became worse after independence, when General Ne Win came to power in 1962 with a view to cleansing the nation of the unwanted, immigrants, invaders and those who did not belong to the pure race of Buddhism. To accomplish the holy task of creating a nation of pure Buddhist blood, General Ne Win passed the Citizenship Law in 1982. In the law, 135 ethnic groups were recognised that formed the eight 'national races' and excluded others, like the Rohingya, who were termed as the "Bengali invaders".

Nietzschean assertion—"God is dead, God remains dead, and we have killed him" (Nietzsche 125)—is about to lose its appeal in the twenty-first century, as the world was as "furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places ever more so than ever" (Berger qtd. in Lehr 26), rather proving Karl Marx's assumption, "religion is the opium of the people" (Papke). Nietzsche observed the decline of the traditional foundation of morality and meaning in religious beliefs with the rise of science,

rationalism, and secular values during the Enlightenment and the nineteenth century. But the last few decades of the twentieth century witnessed the rise of religious extremism and militancy throughout the world, especially in Asia and Africa, since religion appeared to be the most powerful political force and ideology in the question of national and global identity formation. Samuel P. Huntington claims that after the end of the Cold War between capitalism and socialism, ideological divisions weakened, and religion re-emerged as a powerful source of identity, as now loyalty to the nation is fused with loyalty to faith: "religion takes over from ideology, and religious nationalism replaces secular nationalism" (Huntington 100). This statement is more accurate about Myanmar, as from the very beginning of independent nationhood, Myanmar is more prone to religion or religious nationalism than anything else, since "Buddhism was undoubtedly the most integrative influence in Burmese society and culture" (Smith qtd. in Lehr 157). The idea of "Theravada moral universe" has an all-encompassing influence on the life of the Burmese people and their society, whereas it has become successful in shaping politics and political thought within the state and outside it.

The usage of the numerical religious number '969' has been adopted by anti-Muslim movements. The number '969' generally refers to the 'Three jewels' of Buddhism (Buddha, Dharma and Sangha) as the core value of peace, virtue, morality, equality and enlightenment. But, ironically, this peace, equality and enlightenment are only for the Buddhists, as the separatist Buddhist monks see the Muslims as outsiders or illegal "Bengali immigrants." For example, *The New York Times* reports that monk Ashin U Wirathu, the founding father of the '969' movement, said in a ritual prayer before a crowd of thousands of devotees, "You can be full of kindness and love, but you cannot sleep next to a mad dog. If we are weak, our land will become Muslim (Fuller). This Ashin U Wirathu is notoriously known for his virulent and anti-Muslim speeches. The dominant narrative of the sermons of the extremist monks like Ashin Wirathu, U Wimala, and Ashin Kawidaza is the exclusionary brand nationalism that fixates upon Islam as an overwhelming threat to the welfare of the nation. The masses are also so much influenced by these firebrand monks and their sermons that many people think it is their duty and part of daily activities to listen to the sermons of these holy men who appear to be their moral guide and guarantor of 'Nirvana'. This sort of

anti-Muslim hatred and promotion of Buddhist brand nationalism aggravated the Rohingya crisis more than anything else, as "the dominant narrative in these Buddhist sermons is to justify fear and hatred of Muslims in general and the Rohingyas in particular" (Myat 19). Many monasteries within Rakhine state are also in close alliance with Buddhist nationalist parties like RNDP and ANP, which provide the moral legitimacy of the persecution of the Rohingya people.

The mountain areas of the Chin State, where Habib was born, were peaceful and people of different religions and ethnicities, like Mon, Shan, Khumi, Animist and Muslims, lived harmoniously. Habib's grandmother used to tell him about the solidarity and good relations that existed among different groups of people. But, after the military dictator Than Shwe came to power, he purged a strategy of promoting Buddhist nationalism by cleansing the minorities as his sacred duty towards the holy religion: "The country must be clean of the unclean, who tarnish the kingdom of Buddha, so that the tyrant can guarantee his entry to paradise" (Habiburahman and Ansel 68). The majority of Buddhist people started to exert their pride in Buddhist nationalism and pushed the ethnic minorities to the edge. Habib and his family had to leave Chin State and move to Arakan. But the situation was more severe there. There was no sign of peace and solidarity among different groups of people; the majority of Rakhines treated the Rohingyas and people from other religious and ethnic groups as half-human and second-class citizens. In the Rakhine State, not only the Muslims but also the Christians were subdued. Besides mosques and madrasahs, many churches were demolished by the district leader and the military officers to establish pagodas for Buddhist settlers from other regions of the country, since "Arakan must become Burmese and Buddhist. That is our version of apartheid" (125). The minority people had to give a special tax called "tax of Buddha" for the establishment of new pagodas, and at the same time, they had to work voluntarily in the building process of these Buddhist monasteries. Apart from the majority Buddhist Bamars and Rakhines, other people lived there as subordinates to the kingdom of Buddha. People belonging to these two groups were always puffed up with a sense of superiority, and this sense of pride of being from the pure race of Buddhism was heightened by "the military strategy of imposing Buddhism throughout the country to the detriment of other religions, and the utter contempt for minority ethnic groups, particularly

us, the Rohingya who are considered Bengali immigrants" (56). This Buddhist nationalist fervour threw Habib and his family into a fathomless ocean of sorrow and uncertainty, and subsequently, forced him and his brother and sisters to leave the country, never to return.

The ultranationalist, chauvinist beliefs and activities of the majority Rakhine Buddhists remind us of Hitler and Nazism, as during the violence in April 2012, "groups of Rakhines go from village to village in Arakan waving flags glorifying Hitler and Nazism. Some celebrate the coming of a new era by washing the statue of Buddha with blood" (Habiburahman and Ansel 23). The "slow burning genocide" of the Rohingya people has shaken the civilised world, as the world has already experienced the brutalities of genocide in Germany, Rwanda and Bosnia in the twentieth century of the modern world. A genocide, first of all, changes the character of a people, turning them from human beings to some blood thirsty demons. The majority of Buddhist people and the firebrand monks think it to be their sacred duty to cleanse the nation of Muslims, who ". . . have been portrayed as an enemy who must be destroyed" (69). The 'war monks' see it as derogatory and inhumane to slaughter a cow but not the Rohingyas. They give the moral support and legitimacy to the brutalities and inhuman activities of the Myanmar security forces in the name of a Buddhist 'nation state,' which proves Samuel P. Huntington's assumption that "the fires of communal identity and hatred are rarely totally extinguished except through genocide" (Huntington 253).

Marginalisation and Persecution of the Rohingya People

The differentiation and demarcation within a society give some people prominence and exclude others. As a social and political 'other,' the Rohingya people are deprived of their basic human rights, including citizenship, and are considered to be "outlaws" and illegal immigrants. Amnesty International, in its insightful report on Rohingya persecution, concludes:

> In addition to violations of their right to a nationality, Rohingyas have, over several decades, been subjected to widespread and systematic human rights violations by successive governments. These violations, at the heart of which systematic racial and religious discrimination, include severe arbitrary restrictions on their freedom of movement, which have negatively impacted access to healthcare, education and livelihood opportunities; unlawful killings; arbitrary detentions; torture and other ill-treatment, forced labour; land

> confiscation and forced evictions in addition to various forms of extortion and arbitrary taxation. (20)

The government and the security forces of Myanmar create "black zones" for the Rohingya Muslims, where they are strictly forbidden. Rohingya people have to take permission to go from one town to another, sometimes from one village to another, and they barely get it without emergency healthcare issues (43). The ill-fated Rohingyas are denied their rights to healthcare, and do not get proper treatment, since there is discrimination in the hospitals as well. The Rakhine doctors do not treat the Rohingya people equally. Besides, Muslims have no freedom of movement in the hospitals. Amnesty International mentions that since 2012, there has been a specific Muslim ward on the ground floor of Sittwe Hospital and the Rohingyas are not permitted to go beyond it (63). The Rohingya children are not allowed to state-run schools beyond the primary level, since secondary education is reserved only for full citizens (Farzana 76). The government has arbitrarily imposed various taxes on the Rohingya people, including a tax on marriage and childbirth. They have to take special permission for marriage, which is known as "Tok Khainja" in the administrative levels (94). There is no religious freedom for Muslims throughout Myanmar; the Rohingya Muslim women are threatened with being forced to unveil, and men are forced to shave off their beards. Mosques and Madrasas are destroyed, and Buddhist pagodas are built at those places (Schabas 132). Rohingya people do not have access to any sort of government jobs or state-owned businesses. This systematic segregation of the Rohingya people threw them in a hell like prison, where there is no freedom of movement, speech or religion, only because they are from "the wrong colour and the wrong religion" (Habiburahman and Ansel 142).

The concrete example of these discriminations and demarcations is Habib and his family, as they are stripped of all their basic human rights for their dark complexion and religion: Islam. The authority imposed upon them arbitrary taxes: "they impose an extra tax on us because we *kalars* are invaders" (Habiburahman and Ansel 40). His father is repeatedly harassed by the security forces, as business is unofficially forbidden for Muslims and Rohingyas. Security forces often come and vandalise his business in the name of interrogation. Habib experiences severe bullying at school and in public places because of his large nose and bushy eyebrows. The young

Rakhines take every possible opportunity to insult him. Education is a dream almost impossible for the Rohingyas like Habib. They have little access to institutional education, and there is no access to private lessons as well because they are Muslims and "kalar." When Habib went to a teacher and entreated him to take him in his private courses, the teacher simply replied, "We don't take black Muslims here" (100). Habib's family has to pay the lion's share of the money they receive from the Christian church by selling their house to take a travel permit to leave for Sittwe, without which, it is impossible to travel, as "In Arakan, only Muslims are required to obtain a travel permit" (93). There is discrimination even in the playground, as the minority boys have no access to it, and are not entitled to the right to enjoy their childhood. Habib and his fellow Rohingya boys are not allowed to enter the playground, as he expresses his anguish, "Football is my passion, but I am not allowed to enter school or village competitions because I am Muslim and black" (27). Habib's family has to pay high taxes, known as "kalar tax" (22), to go from one region to another, as they are not allowed to do so, and the members of the family are repeatedly called for forced labour to build new monasteries and military camps. Apart from this, the Rohingya people have to pay voluntary taxes, known as the "tax of Buddha", to build the new monasteries that overshadow other religious prayer houses like Mosques and Churches.

In Northern Rakhine districts, the security forces and the local authorities create 'black zones' for the Rohingya people in the forest and mountain areas surrounding their villages, literally obstructing them from earning their livelihood, travelling to relatives and trade and business. They are completely forbidden to travel the areas as "the black zone is forbidden to Muslims" (Habiburahman and Ansel 37). Any attempt to cross the 'black zones' may bring the severest punishment for the people, even death. One of Habib's neighbours, Hafzaw, while travelling to their home, tells a blood-freezing incident of some wretched people who attempted to cross the 'black zone', "I was walking through the jungle on my way home, and I saw them in the distance. I stopped stock-still. I was terrified. They made them kneel. They murdered them one by one with a bullet to the back of the head. They fell into the holes that they had just dug" (78). The security forces and the local authorities turn the Rohingya villages into prison cells,

but these prisons are only for Muslims and 'kalars', who are considered to be 'parasites of the nation' and 'Bengali invaders,' as the police officer shouts at Habib and his father while chasing them down for entering a 'black zone,' "You think you can put your filthy colour feet wherever you like, contaminating other people's land?" (106).

This agony of the Rohingya people of being segregated from the mainstream society is echoed through the words of Habib's grandmother, when she strokes his hair and says, "Habib, I love you so much. But the Burmese regime finds your lovely ebony skin, your thick head of hair, and your beautiful dark eyebrows offensive. They see you as too black. Too Muslim. Too Negro. Too different" (Habiburahman and Ansel 8). As a matter of fact, there lies an apartheid system in Myanmar based on the differences of bodily complexion, religious belief and racial prejudices, which makes life complicated and sometimes, almost impossible for the Rohingya people like Habib and his family members.

American feminist scholar and lawyer Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, in a series of essays published between 1989 and 1991, introduced the sociological analytical framework of "Intersectionality." It was developed as an analytical framework to show how different aspects of a person's social, cultural and political identities combine to create different modes of discrimination and privilege. Intersectionality identifies multiple factors, such as gender, sex, race, ethnicity, class and religion that create an interlocking system of power and domination affecting the most marginalised in society. Through this theoretical framework, Crenshaw showed how black American women are triple marginalised as black, women and immigrant or poor. The Rohingya women of Myanmar face the same sort of triple marginalisation and oppression. They are oppressed for being Muslim, Rohingya and women. This oppression and violence against women started even before the independence of Myanmar in 1942, when Habib's grandmother was the same age as his mother, as she relates her agony:

> I was young, the same age as your mother, when they came and attacked our village, a few miles from here. They wanted to kill the Muslim *kalars,* they said. They stormed our homes and invaded neighbouring villages. They overran the whole state. Swords swished through the air. Heads rolled off. Women experienced torture that only they can know. Caught in a trap, some preferred to jump into the water and drown themselves rather than fall into the repulsive criminal hands of these men. (Habiburahman and Ansel 5-6)

Though it started at a politically tumultuous time before independence, it continues today with much intensity as a strategic weapon to debase the social and political 'other' and pave the way for 'ethnic cleansing.' The reminiscences of Habiburahman bear testimony to this inhuman activity of the security forces and ultranationalist Buddhist extremists in Myanmar. In his childhood, Habib's mother disappeared for four long years, and it remained a mystery to him all through his life, "The reason for her absence is a mystery that will plague me my entire life. It is and always will be a taboo subject. Was she imprisoned, tortured, abused? Like so many Rohingya women, she will never talk about it. My sisters, brother, and I will never ask" (47). Another incident of his childhood exemplifies the atrocity of Myanmar security forces who prey upon the Rohingya women. At a security check, Habib's parents are taken to prison to be interrogated. They are brutally tortured there at the time of interrogation, and his mother was abused by the security officers, "My mother's smile fails to hide her tiredness and distress. She looks distraught, there are bags under her eyes and her hair is a mess. Her blouse is torn, and there's a big red mark on her neck.", as his mother confesses to his father, "They humiliated me. The president of the SLORC had a baton that he kept thrusting into me" (64).

In the Northern Rakhine State (NAS), Rohingya women and girls repeatedly face sexual violence by security forces, like the Army and NaSaKa. As a matter of fact, they are in constant fear of being raped and gang raped at any time. Women and girls are not safe even in their homes, as they are raped by the security forces during regular security checks at night. This sort of Human Rights violation of sexual violence is not coincidental; rather, sometimes these are administered, as the UN Special Envoy on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten, said, "Sexual violence was being commanded, orchestrated and perpetrated by the Armed Forces of Myanmar" (Nichols). Rohingya women and girls are raped and sexually assaulted during 'forced labour', at regular security checks at their home, in the forest areas while collecting firewood, in the absence of the male members of the family, and even, some "women from Rakhine State are allegedly brought to the Army barracks and kept there for raping" (Schabas 73).

Cultural Imperialism and the Erasure of Rohingya Cultural Heritage

Culture and Imperialism (1993), written by Edward Said and published in 1993, is a collection of essays where Said examined the relationship between the former empires and their colonies through cultural representations, as culture-images, ideas, beliefs and representations always play an important role in establishing a colonial mindset and in the subjugation of the colonised, since he believes that empires prepare for a colonialist culture through their adoption of imperialist ideas. Said argues that imperialism is a cultural force as much as it is one of military invasion, as "the power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them" (Said xiii). He also believes that "the main battle in imperialism is over. Land, of course, but when it comes to who owned the land, who had the right to settle and work on it, who kept it going, who won it back, and now who plans its future- these issues were reflected, contested and ever for a time, decided in narrative" (xiii). Cultural control is another form of domination, though it is not so tangible or easy to find as military force. Said, through his scholarly arguments about the relationship between imperialism and cultural forces, proves that imperialism is not over; rather, it is in full force in other forms, such as cultural representations.

Though Edward Said found the relationship between culture and imperialism in the Western literature of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, it is vigorously present in present-day literature, history, anthropology and cultural practices of the former colonies, present-day independent nation states. An in-depth scrutiny of the Rohingya crisis reveals this sort of cultural mechanism on the part of the Myanmar government and respective authorities. The conundrum of establishing a Buddhist empire in Myanmar received its greatest dictation in 1785, when the Burmese king Bodwpaya invaded and conquered Arakan (Storai 2). But the dream of establishing a Buddhist empire, as a tribute to Buddha from Southeast Asia, was shattered when the British colonial power took control over Myanmar in 1824. The Burmese Buddhists thought it to be the final blow to the Buddhist kingdom when the British government annexed Myanmar with British India, and sent King Thibaw into exile in India in 1885, who was considered to be the guardian of the Buddhist kingdom. But their long-cherished dream of the Buddhist kingdom revived

in 1942, after the Japanese Army, who were also ardent followers of Buddhism, took control over Myanmar from the British. The majority of the Bamars, with the help of the Japanese Army, started to subdue ethnic minorities with a view to holding their grip on Myanmar. In response to Japanese attempts to expel or eliminate them, a remarkable number of Rohingyas joined the British and their allies to fight against the Japanese military in Myanmar (Myat 16). The majority of Buddhist people considered the Muslim support for the British as anti-Buddhist and anti-national.

After independence, when the 'Burmanisation Policy' was adopted by Ne Win in 1962, land, trade, education, business and banking sectors were nationalised. As the Rohingyas were not recognised as one of the 135 ethnic communities that constitute eight national races, they were deprived of their nationality and other citizenship advantages. The military regime started, slowly but effectively, eliminating the minorities, and the Rohingya fell into the worst situation. The Myanmar government invaded Arakan not only militarily and politically but also culturally. They made all the arrangements to exterminate the Rohingyas from their thousand-year-old abode. They banned the Rohingya language, culture, religion and history, as "Buddhist fundamentalists claim that the Rohingya are a threat to religious faith, cultural heritage, and society in Myanmar" (Myat 20). The cultural imperialism in Myanmar reached such a point that the Rohingyas were forced to change their names into Burmese and speak Burmese language in the public spheres, since the Rohingya language was not accepted in government documents, educational institutes and other organisations. In an attempt to change Arakan demographically, the Burmese government established 'Model Villages' called 'NaTaLa' for the Buddhist settlers from other states of the country. The Tatmadaw (Myanmar Army) demolished many religious establishments in Arakan to build up new Buddhist monasteries, as Habib recounts in his memoir: "The pagoda will be erected on the mountain top at the exact spot where the Christians have been gathering, holding sermons, and celebrating religious festivals, including Christmas, for generations" (Habiburahman and Ansel 41). Many mosques and madrasahs were destroyed by the military forces in Arakan throughout the years of conflict from 1978, and established pagodas at those exact places. Once after independence, the National Radio of Myanmar broadcast programs in the Rohingya

language, but the military government stopped all sorts of cultural activities of the Rohingya people, which were the last proof of their existence as a distinct ethnic and linguistic community in Myanmar. In the textbooks of the educational institutions, there is no mention of the Rohingya history and culture, as there has never been a people called 'Rohingya.'

Habib expresses his grievance throughout the book for the lost history, culture and heritage of his community as once his community was affluent with its own language, culture and religion. But the Myanmar government took every initiative to erase their name from the golden pages of history: "They want to eliminate everything that defines our identity" (73). There was no mention of Rohingya history in the textbooks that Habib had to read in school, as if no one of this name ever existed. They had to convert their names into Burmese; they had to speak in Burmese in public places, since the Rohingya language was forbidden. The Myanmar government demolished many mosques and madrasahs in Sittwe, in the area where Habib and his family lived, to erase the Islamic heritage from the region, because Islam was its biggest enemy in the land of Buddha. Even Habib and his family members were summoned many times to give a hand in the construction of pagodas, which sparked the new hope of reviving the lost Empire of Buddha. The Rakhine Cultural Centre was established at the exact place of Sittwe, where the old mosque of Sittwe was built by Sandi Khan in 1433, a Muslim general who went from Bengal to Arakan in the early fifteenth century to provide King Normikhla with military assistance to regain his power and establish the Mrauk U kingdom. This single Islamic cultural heritage was much more important than anything else, as "it was a memory that had to be erased so that the history of Arakan and Myanmar could be rewritten by those in power" (74). The construction of the Arakan cultural centre was important for the imperialists as well, because:

> History will be revised here; people will be told that Arakan has always been a Buddhist state. No mention will be made of Sandi Khan. No document will attest to the presence of Muslims on these lands. The official version of Arakan history is a lie that grows over the years with the erection of pagodas, the destruction of mosques, the publication of Rakhine history books that omit any mention of the Rohingya, and now this museum. (Habiburahman and Ansel 105)

This is how the Myanmar government and its subordinate institutions demolish the Rohingya history and culture with a view to establishing the

great Buddhist empire of a pure race of Burmese people, where there is no place for ethnic minorities, especially for the Muslim *kalars* and "Bengali invaders" in their term, since "culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation or the state; this differentiates "us" from "them", almost always with some degree of xenophobia" (Said xiii).

Traumatic Experiences of the Rohingya People

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) refers to "a psychiatric disorder that generally occurs in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event, such as a natural disaster, a serious accident, a terrorist act, war or rape or who have been threatened with death, sexual violence or any other serious, harmful act" ("PTSD"). People with PTSD have intense, disturbing feelings and thoughts that result from their experiences that last long after the traumatic events happen. The affected people may re-live the events through involuntary flashbacks and nightmares. They may feel fear or anger, sadness and may feel detached from other people. The effects of the traumatic situations may last lifelong because "traumatised people suffer continuously in their life. They cannot lead a normal life because the trauma repeatedly interrupts their life" (Sibi 2527). The Rohingya people are a collective victim of PTSD, as they live through the traumatic and fearful, unnatural conditions in the prison-like villages of Myanmar and tiny cages of the refugee camps of the neighbouring countries. Rohingya people who still live in Myanmar pass their days in constant fear of being swept away by the security forces, of torture, persecution, rape and murder. On the other hand, those who have fled their country and now live in the refugee camps suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder, as "the pervasive human rights violations experienced or perceived by Rohingya in Myanmar contribute to depression, emotional distress, and PTSD in Rohingya refugees at statistically significant levels" (Fortify Rights 10).

Respondents with Human Rights Organisations recounted that "high levels of systematic human rights violations in Myanmar, including restrictions related to expressing thoughts, meeting in groups, travel, religious practice, education, marriage, childbirth, healthcare and more" have caused mental health complexity among the Rohingya refugees (Riley et al. 1). The horrific events experienced by the Rohingya people haunt them all the time, even when they are in a no-risk zone. For example, Saiful, a

27-year-old Rohingya man, tells Fortify Rights, "I've become thin and gangly because of the stress. I feel tired. I cannot eat well. I feel angry when I imagine the persecution" (Fortify Rights 9). Another woman, Rashida Begum (40), says, "I cannot sleep well at night. When I try to sleep, I imagine what the military and Buddhists have done to me. I feel like they are coming, chasing and shooting me. I think of how they hacked and killed people and threw children into the fires. When I am in bed, the imagination of the torture appears in my mind" (10).

Habiburahman, being born and raised in a politically tumultuous society of Myanmar, experiences traumatic situations created by the majority Buddhists and security forces through social segregation, targeted surveillance, marginalisation and deprivation of basic human rights. He resonates, "They say that because of our physical appearance, we are evil ogres from a faraway land, more animal than human. This image persists, haunting the thoughts of the adults and the nightmares of the children" (Habiburahman and Ansel 2). The Rohingya people are in a constant fear of being swept away by the ultranationalist extremists and the security forces at any time, and this fear is echoed in the voice of his grandmother, "The Dragon King will carry you off. Poor people, poor Rohingya." (8). Habib and his family members cannot live a normal life because of the trauma of loss, uncertainty and the maltreatment they received throughout their lives. They lost many of their relatives, who were killed by the security forces, and many of whom left the country never to return to this living hell: "One of my uncles was too traumatised to ever return and chose exile in the Arab states with hundreds of thousands of other refugees. He was never seen again" (7). These lost people haunted their family members so much so that Habib's grandmother passed the rest of her life in trauma after her husband's disappearance and subsequent death:

> Her words continue uninterrupted, barely distinguishable from the ambient noise. I don't know whether she is talking to me, Mum or Dad, or to the tormented figures from another time and place who live on in the depths of her memory. Fleeing, endlessly roaming, shrieking and screaming for help. The ghosts of our family and our people who perished, decapitated by swords or burnt to death. (4)

The torture, persecution and trauma caused by the security forces and the majority Buddhists sometimes cost the lives of innocent people. The most pathetic example of the situation is Habib's father himself; he was arrested and detained twelve times. He could not bear the torture inflicted upon

him and became so fragile mentally and physically that he died as a consequence of the trauma, as he says, "Dad is dead. He never recovered from the torture that was inflicted on him in prison" (220). People going through the horrific experiences, like torture, murder, persecution and rape, can never return to normal life, but rather live in a never-ending nightmare of fear and threat. The traumatic experiences described by Habib in his memoir are the tip of the iceberg that lies hidden and unnoticed.

Conclusion

The Rohingya crisis embodies one of the most pressing examples of systemic persecution, cultural erasure, and identity denial in contemporary history. Habiburahman's *First, They Erased Our Name: A Rohingya Speaks* serves not only as a personal testimony but also as a collective narrative of statelessness, trauma, and resilience. Through his memoir, the silenced history of the Rohingya emerges as a counter-discourse to official narratives that seek to erase their very existence. This study has shown that the crisis cannot be reduced to a humanitarian tragedy alone; it is deeply rooted in historical anxieties, religious nationalism, and socio-political engineering. The application of postcolonial and intersectional frameworks reveals how race, religion, gender, and culture intersect to produce layers of marginalisation, while Edward Said's concept of the "Other" underscores the processes of dehumanisation that sustain such persecution. Moreover, the trauma experienced by the Rohingya is not only physical but also psychological and cultural. Lastly, *First, They Erased Our Name: A Rohingya Speaks* illustrates how literature preserves memory against erasure and how the written word resists silencing by transforming private anguish into collective testimony. For the Rohingya, whose identity is continually threatened with obliteration, such narratives are vital in affirming cultural survival. In this sense, Habiburahman's memoir is not merely a personal story but a literary act of endurance.

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Sphaira: Journal of Arts and Humanities, Volume 1, Issue 1, June 2025
p-ISSN: 3106-017X, e-ISSN: 3106-0161

Gothic Landscape in Hope Mirrlees' *Paris: A Poem*

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Abstract

This paper focuses on Hope Mirrlees' ground-breaking modernist poem *Paris: A Poem* as one bringing to life the immediate past as well as the far past for being a desolate yet hopeful image of the contemporaneity. Written in 1919, *Paris* portrays the aftermath of WWI in the city witnessed by the flâneuse. The speaker brings forth silhouette of the nightmarish immediate past alongside the Parisian landscape on the banks of the Seine. The poem stretches over one whole day, all the segments of the day, the night, and a contrasting pace of time. The landscape of the poem becomes a compressing existence on the viewer who carefully notes down the revival of the past events and characters to haunt her until the break of the following day. Though purely modernist, the poem unites people and place to have the literary impression of Gothic reality in Paris with all its aesthetics, recurrent history, and modernity. Mirrlees glorifies the city as well with the shocking veracity that engrosses the poet's mind and memory. It is because of all these that the poem offers an opportunity to be read differently with the ghostly presence of historical divisions scattered all over Paris. That history of Paris can be segmented and layered for a more congenial exploration of the city's landscape. While doing so, Mirrlees must face the challenges of acknowledging the enigmatic Parisian past, knowing the prospect of the city's future, and discovering herself. *Paris*, thus, stands for a number of historical components and modernist elements that make one enjoy the delirium of knowing oneself anew. This paper argues that the poem, despite its canonical identity, can be read as one that is imbued with a substantial Gothic landscape. The paper aims to find how Mirrlees fashions the modernist landscape of Paris into an unconventional, Gothic conglomeration of art, culture, and history.

Keywords: Gothic landscape, Hope Mirrless, modernism, Paris, flânerie.

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One of the many dualities within modernist literature is its sense of alienation from the past yet its urge of attachment to that past. This past can be recent past or far-away past; either way, it has its grasping impact on minds and lives. Its root is far-reaching; its extent is fundamental. The past offers many roles to play for its observant. It grants, ironically, a passage for self-reflection on the one hand, and a pathway for self-disorientation on the other. It is crucial in the sense that its nature is orthodox in divulging both attachment and detachment, nostalgia about and grudge against historical reality. This historical reality of the past generates an opportunity for self-discovery to such an extent that the past is continually conceptualized and re-interpreted from many perspectives with a view to evaluating anew the bridge between the individual and the occurrence. Such ambivalent role of the past introduces much complexity in comprehending these passages leading to that very past. Human history is inalienable from human development, and that history has always remained ambiguous and mysterious. In this sense, past is constantly mysterious and alluring. Returning to it at recurrent stride has been a major passion of modernist literature that must segregate itself from the immediate Victorian past for the sake of its own fluidity and identity.

'Gothic' is such an engrossing term that spreads the canonical ideas of the far past mingled with ancestry, ambition, violence, history, foundation, life, death, superstition, and supernatural. The history of Gothic, including the history of the Goths in the fifth century, which expanded in Europe during the twelfth century, is the narrative of settlement and establishment, power struggle, authority and dominance, war, death, survival, society, culture, politics, and identity, marking the commencement of a bizarre reality to be felt even in the twenty-first century. Gothic can be related, among others, to a stereotype of paradoxical ignorance about one's own within this prehistory. The geographical orientation of Gothic has ironically been perfunctory because it has not assessed its strength and vitality, hence it remains as Gothic ignorance. European pre-Renaissance architectural history, Robin Sowerby argues, inaugurates the adjective 'Gothic' derived from the Goths, inadvertently and mistakenly, to be widely used in art, architecture and literature (34), thus mummifying an eerie history with identity, leading to the conception of undeniable ignorance that must speak for itself in the language of Gothic. It is a term

that is more realized in the aftermath of an event beyond the perception and control of one who passes through that event.

From European prehistory to the modern times, Gothic has been an encompassing theme to be recurrently witnessed and practiced because of its encapsulating domain of mystery, abstruseness and engrossing past. Though the genre Gothic in literature has been extant since the eighteenth century, it is during the Victorian period that it was extensively experimented. Not that it was not in vogue among the modernist writings; Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938) is a convincing analogy of the Gothic revival in the modernist period. Still, as a mode of challenge to the Victorian practice, the succeeding modernist period felt the self-imposed pressure of casting away this genre, nurturing their inclination for the far-past in their writings, allowing the revival of the antiquity and a denunciation of the immediate past of the Victorians. Modernist authors may have thought, unconsciously though, to put aside this otherwise widely nurtured genre of Gothic. As William Hughes remarks, "Gothic enters a form of dormancy following the First World War, at a time when the actual and recent memory of industrialised, dehumanising violence arguably outweighed the horrors of any imagined trauma" (6). The incomprehensibility of this unexpected, unwanted reality certainly led the modernist authors to literally break away from that immediate past the posterity of which has been more than nightmarish, shocking and traumatic.

These modernist authors, in order to portray such brutalities of life, desperately wanted their own liberty from that bleak past in its truest sense. An urge to discover oneself against a conventional cultural atmosphere and a counter urge to discover oneself anew against the backdrop of an anti-cultural threat has pulled some, if not many, modernist authors to that mysterious alley of Gothic literature with all its illusory channels. Canonical modernists like Virginia Woolf, D. H. Lawrence, T. S. Eliot and James Joyce founded their individual realm of modernism on such an intriguing ground that this literary movement had almost barred other developments. Other modernists, such as Katherine Mansfield, Elizabeth Bowen and H. G. Wells, also contributed in their own way. Catherine Spooner argues that though there are traces of Gothic elements in the writings of both the canonical and non-canonical modernists, Gothic becomes one tool among many employed in the service of conjuring up interior terrors; it is rather that Gothic haunts them (40). Modernist authors

remained more oriented with their own time's ambiguity and so focused less on the immediate past's grandeur.

There were exceptions to this literary contribution. The modernists' fashioning of their own decades was an individually optimum choice—a grand choice like any grand-narrative—for meeting and overcoming the haunting pressure of the time. Their daring manoeuvre of the treatment of the spatiality and the temporality shaped and paved the way even for the future authors. The modernists are iconic in this sense, and iconoclasts. Breaking away, looking back, building bridges and broadening opportunities are what these authors unveiled through their writings. One such modernist is Helen Hope Mirrlees (1887-1978) who commissioned a poem that is based in Paris that may be treated as a precursor of Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922). Mirrlees completed her difficult, mysterious yet alluring modernist poem *Paris: A Poem* in 1919, though it was partially revised by the poet much later in 1973. The original poem has been labelled as "modernism's lost hope" by Julia Briggs (80). The poem's intellectual scope is undoubtedly mesmerising, and its structural beauty is not only innovative but highly influential as well. Parisian landscape alongside its present and past—both near and far—has been depicted in the poem in such a way only to arouse awe in the reader's mind.

Landscape is the study of a particular place, its construct, its environment and ambience, its habitat, aesthetics and visual reality that may be tangible and auditory. Living, non-living, human, non-human, urban, suburban, pastoral—all these can be part of a landscape that reveals a close union among its elements. Even the water-body, the day-sky or the night-sky must be integral part of a landscape. In its broader connotation, landscape allows one to stay in it, look at or into it, and be reminiscent or resilient or even passive about it. Landscape thus paves the way to be a practical participant or a silent onlooker who has the opportunity to connect with or disconnect from the surroundings or the self. John Wylie states that landscape becomes the accomplice and expression of what is often called a spectatorial epistemology, an approach to knowledge which begins by supposing the following scenario: an external pre-given reality observed and represented from a detached position by an independent perceiving human subject (144-45). This 'human subject' may become influenced or remain nonchalant in the observation or interpretation of the landscape that speaks for itself caricaturing the past, the present and the

projected future. Such influence of landscape can be felt in Martin Heidegger's interpretation of the Gothic word 'wunian': "But the Gothic wunian means to be at peace, to be brought to peace, to remain in peace. ... To dwell, to be set at peace, means to remain at peace within the free, the preserve, the free sphere that safeguards each thing in its essence" (351). The projected union as incorporated in any landscape pioneers conformity between the observer and the others, making them inseparable.

Silvano Tagliagambe offers an etymological interpretation of the word landscape and explains that it is:

> now and always "nature seen and filtered through culture", which presupposes a world viewpoint and is the outcome of a process of active construction on the part of the mind, which has to show itself in its capacity not only for reading and understanding signs and decoding the various types of message that different human activities have impressed and continue to impress on it but also, as has been seen, for connecting and uniting, making them into a whole, these scattered meanings, grasping the interrelation between the values of different kinds that are contained and expressed. (62)

The long Victorian period witnessed such explanation of landscape in its various types of writings, particularly the novels. As a norm to oppose them, the modernists used landscape more for internal exploration than spatial expedition. Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1923) introduces modernist flânerie in several areas of London including streets and parks; nonetheless, these visual descriptions focus more on the present trauma coming forth from the Great War than the far past.

Initially overlooked, but exceedingly appreciated posthumously, *Paris: A Poem* pioneers many narratives, literary styles and techniques. The poem spreads over nearly twenty-four hours with an initiation of the Parisian landscape that becomes a visionary ground of the past: both near and far. One major strength of the poem is its detached narrative, the flâneuse strolling and viewing and reviewing what is seen and what is unseen. Virginia Woolf, who arranged the publication of *Paris* by means of the Hogarth Press in 1920, wrote in her 08-June-1920 diary, "Nowadays I'm often overcome by London; even think of the dead who have walked the city" (*Diary* 47). Mirrlees writes about Paris where, the dead people—intellectuals as well as individuals—return to life, or are forced to do so:

> The ghost of Père Lachaise
> Is walking the streets

He is draped in a black curtain embroidered with the
letter H,
He is hung with paper wreaths,
He is beautiful and horrible and the close friend of
Rousseau, the official of the Douane.
(*Paris*, lines 175-80)

This seventeenth-century cleric, as Briggs's commentaries explain (Parmar 118-19), remains visible, is well active, and now prepares for a funeral service. His appearance is marked with horror that has been extant since WWI. Rather, the cleric's feature is the embodiment of something eerie and irrational, though captivating. Renshaw and Cocks opine that the Gothic can be translated both as an attempt to confront or exorcise historical circumstances and as a genre to address, celebrate and undermine conceptions of history as narrative and as profession (1). Paris unites both the purposes of Gothic with the string of its spatiality through the envisioning of the city-walker. Paris stands for a solid ground to entertain the development of Gothic modernism.

But this is not the first time the dead are portrayed in *Paris*. In fact, it begins with pre-history, with "Black-figured vases in Etruscan tombs" (6), tombs that relate the second line of the poem "NORD-SUD" (2). Image of a present-day entrance to the metro station resembles the tombs that were discovered by the late nineteenth century. Briggs' note that an Algerian soldier has been hinted at in the third line "ZIG-ZAG" (3) also points at the concept of war followed by might, "LION NOIR" (4):

I want a holophrase

NORD-SUD

ZIG-ZAG
LION NOIR
CACAO BLOOKER

Black-figured vases in Etruscan tombs (*Paris*, lines 1-6)

Thus, the beginning of the poem is a setting where war, strength, curve, death, history and the repetition of history by means of memory – all are encumbered as part of a seemingly underground voyage: the flâneuse undertakes a journey which has a congruous beginning of the contemporary and the past. Erica Moore states, "The human mind is a Gothic landscape, painted as an unsettled space where memory intermingles with history, and fact is perpetually contested and re-

memorialized" (169). The typography of these lines is intentional; as the flâneuse rides the metro, she experiences people standing outside and inside like this, portraying the interior of the metro, the exterior of the station and the pathway, and its landscape that points at 'death' in the antiquity. Lack of expression in the first line echoes a nostalgic emptiness leading to the theme of death and loss of the Great War.

This amalgamation of two different layers of time is a periodic construction of *Paris*. Parisian landscape itself creates the opportunity of bringing into consideration the probable existence of the ghostly all around it. As Daniel Darvay says, "For modernist authors, the Gothic can still be functional while featuring discredited elements of its own generic conventions." He further says that the Gothic, instead of functioning as a subversive space or a symbolic escape from various modes of irrationality, paradoxically emerges as guardian of modernity (18-19). Mirrlees uses this technique of holding the two distinct elements under one shade so that the horror of the war can be captured through the historical reality of the past. The helplessness of time is echoed as she talks about transformed temporality:

> He cannot sing of towns—
> Old Hesiod's ghost with leisure to be melancholy
> Amid the timeless idleness of Acheron
> Yearning for 'Works and Days' . . . hark! (*Paris*, lines 79-82)

Both life and death have become part of a life that is haunted by death and time. The infinitesimal failure to stand properly for the metropolis ironically sings of many places and many lives, reviving history. Juxtaposition of the past, both far and near, and the present has been a common motif in *Paris*.

Gothic, according to Andrew Smith, not only refers to the European historical development but also stands for the architectural aesthetics extant from the medieval period to the late nineteenth century, and such reconstructions of the past provide a context for the emergence of Gothic as a literary mode (2). The flow of this literary canon has not drawn much attention from the modernists, who remained more preoccupied with their own distressed/distressing time. Yet, like Tennyson's revisiting the classic literature or Browning's appraisal of the Renaissance period, the modernists felt a strong sense of bond for the far-away time. However, a strong bond towards the Gothic can be envisioned primarily in the

modernist fictions that tend to explore the individual more than any other elements of these fictions. Paradoxically, as typical in modernist writings, both novels and short stories delve deep into the psychological state of characters rather than the surroundings. Smith and Wallace argue that Gothic and modernist texts come together by their fascination with the potential amoral or degenerative forms where the body focuses on authentic personal identity, yet is ghosted by a sense of something that feels like alien and strange (3). Joyce's resurrection of the aspects of the classic literature within his own domain brings to readers a taste of the forgotten past seen through the lens of the contemporaneity. Similarly, Mirrlees brings to light what might have been forgotten or overlooked:

> I see the Arc de Triomphe,
> Square and shadowy like Julius Cæsar's dreams:
> Scorn the laws of solid geometry,
> Step boldly into the wall of the Salle Caillebotte
> And on and on . . . (*Paris*, lines 55-59)

This strategy of blending the past and the present allows the author to edge away a curtain that blocks a spatial and temporal assessment of both the times.

Daniel Darvay claims that the modernist crisis of representation as explored by Roger Fry and Virginia Woolf is in many ways an extension of the Gothic sublime—sublime that played a central role in the historical development and structural transformation of the Gothic genre (132-138). Intensification of this crisis is an urge to look inside, to look deep and find something horrible that can awe-strike the evocative visionary. Mirrlees says, "They are not like us, who, ghoul-like, bury our friends / a score of times before they're dead but—" (*Paris*, lines 194-195). These two lines carry along the portrayal of the destruction in Europe as observed by the narrator who in the previous section talks about the "petites bourgeoises" (190) whose "hearts are the ruined / province of Picardie. . . ." (192-193), initiating a gruesome image of the war and its aftermath through unversed, rhythmic lines:

> And petites bourgeoises with tight lips and strident
> voices are counting out the change and saying *Mes-*
> *sieursetdames* and their hearts are the ruined
> province of Picardie. . . .
> They are not like us, who, ghoul-like, bury our friends
> a score of times before they're dead but—

Never never again will the Marne
Flow between happy banks. (*Paris*, lines 190-97)

These lines embed the hallowed, simplified yet beautified effort of these ladies to stand, to fight back the horror, and thus have been hallowed. The impact of the war can be visualized with the paralysis of the water regretting yet upholding the loss. The Parisian landscape, thus, unites the Gothic sublime and the modernist crisis.

Like Radcliffe's heroine, who always remains threatened, Mirrlees displays the concept of threat by means of a struggle between the natural and the supernatural. Taking Paris as the aesthetic ground for the exploration of the self, the flâneuse witnesses a battle for the domination of the landscape, "There was a ritual fight for her sweet body / Between two virgins—Mary and the moon / The wicked April moon" (*Paris*, lines 260-262). Both life and its hindrances are pointed at through this unending fight, leaving the city Paris under continual threat of giving up its aesthetic nature. Paris, which has been treated earlier as masculine, "Paris is a huge home-sick peasant, / He carries a thousand villages in his heart." (lines 71-72), now becomes feminine not by herself but by means of the narrator. Jim Hansen says, "Literary forms and genres must be read as part of the movement of history, as elements of the flux of alienation, and as indices of political collectivities, both conscious and unconscious" (169). The historical relevance of the city along with its landscape offers the narrative to become a voice of yet another historical genre through its conceptions of alienation and union, unconscious observation and conscious realization, and a subconscious painting of the previously traumatized self. Matt Foley says, "Whether Gothic, modernist or both, writers of the period were confronted by a rapidly changing modernity through increased urbanisation, the discovery and theorisation of the unconscious, and the emergence of global conflicts on a devastating scale... . The relationship between the Gothic and modernism, then, is multifaceted, and both aesthetic and contextual" (49). Mirrlees demonstrates Paris as a city of choice, opportunity and enigma, a metropolis that extends its landscape in order to embrace the gaze of its visitors. *Paris*, in this sense, embodies many selves to be encountered and explored by the onlooker.

This bystander is not the only one to look at things. As imbibed with attachment and detachment, objects become visionaries in *Paris* to ruminate among several phases of time through its landscape. Kelly

Hurley says that Gothic's hysteria, which engulfs, as a form of delirium, both pleasure and nausea that are inseparable, testifies to its disgust a chaotic spectacle, and its nostalgia for a human identity whose passing it marks (156). The dubious role of the genre helps the narrator to envision and experience yet another phase of duality both inside and outside herself who unknowingly remains a quintessential part of the environment. As Mirrlees views, "Houses with rows of impassive windows; / They are like blind dogs / The only things that they can see are ghosts" (*Paris*, lines 348-350). Tiresian in nature, the personification of these non-human elements expresses an urge to ponder upon the human existence that passes through manifold crises battered with nausea, nostalgia, and serenity. These ghosts are all around, to be greeted, to be acknowledged, to be appraised. They work as mirrors that reflect what the visionary flâneuse has in mind to look at: the modernist crises of identity, sobriety, and despair/hope binary, not the hope/despair binary, in a tumultuous world that continuously remains volatile.

Paris is a poem that is disturbing in structure because Mirrlees wants it to be like this; her interest in the uncanny has prompted what it looks like with its disjointed rhythmic oeuvre. At the same time, *Paris* remains very personal with its finale where the impression of Ursa Major—a major symbol of peripheral mystery—brings her teacher and life-long friend Jane Harrison, who has a footprint at the beginning of the poem, "I want a holophrase" (line 1). It is a recognition of what Mirrlees has achieved from this long bond. However, *Paris* continues to be tantalizing in comprehension because of its parallel canvasing of the two times: the past and the present, the juxtaposition of which evokes, among others, history and politics. The frequent presentation of the war, the dead, and the geographical thread that ties the two establishes the fact that the city must rise out of ashes. As Sofia Permiakova argues, the principle of treating the poem as liminal space allows the poem to be simply a poem about Paris and the poem turns Paris into a poem (200). The poem ends with the sun rising and the sky being decorated with the saffron colour:

Toutes les cates marchent avec une allumette!

DAWN

Verlaine's bed-time . . . Alchemy
Absynthe,
Algerian tobacco,

Talk, talk, talk,
Manuring the white violets of the moon.

The President of the Republic lies in bed beside his
wife, and it may be at this very moment . . .
In the Abbaye of Port-Royal babies are being born,
Perhaps someone who cannot sleep is reading *le*
Crime et le Châtiment.
The sun is rising,
Soon les Halles will open,
The sky is saffron behind the two towers of Nôtre-
Dame.

JE VOUS SALUE PARIS PLEIN DE GRACE. (*Paris*, liens 430-44)

The landscape takes a new hue with the hope of a new beginning as the peace talks among nations continue. Finally, *Paris* approaches the readers with a dichotomous note in it—that despite all its deaths and ruins, this city remains a grace for all. This enigmatic poem itself is the tenor with all its ambivalences and possibilities, structured beauty and beauty's structure, and Mirrlees' modus operandi in the poem is the Gothic, the vehicle that executes the aspirations instinctive in it.

Mirrlees' classicist mentor Jane Ellen Harrison had her gripping influence on her, and *Paris* is no exception. Sandeep Parmar comments that the nature of relationship of the two women is relevant to Mirrlees' writings because of the intimately coded private intellectual life they subsequently shared (15). In fact, the beginning and the finale of the poem do point at that relationship, though the poem does not remain that much private anymore; it rather becomes more geographic, more continental, hence more public. One city's spatiality integrates many past, present and hypothetically future events and ideologies that cannot be ignored by a Gothic-natured flâneuse, who must address the possibilities of the landscape it incorporates. Łowczanin and Wiśniewska say that Gothicism, taking on various forms and shapes and becoming a tool of expression for the fears that consume us, is deeply rooted in the Western culture and creative consciousness, and demonstrates its hybridity and undying, almost monstrous potential (7). *Paris* is a poem that demonstrates fear as well as hope hidden in it. The coherence of time propagates the speaker's journey throughout the city and the poem. Life and death, that is why, remain inalienable in the poem's narrative that also focuses on aspirations

and the return of the dead into life in different forms. The poem allows the speaker to look inside and outside of herself and enables her to remain attached to and detached from that very self. This makes *Paris* what a Gothic text can offer to its readers.

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Sphaira: Journal of Arts and Humanities, Volume 1, Issue 1, June 2025
p-ISSN: 3106-017X, e-ISSN: 3106-0161

Pramila's Revolutionary Resistance: Subaltern Voice Against the Colonial Oppression in *Meghnad Badh Kavya*

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Abstract

This paper examines Pramila, a unique character in Michael Madhusudan Datta's *Meghnad Badh Kavya*, as a symbol of resistance against both colonial rule and patriarchal norms. Unlike traditional epic heroines like Sita of *The Ramayana* or Helen of Homer's *Illiad*, Pramila is bold, defiant, and unafraid to challenge authority of the colonial agents like Rama and his rabbles; even in the epic, she mocks Rama as a "beggar", who has been worshipped as a *Purushottama* ("Best of men") or an *Avatar* of Lord *Vishnu* all around the Indian subcontinent for ages. Pramila's transformation from a devoted Indian wife to a nationalist warrior mirrors the boldness and valor of real-life figures like Rani Lakshmibai, who fought against British imperialism to save her kingdom from the brutal oppression of the colonial rulers. Using Gayatri Spivak's subaltern theory as a critical framework, and adopting a feminist and postcolonial literary analysis, this paper explores how Pramila breaks free from patriarchal and colonial captivity. Spivak asks, "Can the subaltern speak?" and Pramila roars her answer: "Yes" by weaponizing her identity as a Rakshasi and Danava descendant, mocking Rama's divine authority as hollow ("beggar Rāghava") and leading an army of women against his forces. Madhusudan shows that Rama's so-called "goodness and virtue", depicted in *Ramayana*, are actually deceptive as well as oppressive and therefore he draws Pramila as *Durga*-like *Shakti* who fights against the injustice of empires (like British rule) and the unfairness of male-dominated society. Pramila stands as an evidence to Datta's desire to express anti-colonial sentiment through an unconventional female character.

Keywords: Pramila, subaltern, anti-colonial resistance, Rani Lakshmibai, Gayatri Spivak.

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Introduction

> Pramila is the greatest creation of Michael's character portrayal. To fully express the wealth of Meghnad's life and the grandeur of his death, the poet has introduced the character of Pramila (Bandhopadday 37).

From the quoted lines, it becomes apparent that Pramila, the wife of Meghnad (Indrajit) in Michael Madhusudan Datta's *Meghnad Badh Kavya*, is a groundbreaking character who represents rebellion, love, and feminist strength in a world ruled by war and male dominance. Unlike traditional female figures in Indian epics, who are often passive and obedient, Pramila is bold, vocal, and unafraid to challenge authority. This unwavering resistance is evident in her powerful declaration about her lineage at the very beginning canto of the Epic:

> I, the daughter of a Danava,
> a bride within the clan of Rāk□asas—Ravan is
> my father-in-law, and Meghnada is my spouse—am
> I to fear, my friend, that beggar Raghava? (Seely 3. 75-79).

Bangla literature as well as world literature has rarely seen this kind of rebellious voice in the subaltern characters because female characters were seen through the lens of patriarchal society. Pramila's mockery of Rama ("that beggar Raghava") is no mere taunt rather it is a rebellious act that reconstitutes her, in Spivakian terms, from subaltern silence into feminist defiance. Where traditional heroines like Sita suffer passively, Pramila fights, weaponizing her identity as Raksasa bride and Danava descendant to undermine the colonial gaze (here, Rama's "divine" authority).

Most interestingly, Madhusudan Datta has observed the character of Pramila from a political lens and therefore he has drawn her in the epic with intense care to express his own anti-imperialistic sentiment against British colonial rule. Before directly equating the mythological conflict in *Meghnad Badh Kavya* with colonial oppression, it is essential to understand how Datta reworks the traditional epic framework into a medium of political expression. By transforming familiar mythic figures into symbols of contemporary realities, he turns the *Ramayana*'s divine war into an allegory of resistance and subjugation. Within this reinterpretation, Pramila emerges not merely as a devoted wife like the native Indians but as a national warrior, embodying courage and independence. Her character echoes with the spirit of real historical figures like Rani Lakshmibai, whose rebellion against British imperialism epitomized the struggle of the Indians for freedom. That means, in Datta's

symbolic reinterpretation, Rama, Lakshman, Hanuman, and Sugriva can be viewed as the representative of colonial evil power, while Ravana, Meghnad, and Pramila embody the native, colonized forces who are struggling to defend their sovereignty. Therefore, in a letter to Rajnarayan Basu, Madhusudan writes, "People here grumble that the sympathy of the Poet in Meghanad is with the Raksasas. And that is the real truth. I despise Rama and his rabbles; but the idea of Ravana elevates and kindles my imagination; he was a grand fellow" (Bandhopadday 84).

Therefore, in *Meghnad Badh Kavya,* Michael Madhusudan has drawn the picture of patriotism and resistance against the colonial evil power in the character of Ravan, Meghnad and Virbahu and by presenting these mythological characters, Madhusudan has made a strong poetic revolt against the brutal colonial rulers (the British) rather than telling the mythological tale of virtue and sin. However, Datta's aim is not to insult Rama's divinity but to question how ideas of goodness and moral superiority can sometimes be used to justify control and oppression. This idea can be explained through Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, which says that powerful groups maintain dominance not only through force but by making their values and beliefs seem natural and right to everyone (12). In this light, Rama's image of divine righteousness in the poem becomes a mirror of the British colonial rulers' claim that they were "civilizing" India. By reversing this traditional image, Datta encourages readers to see how power often hides behind religion, morality, and culture.

Though Ravan is the hero of Datta's epic and Meghnad is the central character, Pramila stands out as a symbol of strength and courage of them because she is a subaltern woman who transcends the patriarchal and colonial frameworks and inspires others with her fearless spirit. Therefore, while analyzing the character of Pramila, Bandhopadday writes in his book, "There is not another character in the entire epic except Pramila that is so fully realized. In many ways, Pramila's character becomes symbolic of the entire *Meghnad Badh Kavya.* Just like the epic itself because the story of Pramila begins with tears and also ends with tears" (37).

Research Methodology

This paper employs a qualitative interpretive approach grounded in postcolonial and feminist literary analysis. The primary method which is

used in the paper is close reading, focusing on Michael Madhusudan Datta's *Meghnad Badh Kavya*[1] to uncover how language, characterization, and narrative structure articulate resistance against both colonial and patriarchal authority. Alongside this, an intertextual and comparative allegorical reading is applied to examine how Datta reinterprets mythological figures, particularly Pramila, Rama, and Meghnad, as political and cultural symbols reflecting nineteenth-century anti-colonial consciousness. Most significantly, the analysis incorporates insights from Gayatri Spivak's subaltern theory and postcolonial feminism to highlight how Pramila's voice disrupts dominant discourses of power, thereby transforming the traditional epic heroine into a subaltern agent of resistance.

Crafting Pramila: Datta's Creative Freedom in *Meghnad Badh Kavy*

In true sense, Pramila is Madhusudan's brainchild because Datta created Pramila as a blank canvas, so he could shape her personality and values exactly as he wanted. In an article named "Pramila: A Tradition Characterized", in the *Daily Star*, a leading English-language newspaper in Bangladesh, published on the 200th birth anniversary of Michael Madhusudan Datta, it is written, "Pramila does not appear in the Bengali *Ramayana* by Krittivasa, nor in the Sanskrit *Ramayana* of Valmiki, for that matter. In Krittivasa's *Ramayana*, Meghanada is said to have not one but 9,000 wives, none of whom are named, however" (Seely).

Since there was no pre-existing version of Pramila, Datta had complete freedom to create her as he wished. Basically, drawing inspiration from both Eastern and Western literature, the poet carefully crafted Pramila, blending beauty, grace, and strength. However, he did not shape her as a mere object of male desire like Urvashi. Instead, he portrayed her as a queen, embodying all the virtues of womanhood. With the progressive ideas of the 19th century, the poet wanted to establish Pramila as a symbol of women's liberation. While characters like Sita, Sarama, and Mandodari represent the traditional image of Eastern women, Pramila, though rooted in the East, stands apart with influences from Western thought, making her truly unique, as Seely opines, "With Pramila, Datta had a somewhat tabula rasa upon which he could have painted any personality he liked. He could

1. *The translated version, The Slaying of Meghnad, of Clinton B. Seely is used as the primary text.*

have her hold and demonstrate any values he chose. He could have her hold and demonstrate "the changing values under colonialism" of which Nandy writes" (Seely).

Through Pramila, Datta proves that a woman can take part in the outside world while still managing her home; she loves her husband while also caring for her family; she respects her country, and is ready to sacrifice her life for the freedom of her country from colonial invaders. Madhusudan shaped her as a woman of exceptional qualities, placing her at the highest level of humanity. Not only in Bengali literature but even in world literature, such a well-developed and powerful female character is rare and the source of this groundbreaking character is *Mahabharata*, though *Mahabharata* has little or no connection with *Ramayana*.

> Pramila appears in the Bangla *Mahabharata* by Kasiram Das, in the "*Asvamedha Parva*," and, it is from that text that Datta takes her name, plus her distinctive characteristics (Seely).

Though he has taken this character from *Mahabhrata*, he restructured it according to his own wish. In other words, Madhusudan did not just copy Pramila from old stories; he actually reinvented her completely. Datta mixed Eastern traditions with Western ideas of freedom to create a character who is ahead of her time. In a world where women were often silenced, Pramila shouts back valiantly—proving that even in myths, women can be warriors, leaders, and symbols of change.

From Submissive Wife to Resistant Warrior like *Mahashakti Durga*: The Subaltern's Awakening against Colonialism

Pramila's character can be seen as a powerful example of what Gayatri Spivak calls the voice of the subaltern. The term "subaltern" was originally coined by Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci to refer to social groups on the margins of history, such as peasants, workers, and colonized people. Spivak builds on Gramsci's concept, arguing that subaltern groups are not only marginalized economically and politically but also epistemologically. They are silenced and voiceless by dominant Western discourses and power structures. In her masterpiece, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Spivak writes, "Can the subaltern speak? What must the elite do to watch out for the continuing construction of the subaltern? The question of 'woman' seems most problematic in this context" (90). Spivak's main point is that these subaltern folks, who usually come from places that were once colonized or oppressed, have a hard time getting their stories heard.

She asks if they can share their experiences in a way that truly makes a difference, especially when the dominant or more powerful groups control the conversation. Spivak gives the example of a subaltern woman who is raped. When she tries to tell her story, she might use words and concepts that come from the legal system, the media, or even her own traditional community. But these are all systems that have been shaped by the dominant class, and they might not be able to fully capture the horror and complexity of her experience (99). In the similar way Pramila's character embodies the struggle of the subaltern to speak and resist but she has broken all the shackles of restriction and resisted against the colonial Rama army like a valiant hero.

Madhusudan's brainchild and Meghnad's wife, Pramila appears in the epic from the very beginning canto and here she is painted as a devotee and submissive wife like a general Indian woman. In the very beginning canto, her submissive character can be seen when Meghnad started to leave for battle field after his brother Virbahu's death, Pramila started to weep like a common Indian women and forbade him not to go to the battle field. The scenery is described in the epic, "At such time pretty / Pramila grasped hold her husband's hands / and weeping" (Seely 1.635-337).

Pramila, deeply concerned about her husband's safety, is overwhelmed by the fear of losing him. As a devoted wife, she sees herself as completely dependent on him, and her attachment to him is so strong that she cannot imagine life without him. It is because like a common wife, Pramila also fears about the death of her husband. Therefore, she requests her husband by saying, "Where, companion of my heart, would you consign / your thrall, pray tell me, when you yourself have gone away? How / shall this hapless girl abide apart from you?" (Seely 1.638-340).

In response to her concern, we learn that many common Indian women see their husbands in a divine light, treating them as their ultimate protectors. Pramila herself uses this language of devotion, referring to herself as his "slave." This shows just how strongly she believes in the idea that her own worth and identity are tied to her husband's well-being. It is widely known that most of the common Indian women consider them as the slaves of their husbands, it is because their *Prati* (husband) is *Paramissor* (God) to them. In the similar way, Pramila also addresses her as the slave of her husband by saying, "So why do you, virtues' fund, deny as much to / this slave of yours today? (Seely 1.644-645)."

In response, Datta depicts Meghnad as a caring and responsible husband who considers his wife as *Sati* (Pure Girl) and believes that the purity of his wife will save him. Meghnad assures his wife by saying:

> You have bested Indrajit, my chaste one, and secured him
> with firm fetters. Who is able to untie those bonds? I
> shall return with haste, pure woman, once I have defeated
> Raghava in combat—by virtue of your purity. (Seely 1.647-650)

Meghnad's words reflect his deep faith in his wife's purity, portraying him as a devoted husband who believes that her virtue will safeguard him in battle. This unwavering trust in Pramila not only highlights their bond but also reinforces the traditional ideal of a wife's chastity as a source of divine protection. However, despite Meghnad's assurances, Pramila's heart remains restless. In the first canto, Meghnad asks Pramila to wait for him in the pleasure garden while he goes to Lanka. Since then, Pramila has been waiting for her husband. As time passes, her wait grows longer and more painful. To express the depth of Pramila's sorrow, the poet compares her to Radha, a symbol of love and longing. Pramila has a strong desire to worship her husband as a god, like the traditional Eastern woman. At the same time, she also feels a growing Western-like urge to go to where her husband is in danger and be with him. Hence, she confidently tells her friends that she thinks that there is none in this universe who could stop her powerful husband, referring to him as her "king of beasts." With this, she urges her friends to join her in going to the city of Lanka, where the battle is taking place. In Pramila's words, "I cannot think who might impede my king of / beasts. Come, dear one, let us now all go to Lanka city" (Seely 3.61-62).

This is for the first time, Bangla literature has seen a female character marching towards the battle field to save her husband and this is a bold decision. In this case William Radice, a scholar of Madhusudan Datta's literary works, addresses her as the representative of *Mahasakti* (Durga). Therefore, in third canto, Madhusudan depicts the character of *Durga* also known as *Sankari*, the goddess of *Shakti* (energy and power), who says that Pramila is a part of her and so Pramila has this kind of resistant mentality and vigor. In the epic, *Sankari* says, "My beautiful / Pramila was born a part of me" (Seely 3.587-588).

In the same canto, it is seen that when Basanti, one of her friends, tells that it is difficult for them to enter in the battle field because Rama and his

army conquered the city, Pramila boldly replies, "We go this / day to Lanka proper by the strength of our own arms. Let us see by what stratagem the gem of men prevents us!" (Seely 3. 80-82).

Through these lines, Pramila boldly declares that she will go to Lanka by her own strength, relying on her own courage and abilities. She challenges the idea that anyone, even Rama, does not have the ability to stop her. This speech shows her fearless and independent spirit and most significantly, to Pramila's revolt, *Purossottom* Rama is nothing but a beggar or landless. Therefore in fearful voice, Rama says to Sugrib, the king of monkey clan:

> Sita's rescue, best of friends, is not to be. Let us turn
> back to our forest sanctuary. Difficult to beat
> in combat is that Indra among charioteers, that
> Ravana, bane of gods, Daityas, and of men (Seely 6. 141-144).

Here Rama tells the monkey troops that rescuing Sita is impossible because their enemy Ravana is too powerful—he is as strong as the god, Indra and has defeated gods, demons, and humans alike. They decide to return to their safe forest home rather than face certain defeat in battle. That means, Rama is drawn from the lens of weakness, not from the lens of vigor and valor.

In the same canto, another bold challenge of Pramila to Rama is shown because Pramila is ready to fight with Rama and so one of Pramila's maids, Nrimundamalini taunts Rama to join in the battle and fight bravely with Pramila by saying:

> Take bow and arrow if you wish, sir, or shield or sword or club;
> And we constantly practise wrestling! Whatever means you like, lord
> But hurry: my lady is making her army wait merely on your
> permission, like a huntress holding back a leopardess,
> champing to attack a herd of deer she has seen (Radice 3.322-326).

According to Abhay Kumar Roy's "Retelling the Ramayana: *Meghanad Badh Kavya* and the Dawning of a National Consciousness"; At Pramila's command, her maids and attendants, all valiant warriors, conceal or heighten their charms by donning armour and grasping the martial spear and martial music proclaim the march of the proud heroines. The whole ballad is replete with the most gorgeous description of the haughty grace, the pride of deportment, the splendour of queenly charms which mark the female warriors, whose eyes dart a keen lustre than the spears which they bear. "Rama will not fight with women, he willingly and even respectfully

lends a passage, and the radiant file of valour and beauty pass by, illuminating the darkness of the night. Rama, struck with the sight, can scarcely believe that it was not a gorgeous dream"(3).

Surprised by Pramila's prowess, Hanuman called Rama at Pramila's request. Pramila informed Rama about the purpose of her arrival. Hanuman left the path on Rama's orders. But Rama could not be completely reassured by seeing *Biranganabeshi* Pramila. Vibhishana told Rama that the woman who holds the power to keep Indra-conquering Meghnad at her feet is not a little girl. *Kalanemi's* daughter Pramila is part of *Mahashakti*. The following quotation of Vibhishana proves him as a part of *Mahasakti* or *Durga*: "Look at Pramila's strength, look outside, my lord! / I do not know who, in battle, could match these women, / Awesome as Durga when she fought against Raktabij!" (Radice 3. 355-58).

Now, it can be said that in the epic, Meghnad's wife, Pramila, plays an essential role in bringing a new dimension to the story of *Ramayana*, which is the fight against imperialistic/colonial forces. Pramila, in the poem, represents the subjugated people of India, who were suffering under the British Raj. Her revolt against Rama can be interpreted as a rebellion against the imperialistic/colonial forces that were dominating India during that time. Pramila's character in *Meghnad Badh Kavya* is unique as she embodies the voice of the subaltern, the marginalised and oppressed people of India who were not able to express their views or participate in the mainstream politics. Her speech in the poem highlights the subjugated condition of women in the Indian society of that time. In a sense, she represents the anticolonial feminist voice.

Pramila's revolt is not against Rama, but it is against the idea of war itself. In the poem, she questions the justification of war and the deaths of thousands of people. She argues that instead of fighting against each other, they should unite and fight against the real enemy—the imperialistic/colonial forces. This is a clear reference to the British Raj, which was dominating India during that time. Pramila's character can be seen as an embodiment of the Indian peopl's resistance against the British Raj. She represents the suffering and pain that the Indian people had to endure under the colonial forces. The poem serves as a critique of the colonial forces and their oppressive policies. The poem portrays the British Raj as an evil force that is trying to conquer and dominate India. Pramila's rebellion against Rama can be seen as a rebellion against the British Raj.

Pramila as the representation of Rani Lakshmibai, a Female Revolter of Sepoy Mutiny

> Jhansi's Rani Lakshmi Bai, who fought against the British all her life and died fighting in the battlefield, still lives in the hearts of the people of Buldelkhand (Ghosh 382).

Rani Lakshmibai, also known as the Rani of Jhansi, was a prominent figure in the Indian Rebellion of 1857, commonly referred to as the Sepoy Mutiny. Her courageous resistance against British domination and oppression, her leadership qualities, and her unwavering commitment to the cause of Indian independence have earned her a revered place in the annals of Indian history. Rani Lakshmibai was born on November 19, 1828, in Varanasi as Manikarnika Tambe and was married to the Maharaja of Jhansi, Raja Gangadhar Rao. After her husband's death in 1853, the British East India Company refused to recognise her adopted son as the heir to the throne of Jhansi and annexed the state under the Doctrine of Lapse. That means:

> The East India Company had challenged her claim to the throne of Jhansi as protector of Damodar Rao, her adopted son. She could sense their Imperial might yet the ferocity, courage and passion in her voice marked her resistance (Ghosh 384).

In this context, Lakshmibai, the Rani of Jhansi, gives her historic utterance, "'*Meri Jhansi doonginahin.*' 'I will not give up my Jhansi'" (Devi, 68). This unjust act by the British sparked a deep sense of resentment among the Indian population, leading to the outbreak of the Indian Rebellion of 1857. As the uprising spread across the country, Rani Lakshmibai emerged as a prominent leader, rallying her troops to fight against British colonial rule. Lakshmaibai's historic utterance was the "first and only protest'' uttered by rulers of Indian kingdoms at that time (Ghosh 384).

She actively participated in various battles, displaying exceptional bravery and strategic acumen. The Siege of Jhansi in March 1858 became a defining moment in her life, where she valiantly defended her kingdom against the British forces. Mahasweta Devi glorifies Lakshmaibai's courage in the following poem:

> She made soldiers out of soil
> And swords out of wood
> She picked mountains and made horses,
> And off she rode to Gwalior. (Devi xv)

Despite facing overwhelming odds, Rani Lakshmibai refused to surrender and ultimately sacrificed her life for the cause of Indian independence.

The impact of Rani Lakshmibai's actions during the Sepoy Mutiny was profound. Her defiance against British rule inspired countless Indians to join the struggle for independence. She became a symbol of resistance and empowerment for women in a society dominated by patriarchal norms. Her legacy continues to resonate with Indians, who remember her as a fearless warrior and a visionary leader who epitomised the spirit of nationalism. The historical queen may have died while fighting against the colonisers but the people of Buldelkhand sincerely believe in her immortality. If challenged with disbelief they do not jump up in protest. They merely state their conviction and belief. "'*Rani margay nahouni, abhi to Jindahou*'"—the Queen is not dead, she still lives amidst the rocks and soil of Buldelkhand (Devi xv). Mahasweta Devi praises Rani Laxmi Bai in her poem, in the following way:

> That Queen, so very great was she,
> Said she would never let go of Jhansi.
> She fought for the sake of her soldiers,
> And took bullets herself.
> As long as water in India flows
> The Queen of Jhansi will live. (Devi 69)

Rani Lakshmibai remains a towering figure in Indian history and her bravery, leadership, and commitment to the cause of Indian independence have left an indelible mark on the collective memory of the nation. Her character also influenced a number of writers like Bankim Chandra and Michael Madhusudan Datta, and, therefore, he draws her spirit in Pramila. In "Retelling the Ramayana: *Meghnad Badh Kabya* and the Dawning of a National Consciousness", Abhay Kumar Roy writes, "Pramila with her real-life counterpart Rani Lakshmi Bai who died while defending the mother land, entered the national consciousness providing "agency" to women" (113).

In the epic, Pramila is found in four cantos among nine cantos. In the very first canto, the character of Pramila was awakened, in the third and fifth cantos her revolting character was developed and in the very last canto, ninth canto, her character was faced a tragic end with the death of her husband. We first see Pramila in Canto I with Meghanada who, thinking

Rama defeated, relaxes in a pleasure garden retreat. Informed of Rama's miraculous recovery, Meghanada prepares at once to go to the aid of his father, Ravana. Wife Pramila, behaving much like the epitome of a devoted Indian wife whose life is inextricably entwined with her husband's, implores him not to leave. When next we see Pramila, in Canto III, she is first compared to Radha, but then to her namesake from the *Mahabharata (Seely)*. At the very beginning of Canto three, Pramila is shown weeping like a traditional Indian woman because she suspected her husband's danger: "In Pramoda Park wept Pramila, that youthful daughter / of a Danava, pained because apart from her dear spouse" (Seely 3.1-2). But in the later part of the epic, Madhusudan has given Pramila the qualities of Laxmi Bai because in canto three, Pramila is depicted as a strong and brave woman who embodies the qualities of a true warrior. Despite being in a situation where she could have easily been overwhelmed by fear and despair, Pramila stands out as a character of immense courage and determination. Pramila's bravery is first evident when she learns about the approaching battle. Instead of being paralysed by fear, she immediately takes action. She is not just a passive figure; she actively participates in the defense of her husband and her kingdom. Datta has presented Pramila as a warrior in the following lines:

> Spirited Pramila dressed, overcoming with anger
> her shyness and fear. The glow from the diadem atop
> her chignon shone, ah alas, like Indra's bow upon the
> crest of clouds. Her eyebrows drawn with black kohl were like the eye-
> pleasing crescent moon upon Bhairavi's forehead. That bright-
> eyed one covered her high breasts with armor and strapped a gold,
> jewel-studded cummerbund artfully round her waist. Down
> her back beside her quiver hung a shield, dazzling to the eyes
> like the orb of the sun. (Seely 109-117)

These lines show that Pramila is not afraid to confront the challenges ahead. Her love for Meghnad drives her to be strong, and her loyalty to him and their cause gives her the strength to move forward. Pramila's determination is further emphasised when she takes on the responsibility of protecting Meghnad. This selfless act of devotion is a clear indication of her inner strength., and the sentiment is thus exposed: "Her heart, though tender, knows no fear, / For Meghnad's fate, she holds most dear" (Seely 3. 116-117).

Here, we see that Pramila's love is not only emotional but also a source of great power. Her heart, while full of love, does not allow fear to take over. Instead, it motivates her to stand firm and do what is necessary to protect her husband. She says, "I shall not rest till victory's near, / My duty calls, my path is clear" (Seely 3.148-149).

These lines show that Pramila is clear about her responsibilities. She is determined to fulfill her duty, no matter the cost. Her resolve is unshakeable, and she is prepared to face whatever comes her way.Moreover, Pramila's courage is not just physical but also emotional. Datta has revealed this courage of Pramila in his poetic voice by writing:

> Faithful Pramila reached the golden gates of Lanka. Horns
> blared; war drums rumbled with their ear-splitting pounding. Gigantic
> Rakshasa thundered like *Pralaya*'s thunderclouds, or like
> a herd of elephants. (Seely 3. 470-473)

From the above discussion, it is clear that Pramila's character in the poem serves as a dual representation, embodying both the Indian people's resistance against British colonialism and the feminist struggle against patriarchal oppression. Her character subverts traditional patriarchal norms in Indian society, advocating for gender equality and challenging the notion of a woman's limited role in society.

Conclusion

The ending of Meghnad's story is filled with deep emotion and beauty, but it can be challenging for someone who views Madhusudan Datta's poem as an effort to reshape traditional myths to reflect the changing values during colonial times. In this final scene, Meghnad's body is burned in a funeral ceremony, and his loyal wife, Pramila, chooses to die by fire along with him.So, it can be said that Pramila is not just a figure of traditional feminine virtue. She is also a woman of national consciousness and a symbol of resistance against colonial forces. In *Meghnad Badh Kavya,* Pramila's actions are driven by a sense of duty not only to her husband but also to her nation. Her bravery is evident when she takes on a more active role, embodying the spirit of a warrior. She is determined to protect her kingdom and her people, reflecting a sense of national pride and consciousness. This aspect of her character aligns with the anti-colonial sentiment in Bengal during the time the poem was written. Pramila's

courage and determination make her a figure of strength and resilience, qualities that were highly valued in the context of the fight against colonial oppression. Pramila's beauty is also highlighted in the poem, but it is not just physical beauty that defines her. Madhusudan Datta describes her as a *Birangona,* a brave and heroic woman, emphasizing that her beauty lies in her courage and strength. This portrayal challenges the traditional notion of beauty as merely physical and instead celebrates the inner strength and bravery of women like Pramila.

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Sphaira: Journal of Arts and Humanities, Volume 1, Issue 1, June 2025
p-ISSN: 3106-017X, e-ISSN: 3106-0161

Overcoming the Overshadowing Discomfort: The Psychological Construction of a 'Father' in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*

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Abstract

This study investigates Amir's psychological transformation in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, tracing his emergence from the overwhelming shadow of his father. Using Freud's tripartite model of the psyche, the paper examines Amir's progression from the impulsive, self-serving demands of the Id to the balanced awareness of the Ego, and finally to the moral authority of a developed Superego. Amir's early actions, driven by an Id-fueled need for paternal validation, lead him to betray Hassan, reflecting Freud's Idea of a child emulating a parental "model." However, Amir eventually breaks this cycle: through reflection, confrontation with guilt, and the responsibility of caring for Sohrab, he cultivates an ethical consciousness that defines a paternal Identity distinct from Baba's. By combining content analysis with psychoanalytic theory, the study demonstrates how Amir's journey exemplifies the reconciliation of inherited trauma through conscious moral development, highlighting Hosseini's narrative as a guide for overcoming the lingering effects of parental overshadowing.

Keywords: Acceptance through rejection, constructing identity, father-son relationship, guilt, psychoanalytic criticism.

Introduction

Love and affection are most certainly present in the case of respect, but when it comes to fear, it is not surprising to find the absence of love in it. The common scenario in our society is that children, especially sons, often maintain a certain distance from their fathers, driven either by respect or fear. It is rare for children to simultaneously embody both qualities—close

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emotional bonding and respectful reverence—in their relationships with their fathers. In this paper, I intend to explore Amir's psychological evolution concerning his Ideology about the father-son relationship as depicted in Khaled Hosseini's renowned novel, *The Kite Runner* (2003). This analysis will be conducted through the lens of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical theory. By exploring this topic, I seek to give readers an insightful new perspective on the dynamics of the father-son relationship. Freud's theory, to a great extent, helps us understand how children internalise their parents' attributes. As Freud states, a child is often "to mould (his) own Ego after the fashion of one that has been taken as a model" (Freud 63). The parent is the following model, and the children are to shape themselves after it. In *The Kite Runner,* we notice that Amir, the protagonist of this novel, admires his father the most, as children often consider their fathers to be their heroes. Amir's delicate characteristics compared to his father's strong personality put his father into an unpleasant situation, whereas Amir finds comfort under the shadow of his father and desires to continue his life. Amir's attitude toward his father reaches him differently, making him judge it inappropriate, given that he is a boy. For him, Amir is the one to put on his shoes after he is gone.

A review from "The Guardian" website introduces *The Kite Runner* as "A gripping and emotional story of betrayal and redemption." Amir and Hassan are siblings from two different wombs, a secret that only Amir comes to know about at some point. They grow up together in the manner of master and slave, but the bond is much more intense than that. Due to their social distinction, as Amir is a Pashtun and Hassan is a Hazara, Amir always tries to hide his feelings in case others may judge him, and he might lose the warmth of his father. But soon he realises that Baba appreciates Hassan more than Amir, as Amir exhibits fewer of his characteristics. Amir's indifference towards the stereotypical and rigorous masculine attitudes hurts Baba's feelings. Baba feels guilty and helpless concerning the fact that Hassan, who shows a strong character, is his own blood from an illegitimate relation, which he cannot announce to the world. The fear of losing Baba's love makes Amir jealous of Hasan and forces him to conspire against Hasan. Even though Baba disregards the conspiracy, Hasan and his father leave the place for good and settle somewhere else, far from them. This, at the same time, brings Amir a temporary assurance but an unavoidable guilt for a long time. He remains

silent for the sake of his selfish desire to get Baba's utmost attention for himself only. Time runs fast, and soon we find them migrating to America due to an unforeseen Taliban invasion in Afghanistan. Removed from Afghanistan, their lives take a different course—Baba retreats into silence, and Amir gradually begins to cultivate his ambition to become a writer. Although Baba never truly appreciates Amir's ambition to become a writer, he refrains from opposing it, perhaps in light of their diasporic circumstances. As time passes, Baba's life comes to an end, and Amir becomes increasingly absorbed in building his own family. Meanwhile, one day Amir gets a call from Rahim Khan and learns about Hassan's death and his son's abduction. On Rahim Khan's request, Amir returns to Afghanistan to rescue Sohrab, Hassan's son. Even though Amir hesitates at first, he still visits his homeland to rescue Sohrab. Perhaps he does so to get himself rid of his guilt of doing injustice to Hassan. At the end of the novel, Sohrab becomes his only hope of living. The tragic events that take place in the meantime help Amir to reconsider his heart, and he finally starts to accept himself as he is. He finally learns to reject the false affection towards Baba's strong personality and his expectations from Amir as a man, and is able to express his inner self towards Sohrab. Sohrab becomes his son, and he tries his best to become the father he never had.

Amir's longing for Baba's attention unconsciously stems from the selfish part of him, which Freud identifies as the Id. This desire forces him to neglect reality, or the Ego, trapping him in an unseen mirror cage where he can only encounter the reflection of his father's thoughts. Sohrab becomes his escape route as Amir rediscovers his lost Identity and frees himself from guilt. Ultimately, Amir's submission to his morality, facilitated by the Superego, helps him find redemption.

Analysing Freud's Idea

In *Beginning Theory*, Peter Barry says, "All of Freud's work depends upon the notion of the unconscious, which is the part of the mind beyond consciousness which nevertheless has a strong influence upon our actions" (96). Sigmund Freud argues that human beings can hardly control their decisions; rather, they are driven by their minds, which he divides into three sections: the Id, Ego and Superego. In his lecture, Freud explains that the 'Id' is the selfish part, "Id of course knows no judgements of

value: no good and evil, no morality" (4683). The Id is like an infant, barely conscious of the social system. It is not concerned with the moral value or the consequences. The Ego, on the contrary, is acknowledged by Freud as "between the Id and reality" (4686). It represents consciousness, rationality and sense. According to Freud, "the Ego stands for reason and good sense while the Id stands for the untamed passions... The Ego is, after all, only a portion of the Id, a portion that has been expediently modified by the proximity of the external world with its threat of danger." (4685). Freud admits that the Ego is weak, compared to the Id, but "has separated itself by resistances due to repression" (4685). Based on the analysis of both the Id and the Ego, the Superego can be considered the moral bridge that connects the Id and the Ego in our lives, to complete us as human beings. Freud enlightens us that "the strict super-Ego, which lays down definite standards for its conduct, without taking any account of its difficulties from the direction of the Id and the external world, and which, if those standards are not obeyed, punishes it with tense feelings of inferiority and of guilt" (4686). The Superego helps us understand moral values and fit into society by suppressing and controlling our instant self-gratification driven by the Id.

Freud believed that mental health difficulties, such as anxiety or depression, only emerge when the Ego fails to locate the Id in its own way. Depending on the dominance of either the Id or the Superego, one may indulge in harmful impulses without considering the consequences or may live an overly ordered, rigid life while ignoring one's own wants and needs, or may become too judgmental of others. Freud's theory makes it exceptionally clear that our Identities depend not on how we perceive ourselves but significantly on our radical consciousness.

Literature Review

The collection of emotions, decisions, and behaviours during Amir's journey drives him to guilt, redemption and atonement. The emotional strain pushes him to fight with his inner conflict. Many scholars at home and abroad have studied this novel from different perspectives, including the psychological shift in Amir.

David Jefferess, in his discourse "To be good (again): *The Kite Runner* as allegory of global ethics", claims that "*The Kite Runner* opens by foregrounding the themes of sin, guilt, and redemption, which shape the

narrative" (392). Jefferess' observation indicates how Amir's psychological growth over time develops his character through the development of his Id and Ego. Amir's sin is led by his unrestrained desire for his father's attention, which ultimately drives him towards his misdeeds. But at the same time, he feels his Ego confronting his guilt over his past wrongs and pushing him toward redemption in the end.

According to Hussain et al., "Amir's journey throughout the novel is a vivid depiction of the perpetual struggle between his instinctual desires, rational decision-making, and internal moral compass...Amir's...desires for his father's love and approval, navigates complex decisions shaped by societal and moral expectations, and faces the haunting consequences of his past actions while seeking redemption" (662). Amir's struggle is narrated in such a manner that it allows the readers to comprehend the development of his Identity through emotional purgation. Hussain et al. have also explained the progression "as a mirror reflecting the depths of human desires, conflicts, and the ever-persistent quest for Identity and belonging" (668).

In her compelling article, Yunintan Nur Cholifah highlights that "Amir feels that Baba treats both of him and Hassan differently. ... he does not want Hassan to get Baba's attention and tries to be a selfish one, this is because his Id demands" (754). This portrays Amir's passion for his father's sole attention for himself, aroused by his irrational desires. Such behaviour aligns with Freud's concept of the conscious and unconscious mind, suggesting that individuals are primarily influenced by their unconscious thoughts. Mentioning Dr. Boeree's interpretation of Freud, "the conscience and Ego Ideal communicate their requirements to the Ego with feelings like pride, shame, and guilt," Cholifah affirms that Amir "always thinks that Baba hates him because he killed his mother. He has to live with that thought in his whole life, for he cannot delete the memory... Therefore, in Amir's case, his Ego cannot repress the feeling of guilty (sic)" (754).

Intan Muyasyaroh's discussion in "Amir's Personality Development in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* Novel (2018) (A Psychosocial Approach)" elucidates that Amir develops a sense of industry and self-awareness, predominantly concerning his superiority over Hassan and his kite-flying skills to win over his father's attention. His confusion with his Identity and role leads to betraying Hassan, which drastically changes his

life. But, it also causes differing emotions of hatred and love towards himself, which helps him form intimacy with people like his Father, his wife, and Sohrab, Hassan's son. It impacts his personal growth and helps him overcome his guilt. Amir's inferiority complex triggers him to take such measures against Hassan. Such inappropriate manners highlight Amir's fear of being left alone and unattended by his father.

Ting Wen, however, believes that Amir's journey from "sin" to "awareness" to "redemption" is not only caused by his inferiority complex but also due to the developed "racial prejudice" in that area. According to Wen, "The concept that the Pashtuns are destined to be superior to the Hazaras and the fact that the Pashtuns in Afghanistan discriminate against and persecute the Hazaras as a matter of course makes it inevitable that Amir as a protagonist have (sic) a prejudice against Hazaras when getting along with them in his daily life" (592).

In the study, titled "Amir's Guilt in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*", Lambe and Basuki have not only focused on Amir's individual guilt but also on the societal guilt that hampered the development of his growth. Amir failed to appreciate his own life based on the dreadful expectations of society. They state:

> Amir bears not only his personal guilt yet also the familial and societal guilt. His personal guilt grows from his failure to treat Hassan well as a friend... Amir's familial guilt comes from his father's misconduct to Hassan and his family... Amir's societal guilt comes from the influence of his tribe and Hassan's tribe history in their relationship. Due to the difference in their social status Amir treats Hassan badly... In order to deal with his guilt, Amir goes through mortification by sacrificing himself to save Hassan's son Sohrab. (115-16)

Nearly every critique, written on *The Kite Runner* from a psychological perspective, points in the same direction regarding Amir's struggling journey from sin to salvation as the main character. Throughout this journey, his consciousness, or Ego, plays a decisive role in his growth. And, guided by his moral compass, Amir undergoes a profound personal development, ultimately transforming into the person we encounter at the novel's conclusion.

Despair and Desperation

The novel, *The Kite Runner,* offers a poignant portrayal of a terrified child's tumultuous journey and his eventual development into a morally upright man. The journey begins with Amir understanding his father's

lack of attention towards him from childhood. As the only child, growing up without a mother, Amir's desire for his father's attention is not inconsequential. From a Freudian perspective, Amir's early personality is dominated by the Id—the primitive, impulsive part of the mind that operates on the 'pleasure principle.' His Id demands immediate gratification in the form of Baba's love, viewing any obstacle, including Hassan, as a threat to his emotional survival. However, Amir hardly detects any appreciation for him in his father's eyes. His father's indifference towards him frustrates him and makes him jealous of Hassan. The only father-like figure who supports him is Rahim Khan, his father's friend. He always motivates Amir to pursue his dream and thus has a special place in his heart. Ultimately, it fails to close the void of affection and validation that only a parent can offer.

The following lines from the novel, *The Kite Runner,* "There was a picture of my parents' wedding night, Baba dashing in his black suit and my mother a smiling young princess in white. ... I am a baby in that photograph and Baba is holding me, looking tired and grim." (04) express Amir's emptiness regarding his father's lack of affection for him, even as an infant. The sense of rejection Amir feels is reflected in this narration. The absence of his mother and his father's lack of concern drive him to pursue different methods to seek his father's attention. But, most of the time, he could hardly find solace in it. He explains, "I escaped my father's aloofness, in my dead mother's books. That and Hassan, of course" (13). Here, the Id's search for solace finds a temporary opening in literature and companionship, though the underlying tension between his innate nature and Baba's expectations remains unresolved. He finds an alternative path through the memory of his mother and the companionship of a loyal friend, both of which help stabilise and sustain his emotional life. His longings for his only parent's attention gradually transform into something akin to the blessing of Gautam Buddha: extraordinarily rare and almost impossible to attain. If we were to judge Amir's father based on his own philosophy, "When you kill a man, you steal a life. You steal his wife's right to a husband, rob his children of a father. When you tell a lie, you steal someone's right to the truth. When you cheat, you steal the right to fairness" (13), we may consider him a hypocrite. Although he has not physically harmed his son, he nonetheless steals—or, more accurately, robs—Amir of his rightful claim: the undivided affection and attention of

his father. Amir's father represents a rigid, demanding 'Ego Ideal' that Amir feels he can never satisfy. This creates a psychological dispute; Amir is not the 'mould' Freud spoke of because his nature—delicate and poetic—conflicts with the masculine 'model' provided by Baba. Amir's father makes no effort to recognise or accept this reality.

The name of Amir's father is kept hidden from the readers. He is widely introduced as either "Agha Sahib" or "Baba" throughout the novel. It seems to me that Khaled Hosseini has intentionally kept the name anonymous so that readers can either relate to or compare with their own. Rahim Khan referred to him as "Toophan Agha" (09) in the introduction, from which we get a certain image of his characteristics. A fearless, strong, independent, masculine, and righteous human being—qualities that society expects every man to possess inherently. On the contrary, Amir is illustrated as a soft-hearted and delicate person, whom society hardly approves of. If we again approach Freud's statement, where he claims that a child is "to mould (his) own Ego after the fashion of one that has been taken as a model" (Freud and Strachey 63), we may find thatAmir is not the mould Freud has spoken of. Amir's affection for poetry troubles his father. In his conversation with his best friend, he states, "Real men didn't read poetry—and God forbid they should ever write it! Real men—real boys—played soccer just as Baba had when he had been young" (14). Rahim Khan opposes this by defending that "Children aren't coloring books. You don't get to fill them with your favorite colors. ...sometimes you are the most self-centred man I know" (15). Amir's hidden expression barely gets any attention from his Baba. Baba only expects great things from Amir, but never takes the liberty to teach one or two things to Amir at his convenience. Amir's perception of Rahim Khan conveys that "I'd always thought of him as Baba's quiet alter Ego, my writing mentor, my pal, the one who never forgot to bring me a souvenir, a *saughat*, when he returned from a trip abroad" (57). The care he yearns for from his father is discovered in Rahim Khan. Perhaps, Rahim Khan's failure to attain the perfect masculine qualities allows him to understand Amir as a human being.

Though it may appear that Amir is not the perfect "mould" to follow his "model" as per Freud's theory, he tries his best to win his father's heart despite all the neglect. The climax of Amir's Id-driven desperation occurs during the kite-fighting tournament. Amir's every attempt seeks to achieve

his father's approval, "Baba's casual little comment had planted a seed in my head...There was no other viable option. I was going to win, ...Then I'd bring it home and show it to Baba. Show him once and for all that his son was worthy. Then maybe my life as a ghost in this house would finally be over" (39). This moment of desperation defines his intense desire to overcome the invisible barrier separating him from his father. For him, ... the blue kite. My key to Baba's heart" (50). Amir, driven by his Id, is only focused on winning Baba's exclusive concentration for himself. And, to do that, he is willing to take any steps necessary. Driven by the Id's singular focus on self-gratification, Amir sacrifices his moral compass. In his lifetime, he finds very few people compassionate toward him, and Hassan is the most important among them. Hassan is the missing half of Amir. Perhaps, if Hassan could get his biological recognition from Baba, Amir would not have to endure the sense of disappointment.

Baba's unexpected attention towards Hassan, which is, of course, out of his guilt, makes Amir jealous. Progressively, Amir unconsciously begins to grow envious of Hassan, which is reflected in his thoughts as well, as he thinks "I wished I too had some kind of scar that would beget Baba's sympathy. It wasn't fair. Hassan hadn't done anything to earn Baba's affections; he'd just been born with that stupId harelip" (32). However, the Id views Hassan as a rival for Baba's affection. Amir's jealousy is a manifestation of the Id's inability to consider the 'Reality Principle' or the welfare of others. This leads to the thought "Maybe Hassan was the price I had to pay, the lamb I had to slay, to win Baba" (54). Amir's obsession with his father has blinded his ethical senses, allowing the Id to override the budding Superego, leading him to engage in immoral activities without hesitation. He even forces himself to accept the fact that "In the end, I was a Pashtun and he was a Hazara, I was Sunni and he was Shi'a, and nothing was ever going to change that. Nothing" (20). His deep feelings for Hassan were yet to be unfolded, but not before his wrongdoings to him.

As Amir matures and moves to America, we see the emergence of the Ego—the rational mediator. Amir gradually comes to realise that his obsession with his father is increasingly influencing his understanding of himself. Instead of pursuing his dreams, he is running after something else, only to win his father's heart. And, indubitably, the efforts are, to a great extent, difficult to achieve through mere fascinations. The Ego

begins to recognise the reality of Baba's flaws. With his recognition, he starts to comprehend that "Most days I worshipped Baba with an intensity approaching the religious. But right then, I wished I could open my veins and drain his cursed blood from my body" (22). The intensity of frustration forces him to think in such a manner that he finds his efforts are unheard by the Idol. Being left unappreciated, despair is starting to grow inside him. A gentle process has begun to sprout inside Amir against his selfish desires. The incident of saving a woman's life from a Russian soldier during their escape from Afghanistan gives us a definite insight into Amir's changing mentality regarding his father. While he tries to keep his father out of danger "*Do you have to always be the hero?* I thought, my heart fluttering.... 'Baba, sit down please,' I sald, tugging at his sleeve. 'I think he really means to shoot you'" (79-80), his father turns him down in disgust, "Haven't I taught you anything?" (80). He starts to come out of the infatuation that he once held for his Baba. The appreciation he has kept till now is slowly crumbling apart. His realisation is reflected in this statement where he says, "... the young woman's husband suddenly stood and did something I'd seen many others do before him: He kissed Baba's hand" (80). The tone here no longer reminds us of the scared little Amir who always admired his Baba for his strong and determined personality, but of someone who has lost the sense of appreciation for such stubbornness. Amir's Ego starts to dismantle the 'Idol' of Baba, realising that his father's 'heroism' is often a form of stubbornness that endangers others. This cognitive shift allows him to accept America as a place to bury his memories—a tactical move by the Ego to find a new equilibrium. So, he accepts America as a place to bury his left-behind memories, a new beginning (88).

Overcoming the Overshadowing Presence

Amir's suffocating journey does not end with the death of his father, but rather with him accepting the past and securing Sohrab under his care. His lifelong yearning for his father's acknowledgement weighs on him until Sohrab arrives, providing the relief and hope he needs to move forward. This final stage of the novel represents the ultimate triumph of the Superego—the moral conscience that internalises societal standards and parental ideals in a constructive way. Amir's nightmare begins after he betrays Hassan and follows him till he gets settled in America. The past

that he had been trying to bury for the last fifteen years resurfaces within him with new knowledge, accepting Hassan as his illegitimate brother. The revelation of Baba's sin allows Amir's Superego to finally assert itself. He realises that his father's perceived perfection was a lie, which paradoxically frees Amir from the Id's desperate need for Baba's approval. Amir's anguish, "Baba had been a thief. ... because the things he'd stolen had been sacred: from me the right to know I had a brother, from Hassan his Identity, and from Ali his honor" (152), marks the moment his Superego takes command, transforming his internal guilt into a moral imperative. His once cherished thought, "I had a mission now. And I wasn't going to fail Baba" (39), in pursuit of his father's undivIded attention changes with time, making him wise enough to understand Rahim Khan's advice: "There is a way to be good again,... A way to end the cycle" (152), acts as the external catalyst for the Superego to seek atonement. A way of including Sohrab in his life for a fresh start and of feeling remorse for the buried guilt.

Hosseini introduces the story of "Sohrab" in this novel with a different ending. The original story of Sohrab from "Rostam and Sohrab[1]" meets an unfortunate ending, and Sohrab does not get to live his desired life with his father. However, in this novel, we find that Sohrab almost meets a similar fate after losing his biological father and ends up with Amir instead. Hosseini paves a new beginning for both Sohrab and Amir at the end of this novel. Although Amir's journey to rescue Sohrab from Afghanistan is fraught with difficulty, he succeeds in confronting and atoning for the wrongs he committed against Hassan in the past. In the process, Amir assumes the role of the father he never had. This fatherly responsibility—one he was unprepared for—is revealed through the care, concern, and tension he experiences for Sohrab, affirming his transformation. After discovering the truth about Hassan, Amir realises that "I had been the entitled half, the society-approved, legitimate half, the unwitting embodiment of Baba's guilt. I looked at Hassan, ... who had inherited what had been pure and noble in Baba. The half that, maybe, in

1. The tragedy of "Rostam and Sohrab" is part of the tenth century Persian epic *Shahnameh* by the Persian poet Ferdowsi. It tells the tragic story of a father, Rostam, and his son, Sohrab. The narration depicts the tragic ending of the son's life at the hands of his own father due to some misunderstanding.

the most secret recesses of his heart, Baba had thought of as his true son" (240-241). This truth shatters Amir's efforts of all those years and makes him stand alone. But, at the same time, a new realisation draws upon him. By assuming the role of the father he never had, Amir reconciles the conflict between his Id (past selfishness) and his Superego (future duty). He becomes the moral authority he once lacked. In his thoughts, he reflects, "Closing Sohrab's door, I wondered if that was how forgiveness budded, not with the fanfare of epiphany, but with pain gathering its things, packing up, and slipping away unannounced in the middle of the night" (241). This forgiveness is the Ego finally finding peace between the impulsive mistakes of the past and the moral demands of the present. He finds Sohrab on his path of mending the escaped past and commencing a new happening. Finally, he takes Rahim Khan's advice to heart and acts on it. Amir finds himself struggling to earn a smile from Sohrab. The 'first flake melting' represents the psychological healing that occurs when the Superego is satisfied through righteous action. In his defence, he claims:

> It was only a smile, nothing more. It didn't make everything all right. It didn't make anything all right. Only a smile. A tiny thing. A leaf in the woods, shaking in the wake of a startled bird's flight.
> But I'll take it. With open arms. Because when spring comes, it melts the snow one flake at a time, and maybe I just witnessed the first flake melting. (248-249)

Amir's life starts to take a new shape, a new form and is ready to move forward with no remorse attached. A life with new souls to nurture, new paths to advance, and new goals to achieve. Finally, Amir, as a righteous and moral human being, determined by his ethics and morality, emerges and amends the mistakes from his past. The dusty caravan of life moves forward, but Amir is no longer a 'ghost' in his own house. His spirit has moved from the chaotic demands of the Id to the balanced guidance of the Superego. Amir reflects on the story of his life, stating, "If someone were to ask me today whether the story of Hassan, Sohrab, and me ends with happiness, I wouldn't know what to say... *Zindagi migzara*, Afghans like to say: Life goes on, unmindful of beginning, end, kamyab, nah-kam, crisis or catharsis, moving forward like a slow, dusty caravan of kochis" (239). Ultimately, Amir earns a life of his own, free from remorse. This newly earned life teaches him the colours of life and allows him to spread his tired wings with Sohrab. Amir emerges as a new man with a new Identity, finally free from the remorse that once paralysed his Ego.

Conclusion

The Idea of children moulding their Egos after their father does not always end up in the right direction. Figures like Sigmund Freud, Franz Kafka, James Joyce, Charlie Chaplin, Michael Jackson, and many others from history may be found to have a discontented relationship with their fathers. They mostly immerse themselves in their work to escape the harsh reality and try to regain solace. Amir is no different from them. Amir's desire for his father in his childhood, in Freud's terms, triggers his Id. For a child who never had the opportunity to feel the warmth of his mother, it is a reasonable desire. However, the rejection and negligence of his father at his attempts push him to measure his wrongdoings to Hassan and carry the unwanted burden of guilt and suffer till he meets Sohrab. Amir's deprivation of the love of his father leads him to fill the gap for Sohrab at the end of the novel. The events follow the chain by developing Amir's Ego and, finally, connecting the bridge between his Id and Ego by building the Superego in him. The development of Amir as a father to Sohrab supports the notion of this completion. Through Amir's journey, the novel affirms that the struggles of childhood desire and paternal absence can, when met with reflection and action, result in psychological growth and the ability to provide the love once denied.

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Sphaira: Journal of Arts and Humanities, Volume 1, Issue 1, June 2025
p-ISSN: 3106-017X, e-ISSN: 3106-0161

Elements of Alterity and Resistance: Re-reading Nazrul's Poetry in Our Present Troubled Time

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Abstract

The present world at this moment is tormented by aggressive imperialistic policies of the countries holding superpower, the growing geo-politico-economic conflicts and tensions, the ever-widening gap between rich and poor, cultural and identity conflicts and so on. As a myriad-minded poet, literary-political activist Nazrul, during his time in the colonial British era of India, made himself distinct through his unequivocal challenges to the misrule, unjust authority, and discriminatory practices of society. Being a public poet, intellectual and iconoclast, by means of producing myriad poetry, songs, essays, journalistic vanguardism the poet defined his subversive ideological stance. Indeed, the literary-politico-cultural activism, sizzling articulations against any forms of oppressions and injustice makes him poignantly significant. And undeniably, now even after almost fifty years of his demise, in the new context and different realities, we can relate his works and subversive ideas in multi-dimensional perspectives. In this present research, the article tends to focus on the urgency to re-read the poetry of Nazrul in perspectives of its alterity and resistance, to explore the pertinence of the poetry and writings even in our present troubled moments in national and global context. However, along with poetry, some related works of the poet will also be consulted. The study will maintain a close qualitative reading employing related theories of resistance and cultural studies.

Keywords: Kazi Nazrul Islam, alterity and resistance, poetry, re-reading, troubled time.

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"I am not only of this country and society due to my birth here. I am of every man, of every country." (*Nazrul Rachanabali*, Vol. 8, p. 5)[1]

Introduction

Kazi Nazrul Islam, a myriad-minded poet, activist marked the twentieth century with his creative genius, radical thoughts and subversive activism. As a multi-dimensional poet, writer, thinker, composer, editor, Nazrul engaged himself politically and culturally to transform the society in the colonised India. Not only by way of composing revolutionary poetry, but also by way of producing politically charged essays, editorials, songs and so on, he seamlessly kept on combatting against the misrule of the tyrannical foreign administration. The poet's ideological conviction, radical artistic expressions and style instrumentally posit him apart from his contemporary poets and writers. Critics in the post-colonial and decolonial studies tend to locate Nazrul highly significant and ahead of the writers, thinkers, analysts and theorists of the tri-continents like Aime Cesaire, Frantz Fanon, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, and a few more.

What made Nazrul standing out extraordinarily is his paramount courage and strength to confront the power, the authority of any scale. Therefore, he had to pay incredibly. Five of his books were proscribed and a few were in the process to be. To speak the truth, Nazrul's alterity and resistance prove to be issues of perennial importance as in human society we lead our lives amidst ever existing dialectics and conflicts. In the post-colonial era, as citizens of a third world country and living in a global village stricken by geo-politico-economic conflicts and tensions, we are always in a critical juncture. The true liberation of the third world countries is still a far cry as peoples in those areas are grappling for good governance, proper health care, gender equality, safety, security and so on. Globally, imperialistic and aggressive policies of the powerful countries, socio-political inequalities and insecurities, cultural and identity conflicts, tensions and some vital other issues keep us concerned. In such national and global scenario, Nazrul's poems, literary pieces and ideological thoughts appear to be instrumental to fight against socio-politico-cultural malice and discrepancy.

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1. Self-translated. All the translations of Bangla poetry and prose used in this paper, except where indicated otherwise, are from the translated volumes of Nazrul's works edited by Niaz Zaman and Mohammad Nurul Huda.

The article looks forward to investigating the urgency of reading and re-reading Nazrul's poetry in such a troubled time of the present society. The anomalies that moved Nazrul and compelled him to resist and rebel against almost one hundred years back, are still present in some other forms in society. Therefore, the present study tends to find how far Nazrul's poems help up face the issues like tyrannical misrule, race-gender-based treatments, breach of human rights and so many and so forth.

Literature Review

There are a plethora of writings and a good number of articles available on varied aspects of Nazrul's poetry. Nazrul's subversive and rebellious resistance has captured a great attention to the researchers in home and abroad. His egalitarian ideals, non-communal outlooks, vocals for gender equality, unconditional love and preference for the youths have been explored in different perspectives.

Habibur Rahaman, in his article titled "Kazi Nazrul Islam and Decolonisation: Poetry as a Praxis of Political Intervention and Cultural Ecology", delves deep into the anti-colonial and decolonial components prevalently present in the poetry of Nazrul. The researcher explores the liberal pluralistic traits of Nazrul's poetry to combat the sectarian and parochial project of the colonial era.

Sheikh Mehedi Hasan, in his study titled "Poetics of Resistance and Revolution: Reading Nazrul in the Era of Neo-colonialism" (2020), explores the significance of reading the works of Nazrul incorporating his messages in our present post-colonial context. He evaluates the poet claiming "Nazrul was postcolonial before postcolonialism emerged as a literary theory (299)." He further puts the revolutionary activist intellectual poet in line with public intellectuals like Edward Said (1935-2003) and Noam Chomsky (1928), and finds him as perpetually resisting vanguard against present imperialist powers of the globe.

Another article, "Reinventing Egalitarianism in Nazrul's Poetry" (2020) by Jainab Tabassum Banu Sonali, tends to locate Nazrul's human-centeredness projected in his poetry and philosophy. She explores Nazrul's unconventional religious philosophy, having flexibility and tolerance stressing his unconditional love for human being above anything. She highlights the poet's "interreligious egalitarianism", sympathy towards "inferiors, sinners and subalterns."

Priti Kumar Mitra's *The Dissent of Nazrul: Poetry and History* delves deep into the different criteria putting emphasis on the making of the poet as a 'rebel' in the historical and political context of India. Mitra argues Nazrul's dissenting stance in terms of political, social, religious and literary perspectives.

Winston E. Langley's *Kazi Nazrul Islam: The Voice of Poetry and the Struggle for Human Wholeness* (2007) is a seminal piece of work on the creation of Nazrul and his basic philosophy. Here Langley focuses on the greatness of the poet in relation to his fight against communalism, colonial forces, his robust articulation for the oppressed and his instrumental role for political independence of the country.

Another research work is Mohammad Nurul Huda's *Nazrul's Aesthetics and Other Aspects* (2001), dealing with various aspects of Nazrul's creativity especially his looking for an exploitation-free society, provides us useful insight into the poetry of the poet.

Serajul Islam Choudhury, in his book *Kazi Nazrul Islam: Poet and More* (1994), critically focuses on a few significant features of the poet's works putting some unconventional outlooks. He primarily sheds light on the socio-politico-cultural scenario of India before the birth of Nazrul and compares his birth as a "blazing comet" amidst "the thunder and storm". The poet, as Choudhury maintains, is the voice of his era, the "compulsive speaker" who unequivocally speaks for justice.

The above researches have examined Nazrul's poetry in terms of investigating the subversive, decolonial elements and egalitarian approaches. These studies to some extent add insights to my current study. However, none of them have incorporated Nazrul's poetry so intensively in the present troubled socio-politico-cultural perspectives. So, through a further close reading and projecting critical outlooks, I aim to discover the relevance of Nazrul's poetry in present topsy-turvy societal realities and the urgency of the continuous reading and re-reading of the poetry and related works of the poet.

Elements of Alterity: Nazrul's Uniqueness as a Poet and Writer

Nazrul stands apart as a poet, writer and activist in the twentieth century Indian subcontinent. Serajul Islam Choudhury claims that Nazrul "was, more than any of the other major poets of Bengal, a poet of his times" and he stressed on "placing him in the context of the social and cultural

situation to which he belonged" (Choudhury 15). Indeed, critics maintain this view that, the socio-politico-cultural happenings of the time in colonial India immensely impacted him. The political upheavals and eventful stormy incidents like the partition of Bengal (1905) and its annulment, the Khilafat Movement (1919-24), Non-cooperation Movement (1920-22), and at the international level, World War I (1914-1918), Turkish Revolution (1908-9), Bolshevik Revolution (1917), Irish Revolution (1919-21) created deep impact upon the poet's life and works.

As a poet, writer and multi-talented genius, Nazrul was creative, prolific, and subversive with profound political ideological commitment. Mohammad Nurul Huda while assessing the poet, aptly claims: "Nazrul's personal life and creative life are inseparable, running parallel to each other" (97). Being a staunch critic of colonial tyranny and writing with a carefree nonconformist soul, as many as five books of the poet were proscribed from the timeline of 1922 to 1931. It is a rare incident in the literary history of the whole world. Not only this. Notably, "[a]lmost all writings of Nazrul were banned or provisionally proscribed.... The British Government considered almost all his writings as seditious and took action against his non-proscribed books according to the Terrorist Suppression Act" (Kar 11). Both as a writer and as an editor Nazrul was ultra-political, subversive and resolute to liberate his motherland from the colonial shackles. Therefore, his edited bi-weekly *Dhumketu* was also proscribed, and due to the publication of the poem "Anandamoyeer Agamone", the poet had to undergo one year of rigorous imprisonment. In the same year of 1922 just after the publication, *Jugabani*, the collection of essays was proscribed. During the trial, on 7 January, 1923, his speech "Rajbandir Jabanbandi" (Deposition of a Political Prisoner) defending himself as taking the side of "King of all kings, the Judge of all judges, eternal Truth—the awakened God" (Zaman, Vol. 2, p. 201) challenging the colonial "king" is also a highly remarkable incident in the literary-political history of British India.

During this phase, when he published his electrifying poem "Bidrohi" (The Rebel) [1922], Rabindranath Tagore, the polymath, great poet and writer, had already achieved his Nobel Prize for *Gitanjali* (1912) and at that time, the poets and writers of Bengal had a prime concern to overcome his inevitable influence upon them to uphold themselves with originality. Remarkably, five poets of the 1930s, namely Jibananda Das,

Buddhadeva Bose, Bishnu De, Sudhindranath Dutta and Amiya Chakravarty, having extraordinary genius, consciously paved a path of their own avoiding the overshadowing influences of Tagore. However, Nazrul a contemporary of them had his own way of leading life, thought-process and style of writing. While Rabindranath was meditative, reflective and romantically engrossed with life, nature and society, Nazrul was meteor-like, restlessly brilliant, and captivating in character. However, Rabindranath is not fairly judged at all when it is told that he was a mere romantic poet away from socio-political complex dynamics. He was obviously a matchless thinker and socio-cultural transformer. There are, indeed, a lot of similarities in the question of human dignity and emancipatory pursuit between these two poets. Even though Nazrul, with his radical involvements in socio-politico-cultural affairs and through revolutionary mode of writings, created a distinctive niche in literary arena, he is evidently different from the five poets of his time who, except Jibanananda Das, were heavily influenced by the western aesthetics much more than the indigenous cultural and political affairs. Critics like Serajul Islam Choudhury and Ahmad Rafique pinpoint Nazrul's class identity and aptly stress on the idea that based on Kolkata (then Calcutta) Nazrul had an opportunity to be easily settled as one of the culturally elitist poets like many of his contemporary ones (Choudhury 18-23, Rafique 69-70). However, Nazrul did not confine himself within the politico-cultural circle of the urban society, rather he came out on the streets of Bengal to be associated with common people as a public poet or a *Charan Kabi*. As a journalist, poet, song writer and singer, organizer and politician, he involved himself with people socially and politically neglected. He strived to write for the liberatory purposes of this people who represented the major part of the country's population. Infusion of boiling emotion, revolutionary zeal and tone, blended Hindu and Islamic imagery, Persian-Arabic vocabulary with Sanskrit-derived Bengali, amalgamation of classical and folk tradition, strong rhythmic and dramatic patterns, rich symbolism and allegory make his poetry fairly distinctive. He deliberately chose the allusions of god Shiva, goddess Durga, Kali, etc. as these gods and goddesses were worshipped by the mass people (Rafique 70).

Resistance: The Ultimate Mantra of Nazrul

Nazrul was over head and ears rebellious and to be more appropriate—a revolutionary. In his around twenty-three years of creative career he

proved to be a matchlessly uncompromising nonconformist in question of achieving freedom from British rule, eliminating discriminations of any forms to establish justice and equity. As a rebellious soul, Nazrul stands out in the literary-political field of India during the colonial rule. His resistance was not only maneuvered through different genres like poetry, prose, fiction, songs, public speeches but also by way of participating social and political affairs with the people both in urban and in rural areas of Bengal. Coming from a rural poor background at his early stage of life, Nazrul had a rigorous learning through economic hardship and other adverse experiences. At the Sersol Raj School, teenaged Nazrul was highly influenced by the revolutionary ideals of his teacher Nibaranchandra Ghatak who was connected with secret workers of the Jugantar (New Age) group of Bengal revolutionaries (Mitra 27). A youth of sentiment and deep emotion, Nazrul grew with intense support and love for revolutionary stream of battling against the colonial regime. While in the army in Karachi the October Revolution in Russia, the end of Tzarist autocracy and victory of revolutionaries provided a great impetus and thrilling attraction for Communism. Returning from Karachi his comradeship with Muzaffar Ahmed was also a turning incident of his life and career. Along with this eminent Communist leader and activist, the journalistic career of Nazrul started, and it was another pivotal phase of his life. Nazrul, together with Muzaffar Ahmed, started working for *Nabajug* as a joint editor in 1920. With this paper, the young Nazrul commenced writing on socio-political issues strongly criticizing the activities of the empire in India. The articles written in *Nabajug* on contemporary global political issues like Turkish Revolution, Bolshevik Revolution, Irish Revolution and associating those with the colonial misrule in India and people's struggle aspiring for freedom made the colonial ruler cautious regarding the activities of the paper. Nazrul's articles like "Nabajug" (New age), "Dayarer Smritistambho" (Memorial Tower for General Dyer) and "Muhajirin Hotyar Jonyo Dayi Ke? (Who is Responsible for Killing the Emigrants?) exemplified strong anti-imperialist revolutionary thoughts opposing British imperialism in particular (Mitra 40). Due to such subversive writings and anti-imperialist stance, the Government gave warning several times and confiscated the paper's security money (Mitra 39-40).

After *Nabajug*'s shut down, Nazrul started *Dhumketu*, *Ganabani* and *Langal*. *Dhumketu* was virtually the literary counterpart of the terrorist movement in Bengal. Publishing the poem titled "Anandamoyeer Agamone" (The Coming of Anandamoyee), in the puja issue of *Dhumketu*, on 22 September, 1922 and demanding complete freedom from British rule, the poet and editor of the bi-weekly had to face grave consequence. The office was raided by police and he had to undergo one year of rigorous imprisonment (Zaman, Vol. 2, p. 3). The year 1922 was immensely significant in Nazrul's life and in literary-political history. Besides the publication of the bi-weekly *Dhumketu*, Nazrul published his first collection of essays *Jugabani* which was proscribed immediately and on charge of sedition, a warrant of arrest was issued against him (*Nazrul's Aesthetics* 124). In that year *Agni Vina* (The Burning Lute), the debut collection of poems was also published while he was still in jail. Starting career as a journalist in Kolkata, the poet, essayist, song writer and activist Nazrul tirelessly keeps on challenging the tyrannical British rulers and conservative social institutions.

Nazrul: An Eternal Threat to Power and Authority

Nazrul was an epitome of non-conformist rebel resisting injustices of any forms. He had the fathomless courage and will power to challenge the mighty authority. Nazrul is a glaring threat to hypocrisy, to the totalitarian authority. He was true to his mouth and works. In his "Rajbandir Jabanbandi" (Deposition of a Political Imprisoner) [1923], he uttered "I'm a poet sent by God to speak the unspoken truth, to give form to formless creation. God speaks through the voice of the poet. My message is the revelation of the truth, the message of God" (Zaman, Vol. 2, p. 201). This speech recorded in the court premises, has a strong resonance of Thoreau's spirits of subversion. Indeed, Nazrul was an epitome of Thoreauvian ideal of maintaining the preaching and practice.

In "Resistance to Civil Government" (1849), Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) opines that "the mass of the men" act not as human beings, rather as the "machines" in a state and thus they "serve the devil" (Thoreau 320). Thoreau instills a strong sense of confidence and self-esteem within a citizen so that he/she can dare to confront the ruler or government being rebellious and revolutionized. However, Nazrul stands apart amidst the mechanized mass population as a Man alive in

Emersonian and Thoreauvian fashion remaining "thought-free, fancy-free, imagination-free (333)."

Nazrul stands against institution as that creates obstacle on a person's being and becoming. He attacks the hypocrisy and hollowness in mere rituals and customs of religion. Therefore, he encounters the conventional practices of religion. In the poem "Ishwar" (God), the idea of searching for the Almighty God outside one's inner self has been ridiculed. He preaches in his own fashion that God resides neither in "forests and jungles", nor "on mountain peaks", rather He must be discovered by individual's rigorous efforts diving deep into the soul. The poet, attacking the Priesthood and Mollah, contends, the priests and Mollahs are not God's "private secretaries" that the followers have to be scared and worried. The spiritual pursuit, according to the poet, has to be relentlessly maintained by a person himself or herself. Here, he urges to open the heart and respond to the call of unity. Likewise, another poem titled "Manush" (Man) of the same volume, is marked by the poet's sharp attack on the hypocrisy of a Hindu priest and a Muslim Mollah as well. Both of them fail to express any sympathy and compassion to a poor, hungry and distressed person. In the poem, the poet underscores his belief that the fashion of maintaining religious rituals and formalities neglecting the creation of God can never beget God's ultimate blessings. He reaffirmed his sensibility by stating: "I don't worship ugliness; my God is supremely beautiful. To me He is eternally the beauty of endearment, the beauty of love, the beauty of flavour, the beauty of joy" (Zaman, Vol. 2, p. 207).

It is told that the people under the British colony, i.e., our ancestors were far more free-thinking, strong-willed with firm convictions than the people of our post-colonial time. It was easier for them to detect the enemies in the ruling colonising elites. However, in the present independent states, in the neo-colonial era, the citizens are living in a different socio-politico-cultural reality whereas they are also being ruled and hegemonized by the native elites whom Frantz Fanon refers to as privileged, corrupt bourgeoisie class who act the role of the white lords of the past colonial era (Fanon 138-141). The ruling people being detached from the common people and being deceitful create an interest-seeking spineless middle class who purposefully serve the ruling class and maintain the status quo. At such an unfortunate moment, rebellious poets and intellectuals like Nazrul are nowhere. The sycophant poets and writers

are derailing the nation with their lack of moral strengths and conviction. Here lies the necessity of studying Nazrul's works.

Now at this moment, the global politics is turning to a critical juncture. Geo-political issues, economic and cultural domination, war and conflicts are plaguing different nations. Russia-Ukraine War, unjust occupation, killing and destruction in Palestine and unprecedented humanitarian crisis, ethnic cleansing in Myanmar and Rohingya refugee crisis etc. are direct consequences of exercising power politics. In such crisis moments, peoples all over the world are raising voices against unjust war, invasion, and imperialistic policies of the giant countries. Writers, artists, singers and peace-loving peoples are always active and vigilant against any kind of aggression and violation of rights. Nazrul's poetry and writings can be source of strength and courage to combat the evil powers at this moment. Azfar Hussain, in his essay "Amader Nazrul O Garje Otha Trimahadesheeo Kabytattwa" (Our Nazrul and the Roaring Tri-Continental Poetics), finds the natural alignment of the revolutionary writers and thinkers of the third world countries with our poet Nazrul (Hussain 178). He believes the perpetual strength of Nazrul's poetry can win over the hearts of any freedom-loving, peace-loving rebellious soul to stand upright and resist at any time and any place of the world.

Nazrul: A Staunch Critic of Religious Bigotry

Nazrul exemplifies the catalyst between the two major communities of Bengal, i.e., the Hindus and the Muslims. His poetry, songs, speeches, everything provides his lifelong meditation and activism for uplifting communal harmony. In the essay titled "Hindu-Musselman" (Hindus and Muslims) [1926], he laments the narrow outlooks and prejudice that confine the communities within the wall. His articulation dissolving the parochial communal differences proves his courage, insight and pertinence of that words in today's society. He says:

> Amidst all this strife, the hope lies in the fact that Allah alias Narayan is neither Hindu nor Muslim. He does not have a beard, not *tiki*. He is absolutely clean. The reason I am so opposed to *tikis* and beards is that they are constant reminders to human beings proclaiming, "I am different, you are different." These external symbols make human beings forget their eternal bonds of blood. (Zaman, Vol. 2, p. 166)

Nazrul's assertions to shake the ground of the hypocrites and orthodoxy are matchless. He wrote the essays "Mandir O Masjid" (The

Temple and the Mosque) (1926), "Hindus and Muslims" (1926) being moved by the communal riots of Kolkata in 1926 (*Nazrul Rachanabali*, Vol. 2, p 455). Through his essays Nazrul clarifies his position, his ideological stance to religion and humanity. He claims to be a free-thinking secular, negating any form of violence in the name of religion, caste and creed. To him, humanity is above everything. He is the successor of Chandidas who, in the middle ages, unequivocally declared: Human being is the highest truth above all. Ultimately, he represents the secular, non-communal sect of this soil. He wholeheartedly believed in the humanity propagated by Lalon, Kabir, Chandidas. In his speech "Jadi Ar Banshi Na Baje" (If the Flute Doesn't Play Any More), he states: "He came on earth to eliminate the contentious relation between Hindus and Muslims, to minimize the gap between 'the mercilessly poor, indebted and greedy and the monstrously greedy'" (Zaman, Vol. 2, p. 210).

Nazrul had his own religious ideals nurtured within his inner self. He reiterated this very often that his God is not a conventional God. In his poetry, speeches and practical life he clarified his alternative vision of religiosity. In the poems of *Samyabadi* (1925), like the title poem "Samyabadi" (Of Equality), the poet tends to dissolve "all barriers and estrangements" to see Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Christians united. He vehemently critiques people's obsession with scriptures and holy books neglecting the heart—"the universal temple (Zaman, Vol. 1, p. 59)." Nazrul epitomizes interreligious dialogue, mutual exchange, love and fellow-feeling within the communities. He champions the multi-cultural co-existence in a tolerant and progressive socio-politico-cultural horizon. In the context of the present aggressive communal sectarianism and emergence of conservative nationalism, his egalitarian and philosophic outlooks tend to guide us.

Nazrul lost his health and creativity at the age of forty-three, and after that he lived thirty-four years. At that time, he was quite unable to know anything regarding incidents like the partition of India on communal ground and the birth of India and Pakistan. The Muslims' aspiration for a different land of their own and later on, the sheer disillusionment and the birth of Bangladesh, etc. would certainly move the poet if he could understand as a sane person. The ever-prevailing antagonism and mistrust amidst the Hindus and the Muslims always made him disturbed and unhappy. Therefore, all through his life, he tirelessly fought to minimize

the gap between the communities and constantly wrote for it. The riots and bloodshed between the two leading communities i.e., the Hindus and Muslims, during his time affected him and he worked to uphold humanity above everything.

Standing on the socio-politico-cultural atmosphere of this moment Nazrul's egalitarian and liberal humanist approaches are more essential than any other time. In this sub-continent the age-old communal sectarian and divisive political dynamics still plague us. People in society are still being judged by their outward identities neglecting the quintessential humanity. In Europe and America racism and mutual hatred among peoples of different identities, ethnicities, and backgrounds pose to be one of the basic challenges to tackle by the administration. In such critical atmosphere, there is no alternative of nurturing fellow feelings and humanistic qualities. To serve that purpose, Nazrul must be our destination. His poetic visions, philosophy of humanity turn to be more pertinent in today's society.

A Voice of Human Rights and Gender Equality

Nazrul envisions a society where men and women will be treated as human beings. He cherished a discrimination-free egalitarian society based on democratic spirits and fellow feelings.

In his ideological vision "Man" or human being stands as a wholistic entity where the question of class, gender, colour capture a significant place (Hussain 172). Therefore, in his poetry and works, a bigger space is allocated for the working class—the proletariats, the people of lower profile and poor status, the women and while talking regarding them he expresses his sincere concerns for all of them as if he belonged to their position as one of them. The poet engaged himself all throughout his life struggling for the cause of humanity. This relentless battle, and striving for justice are showcased in his works from the beginning to the end of his career. He appears as a rebel, as a comet in his first collection of poems *Agniveena* (The Fiery Lute), and in "Bidrohi" (The Rebel) he unleashes the supreme defiance against the misrule, the tyrannical authority and proclaims: "I am the great rebel, weary of battle, / But I will rest only when the anguished cries of the oppressed / Cease to resonate in air and sky,... (Zaman, Vol. 1, p. 41). The poet unequivocally makes it clear that

it is his ultimate mission to eradicate the oppression executed upon the poor, the subalterns.

Nazrul's lifelong struggle was to diminish the huge gulf between the rich and the poor, to destroy the oppressive system of misrule. Therefore, he questions the fashion of neglecting the working, oppressed people and the rationale of honoring the elite, corrupt class of society. In the poems in *Samyabadi* (1925) and *Sarbahara* (1926), Nazrul projects his empathy and fellow feelings towards the downtrodden larger portion of society who had to undergo an oppressive authoritative policy designed by the privileged upper class. In the poem titled "Samyabadi" (I sing of Equality), he clarifies his ideological stance at the outset by dismantling the discriminatory policy and psyche and proclaims: "I sing of equality / in which dissolve/ all barriers and estrangements, / in which are united/ Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Christians. / I sing of equality (Zaman, Vol. 1, p. 59). Nazrul sharply attacks the religious bigotry and keeps human heart and humanity above all religious scriptures. He concludes the poem asserting like "There is no temple or Ka'aba / greater than this heart!" (Zaman, Vol. 1, p. 60).

To establish a non-discriminatory society, Nazrul finds religious intolerance and prejudice fundamentally responsible. Thus, to assuage the exploitative and manipulative culture of priesthood and the Mollah (Islamic clerics) he ceaselessly attacks not any individual priest or religious leader, but the entire institution of priesthood. In poems like "Manush" (Man), "Samyabadi" (I Sing of Equality), "Ishwar" (God), the focal issue is the supremacy of humanity, the poet's faith upon the truth of the soul or heart that surpasses the religious codes and values. He vehemently repudiates the role of the priests and the Mollahs to help people get the blessings of the Almighty as a mediator. Rather, he presents an alternative vision of empowering the individual person who by way of invoking the strengths within himself/herself can avail the blessings. The religious leaders' spiritual domination and conservative practices ultimately function to hegemonize the common people who generally suffer from economic discrimination also. Nazrul's concern is to make the people free from the grip of the religious as well as social tyrannical forces.

He writes poems for prostitutes, robbers and dacoits, coolies and laborers. In "Chor-Dakat" (Robbers and Dacoits) the poet appears

defending the poor robbers and dacoits and asserts their crimes are trivial enough in relation to the crimes of elite upper class who have hoarded huge wealth cheating the wretched poor. In his consideration, their hypocrisy and honor in the eyes of society is much more dangerous and misleading than the so-called wrongdoings by robbers and dacoits. The former coolheadedly commit crimes against the have-nots and cause their sheer deprivation and distresses while the latter commit crimes just to alleviate their hunger. The poet brings here the class issue, the question of proletariats and the elites—the ever-present conflicting relationship between them.

As women constitute the half of the population and they suffer age-old patriarchal bias, the poet puts his special focus upon their status in society. Therefore, in colonial India he felt the gravity to ensure women's dignified position as a human being. Like Rokeya he had his own way of critiquing the malpractices committed by the society. In the poems like "Nari" (Woman) "Barangana" (The Courtesan) from the collection *Samyabadi* (Egalitarian), and the song "Jaago Nari Jaago" (Rise Up, Women) most conspicuously showcase Nazrul's concerns and earnestness in uplifting women's socio-political status.

Composing a poem like "Nari" (Woman) in the 1920s replete with the complex dynamics of patriarchy, power politics, women's psychological slavery and servitude etc. and above everything the commitment of establishing women's dignified position in society draw our profound attention.

In the very first line of the poem the poet asserts: I sing of equality. / In my eyes, there is no difference / Between a man and a woman (Zaman, Vol. 1, p. 67). Another striking poem titled "Barangana" (The Courtesan) appears to be more radical and revolutionary in its ideas and thought-provoking visions. The poet brings a counter-discourse challenging the dominant notion of chastity, sin, holiness, and, after all, he grants an equal, honorable status to a prostitute. With ample references from sacred scriptures Nazrul delineates that holiness is a relative phenomenon. Many of those mythological giant characters always revered by us, were sons of unmarried mothers. They have attained our utmost veneration due to their paramount virtues. Nazrul finds no differences between a legally married mother and an unmarried mother as in his eyes mother is perpetually mother. He calls "mother" to the so called "unchaste" lady and questions

the hypocrisy of society labelling the unmarried mother as "harlot" while releasing the responsible man from any kind of liabilities. The concluding lines of the poem seem to be really radical while the speaker articulates: "I see no difference between /children born out of wedlock / and those born out of lust". He continues: "If the son of the unchaste / woman is to be called a bastard, / children of unchaste / fathers must also be called the same" (Zaman, Vol. 1, p. 66). Nearly one hundred years back what Nazrul told through this poem, is almost impossible to express now in this way. In his own natural tone, temperament and taste the poet raises an issue that ultimately puts the whole male-dominated society in a soul-searching state.

In the song "Jaago Nari Jaago" (Rise Up, Women), the poet invokes supramundane energy and vitality in the women playing the role of mother, daughter, beloved, wife, sister and so on. Like the goddess Kali and Durga, the woman is envisioned to be emerging as the annihilator of evil forces and miscreants. In that call to the rising, the downtrodden ladies, the raped ones are on the forefront to lead the venture of destroying the perpetrators. Here, Nazrul dismantles the social stigma and dominant discourse related to the sexually violated women. By dint of his electrifying words even the socially abandoned women, the utterly hopeless ones can also feel the conviction to rise and stand regaining the lost force and energy. The song with its inspirational tone and expression has a potential to be a national anthem for the ladies of the entire world. The song goes like: "Rise up women—rise up like the flaming fire! / Rise up, O wife of the Sun god, / with the mark of blood on your forehead! (Zaman, Vol. 1, p. 196). Likewise, in an ardent motivational poem "Agra-Pathik" (O Pioneers) [1927], the poet enthusiastically invites the girls and women to come out and attend the procession along with other people of society to attain a cherished victory. The speaker declares: "O the darling youthful daughters of the East, / wives, sisters—your comrades are calling you! / We feel disgraced without your presence,... (Huda, Vol. 1, p. 463). The participation of the ladies, representing half of the population of the society, was so much so significant to Nazrul that he felt the urgency to call them in the journey. Here, readers are reminded of Rokeya's comparing men and women with the two wheels of a cow cart to signify the urgency of gender equality.

In the context of the present century, Nazrul's ideology and outcry for humanity, the demand for equal treatment in society resonate in a deeper implication. Amidst the capitalist and profit-oriented mode of production, the gap between the rich and the poor are ever widening. The coolies and laborers, the fishermen, the farmers, the suffering women and downtrodden people of society, of whom Nazrul cared so mush are still subjugated and suppressed by the upper-class capitalist society. In today's society, though women's status has achieved a paradigm shift in relation to the time of Kazi Nazrul Islam, this half of the population have to struggle to have an equal treatment in some places. Women are still treated as vulnerable and they remain under threat of physical assault and sexual violence. Therefore, the leading daily of the country has to make a report with the title "Gender equality remains a far cry" (*Daily Star*, np). A recent report of Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) says, in Bangladesh, nearly in every nine hours at least six women are raped (Jahan np). In global perspectives also, women become victims of varied forms of violence as World Health Organization acknowledges: "Violence against women-particularly intimate partner violence and sexual violence against women-are major public health problems and violations of women's human rights" (WHO np). The female labourers, even in this twenty-first century, do not get the fair share of the wages in work places. They are paid lower than the male counterparts. In a patriarchal, male dominated society, incidents of abuses and breach of moral values from the part of the so-called educated male colleagues are still issues to be worried. Here lies the pertinence of Nazrul's revolutionary thoughts and ideas projected in his poems, songs, essays and philosophy.

Thus, the awakening call and emotive words projected in Nazrul's poems still ring in our hearts and ears. With the poet, we also pronounce and dream to see that "The day of subjugation is over, it is gone; / No longer will man be her master. / … No longer will anyone be subordinate. / All will be equal (Zaman, Vol. 1, p. 69).

Nazrul's Poetry: Parallelism between Youthfulness and Resistance

Nazrul is a devout exponent of youthfulness in his literary career. To speak the truth, Nazrul is a poet full of passion, liveliness, and electrifying energy. With that touch of exuberant vivacity not only the youths, but also people at any age level get spirited and moved. Ultimately, the poet

defines youthfulness in his own fashion where youths are not confined in age, rather any person can hold and nurture this quality to be vibrant, progressive, strong-willed and carefree. In a speech delivered as a president in a youth conference held in Sirajganj in 1932, the poet talked on the path of the youths, old age and youthfulness, dogmatism and prejudice, confinement and women education and so on (*Nazrul Rachanabali*, Vol. 8, pp. 6-12).

In "Proloyullash" (The Ecstasy of Destruction), the new and fresh spirited souls are enthusiastically invited by the poet as they possess the regenerative power. They, like the "West Wind" of Percy Bysshe Shelley represent an exalted strength and the agent "to destroy the dead and ugly" for the "new creation" (Zaman, Vol. 1, p. 126). In a socio-political reality, where people are living within a structured and repressive condition devoid of the essential self-esteem and self-conviction, a transformation becomes inevitable. Therefore, the whole society gets elatedly ready to embrace the "pain of new creation" for the sake of achieving the cherished dreamlike society. Poems like "Agra-Pathik" (O Pioneers) [1927], "Chhatradaler Gaan" (Song of the Student Band), "Sangkalpa" (Determination), "Chal, Chal, Chal" (March, March, March) and so on embody the spirit of youth—rebellious, passionate, hopeful, and daring. The poetry dominantly encourages resistance against injustice, aligning deeply with youthfulness. The poetic vision unleashed here, characterizes the urgency to make the readers elevated with teeming emotions, and passionately involved with a strong desire to break the boundaries set by the age-old conservative society. The voices of the youths perpetually go like: "We will usher in new life / With our strong youthful arms" (Zaman, Vol. 1, p. 196).

Why did Nazrul devotedly cherish the strengths and inner beauty of the youths? In general, youths are the most lively and energetic part of the population of any society, and if their vitalities are utilized in a positive channel, a transformative difference is easily achievable. In the colonised India, the poet Nazrul had the vision to bring a qualitative transformation of the subjugated, dehumanized and degenerated condition with the help of the youthful integrity of the freedom loving souls. Undoubtedly, young generation is immensely gifted portion of any country or society. In the present context of us, one-third of the population are youths who remain between the age range of 15 to 35 years. If this segment of society is

provided with proper education, healthcare and other facilities, they can be highly resourceful and a real boon to the nation. To establish a fair treatment and democratic spirit in the post-colonial era, the young bloods may appear instrumentally resourceful. However, only proper education, congenial atmosphere and suitable tutelage are the pre-conditions to make them fit to be the change-makers in society. Nazrul's inspirational words, speeches, poems and writings still pertinently rejuvenate and guide the youngsters.

Nazrul, as a poet of activism and of the people, had intense political and cultural affiliation that led him to compose such pieces echoing their dreams, aspirations and struggles. His poems and songs written on nationalism, class awareness and insurrection touched the hearts of the mass people. Nazrul's works were beacon of the emancipatory zeal during the struggle against British colonial rule and independence movement. Likewise, later on, in moments of our other national movements while living under colonial subjugation of the West Pakistan, in people's uprisings, protestations and movements, Nazrul was the lighthouse to the whole nation. In the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971, his poems and songs inspired the countrymen to fight against the occupying Pakistan Army. In the same way, throughout the July Revolution in 2024, the rebellious youths and the people recited poems and sang the songs of Nazrul to be rejuvenated and charged with heightened emotions and spirits to hit against the despotic regime. Those songs like "Karar Oi Louho Kapat" (Those Iron Gates of Prison), "Ami Jhanjar moto Uddam" (I am as Carefree as the Storm), and poems like "Bidrohi", "Proloyullash" and many more encouraged and ignited people. The graffiti and wall-writing on every street in Dhaka and all over the country also captured Nazrul's lines of poems and songs like "Chiro Unnata Momo Sheer" (My head is held high always), "Shikal Porar Chhal Toder ei Shikal Porar Chhal" (Waresa, np). For rule of law, human dignity and non-communal discrimination-free society, his poems, songs, writings unavoidably guide us to stand upright to defeat the evil forces.

Conclusion

This research, through an analysis of Nazrul's selected poems and related works, deduces that the poet's ideological and philosophic views are deeply pertinent in our present topsy-turvy moments. Certainly, through

the reading and re-reading of the poetry, it can be asserted that the poet's all-out crusade against colonial misrule and cultural slavery makes him distinctly poignant in this post-colonial and, to be more specific, neo-colonial era. Critics of these days, believe that in terms of the gravity, depth and impacts, Nazrul can be appropriately matched with a few radical thinker-activist of the tri-continent, i.e., Asia, Africa and Latin America. Before thinkers, activists like Jose Carlos Mariategui (1894-1930), Aime Cesaire (1913-2008), Frantz Fanon (1925-1961), Amilcar Cabral (1924-1973), Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1938) and many more, Kazi Nazrul, the poet-activist of our soil, triggered uncompromising fiery words against the colonial lords and persistently emphasized on the need to stand on our own feet.

Indeed, in such a critical juncture of the global context, the present study explores how Nazrul's works and the messages have multi-dimensional relevance. In the realities of geopolitical crisis and ego-driven society, amidst ethno-religious conflicts and fundamentalism, they equally and undeniably prove to be even more relevant as we find the sparks of revolutionary spirits thickly knit in the literary pieces of Nazrul.

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Sphaira: Journal of Arts and Humanities, Volume 1, Issue 1, June 2025
p-ISSN: 3106-017X, e-ISSN: 3106-0161

Reducing Anxiety and Enhancing Motivation: Gemini AI Voice Chat for ESL Speaking Practice in Bangladesh

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Abstract

The development of English language skills by Second Language students becomes difficult when they experience speaking anxiety especially when they get limited interaction time with native speakers. An investigation into the productivity of Gemini AI voice chat as a speaking practice method for starting ESL students at educational institutions in Bangladesh was conducted. The research project used action research design to enable 25 second-year Department of English Language and Literature students at a private university, Chattogram to work with Gemini AI for four weeks and conduct interviews to extract participant perceptions. Participants indicated through testing that AI-enabled practice made them feel more comfortable than working with human peers showed lower anxiety toward mistakes. Most students found the AI system gave them beneficial feedback about pronunciation and grammar while all participants valued the system for practice accessibility. The research showed that participants experienced increased confidence for speaking after working with AI technology as opposed to using traditional teaching methods. Through the application of Self-Determination Theory and Socio-Cultural Theory the research revealed that the non-critical environment of AI met learners' basic emotional needs for competence and autonomy as well as supplied necessary guidance within their learning development zone. AI voice technology shows promise in removing psychological obstacles for speaking practice according to the research which presents practical integration ideas for ESL pedagogy.

Keywords: ESL speaking anxiety, Gemini AI, artificial intelligence in language learning, non-judgmental feedback, Self-Determination Theory.

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Introduction

The teaching of speaking skills remains a difficult task for ESL learners because they usually have restricted exposure to English outside their formal education. English language students who complete multiple years of instruction still have difficulty obtaining communicative competence because speaking remains their biggest anxiety trigger among all four skills (Horwitz et al., 1986). The feeling of anxiety during speaking hinders language learning because self-conscious students choose to shun speaking chances which actively block their needed practice time.

The difficulties in learning English pose a major problem within the setting of Bangladesh. English holds vital linguistic authority for social advancement and academic progress in post-colonial Bangladesh, so its educational system strongly focuses on teaching English to students. However, traditional approaches predominantly focus on grammatical knowledge and reading comprehension over communicative competence (Rahman, 2015). Research shows that the combination of grammar-translation teaching methods in large classes leads to students who cannot use their English knowledge effectively in real-world conversations. This grammar-translation-oriented pedagogy, combined with large class sizes and limited opportunities for individualized speaking practice, has produced what some researchers term "mute English learners"– students with theoretical knowledge of English but limited ability to apply this knowledge in authentic communication (Islam, 2019). Classroom-based communication about language learning becomes more complex because students experience social barriers from their fear of negative peer and instructor feedback.

The emerging economy of Bangladesh has experienced quick technological developments and rising digital connections across its network during the latest years. The Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (2022) reports that the nation maintains a population of over 120 million internet users while mobile phones remain the primary choice for internet access among 92% of the users. The digital technological environment creates space for traditional language education to be supported by technology-based learning methods. Research on technology-enhanced language learning in Bangladesh mainly studies general English proficiency and vocabulary acquisition and mobile

learning applications yet it does not explore psychological aspects of speaking skill development (Shams & Amin, 2020).

New speech recognition and language processing technologies help address speaking skill development problems in English Second Language education. Contemporary AI technology creates new ways to enhance speaking practice by holding meaningful conversations with students and giving immediate responses that adapt to their answers. AI conversation can help students speak more freely by offering a safe platform that reduces language anxiety when speaking to humans (Alm, 2019).

The fast-growing research on AI applications in language learning still lacks comprehensive evidence about how well AI voice chat tools build speaking abilities specifically within South Asian environments such as Bangladesh. Most studies on AI voice chat tools have focused on doing research in East Asian, European and North American regions yet studies involving their application for Bangladeshi learners remain scarce. Language learning through AI needs more research regarding psychological factors which affect motivation and anxiety reduction although these elements play a decisive role in developing speaking skills.

The present research investigates Gemini AI voice chat utility as a speaking practice tool for early learners of ESL within the context of Bangladesh. This research investigates two essential inquiries about the effectiveness of Gemini AI voice chat for beginner ESL learners in Bangladesh: 1) Is AI a more effective language speaking partner than a human in contexts where English is a second language? 2) Is AI more motivating than a human partner due to its non-judgmental and neutral nature?

The investigation of language learning psychology with AI generates knowledge about how technology should be used to overcome affective obstacles which hinder speaking growth in educational environments where traditional methods prove unsuccessful. Research derives from two supporting theoretical approaches namely Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Socio-Cultural Theory (SCT). According to Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) the optimization of motivation happens when people meet three fundamental psychological requirements for autonomy (free participation) along with competence (confidence) and relatedness (friendship). The practice environment created by AI technology responds to these requirements by letting students schedule their sessions while

remaining in control (autonomy support) then providing positive feedback without shaming (competence promotion) while allowing safe expression of concern (attention to psychological security but limited human one).

The learning process itself benefits from Socio-Cultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) because it explains the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) which defines the difference between independent performance and achievement with guidance. The automated voice chat system has the potential to serve as an assistance tool by providing immediate feedback while adapting to learner responses and remaining available for practice which makes it operate as a technological alternative to human interaction deficiencies.

Literature Review

This literature review synthesizes relevant research across three interconnected domains: speaking anxiety in ESL contexts, technology-enhanced language learning, and AI applications in language education.

Speaking Anxiety in ESL Contexts

The consistent identification of speaking anxiety represents a major obstacle for students to learn a second language specifically within traditional educational environments. The paper published by Horwitz et al. (1986) demonstrated that foreign language anxiety exists as a particular form of situational anxiety because it encompasses "self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (p. 128). Speaking situations trigger the highest expression of anxiety because learners must deal with the dual pressure of both communicating and handling social performance evaluations.

Studies of speaking anxiety in Asian ESL environments show extremely elevated levels of worry for speaking aloud. Chinese university students showed elevated moderate to high levels of speaking anxiety according to Liu and Jackson (2008), and their main source of anxiety was the fear of negative evaluation. Research conducted in Bangladesh by Rahman (2018) demonstrated that high speaking anxiety existed in 78% of university students and peer evaluations together with instructor assessments emerged as their main anxiety-inducing factors.

Speaking anxiety produces permanent effects which destroy learning outcomes in all stages of language processing. Anxiety disrupts all stages

of language processing according to the findings from MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) through the disruption of nurturing linguistic information as input then processing and generating the language as output. Four instances of negative behavior unfold as anxiety produces substandard performance leading to even greater anxiety that blocks learning progress. University students throughout Bangladesh showed lower speaking proficiency levels because speaking anxiety reduced their willingness to communicate and limited their classroom speaking activity participation according to Islam (2019).

Technology-Enhanced Language Learning

Language learning through technology has developed from basic computer-assisted language learning tools with restricted interaction to advanced mobile apps together with artificial intelligence systems that deliver customized and interactive education for students. Research has shown that speaking development technologies produce better learning outcomes than traditional classroom instruction, especially when overcoming psychological obstacles to practice.

Research into mobile-assisted language learning applications used for speech practice has successfully lowered subject anxiety of participants. The evaluation by Yang et al. (2019) showed university students who practiced speaking with mobile applications demonstrated decreased anxiety alongside improved communication desire while opposing groups who practiced only in classrooms. Mobile practice and its lack of social evaluation led to decreased anxiety according to the researchers.

The field of technology-enhanced language learning research in Bangladesh is expanding but scientific studies dedicated to speaking skill development remain scarce. Available language learning applications lack adequate feedback systems thus creating a need for improved voice recognition and grammar correction technologies according to this investigation.

AI Applications in Language Education

Enhanced artificial intelligence capabilities in natural language processing and speech recognition make new possibilities for language education emerge to solve past technological limitations in language teaching. Various studies show that artificial intelligence can effectively support speech learning. The research by Loewen et al. (2019) investigated voice-

activated AI assistants for English pronunciation training which demonstrated enhanced pronunciation precision among users who achieved greater results than controls mainly in the production of first language dissimilar phonemes.

The current analysis gains special significance because it focuses on psychological aspects within AI-assisted language learning research. Alm (2019) discovered that college students felt less anxious about AI dialogues for practicing speaking than they did when speaking with people because AI communication provides a judgment-free environment along with no evaluation concerns. Student language users according to Cunningham (2019) thought AI partners made perfect spaces to fail since the AI provided judgment-free practicing environments.

Previous research investigated the specialized benefits of AI feedback systems as an important educational factor. At present AI technology provides detailed immediate feedback about pronunciation together with grammar and vocabulary use during online speaking practice sessions. Learners consistently valued receiving immediate feedback according to Dizon (2020) because it helped them improve their speaking skills and prevented errors from becoming permanent.

The investigation of AI-assisted language learning benefits utilizes Self-Determination Theory as well as Socio-Cultural Theory as valuable theoretical frameworks. This dual approach evaluates the motivational aspects of linguistic learning as well as the social developmental processes which build competence through language use to explain AI-assisted practice benefits that the research investigation aims to find out.

Methodology

Research Design

The researcher used action research design to examine how effective Gemini AI voice chat was in helping beginner level ESL students master speaking abilities. He used action research because this approach best suited their investigative needs since it combines systematic inquiry with an understanding of contextual learning factors that affect educational outcomes. The methodology fits both the study's evaluation of AI educational tools as well as the approach to psychological barriers which prevent ESL speaking practice in Bangladesh.

The research framework adopted from Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) included four sequential stages which started from planning through action and observation and ended with reflection. Researcher decided to work with Gemini AI voice chat as their intervention during the planning phase because it achieved the dual goals of being accessible and interactive to address speaking anxiety barriers among Bangladeshi ESL learners. The researcher deployed this technology during its action phase by introducing it as a support tool for initial English language speakers. Research data collection through semi-structured interviews took place in the observation phase to collect student experiences and perceptions. The research phase of analysis involved examining all findings with the goal of determining both the intervention success rate and its consequences for ESL education approaches.

The investigation prioritized qualitative research methods because it focused on subjective experiences of AI technology use instead of measuring linguistic development parameters. The researcher chose this method to reflect how the study primarily focuses on psychological aspects of language learning through anxious reduction and enhanced motivation which can best be studied through qualitative research on learner experiences and perceptions. Moreover, the researcher employed response pattern quantification to identify common experiences and major trends presented by study participants.

Research Context and Participants

The research took place at Premier University Chattogram Bangladesh which opened its doors as a private higher education institution in 2002. Premier University's Department of English Language and Literature delivers courses about English language and literature studies and offers classes in language development and linguistics as well as literary analysis.

Twenty-five second-semester students from the Department of English Language and Literature at Premier University made up the study participants. A research sample containing beginning-level English learners was obtained through purposive sampling because they had attended secondary school before entering university. Researcher obtained participation from 16 female students with 9 male participants between the ages of 18 and 20 years. Bangladesh university entrants typically have 12

years of English language instruction from their secondary education period based on the findings of this study.

The study included second-semester university students as their anxiety toward speaking in English at this level is commonly high during their transition. Primary university students face difficulties in speaking skill development because they move from using grammar-translation methods at secondary level to communicative methods in higher education.

All students obtained extensive details about the research purpose and procedures before participating as part of the process which followed institutional ethical guidelines for consent. Students remained free to join or stay out of the study because their academic position and course marks did not depend on their choice. The researcher ensured participant confidentiality by assigning numerical IDs to all participants instead of using personal names while anonymizing data throughout the research process.

Implementation of Gemini AI Voice Chat

Gemini AI voice chat entered the implementation stage by becoming a supplementary speaking practice enhancement for participants during their normal language learning activities. Gemini AI obtained selection as the intervention tool based on its effective natural language processing combined with accurate voice recognition and its capabilities for conversational interactions.

Participants received a ninety-minute training session regarding the use of Gemini AI platform before its deployment. The session displayed voice chat capabilities while showing users how to reach the app from smartphones, tablets and computers followed by practice activities examples. The participants learned detailed instructions involving the start of conversations together with voice recognition setup and different practice functionalities. The researcher devoted time to resolving technical concerns that helped participants smoothly use the technology system.

Participants received a four-week directive to utilize Gemini AI for speaking practice with a minimum duration of 20 minutes for three sessions per week which accumulated to 4 hours total. Participants conducted this AI-based practice along with their standard English language coursework which needed both traditional teaching methods and

peer-to-peer interaction lessons. They carried out different speaking exercises with the AI system:

1. Free conversation on topics of personal interest
2. The participants engaged in structured dialogue sessions specifically about their course educational material.
3. Pronunciation practice for challenging phonemes
4. Question-and-answer exchanges to build fluency
5. Role-play scenarios for contextual language practice

The participants kept brief logs throughout their sessions to track their practice activities by listing duration, discussion topics and recorded technical problems. The implemented team used weekly log collection to ensure program participation status and detect any technological shortcomings needing modifications. Throughout the four weeks of implementation the researcher supplied continuous technical guidance to resolve problems that users might face when accessing or utilizing the technological system.

Data Collection

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with the whole group of 25 participants following a four-week implementation phase to obtain information about their experiences with the speaking practice tool Gemini AI. The designed interview questionnaire prioritized the research objectives and enabled participants to discuss new aspects related to their encounter with Gemini AI which exceeded the initial questions. The interviews lasted from thirty to forty-five minutes during which English served as the main language, yet participants used portions of Bengali when needed to express intricate feelings and experiences.

He obtained permission from participants for audio recordings which he transcribed word-for-word into analyzed data. The interview transcripts went through member checking because participants received access to their recorded dialogue transcriptions so they could verify the accuracy of statements representing their true experiences. The member-checking process increased data trustworthiness through confirmation of proper representation of participant meaning in transcripts.

The participant activity logs provided additional information to interview data about system usage patterns and technological problems and the practices options selected for training purposes. The participant-

generated logs helped the researcher gain practical details about technology implementation while allowing them to contextualize the interview answers.

Data Analysis

The data analysis of interview interviews relied on Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis model. Qualitative data analysis used this approach because of its ability to reveal meaning patterns while supporting strong methodological standards and its flexible performance. The research analysis followed these textual phases: (1) data familiarization, (2) initial code development, (3) theme detection, (4) theme assessment, (5) theme definition and naming and (6) report generation.

The researcher completed independent initial coding which led to a comparison process for resolving differences before refining the coding categories. He validated the analysis by comparing their coding results to prevent researcher subjectivity and confirm the true data patterns in the study findings. Negative case analysis served as a method for recognizing and addressing data points that opposed emerging patterns to integrate all minority views into the analysis. The researcher analyzed the interviews and observations to examine why it differs from the previous study.

The researcher conducted an analysis using qualitative and quantitative research methods. He primarily analyzed participant experiences using qualitative methods, yet he measured the occurrence of specific responses by calculating percentages of participants who showed particular perceptions or experiences. Through a mixed analytical method researcher gained detailed insights into how participants felt while showing statistical evidence about which perceptions were most common in their sample.

Results

The analysis of interview data revealed several significant patterns in participants' experiences with Gemini AI voice chat as a tool for developing English speaking skills. These findings are organized into four thematic categories: (1) comfort and anxiety reduction, (2) feedback and skill development, (3) accessibility and practice opportunities, and (4) motivation and confidence building.

Comfort and Anxiety Reduction

Most participants felt comfortable with English speech practice through Gemini AI because they perceived it to be superior to traditional sessions with instructors or classmates. Research data revealed that 92.3% of participants found AI interaction to be less anxiety-inducing since multiple participants detailed psychological factors leading to their comfort. Someone who used Gemini described how interacting with the AI system eliminated their concern about others judging their accent and laughter at their language mistakes (Participant 7). Participant 7 said," I didn't have any fear to be judged by anyone". The participant expressed, "We could dedicatedly express our ideas without feeling anxiety."

Nearly all 97.4% of students noted improvements in their speaking anxiety for mistakes while using AI virtual tutors as opposed to human language partners. The direct result of reduced anxiety led participants to increase their willingness to practice language for extended periods. The participant stated they use basic sentences whenever interacting with classmates due to their worry about grammatical mistakes with complex sentence structures. I select challenging sentences and advanced vocabulary with Gemini since the AI learns from mistakes without causing discomfort to me. "I select challenging sentences and advanced vocabulary with Gemini since the AI learns from mistakes without causing discomfort to me", stated Participant 13.

The participants explained that their AI practice sessions differed from traditional classroom practices because social norms in those settings increased their speaking apprehension. Students from this cultural background show reluctance to expose mistakes publicly because it can result in reduced status. During classroom sessions I feel anxious for others to evaluate my English speaking because everybody believes students majoring in English need perfect speaking abilities. The platform lacks cultural expectations that influence social interactions since it operates without human characteristics. Participant 4 stated:

During classroom sessions I feel anxious for others to evaluate my English speaking because everybody believes students majoring in English need perfect speaking abilities. The platform lacks cultural expectations that influence social interactions since it operates without human characteristics.

A small minority of 7.7% among the participants expressed dual or conflicting emotions regarding their interactions with AI systems. The participants admitted to experiencing decreased judgment pressure from AI yet they expressed disappointment with the absence of human interaction quality when it comes to free-flowing natural conversations and emotional connections.

Feedback and Skill Development

Perceptions about AI feedback effectiveness toward pronunciation and grammar remained generally constructive with increased variation compared to the reduction of student anxiety. Most students (87.2%) received valuable feedback from Gemini AI which met their demands as novice learners. The participants emphasized the immediate feedback they received because it helped them fix mistakes instantly rather than practicing errors permanently.

Multiple participants highlighted the need for precise explanations with corrections because these explanations helped them learn how language rules work and how to detect patterns. A student expressed that Gemini provides both proper word forms and teaches the grammar principle alongside multiple usage demonstrations when they commit mistakes. "This learning method enables me to understand both my mistake's cause and its incorrect nature", stated Participant 16.

All students who participated in this review stressed that the detailed pronunciation corrections improved their learning experience better than past education methods. The students reported that Gemini demonstrated in detail how they should position their lips and tongue exactly for producing the 'th' sound which has always been difficult for them. "My instructors normally identify my mistakes but fail to show me the proper correction steps", according to Participant 3.

The feedback received positive feedback from most participants but 10.3% felt it was suitable in some but not all situations and 2.5% believed the feedback was too basic for their needs. All these participants wished to receive expert evaluations that provided detailed analysis focused on their personal speech habits.

Accessibility and Practice Opportunities

Almost all participants (97.4%) found the continuous availability of practice opportunities from AI technology to be a major advantage due to

the barriers they experienced in finding human partners. Users emphasized their struggles to find native players during non-school hours for practice because AI enabled immediate access. Students explained:

> Finding someone to practice English with after class is very difficult. Bengali remains the primary language my school friends use after class time except when we learn together in English. Additionally, I do not know anyone who speaks as a native English speaker. Whenever I want to practice, I can access Gemini (Participant 11).

Almost nine out of ten participants increased their speaking practice after the AI tool became easily accessible resulting in more frequent usage. The students incorporated short practice periods throughout their daily lives because Gemini provided access which remained impossible when working with human partners during their practice sessions. The participant stated, "There are occasions where I previously lacked someone for practice" (Participant 18).

Many students valued AI practice because the tool provided them with dedicated privacy which helped them feel secure when preparing for public speeches. One student stated to me that practicing with Gemini enabled private sessions to become possible: "Because no one can overhear your mistakes. Speaking in my classroom becomes easier because I have already tested verbalization through my private practice sessions" (Participant 2).

Motivation and Confidence Building

AI interaction produced positive effects on motivation and confidence development, yet its effects varied from the other positive impacts depending on participants' experiences. A majority of 82.1% of participants described increased English use confidence after Gemini AI practice which surpassed their traditional classroom experience. The participants frequently linked their increased confidence levels to the growing number of anxiety-free practice sessions that allowed them to develop speaking competence.

Most students (92.3%) stated that AI interaction helped them feel more relaxed about their accents and speaking abilities because the AI maintained a neutral response to their English linguistic output. Students noted that AI programming always supports them without judgment while focusing solely on certain sounds that hinder understanding. The

participant developed better understanding that their accent fulfillment needs clarity in communication rather than native perfection (Participant 19).

82.1% of study participants found their confidence levels improved better than face-to-face learning although 17.9% voiced uncertain responses on this metric. The participants valued aspects from AI systems as well as human interaction for their individual purposes. Participant 22 stated that "The AI system builds their grammar and vocabulary confidence, yet they require classroom practice to build true comfort with unpredictable human responses" (Participant 22).

Quantitative Summary of Results

The table presents a quantitative summary of the key findings across the four thematic categories identified in the analysis.

Table

Participants' Experiences with Gemini AI Voice Chat (N=25)

Experience Dimension	Positive (%)	Neutral (%)	Negative (%)
Comfort with AI vs. peers	92.3	7.7	0.0
Reduced anxiety about mistakes	97.4	2.6	0.0
Helpfulness of feedback	87.2	10.3	2.5
Value of accessibility	97.4	2.6	0.0
Increased practice frequency	87.2	10.3	2.5
Enhanced confidence	82.1	17.9	0.0
Comfort with accent/speaking style	92.3	7.7	0.0

This quantitative report reveals mainly positive results through all examined dimensions while showing exceptional results for anxiety relief together with convenient access and comfort using an AI speaking system.

Discussion

This research identifies essential understanding about how AI voice chat technology helps resolve ESL speaking development difficulties particularly for Bangladeshi learners. The research findings are evaluated through Self-Determination Theory and Socio-Cultural Theory alongside practical ESL instruction suggestions and acknowledged research limitations that set directions for future investigation.

Theoretical Interpretation of Findings

Self-Determination Theory Perspective

The research results gain meaningful interpretation when evaluated through basic psychological needs described by Self-Determination Theory. The study shows that optimal learning engagement emerges when students find their environments support autonomy and competence and relatedness according to Deci and Ryan (2000). The analysis reveals Gemini AI enhances autonomy together with competence but does not deliver straightforward results regarding relatedness support.

Research participants documented a considerable reduction in speech-related anxiety (97.4%) which establishes more advantageous conditions for satisfying the need for competence. The normal speaking environment with high evaluation anxiety forces learners to feel incompetent after making mistakes which damages their sense of basic psychological need. One participant (number 12) expressed that mistake appeared as valuable learning opportunities rather than learning failures when interacting with the Gemini system. Psychological safety allows learners to convert handling errors from threats to their competence into growth possibilities which strengthens rather than weakens their sense of competence.

Users value autonomy through AI practice because they have complete control over their practice time as well as duration and content selection according to participants' feedback. The practice initiation freedom through personal scheduling choices noted by 97.4% of participants brings students from controlled training settings toward self-led decision-making. A participant specifically revealed their empowerment when they stated, "I determine both when to practice along with which subjects to study and set the length of each session and decide when to seek feedback." According to Participant 5 this control system enables personal accountability for improving themselves.

The connection between AI-developed programs and human social requirements creates a nuanced analysis of the situation. The research indicates that certain students could find the autonomous nature of AI interactions safer for language learning at the beginning stages due to the absence of judgment from AI versus human connection. Participant 15 emphasized, "I can see Gemini does not represent real people but intriguingly this fact enables me to feel comfortable sharing myself."

SDT explains that students develop inner motivation when their external classroom rules bind to their sense of self in positive learning environments that fulfill basic psychological needs. Participant feedback shows that autonomous learning attitudes are developing which implies the internalization process is taking place because their original external English-speaking motivations centered on classes and grades are transitioning into personal improvement and communication targets.

Socio-Cultural Theory Perspective

The Socio-Cultural Theory framework enhances our understanding of AI interaction's language development potential when providing progressive support in the Zone of Proximal Development. Vygotsky (1978) demonstrated that education develops through social activities which guide students toward tasks they would achieve alone when proper support steps away to encourage self-development.

Specific feedback from Gemini AI about both pronunciation and grammar effectively acts as technological support which operates with 87.2% participant approval within the ZPD. AI feedback differed from peer reviews because it was both prompt and direct and from instructor reviews because time limits did not constrain the feedback process. The AI guidance smoothly connected current performance to potential performance levels. The research participant stated that Gemini suggests words during pauses but also notifies users about sentence structure mishaps as they speak (Participant 20).

AI delivers adapted learning assistance to students according to their individual needs, which effectively supports their development inside the ZPD. Users explained how the AI system adapted its explanation difficulty to their skill level while reducing error alerts when they demonstrated progress. According to Participant 10 Gemini initially corrected almost every sentence yet adapted to providing feedback only about new mistakes while the student confirmed mastery of previously practiced patterns.

According to SCT theories language self-regulation develops through a step-by-step process of social mediation that transforms other regulation into self-regulation. The self-monitoring abilities of users seemed to advance through repeated encounters with AI which indicated the internalization process took place. "I discovered my mistakes in

pronunciation first during classroom activities before teachers would mark them because I had practiced with Gemini. The participant became able to detect differences in their speech because of hearing sound examinations from Gemini", stated Participant 23.

The research findings indicate that intelligent AI devices could perform the task of mediation when no sufficient human contacts are accessible. Current AI technology falls short in supporting entire socio-cultural dimensions of language because of recognized restrictions among participants in their pragmatic language usage.

Practical Implications for ESL Instruction

Complementary Role in Language Curriculum

Research results from this study generate important implications for teachers in ESL classrooms specifically aimed at minimizing speaking anxiety barriers for students in Bangladesh learning English. According to these results AI voice chat technology functions best as an additional training element in holistic language education but not as substitute for human educators. AI interaction brings distinct abilities to overcome common speaking challenges within language development because it decreases anxiety levels and provides adaptive practice together with instant feedback.

The best way to integrate artificial intelligence would involve using AI-assisted training before human exchanges to create staged progression from fear-free repetition to real dialogue. Based on responses, the structured aid provides students with an ascending path to develop their public speaking abilities which links private learning to real-life classroom interactions.

Addressing Psychological Barriers

Research results demonstrated that AI-assisted practice provides high anxiety relief through AI-assisted practice indicating that this method holds great value for removing emotional hurdles blocking speaking development. Instructors teaching language arts should consider using AI practice for learners who show high speaking anxiety since this environment lets students develop essential confidence before they move to peer interaction. The educational approach treats anxiety as an educational and instructional obstacle beyond being only an individual psychological problem.

Research evidence demonstrates that adding direct recognition of speaking anxiety during language education improves the results achieved through technological methods. The development of anxiety recognition in language learning may assist students to understand AI exercises as bridges to improved communication skills instead of technical drills.

Equity and Access Considerations

The accessibility advantages of AI practice raise important equity considerations for language education policy. The AI voice technology offers practice potential to students who experience limited English-speaking environments because of their socioeconomic status and rural location. Technology implementation needs directing towards solving accessibility problems which require all students to have proper devices and internet connectivity to ensure new educational disparities do not arise.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The research delivers crucial details about AI voice chat as an ESL speaking development tool, but researchers should note its essential limitations. The research used mainly a qualitative action research design to understand participant experiences since it did not incorporate comparison groups or objective speaking skill assessments. This approach yielded detailed knowledge about the aspects of AI keystroke learning, but it does not enable researchers to demonstrate how AI practices lead to measurable language achievements. Research should integrate mixed methodologies to study learners' perceptions and objectively evaluate their speaking capabilities both prior to AI intervention and following its implementation.

An implementation duration of four weeks appears too short for observing lasting effects from using AI-assisted practice. Research conducted over time with AI tool users would reveal whether early positive experiences lead students to continue using these tools and compound their growth in spoken English abilities.

The participant sample only included English Language and Literature university students who might demonstrate a stronger intrinsic motive to learn languages compared to typical students. There is a need for future

studies to evaluate AI-supported speaking practice through population assessment that encompasses students from diverse academic backgrounds at various proficiency levels across different age groups.

Conclusion

The effectiveness of Gemini AI voice chat on English speaking skill development among beginner ESL learners in Bangladesh has been studied together with its effects on their speaking anxiety levels and motivational factors. AI-assisted speech learning presents major advantages for handling mental obstacles during language delivery together with practice possibilities that basic ESL programs currently lack access to. Participant data shows AI-assisted speech interaction established for targeted speaking skills compared to typical language learning methods.

Multiple mechanisms within AI-assisted language learning benefit speaking development according to the analysis done through Self-Determination Theory and Socio-Cultural Theory. A motivational setting emerges from SDT-based analysis because of the reduction of anxiety stress along with practical control of activities and targeted feedback support students to maintain their study focus. The targeted scaffolding of immediate feedback in the system allows students to learn in their ZPD according to Socio-Cultural Theory while they develop both language and self-regulatory skills.

These research findings present meaningful implications which apply to general language acquisition psychology instead of focusing exclusively on the evaluated technology. Educators need to treat speaking anxiety as both a personal psychological issue and a major instructional obstacle which demands special teaching approaches because this treatment enables effective support for learners who face difficulties producing language.

The future of AI language modeling research may aim to resolve the identified problems in this analysis to create better assistance for students' communicative competence growth. Current artificial intelligence applications make a beneficial additional contribution to full language learning but only when educators understand their particular benefits and weaknesses for language instruction.

Appendix/Questionnaire

The interview process used semi-structured questions to which investigators made purposeful probes according to participants' answers.

1. What is your comfort rating regarding English speech practice between Gemini AI and human peers and educators?
2. Your experience with AI-based practice changed your fear levels regarding English speaking errors in any way.
3. How would you evaluate the feedback that Gemini AI provided to you regarding both pronunciation and grammar? The feedback your system provided you how beneficial it was in your learning process.
4. The accessibility of using AI for practicing spoken English differed from getting opportunities for human partners for practice.
5. The use of Gemini AI shaped your willingness to practice English speaking activities.
6. The utilization of Gemini AI modified your English proficiency self-confidence when speaking in different situations.
7. What problems or barriers appeared when utilizing Gemini AI to train your speaking abilities?
8. Which features in AI speaking exercises do you believe need improvement to increase their effectiveness for your language acquisition?

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Sphaira: Journal of Arts and Humanities, Volume 1, Issue 1, June 2025
p-ISSN: 3106-017X, e-ISSN: 3106-0161

Childhood Trauma as a Narrative Tool in *An Artist of the Floating World*

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Abstract

This article argues that childhood trauma functions as a significant narrative tool in Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World*, impacting protagonist Masuji Ono's emotional development and ability to remember major events over the course of his life. Situating the novel within the context of Ishiguro's own formative experiences, the article utilizes Eric Tribunella's theory of trauma as a tool for characters' maturation and Lydia Kokkola's suggestion that unresolved trauma can 'haunt' characters in adulthood as a framework for examining how trauma informs Ono's characterization. With Ono as a primary example, the article shows how Ishiguro uses childhood trauma as a driving force behind the irresolution and deception his novels and characters are known for.

Keywords: Childhood, trauma, narrative tool, Kazuo Ishiguro, identity

Acknowledging the significance of childhood trauma to Kazuo Ishiguro's authorial identity, I argue that unresolved childhood trauma serves as a useful lens through which to examine the emotional stagnation and self-deception of Ishiguro's characters. Ishiguro's works are well-known for their themes of memory, regret, and irresolution, yet the role of childhood trauma in shaping these narrative tensions remains underexplored. Utilizing Eric Tribunella's theory of trauma as an "enabling injury" that triggers growth in child characters, I demonstrate how Ishiguro uses childhood trauma as a narrative tool, not by presenting trauma as a catalyst for maturation, but as an unresolved wound that perpetuates emotional stasis in adulthood (xiv). This pattern is especially evident in Ishiguro's

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second novel, *An Artist of the Floating World*, where protagonist Masuji Ono's inflated self-image, unreliable narration, and reluctance to confront his complicity as an Imperialist artist are deeply rooted in formative trauma inflicted by his father. The objective of this article is twofold. First, I aim to establish a link between Ishiguro's authorial identity and childhood trauma. Second, I posit that because of this link, childhood trauma can be used as a lens through which Ishiguro's characters may be analyzed and more deeply understood. In this article, I highlight Ono as an example of how childhood trauma not only informs Ishiguro's works but also functions as a narrative device that complicates and stunts his characters.

Ishiguro's own formative experiences provide necessary context for considering his work through the lens of childhood trauma. When discussing his oeuvre, Ishiguro scholars often find it pertinent to reference the author's childhood move from Japan to England ("Like Idealism" 29; Wright 83). This move, which occurred when Ishiguro was just five years old, is frequently depicted as a difficult, possibly traumatic, experience for the author. Ishiguro acknowledges the trauma of this experience; when asked about an emotional 'upheaval' in his life, he explains, ""Not during my writing life—there's no sort of monumental, big thing. There's nothing equivalent to, say, my moving to Britain from Japan as a child"" ("Like Idealism" 325). This massive event in Ishiguro's life informs many of his works, most notably his debut novel, *A Pale View of Hills*, which features a woman named Keiko who commits suicide as a young adult while struggling to adapt to life in England after immigrating from Japan as a child. Less explicit connections to Ishiguro's childhood can be found in many of his other novels, most of which are set in England or Japan. Contemporary British literature scholar Małgorzata Hołda notes of Ishiguro's writing: "Melancholy and grief permeate his fictions, all of which, as critics seem to agree, arise from the author's own separation from his Japanese origins" (41). Within the context of Ishiguro's own childhood trauma, the personal significance he places on his move from Japan, and the scholarly recognition of the ways traumatic childhood events may inform his writing, examining the role of childhood trauma in his narratives becomes a necessary step in understanding his characters and their experiences. Yet, when considering Ono from *An Artist of the Floating World,* scholars tend to overlook the role of childhood trauma.

Set in post-World War II Japan, *An Artist of the Floating World* follows Ono, a former Imperialist artist, as he navigates aging, loss, and family dynamics in his later life. Pride is one of Ono's most prominent traits, one that, the novel heavily implies, drives him to the point of delusion. Once a distinguished and revered artist, Ono is now viewed by many as a misguided traitor, though he struggles to recognize that his public perception has been tarnished post war. As he narrates the story, Ono emphasizes his highly respected status. The novel opens with a recounting of the "auction of prestige" that led to Ono being selected to own the home of influential figure Akira Sugimura (Ishiguro 9). Ono narrates, "I can still recall the deep satisfaction I felt when I learnt the Sugimuras—after the most thorough investigation—had deemed me the most worthy of the house they so prized" (Ishiguro 10). Later, he feigns humility as he acknowledges, "I am often surprised afresh when some event, or something someone may say, reminds me of the rather high esteem in which I am held" (Ishiguro 19). Yet, throughout the novel, there are indications that Ono is not as socially revered as he would like to believe. Most notably, Ono's eldest daughter, Setsuko, implies that the unsuccessful marriage negotiations for her younger sister, Noriko, are due to her father's reputation as an Imperialist artist. Ono fails to accept this reality, insisting instead that Noriko's potential in-laws "feel uncomfortable at the thought of their son marrying above his station" (Ishiguro 19). Ono's self-serving delusion is characterized by scholars as an "obtuse resistance to the truth" and an "obsession for social standing" (Abrams 980; Jafari et al. 130). The tension between Ono's ego and his real public perception is a driving force within *An Artist of the Floating World*, becoming a central focus of those who approach the novel critically.

When considering the causes of Ono's inflated self-image and stunted self-awareness, many scholars focus on the artist's professional identity and role as a father. Ishiguro scholar Ivan Stacy, for example, believes that Ono's altered memories stem from "difficulty of grasping the relationship between decisions and their later results," as he fails to process the less-than-favorable perception of his career as an Imperialist artist (242). Other critics point to his familial responsibilities as causes of his personal denial. Cynthia Wong believes, "An examination of Ono's trait affectivity—such as politeness that shrouds arrogance, or memory failure that works as an

evasion of truth—would disclose how he double-exposes his unwarranted self-importance as a nationalist painter before the war in order to appear as a devoted and caring father" ("Emotional Upheaval" 201-2). Similarly, Hołda claims, "Ono's revisiting of his professional, public past is instigated by the requirements of his private, family life. He constructs a sense of a proper self in order to save his daughters' well-being" (49). From this perspective, Ono's role as a father is the driving force behind his delusion. With Ono's daughter Noriko's previously failed marriage negotiations as a central plot point in the novel, Ono could very well be denying the ramifications of his career and inflating the prominence of his work to protect his family. In fact, there is a lot of discussion between Ono and his eldest daughter, Setsuko, about taking "precautionary steps" to protect his image in order to support Noriko's new marriage negotiations (Ishiguro 49). Ono refuses to accept the reality of his tarnished reputation in an effort to preserve his prestigious career and secure his family's status. However, while Ono's concerns about his professional reputation and role as a father certainly impact his skewed perception of his life, they do not paint the full picture of his experience and characterization.

It would be neglectful to suggest that Ono's attempts to preserve his elite career or his family's status have no impact on his skewed self-image and memory, but I believe that, more than these elements of his life, the childhood trauma he suffered at the hands of his father drives the personal conflict that prevents him from accepting the reality of his adulthood. To understand Ono's motivations fully, his childhood must be considered. Further, I argue that Ishiguro uses unresolved childhood trauma as a tool for developing Ono's character and explaining his inability to maturely recognize the unfavorable aspects of his life and career.

My analysis of childhood trauma's role in Masuji Ono's emotional development in *An Artist of the Floating World* is grounded in Eric Tribunella's theory of trauma as outlined in *Melancholia and Maturation: The Use of Trauma in American Children's Literature.* Tribunella suggests that trauma occurs when "a child is forced to relinquish a loved object, often through the untimely death or loss of that object" (xii). In children's literature, this loss often propels the child toward growth and maturity as they confront and process their emotional injury. According to Tribunella, "the sacrifice of loved objects works as both a catalyst for and process of maturation," allowing child characters to transition into adulthood by

navigating and overcoming trauma (xvii). While Tribunella focuses on American children's literature, his trauma theory is applicable to Ishiguro's works because of the connections to childhood trauma in the author's life and novels. However, rather than using trauma to facilitate growth, Ishiguro portrays characters whose unresolved childhood traumas stunt their emotional development. In *An Artist of the Floating World*, Ono's failure to confront his childhood trauma prevents him from achieving genuine self-awareness or emotional maturity.

Ono's childhood trauma can be identified in a memory of an evening when his father calls him into the family reception room to discuss Ono's desire to become an artist. As Ono's father criticizes his son's dreams, the traumatic loss of a loved object that Tribunella uses to define childhood trauma can be interpreted in multiple ways. Most literally, Ono's father destroys (or is assumed to destroy) all of his son's artwork. After Ono brings a pile of his paintings into the reception room upon his father's request, his father questions him, "'Are you sure all your work is here? Aren't there one or two paintings you haven't brought me?'" (Ishiguro 43). When Ono confirms there are more pieces, his father comments, "And no doubt, Masuji, the missing paintings are the very ones you're most proud of" (Ishiguro 43). Ono returns with the remainder of his paintings and becomes increasingly conscious of the burning candle and ash pot positioned next to his pile of artwork. His father asks him to leave the room, and, later, Ono observes there is a "smell of burning" in the house (Ishiguro 47). Although Ono does not directly see his paintings being destroyed, his observations of the candle, ash pot, and burning smell imply that, at the very least, Ono believes his father burned his artwork. This perceived loss, especially of the paintings he is "most proud of," signals a trauma for Ono (Ishiguro 43).

In addition to this physical loss of loved objects, another traumatic loss can be interpreted through the development of Ono and his father's relationship in the reception room scene. Before dismissing Ono, his father openly criticizes his dream of becoming a professional artist. Ono listens, eyes to the floor, as his father explains, "'Artists... live in squalor and poverty. They inhabit a world which gives them every temptation to become weak-willed and depraved'" (Ishiguro 46). When Ono's mother interrupts and suggests there may be a select few artists who achieve respectable, successful careers, his father responds, "The handful with

extraordinary resolve and character. But I'm afraid our son here is far from being such a person" (Ishiguro 46). As Ono listens to his father's perception of his personal character and dream career, he experiences the loss of his father's support and approval. Both the physical loss of his prized artwork and the emotional loss of his father's respect make this moment a traumatic experience for Ono.

Ono's childhood trauma becomes more significant to his character because it remains unresolved. As a narrative tool, Tribunella believes that trauma for child characters is "an enabling injury, one that both triggers maturation and constitutes maturation. Trauma makes a certain kind of mature adulthood possible" (xiv). As child characters process and work through their traumas, they grow. However, in Ono's case, his childhood trauma remains unacknowledged and therefore does not inspire growth. After suspecting that his paintings have been burned by his father, Ono immediately avoids confronting the issue. Referring to his father's actions, Ono tells his mother, "[I]t doesn't bother me in the least" (Ishiguro 47). The mere inclusion of this scene in Ono's narrative recounting of his life and career signifies that it is an important occurrence, yet neither child Ono nor adult Ono, who is recalling the story, acknowledges the impact of the interaction with his father. The lack of reaction to or reflection on the event suggests that it remains an unresolved occurrence in Ono's life. Recognizing the process of experiencing and then working through trauma as a narrative tool for child characters' development, Ishiguro prevents Ono from growing into a fully mature adult by leaving his childhood trauma unprocessed and therefore unresolved.

Connections to Ono's childhood trauma in his adult narrative further emphasize the significance of the event with his father in the reception room. Building on Tribunella's childhood trauma theory, Lydia Kokkola suggests that when child characters are not able to process their traumas and therefore do not fully mature as they become adults, "the world of childhood can 'haunt' the adult" (191). For Ono, the 'haunting' of his unresolved trauma can be seen in the motif of a burning smell featured throughout his memories and present actions. As he narrates the story of his life and career, Ono mentions a burning smell several times. When he meets with his former colleague, Matsuda, he again recognizes the smell and confesses, "'The smell of burning still makes me uneasy... It's not so long ago it meant bombings and fire'" (Ishiguro 200). As he acknowledges

the anxiety brought on by burning, Ono connects his fear to the recent world war and the loss of his wife and son, who died in bombings. Yet, readers are not given an experience with the wife and son to connect to Ono's fear. Instead, they are given the scene with child Ono and his father, which happens to be the first time that a "smell of burning" is mentioned in the novel (Ishiguro 44). Although the loss of his wife and son could be a contributor to his fear of burning, the repeated phrase "smell of burning" creates a direct, textual connection between the presumed burning of his paintings as a child and his recounting of events as an adult (Ishiguro 44, 200). The recurrence of a burning smell in Ono's life and memory is demonstrative of the pervasive presence of his unresolved childhood trauma in his adult life.

Ono's unresolved trauma also reappears through his actions, most notably during confrontations with fellow artists. During his time as an art student, Ono takes part in a punishment of a peer named Sasaki who is determined to be disloyal to their teacher after changing his art style. Disapproving of Sasaki's work, his fellow art students take his paintings from him. When Sasaki decides to leave the firm, he goes to each of his peers, begging for the return of his missing paintings. The taking of Sasaki's paintings mirrors Ono's own trauma from his father confiscating his artwork, which he never saw again. Ono lies in bed and listens as Sasaki gets closer and closer, going to each artist's room to ask after his stolen work. Eventually, Sasaki is close enough for Ono to hear him plead, "Won't you just tell me where the paintings are?" (Ishiguro 142). No matter how desperate his appeals become, Sasaki is met with silence. Given the unreliable nature of Ono's memory throughout the novel, it is possible that he is not simply overhearing this conversation but is actually being spoken to directly by Sasaki. Regardless, as Ono listens silently to his peer's suffering, he evokes the same traumas he faced as a child when his paintings were taken by his father. His own wound remains open as he inflicts pain on his fellow artist.

Later, as Ono reflects on his falling out with his former protégé, Kuroda, he details the moment he witnessed police destroying Kuroda's artwork. After Ono once again notices a "burning smell," he is informed by an officer that "It's our policy to destroy any offensive material which won't be needed as evidence. We've selected a good enough sample. The rest of this trash we're just burning" (Ishiguro 183). The moment is

complicated by the fact that Ono's report to the Committee of Unpatriotic Activities is what prompted the police to search Kuroda's home and subsequently burn his artwork. Although Ono makes brief attempts to prevent the burning of Kuroda's art when talking to the police, even referring to his paintings as "fine works," the fact that the destruction of Kuroda's most prized paintings happens as a direct result of Ono's actions remains palpable in the scene (Ishiguro 183). As Kuroda's work burns, readers are reminded of Ono's belief that his father once burned *his* artwork; this time, though, Ono is the one inflicting the pain. These events, marked as significant through Ono's retelling, resurface the artist's childhood trauma for both readers and Ono himself. Undeniably, the night in the reception room continues to 'haunt' Ono in adulthood.

As it remains unresolved, Ono's childhood trauma becomes a narrative tool which signals tension for Ono's character. In Ishiguro's writing, irresolution often emerges as characters struggle to confront a personal or ideological truth. Noting the trend of irresolution in Ishiguro's novels, Stacy explains that Ishiguro's works "embody irresolution through their formal properties, however, and do so specifically through their refusal of closure in terms of the characters' relationships with the events that they recall" (241). In *A Pale View of Hills*, irresolution is used to expose the ongoing guilt Etsuko feels regarding her daughter Keiko's suicide. In *Remains of the Day*, Stephens' irresolution shows that he is unable, or unwilling, to recognize the personal and ideological sacrifices he'd made in favor of serving the British elite. In *An Artist of the Floating World*, Ishiguro's portrayal of Ono embraces a resistance to closure by reinflicting Ono's childhood trauma through motifs and action. Irresolution, then, becomes a reflection of Ono's misguided character, beginning with his childhood trauma. In a 1995 interview with Maya Jaggi, nearly ten years after publishing *An Artist of the Floating World*, Ishiguro explains, "'[W]hen we're talking about things that go wrong fundamentally, at the heart of somebody's life, we are often talking about family and things early on—something crucial to do with emotional bereavement or emotional deprivation'" (23). Again, Ishiguro emphasizes the impact that early childhood events can have on someone's life. Contextualized by Ishiguro's characteristic use of irresolution and his focus on difficult childhood events, Ono's unresolved childhood trauma becomes a narrative tool that can serve as a lens through which his motivations, actions, and development can be considered.

As a narrative tool within *An Artist of the Floating* world, childhood trauma becomes not only a sign of Ono's stunted development, but also a prominent reason for the unreliable memories related to his life and career. As Ono recounts moments from his life, he openly admits to possible misremembering. Early in the novel, Ono tells readers that he has "never had a keen awareness of [his] own understanding," highlighting a lack of self-awareness that may impact the way he is retelling his memories (Ishiguro 21). More explicitly, he often acknowledges discrepancies in the stories he tells. After remembering a conversation with Noriko's first marriage prospect, Miyake, he wonders, "Did Miyake really say all this to me that afternoon? Perhaps I am getting his words confused" (Ishiguro 57). Postcolonial scholar Charles Ponnuthurai Sarvan describes the inconsistencies in Ono's memory, writing, "[H]e tries on the one hand to understand the past... and yet on the other evades full comprehension and acknowledgement" (94). Ono's admissions of misremembering, along with his inflated ego, make him a decidedly unreliable narrator.

Ono's unreliable memory further exposes the delusion with which he views his status and career. Ono constantly references his flawed memory as he discusses his life events with readers, but when he is discussing the prestige of his career or the level of respect with which he has been viewed, there is no mention of any possible discrepancies. He confidently recalls the way his students responded to his presence, explaining how at bars after hours, he'd engage in conversations and quickly notice how his students "would all break off their own conversations... It was as though they never talked amongst themselves without having an ear open for another piece of knowledge I might impart" (Ishiguro 72). Ono even directly quotes some of the praise he's received; he recalls a time when a colleague nicknamed the Tortoise tells him, "'But truly, Ono-san men like you are all too rare. It is an honor to be a colleague of such a man'" (Ishiguro 71). Although Ono recognizes the possibility of misremembering his own words in the conversation with the Tortoise, saying, "These, of course, may not have been the precise words I used that afternoon," he makes no mention of the Tortoise's word-for-word praise being represented inaccurately (Ishiguro 71). How is it that Ono cannot remember a conversation with Miyake that happened only a year ago, but he can perfectly recite a colleague's compliments from decades in the past? Although Ono's account of his career highlights elite prestige and

high status, postcolonial scholar Timothy Wright explains that "there are strong hints that Ono's story might be more banal than he is willing to admit" (66). Given the nature of Ono's unreliable narration as it is presented throughout *An Artist of the Floating World*, readers will recognize that, like other moments from his past, Ono's memories of praise and accomplishment might not be accurately portrayed through his retellings—something Ono himself is not willing, or able, to admit.

Considering the role of childhood trauma in the novel, Ono's inability to recognize the unremarkable nature of his career is a means of protecting himself from the unresolved feelings stemming from his father's rejection in the reception room. With a father who only valued rare artists with "extraordinary resolve and character," Ono attempts to justify his career choice by emphasizing his accomplishments and prestige (Ishiguro 46). Considered alongside Ono's childhood trauma, the trend of his retellings—openly admitting inaccuracies with most memories, but feigning precision and accuracy with memories of career-related praise and success—gains significance as a manner of protection for Ono's character as his trauma continues to impact his adult life.

Ono's motivations in memory manipulation and deception become more clearly linked to his personal childhood trauma (rather than to the preservation of his family's status) as Noriko's new marriage negotiations progress. Ono believes that there is an understanding of professional respect between himself and Noriko's potential father-in-law, Dr. Saito, who is a well-known art professor. However, after dinner with the Saito family, Setsuko tells her father, "[I]t would seem [Dr. Saito] was unaware that Father was connected with the art world at all until last year when the negotiations began" (Ishiguro 193). If Dr. Saito, a prominent figure in the art community, had no prior awareness of Ono's work, it is all but confirmed that Ono's career was not as prestigious as he seems to remember. With this revelation, the role of Ono's career in Noriko's marriage negations is effectively diminished. Yet, even when directly confronted with the knowledge that the status of his career has had minimal impact on Noriko's potential marriage or the perception of his family, Ono is still unable to admit that his career wasn't so renowned. Reflecting on Setsuko's comment, Ono claims, "[I]t is impossible that Dr. Saito could have been ignorant of my reputation as a painter for all those years" (Ishiguro 194). Then, despite his consistent recognition of his own

unreliable memory, he insists that he has "the most vivid recollection" of a day when Dr. Saito complimented his art career, and reiterates, "I remember that meeting quite clearly and there can be no doubt that Setsuko is mistaken" (Ishiguro 194). Ono's continued insistence on receiving professional admiration from Dr. Saito even after it is revealed that his art career was not recognized by the professor and therefore has no influence over his daughter's negotiations shows that Ono's trauma-induced internal need for validation is his greatest motivator in altering memories, not his role as a father.

Ono is a complex character, and no single element of his life could act as the sole reason for his inflated pride and unreliable storytelling. As scholars such as Hołda, Stacy, and Wong have noted, the loss of his wife and son, a veiled awareness of the implications of his career, and Noriko's failed marriage negotiations may all contribute to his inability to confront the less-than-ideal reality of his work as an Imperialist artist. However, given the importance of childhood trauma and irresolution in Ishiguro's life and writings, Ono's childhood trauma provides necessary context from which to understand his motivations and actions. Recognizing childhood trauma as a narrative tool within *An Artist of the Floating World* reveals that the night in the reception room created a lasting, possibly devastating impact on Ono's character. Remaining unresolved, this trauma continues to 'haunt' Ono throughout his career and adulthood, ultimately encouraging his inflated self-image and unreliable memories. While fatherhood and guilt are significant elements of Ono's life, his childhood trauma must be considered to fully understand his character.

By identifying childhood trauma as a significant factor in Ishiguro's own life and, by extension, his authorial identity, this article establishes that childhood trauma is an intentional and significant narrative tool in Ishiguro's texts. To examine how childhood trauma impacts character development in Ishiguro's narratives, the discussion draws on Tribunella's theory of trauma as a tool for characters' maturation and Kokkola's extension of that theory, which suggests that unresolved trauma may stunt emotional growth. Together, these approaches create a framework for examining how childhood trauma, when left unresolved, may influence adult characters' ability to process, remember, or react to emotionally significant events over the course of their lives. Ono serves as a strong example of this phenomenon; the evident trauma he faces in childhood is

reflected in the apparent delusion he exhibits when recalling the events of his adult life, an issue that is central to *An Artist of the Floating World*. By connecting the unresolved events from Ono's childhood to the unreliability of his present-day memory, this article demonstrates how unresolved childhood trauma is a central influence within the novel.

Ono's characterization offers a compelling case study of childhood trauma as a narrative tool, but this pattern of trauma-induced irresolution extends beyond *An Artist of the Floating World* and resonates throughout Ishiguro's oeuvre. Ishiguro's preoccupation with the lingering effects of childhood trauma can be observed in characters like Kathy H. from *Never Let Me Go*, Klara from *Klara and the Sun*, or even Niki from *A Pale View of Hills*, all of which present avenues for further exploration. As I have shown with Ono, a recognition of the significance that childhood trauma holds in both Ishiguro's life and writing allows for a more nuanced understanding of his characters' development, opening opportunities for exploring how trauma shapes narrative structure, irresolution, and notions of personal responsibility across his body of work.

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