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**Post-War Trauma, Otherness, Ownership and Fluid Identities in
Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient***

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The English Patient has been described as Michael Ondaatje's attempt to understand the basic essence of humanity beyond all restraining discourses of national boundaries and ownership. This view is chiefly an account of the novel's decided negation of the rigid nationalistic ideologies that provoke a destructive scenario as played out in the murderous Second World War culminating in inconceivable extremities in the form of nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. There is also an assertion of a fluidity in terms of personal identities when the constructed otherness of human beings is placed in a no man's land where the sole motivations are interpersonal connection and mutual affinity. This paper reads the novel that won the 1992 Man Booker Prize for Fiction, to suggest how it is not only a dramatization of the popular post-war detest of inhumanity of the techniques of modern warfare, but also an informed study of the gross distrust of territorial claims and debates on nationalism which were engendered as a result of the traumatizing loss of human lives in pursuance of the unquenchable thirst of establishing rigid identities and dominance of a select few on the pretext of complete demonization of a racialized other.

Keywords: fluid identities, nationalism, other, ownership, racial, trauma.

The contextual backdrop and the human portraits of Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*, make it a work of world literature that is at once universal in its themes and local in setting. Ondaatje's initial claim to fame rested centrally on the success of the novel and its impact on the literary scene is such that it was recently awarded The Golden Man Booker Prize in a one-off commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Booker Prize, from among all the competing titles

that won the Booker prize since its inception. He is renowned today as a poet and novelist who presents an authentic depiction of the contemporary war-fraught modern world and the complex human condition. His concern with wars and the resultant brutality is movingly reflected in works such as *The English Patient*, *Anil's Ghost* and *Warlight*. The present paper reads *The English Patient* as an amalgamation of several aspects in making a complete evaluation of the socio-political conditions during the Second World War. The immense loss of life and disrupted sense of being that resulted after the war generated a deep-seated, incomprehensible trauma that is visually and psychologically dramatized in the novel. The paper also studies how othering of the characters, based on their ethnic, gendered and regional affiliations, makes them vulnerable to hate and violence. However, in the reductionist setting of a decrepit house, seemingly in the middle of nowhere, the grip of ownership and national identification are removed, compelling the characters to assume fluid roles and to reassess their place in the world in relation to others simply on the rudimentary essence of being human.

The primary scene of action occurs during the culmination of Second World War with characters reeling under the impact of its extremities. This post-war trauma that looms large by the middle of the novel and later with the crucial reference to the atomic bombings, is the key factor in directing their actions. Whereas the protagonist suffers a life-threatening burn and escapes death only to be triggered constantly with the painful memories of his past, the nurse who tends to him struggles to find a father figure in him, trying to make amends for her absence when her father needed her. The Canadian spy who bears intense physical torture at the hands of the Italian forces carries the trauma as kindling for revenge and his suspicion of the patient's identity unsettles him for the same reason. Otherness in the novel is represented through various aspects such as racial and gendered forms, and also through mental and physical abilities. Ownership is another problematized concept in the novel, be it personal or territorial. Kip does not feel at home serving the British in the war due to his realization of the ownership the imperialists have unjustly commanded over their colonial subjects, which turned them into the racial other who is both possessed and abused. Almásy's memories of being tied to Katherine as well as his desire for a world without territories

manifest his angst at being delimited to any particular personal, racial or national identity since all such attachments lead to conflict. Ultimately, fluid identities are at the core of the novel as they place the characters in a setting with no external specifications other than being a safe house for people lost in the torrents of the war. Doubts regarding Almásy's national identity that form the title is the subject of debate throughout the novel and everyone speculates whether he is British, German or Hungarian. But, identities of other characters also keep on shifting according to their gendered roles, such as Hana taking up the role of nurturing the patient to that of an alien in her attempts at uniting with Kip. Even Kip's identity as a once colonial subject to the defending sepoy of the British and then a lover of a Canadian woman causes him to reflect on contemporary conditions from varying points of view.

Set in a small villa in post-war Italy, the novel develops enticing themes of love, friendship, healing and belonging, which people all over the world can relate with. As a quintessential novel within the categorical domain of world literature, it stands out as a representative piece owing to its fulfillment of what are identified to be the primary qualities of such a work: 'universal themes and values' which render the specifics of culture and locality as 'secondary or irrelevant' (Damrosch, 2003: 213). In the post-war chaos and minimalist setting which nevertheless reinforces the survival instinct of all the characters, *The English Patient* shines bright due to its conscious attempt to figure out the basic essence of humanity beyond all restraining discourses of national boundaries and ownership. It narrates how nationalistic ideologies could be destructive and how identity is a fluid concept. Individual identities can be transformed under duress. The work reveals how nation in itself is not a problem but that nationalism can be a menace (Ratti, 2013).

It is intriguing how the characters who appear at the abandoned villa named Villa San Girolamo, once a war hospital dedicated to attend to the British soldiers and even before that as a lodging for the Germans, find a new home away from the particulars of their original identities and thereafter, with the passage of time, forge new relationships and sense of belonging that transcends their deeply ingrained nationalistic loyalties. Belongingness to a place, home and people is a universal trait, and the novel emphasizes its potency. The threatening backdrop of

a cruel war which ends up cornering people of different nations, even some supposed enemies, within the traceable range of the villa and the desert surroundings, serves to state that personal identities are fluid and often undergo a shift when away from the predominant discourse which impacts human behaviour; their human essence enables them to garner a sense of belongingness bereft of all radical socio-political narratives. The landscape then is closely tied to the concept of nationalities and identity formation (Irvine, 1995: 139-45). Equally fascinating is the parallel between the lived experiences of Michael Ondaatje and his characters in the novel. Born in Sri Lanka, Ondaatje spent most of his early years moving across nations owing to the conflicting married life of his parents and their separation which at first brought him to England at the age of eleven and then back to Sri Lanka for a short duration after which he returned and moved on to Canada. These dislocations brought their own share of bearings for the author as he acknowledged in an interview with Eleanor Wachtel: “They were all traumatic moves for me, but I don’t think I showed it very much” (Wachtel, 1994: 259). Being on the move for much of his young life, Ondaatje suffered a loss of friendships and felt a desire to belong. Just as the characters in the deserted terrain of the novel’s setting find belongingness far away from home in the midst of a war zone, Ondaatje’s lived experience of moving from his homeland to Canada and then coming to develop a sense of belongingness to it defines much of what ails the characters in the novel. Ondaatje came into his own as an author in Canada and such propinquity helps him identify as a Canadian rather than Sri Lankan or English. He describes the characters in his novel to be seeking to escape the limiting bounds of nationalities and ownership: “Those migrants don’t belong here [in the villa] but want to belong here and find a new home” (Wachtel 260). The notion of home gets a redefinition in the dense text of the novel where belongingness appears not so much a sentiment rooted in place but more as attachment with the people. It is further crucial to note here that these people come from disparate, even seemingly combatant identities, but their loyalties shift in the face of altered circumstances and the rekindling of innate humane traits in the light of which the outer world of insensate warfare seemed to be an indiscriminating threat.

The pervasive adverse impact of a hazardous war colours the world of the novel and plagues the psyche of the characters to a debilitating extent:

It is still terrible out there. Dead cattle. Horses shot dead, half eaten. People hanging upside down from bridges. The last vices of war. Completely unsafe. The sappers haven't gone in there yet to clear it. The Germans retreated burying and installing mines as they went. A terrible place for a hospital. The smell of the dead is the worst. We need a good snowfall to clean up this country. We need ravens. (24-25)

The plot becomes a dramatization of the inner turmoil and enervative trauma of the characters trapped in the midst of the abominable brutality of the war zone. The protagonist, László de Almásy is the most direct victim of the havoc wrought by the war since the fiery opening of the novel where he survives a plane crash though not without severe burns which almost completely disfigure his face. This defacing frames the structure of the work, for it is on account of his severe burns and his English accent which he picked up through a long contact with the British cartography group, he is able to delude others into believing that he is an English soldier, even though he happens to be a Hungarian count and a desert explorer. However, this is not solely a deliberate attempt as the shock of the disastrous events send the patient into a terrible schizoid state where the external chapped skin functions as a symbolic marker of his deeply disjunctive psychological state. The narrative becomes available through constant flashbacks which appear to him in random and uncontrollable series, and he is unable to establish a clear difference between his past actions and his present identity. These schizoid themes then play out in the larger external setting too, with the erasure of boundaries between the self and the other, projected on to inanimate entities such as the desert which gets depicted as a woman, a desirable object and a property for possession. Hana, a young Canadian Army nurse, who becomes the principal caretaker of the patient is harrowed by the trauma of her own troubled past and her failure in saving her father who also died of burns. The primal motive of her conscious decision to stay back to serve the English patient while all of her group relocated further along the way is the deep-seated desire for “a symbolic connection with the absent and painful figure of the father” (Younis, 1998). To her, the patient is a saintly figure who suffers doubly from the physical as well as the psychological taxation of the catastrophic war, the gross extremities of which

make him denounce the existence of God in the Nietzschean fashion, whereby it is professed that there never was a God but a figment of man's imagination, fabricated by the inability to grasp the insurmountable mysteries of the physical universe (Nietzsche, 1887).

David Caravaggio, the Canadian thief turned spy for the Allies in the Second World War, is a character that undergoes a great deal of physical torture on being captured by the Italian forces fighting from the Axis side and he returns to Italy fueled with smothering vengeance. He informs that he became friends with Hana's deceased father before his death in the war. His successive attempts at manipulating the patient into revealing his true identity originate from his belief that the English patient is actually a Hungarian man named Almásy, who was known to serve the Germans during the war as he being a desert explorer, was well-acquainted with its dialects and people. He even assisted German spies get past the desert and was frequently referred to as the English spy owing to his prowess at the British accent. The cause for this belief is a conversation between him and the patient in which he suggests some specific names as Cicero, Zerzura and Delilah for naming a stray dog, which only Almásy would, as these names were used as code names for the German spies. Hence, according to him, the patient was a representative enemy deserving to be eliminated for his act of assisting the Germans. Thus, external motivations constantly trouble the superficial calm of the villa and mingle with personal grievances to reinforce the nationalistic agendas. Kirpal Singh, referred to by the nickname Kip during the major portion of the novel, is a Sikh sapper from the side of the British army and he is the central figure of the prototypical Other in the novel as he is the colonized man who has adopted and appropriated the ways of the colonizer and even supports them in their strategic endeavours of diffusing bombs and booby traps that Germans laid all over the place. It is Kip who introduces the idea of the possible existence of active mines in the villa and the surrounding regions as an act of commination to the security and peace of the place. His heartwarming simplicity and his artless demeanour make him close to Almásy as well as the centre of Hana's affections. As an active agent in the ongoing war and as a saviour of Hana and the English patient, Kip's character always reminds the reader of the fragility of the sense of safety that the villa symbolizes and even as

the novel closes with the thunderous news of the nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the US forces, his disgust at the very idea of the demise of humanity and 'Englishness' as a phenomenon that generates all the conflicts in the world, indicates his feeling of being unwittingly involved in the genocide by siding with the colonizers even though the precise nature of his job is to deactivate the explosive mines to save innocent lives. After the atomic bombings, Kip "seeks rightful vengeance upon this worthy representative of the Anglo-Saxon world view", although with Caravaggio's exposing of his identity as a Hungarian, "who had worked as a spy for the Germans during the war", he is able to leave him to his destiny (Sahib, 1993: 96). The decapitating trauma of the war causes Almásy to retract into the deep recesses of his psyche wherein, under the induced effects of morphine, he narrates the saga of his adulterous relationship with Katharine Clifton who had accompanied his desert exploration team with her husband Geoffrey. This narration of the past tragedy and the traumatic bearings it has for the survivor offers a sort of "talking cure" which not only enables Almásy to showcase his agony but also reconcile with his trauma (Visvis, 2009: 89). The moving intonations of Katharine's voice coupled with the fireside readings of Herodotus' *Histories*, apart from informing the structure of the work in their several overlapping motivations, turn into a symbolic ritual which invoke the animalistic desires of Almásy turning into an almost sadomasochistic relationship, but also end up arousing a need for belonging in a land sans boundaries and territorial signifiers. This brief connection between the two becomes the cause of agony when Katharine suffers a plane crash, from which Almásy is unable to rescue her, even though he turns over to the Nazis to seek help, going against the grain. The final moments of necrophilia with Katharine's dead body in a cave, awaken the fantasies of something lost but still very alive within him, thereby generating a schizoid condition. Even though the trauma is incommunicable owing to the limitations of language or narrative in representing it, the novel does not suffocate helplessly in this inability of expression and rather the characters through all their shared stories and personal angst appear to work through (LaCapra, 2002) their individual traumas by fostering mutual connections and differentiating their past and the present in the hope of the best possible resolution which they even achieve to some extent. Thus, lives of the characters in the

fictional world of the narrative are disrupted and even modified in post-war uncertainties and a rapidly altering world order.

The novel questions racial otherness and the concept of national identity in several significant ways. It deeply concerns itself with the critical postcolonial issue of “the identity crisis that has taken hold of the contemporary man as a result of the imperialist/native confrontation” (Sahib, 1993). Not only are the characters displaced in a neutral setting, their very identities are brought into abortion through the clutter and the clamour of the war zone, through the imprecise fixity of the desert region, and through the very structure of the text that contrasts the conflicting nationalities in a survivalist mode. Due to its pinning of the nationless state on the different characters, the *other* in the narrative shifts in accordance with the changing focal point. In terms of racial otherness, Kip appears to be the most representative character that stands for the Orient while all the other characters, despite all their glaring and conflicting differences, come from the Occident, as Hana observes:

She learns all the varieties of his darkness. The colour of his forearm against the colour of his neck. The colour of his palms, his cheek, the skin under the turban. The darkness of fingers separating red and black wires, or against bread he picks off the gunmetal plate he still uses for food. Then he stands up. His self-sufficiency seems rude to them, though no doubt he feels it is excessive politeness... It was as much a result of being the anonymous member of another race, a part of the invisible world. (95-96, 145)

This is similar to the originating idea of otherness in debates on gendered identities wherein the female is often found to be defined and *othered* in comparison to the male, relegated almost universally to the categorical status of the second sex (Beauvoir, 1952). The colour of Kip’s skin is mentioned several times in the narrative right from his enlistment in the British bomb squad to his descriptions by other characters and he is practically neglected by other young men of his company simply on account of his Indian descent: “He was accustomed to his invisibility” (196). This neglect of him based on the colour of his skin becomes the reason for Hana to be drawn to him, as she too found herself disregarded by others in life. In the colonial discourse, along with other racial bias, the colour of skin becomes a sort of fetish which, as Homi Bhabha claims, “is the most visible of fetishes, recognized as ‘common knowledge’ in a range of

cultural, political, and historical discourses, and plays a public part in the racial drama that is enacted everyday in the colonial societies” (1994: 112).

Kip’s otherness in his skin tone also aligns him with the English patient for he too, suffers severe burns which not only disfigure his body but also blacken his skin thereby causing others to cast aspersions on his identity. The patient is a white man with a ‘black body’ and the colour of skin becomes the reason for Caravaggio to doubt his lineage and even coming to think of him as an enemy. The patient however, is *othered* on more grounds than one. He is most visibly *other* on account of his physical disability that makes him reliant on the other characters in the novel for psychological and physical sustenance. His dependence on Hana is crucial for without her devoted support and care he might not have lived long enough to revisit his memories. He becomes marginalized even as his identity as the English patient comes under a scanner, and even though it is a false one, it provides him the privileged and protected status his real identity would not have. Caravaggio’s racial origins as well as his participation from the side of the enemy lead on to his othering in the most chilling ways which diminish all boundaries of physical conduct in which the Italian forces sever his thumbs in the most gruesome corporeal punishment. Hana too, is othered on multiple accounts, for being a woman and a nurse; she is on the caretaking side of the whole mess and so othered on account of her role too, as she is in charge of assuaging the consequences that the warring men leave behind through their senseless acts of death and destruction, and her sense of duty does not allow her to forsake the patient even if it causes a danger to her own life. It is however, again significant to observe that her decision to serve the wounded patient springs less from her ethical commitments as a nurse than from the trauma of missing the death of her father. Thus, in a Freudian sense, her desire to witness the exact moments of her father’s death, the unfulfilled desire to reverse the turn of events, the futility of which ultimately has traumatic implications, just as the inability to awaken on time has agonizing realizations for the father in Freud’s dream of the burning child, become significant (Caruth, 1996). The patient’s similar dejected state, which was also induced through severe burns, prolongs the final moments of her father’s demise and by looking after the patient, even with the cruel realization that he would not survive, offers her redemption.

In the active and throbbing world of masculine rage, Hana is the *other* just as Katharine Clifton is, for both are accorded passive roles of providing for the needs of the male figures in the novel, even when the titular character is rendered almost incapable mentally and physically. Therefore, in comparison to the external world of a violent war and its destructive repercussions, the characters in the fragile interior domain of the villa are all viewed as others.

One of the most crucial concerns that structure the framework of the novel is that of ownership which is closely tied to the themes of multiple identities as well as to the believed ends of the war. The novel is basically about ownership of land, of relationships of nationalities and this is demonstrated through the protagonist's controversial character which is a blend of many things. He belongs to nowhere, and yet, he is seen as English due to the way he talks. He is suspected to be Hungarian because of the things he subconsciously reveals. Like other characters, he does not own the desert or the villa. His relationship with Katharine is only a passing phase and he bears no claims to it, first, as she was married to a man who owned her like a commodity, and second, as she dies untimely. Almásy's clearly worded disgust of ownership defines his disgust for both ownership of relations and territorial regions. In one of his reminiscences, he expresses hatred of being owned and urges Katharine to forget him as soon as they are separated. In another significant statement, he claims how he desired to live in a world without maps and borders, without the limiting concepts of nationalities (hence his inclination for desert exploration for the vast stretches of the unexplored region affords him a sense of freedom and escape from restricted existence). Despite these passionate claims, his actions evince a contradictory reality. His work in cartography is the most evident diffusion of his statements as he worked tirelessly making maps and charting out borders into the desert region, thereby planting territorial markers on a land free of human expansion. Moreover, in his relationship with Katharine, he becomes involved in an unalterable tussle with Geoffrey Clifton, whose wish to have sole authority over his wife, as expressed in his impassioned speech regarding the love of one's wife, causes their saga of stolen moments of bliss to end in a rather tragic culmination with her death. Katharine dies of what Geoffrey claims to be his hamartia – uxoriousness. His Englishness, however mistaken, contrasts him with Kip's oriental position as a secondary pawn in the predefined

ideological board, wherein Englishness comes to represent an ownership attitude and not just affiliation to a particular nation. Kip's zealous remark in response to the news of atomic bombings, when he is about to shoot him, is crucial: "American, French. I don't care. When you start bombing the brown races of the world, you're an Englishman" (210). Kip is a transitional figure in the novel as he is at once owned and liberated. He is able to escape his identity through adoption by English parents but when they die, he is again faced with the bitter realization of being an outsider in the Western world. He becomes conscious of his country still under the rule of the people he has come to serve, and therefore he too is colonized and owned even if to a second degree.

On a psychological level, the terror and blatancy of the war render the cognitive faculties of not just Almásy, but all other characters playing their part in the larger war drama, being owned and manipulated by the existential crisis that loomed large all around them. For the patient however, he could move through the borders and exist in the thrill of his desert exploration in a nationless state even prior to the compulsive thrust of such realization on the other characters. By the time he is found by the Bedouin people and reaches the villa, the patient has lost his identity, his physicality and even his impulses but the instinct to possess, to demarcate and to *own* still reverberates through intermittent flashbacks. The question of ownership is certainly one of desire but in a typically characteristic fashion, it is very much a Western concept since the outside world is still lost in frenzy, with nations still fighting and killing on the pretext of identities. Most of all through Kip, Ondaatje highlights how the position of the Eastern subject in the all-pervasive chaos is volatile and contrasted with the Western motivations of annexation, possession, dominance and control. Through whatever limited respite offered in the safe zone of the villa, the identities of the characters exhibit fluidity in multiple ways.

The most crucial theme that underlies Ondaatje's novel is the issue of national identities and what they stand to promote or deny. But, with the fragility of the particular circumstances, these identities are challenged, nullified and displaced. The identity of Almásy is almost unanimously accepted to be of an Englishman despite the blackened colour of his skin, and in this, the fluidity of national identities is expressed even before the events in the novel commence. Working

for the British, and finding a belonging to the desert for its typical characteristic of dispossession and freedom, despite the human claims to map its topography, Almásy makes a subconscious adaptation of their ways and through the turn of events and the burning of his skin beyond recognition, is able to transform his identity with a divine intervention. The basic tenets of theories regarding identity formation and function establish that identities have both cognitive and emotional processes informing them and they work at both conscious and unconscious levels (Burke and Stets, 2009). In the case of Almásy it is largely owing to the emotional basis of identity that he submissively accepts the English identity mistakenly accorded to him as his cognitive faculties come under a marked duress due to the violence of the war. Hana's personal perceptions cause her to fit into the requisites of her gender identity as a female nurse. Thus, she is always devoted to caring for the needy and compensating for her absence from the final scene of her father's death. It is these perceptions of her traumatized self that push her to control the set of events this time with the patient in order to symbolically revoke the failure she faced with the death of her father. Caravaggio's identity as a thief and later on a spy is also removed from the present in which he finds a connection to Hana, as he is the last person to see her father before his death. He comes repeatedly in conflict with the patient, despite their initial bonding, as the external uncertainties pressurize him and fuel his desire for revenge.

Kip's identity, however, is the most problematically marginal, highly fluid and yet intricately related to that of Almásy in the notion of the "international bastards" that he purports at one point in the text referring to the migrant status and the quest for belonging that they both are subject to (Ondaatje, 1992: 126). Claiming themselves to be international bastards, Almásy seems to be oblivious of the privileged position that is available to him as a Western subject, whereby he can make a conscious choice of losing his identity, whereas Kip is a colonial subject whose country has been annexed by the colonial power and he continues to serve them in order to escape his roots (Novak, 221). At best, he is in a transition phase between the old and the new cultures and even through the narrative, we rarely come to know about his past or his belonging in his own words. In other words, he still functions as a marginalized colonial subject as visualized by the privileged Westerners and all we know about his past is through third person commentaries

of the other characters, thereby relegating him to an inert position where he is denied the agency of choice. The fluidity however appears in Hana's passions for this exotic young man who captures her attention beyond all the differences of their cultures and affiliations. The genuine concern with which he expresses his concern for her and decides to clear the villa of any active explosive traps that the Germans might have set up, and his truthful concern and love for her as an individual lay down the foundation of a love story that is alive even after they are separated by the vast interruptions of distance, time and space. Ondaatje develops him as fully as he does the character of Almásy, and even though, the text seems to revolve around the troubled memories of the English patient, Kip brings a depth and signification of his own through the duality of his character. The characters in the novel exhibit fluid identities despite the contradictory and pugnacious differences of their national origins. They are able to realize as well as expose the hollowness of ethnic and nationalistic prejudices that often provoke the worst selves lying dormant in the people by making emotional appeals to their sense of self-pride and belonging. Cultural hybridity runs deep through the narrative, providing a safe haven for the characters to shake off their given national identities and assert their human selves in the reductionist setting, even though by the end of the novel, national identities re-impose and through Kip's reassertion and acceptance of his Sikh identity and subsequent return to India, the fundamental divide between the East and the West is reemphasized (Bolland, 2002). They also experience a sense of belonging to this place which they have no obvious prior connection to and to the others of a different race, who have suddenly become one in their essential humanity and in their mutual plight of facing an indiscriminately decimating war.

Michael Ondaatje's novel functions as a subtext of the contemporary reality of havoc induced by the devastation of the Second World War which overturned the ways of the world. Through its persistent safeguarding of the delicate bond that the characters develop between them, the novel reiterates the message that it is the rigidity of our fixated identities that makes us hate others enough to eradicate them, but in our essence, we are all living and breathing individuals with the same needs to belong, to survive and to seek love.

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A Rejected Estate of the British Empire: Triangle of Tea, China and Assam

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Trade with ancient Asian traders like China and Burma was always at the forefront of the British East India Company's policy in the Northeastern frontier of Bengal or Assam, specifically, China with whom the Company had a trade negotiation of tea. Thus, entering into China was of special significance and several British fortune hunters were experimenting with it. No other parts of the British Indian empire had a direct linkage with China except the Northeastern frontier. Despite this proximity this region was not considered valuable to be included into the empire. Thus the article aims to analyse the reasons behind such a drastic departure from the general law of mercantilism otherwise followed across India and how later it was this tea trade with China that turned upper Assam into one of the most important agricultural estates of the British empire after repeated rejections.

Keywords: tea, upper Assam, empire, East India Company, China.

British Tea Trade with the Celestial Empire of China

Although Bengal was occupied by the EIC in 1764, right after the Bauxar war, till 1788 there was no mention of Assam in British administrative parlance despite being geographically adjacent to the former. The first official recognition of the possibilities of trade with Assam was published in the *Calcutta Gazette* on 21 August 1788 (Scott, 1864: 262). Although the region was not yet annexed by the Company, its geographical proximity to Southeast Asia was taken seriously. The Company was not the first to use Assam to intrude into China. Mohammed-Bin-Bakhtiyar-Khalji, the commander in chief of Qutub-Ud-Din Aibak had also

adopted the same strategy with the ambition of furthering his victory in Tibet and China after establishing supremacy over Bengal (Baruah, 1998:179).

There was a total of sixteen European companies like the Spanish, Prussian, Dutch, Portuguese etc. who left no stone unturned to brighten their trade fortune in the far East but none could become as successful as the EIC due to its tea trade with China (Mintz, 1985: 112). The then British Queen was so satisfied with the efficiency of the Company in importing and smuggling Chinese tea, that in 1721 she granted the world's largest tea monopoly to it. Absence of any rival in this economic sector strengthened its financial condition unprecedentedly and it became the first company to initiate propaganda on behalf of a beverage (ibid). Within a few years, this trade helped the Company to emerge as a formidable rival of states and empires with power to acquire territories, command fortresses and troops, form alliances, make war and peace and exercise both civil and criminal jurisdictions (ibid:112).

However, for this success the British had to tolerate the 'haughty pride'¹ of the Chinese Government, albeit resentfully. China was a self-sufficient economy and almost all its basics were produced within her own territory and scarcely had she any need for the European products which the traders tried to sell or exchange. This self-sufficiency gave her a unique upper hand in her dealings with the Europeans who in turn became dependent upon China for tea, a position they detested. Besides, every stage of manufacturing tea in China was riddled with middlemen who extracted heavy toll taxes, protection money, transportation duties etc. raising the cost of the finished product. After packaging, the tea bags were coated with indigo and gypsum. Here the Hong merchants emerged as the ultimate tea dealers with significant influence in Canton where the final trade for tea between the Chinese and the Europeans took place, 'one considerable item which entered into the cost of tea was the Hong merchant's profits.'² Moreover, in 1757, the Qing emperor of Manchu ethnicity declared Canton or Guangzhou as the only Chinese port open for the foreigners and mandated dealings through licensed Chinese only to control illegal activities of European traders, including attempts to smuggle tea seeds and plants (Hayes, nd). Unlike in Europe, tea or Cha' was not just a commodity to be consumed in China. It was (is) one of the most sacred components of Chinese culture, an offering in religious and spiritual

rites and a means to express reverence (Hohenegger, 2006). But the British traders were enraged by such protections and had continuously been looking for scope to 'pull down' the Chinese pride and at one point of time the then president of the Royal Society, Sir Joseph Banks advised the Company that the best way to achieve this was to push forward the cultivation of tea in the 'Indian Himalayan regions'; where the climate was like that in the 'tea districts' of China (Chambers, 2000: 115).

Assam in the Eyes of the East India Company

Had the Company furthered its trade relations with the Ahom kingdom in upper Assam as per the 1788 report, it could have direct access to China. The native Assamese and the hill traders were acquainted with the trade routes and also the commodities which the Chinese revered. The Company had been using the Bay of Bengal route from Eastern Bengal to enter Burmese regions like Arakan and from there they had to travel to Bhamo and then southwestern Chinese province of Yunnan. Land routes from Assam could have saved enough money and man power required for this journey. But the Company did not pay attention to Assam despite its proximity to China and although it had already been adorned by nature with that 'magical plant' which the British had been preying upon.

With the aim of cultivating tea in India, the first tea report was published in 1788 but Banks did not mention the name of Assam although a Dutch traveller Jan Huyaghen Van Linschton in 1598 had established the fact that tribes of the Northeast frontier of Bengal consumed beverage made of tea and prepared vegetable from its leaves with garlic and oil (Mann, 1918: 6). He further informed that this way of consuming tea resembled closely to that of the Burmese known as the letpet tea. This similarity between Assam and Burma was important because as per the information provided by Buchanon, Burma possessed a tea plant just like China³ and since the people of upper Assam consumed it, so tea might be a familiar plant to all these people. Despite this, Banks selected Coos Beyhar, foothills of Bhootan and Rangpore as he was inclined towards the 'healthy Himalayan hills' of Hindoostan rather than Assam which was a 'remote' unknown country.⁴ Although Burrell argues that this exclusion was because of the frontier 'troublesome' tribes of upper Assam who were not annexed by the Company

but it can also be that if the plant was really of utmost significance, the Company could have waged a direct attack upon Assam or attempted a political interference as per the logic of 'plant capitalism' (Biswas, 1950: 185-236). But neither the report nor the first commercial scheme with Assam was ever materialised.

Utilising Other Indian Commodities, Rejection of Assam

As per the declaration of Banks, a delegation was dispatched to China under Lord McCartney in 1792 to smuggle out tea seeds and plants to start cultivation in the Himalayan regions. This was the year when Swargadeo Gaurinath Singha appealed to the then Governor General Lord Cornwallis to assist him in subduing the Moamaria rebels that threatened the kingdom. Cornwallis perceived it to be a completely novel means of exploring a country and an appropriate opportunity to assess its natural resources (Johnstone, 1877: 17).

An expedition under Captain Welch was dispatched. The Moamaria(s) were defeated easily and in February 1793, a commercial treaty between Welch and Gaurinath Singha was conducted facilitating unrestrained trade between Assam and Bengal (Baruah, 1989: 321). However, just one year after that Welch was called back to Calcutta as part of the then Governor General Sir John Shore's policy of 'non-interference' and the treaty became redundant. During that very year Dr. Wade who accompanied Welch published an account of Assam where he described the commercial links between China and upper Assam at length. But it could not lure the British to Assam. Interestingly by that very time (1781-1790) Britain's import of Chinese tea increased by 20% compared to the earlier decade. But China's self-sufficiency posed a threat in continuing the trade. To appropriate the Englishmen's preference for tea Emperor Sin-Chung's declared that silver would be the sole means of foreign trade in China and people also need to pay land revenue through it. It was a means of strengthening the Chinese treasury and brought an exclusive opportunity to the British because they had already intensified mining in the South and Central American countries like Mexico (Branding and Cross, 1972: 545). According to Chung (1974: 412-15), during 1801-1810; Britain alone imported 80% of Chinese tea with the help of this mining.

Although Banks' delegation to China was expected to yield some positive results

to lessen the costly means of balancing tea trade, and indeed McCartney emerged successful in smuggling seeds but the Calcutta Botanical Garden (CBG) remained unsuccessful in cultivating them. The Chinese emperors, alert to British attempts at smuggling tea out of the country deployed its royal forces at the Canton base to capture any suspected ship and prices were also put upon the head of anyone engaged in such smuggling. The British regarded such overt protective measures ‘vice-like’ control of China which hurt the British national pride although they could not discontinue the trade (Dutta, 2017). Even after the American Revolution in 1776 when British lost hold over the Americas, they discovered raw cotton from the annexed regions of Bengal, Surat, Awadh, Madras etc. as the new commodity to be exchanged for Chinese tea. It was solely from the trade of cotton that London received 5.9 million lbs of Chinese tea in 1783 which increased to 16.7 million lbs. in 1790.⁵ Hence Bowen remarked that without cotton from Bombay, the Company could never have generated the annual financial requirements needed to fulfill the demand for cheaper Chinese tea in Britain.

The profits incurred by the Company in procuring Chinese tea, first by trade against South and Central American silver and then Indian cotton and thereafter opium, as we shall discuss later, were sufficient to neglect the availability of indigenous tea in Assam. The British were content with Chinese tea as it sustained the EIC’s monopoly and not willing to disrupt it by letting British traders to cultivate tea in Assam. In fact the Company suppressed each such attempt by patriotic Englishmen who aspired to be independent in tea (Ukers, 1937: 133).

However, these were not the only reasons for vehement rejection of Assam. When the above mentioned strategies were working properly, the Company did not wish to enter a region designated as the heartland of wizardry and witchcraft,⁶ where hobgoblins and demons were more frequent than humans (Saikia, 2006 : 33). Not only that, Assam’s climate with an annual rainfall of more than hundred inches was a deterrent in this regard (Butler, 1855).

Opium, Fall of Monopoly and Assam

While Indian cotton enabled the EIC to continue its tea import during the early nineteenth century, Assam again fell into a web of conspiracies among and between the Ahom ministers, aristocrats etc. for the throne which culminated in

Badan Chandra Bar Phukan's invitation to the Burmese to invade Assam in 1817. The Burmese unleashed a horrific reign of terror⁷ turning the region into nothing more than a 'profitless primeval jungle' (M'Cosh, 1837: 33-36). In 1819 Swargadeo Purander Singha appealed to the Company Government to thwart the Burmese commander Alumingi, "Reinstate me as the king, I shall remain treaty bound under you and contribute Rs. Three lakhs annually. The expenses for the garrison that you shall dispatch would be borne by me."⁸ But the Company outrightly rejected that appeal declaring that it was not their policy to interfere in matters of foreign countries. It is important to note that this rejection emanated just four years after Colonel Lattier's report in 1815 that aboriginal tribes of upper Assam had the habit of consuming a beverage prepared from Camellia plants available in the region. In that very year, a correspondent of Banks, Mr. Govan advised the EIC that tea should be cultivated in Assam (Griffith, 1967: 33-38).

This was the time when realizing a long held British apprehension, China attempted to stop importing Indian cotton and began producing its own. But rather than considering Assam, the Company again discovered a new commodity to be exchanged for tea which later altered the history of China and consequently of Assam.

In 1765 the Company had taken over the Diwani of Bengal, Bihar and Orrisa through the treaty of Allahabad which helped it to gain access to the opium producing regions of India. To establish its hegemony, it abolished free trade of opium in 1773, and monopolised it (Farooqui, 1998: 13) authorizing itself to regulate both the quality and quantity of the product and the capacity to undercut any international opium trade competition. By the later part of nineteenth century, the Company officials observed the fact that in Malaysia and Indonesia, the Chinese were in the habit of consuming opium to a great extent. The rich took a sense of pride in its consumption and regarded it a sign of aristocracy. The Company took advantage of it and took over the Portuguese opium trade with China in 1773. Not only that, after the Anglo-Maratha war, the Company also appropriated the Malwa opium trade conducted by the Dutch EIC (Aitchison, 1929: 19). This appropriation enabled it to export sixty tonnes of opium in 1776; 120 tonnes in 1790. So opium became a ready-made replacement for tea trade with China. Further, with the exploitative means adopted by the British for

production of opium, the product became immensely profitable, and soon emerged as an independent commodity of trade surpassing the cost required for importing tea.

Such extensive export of opium to China led to large scale addiction and was branded as 'moral crisis' in the country.⁹ The situation was so grave that China banned the production and import of opium in 1800, in 1813 it outlawed smoking it and imposed capital punishment as the apex means to deal with the problem. Yet the British traders were selling it illegally since 1800. The Chinese authorities became aware of it and constantly appealed to the British Government to stop it. While within Britain the trade of opium was stopped, the same law was not extended to the traders operating in China. Comparing the traded commodities of China and Britain, the Chinese war Commissioner Lin Zexu wrote to Queen Victoria, "of the products which China exports to your country, there is not one which is not beneficial to mankind, by what principle of reason then should these foreigners send in return a poisonous drug?" (Zexu, 1839: 497-503).

However, before Zexu could take any direct action against the British, a massive blow hit the Company as the Government of Britain, owing to constant criticism of this illegal trade both by the common people and the Christian missionaries, a war like environment along with agitation of the private trading houses of Britain to open up this trade for everyone, lifted its monopoly in 1833 (Greenberg, 1969: 184).

This was a huge financial attack to the Company and perceived as an assault to the prestige of the British nationhood as tea had already become the national drink of Britain in the late eighteenth century and building a tea empire was valued as equivalent to building the British empire itself (Hoaglin, 2018). There arose an urgency not only in the Company but also in Britain. One Mr. Walker had announced, "It is of national importance that some better guarantee should be provided for the supply of tea than that already furnished by the toleration of the Chinese Government" (quoted in Ukers, 37-8).

Walker also warned the Company that, "if in future we are not rendered independent of China by producing our own, it would be our own fault."¹⁰ Hence cultivating tea outside China became an urgent need. With this aim the then

superintendent of the CBG, Dr. Nathaniel Wallich started cultivating it in Penang between 1822-1829. Although the plant thrived, it yielded an unsatisfactory taste.¹¹ Sensing the desperation, the then Governor General of India, Lord William Bentick immediately constituted a Tea Committee in 1834 to inspect the probability of tea in India as if it was an entirely novel venture without any precedence. The first task of the Committee was to dispatch circulars particularly to the district commissioners of hilly regions of the Indian Himalayas (but not Assam) enquiring about their climatic conditions. Thus, the old bugbear of healthy Himalayan hills was still retained which Mann (1918, 5-6) branded with frustration as 'Banks' false analogy'.

Interestingly all these rejections sprang up after some of the greatest discoveries and success in cultivating the indigenous tea plant in upper Assam which were rejected and sidelined by the CBG.

When Robert Bruce, a military man turned merchant, discovered tea growing wild in 1823 at Rangpur, the Company officials neglected it by declaring that they knew more the interior parts of China or Nepal than Assam, a 'vast, fever-infested Jungle'.¹²

This 'first official discovery' proved to be such a negligible matter that even three years after it when the treaty of Yandaboo was signed in 1826, upper Assam was not included in the British empire considering it to be economically unpromising. While the capacity of lower Assam to yield annual revenue was assessed to be three lakhs, upper Assam's capacity stood barely at one lakh. Hence, while the former was immediately included into the empire, the latter was kept as a 'frontier' against the Burmese without any formal inclusion (Barpujari, 1963: 19-20). This rejection was offered after the agent of the Governor General in the Northeastern frontier of Bengal, David Scott dispatched specimens of indigenous tea plant, its seeds, fruits and flowers to the CBG in 1821 (Burrell 1877, 203). Not only that, upper Assam was considered unprofitable to the extent that before declaring the first Burma war in 1824, the Ahom swargadeo was not even consulted although the Burmese had been intruding into Northeast India through this very region and this was the place most crucially affected by their invasions. Neighbours of upper Assam like Cachar (under Govinda Chandra), Jaintia (under

Ram Singha) and Manipur (under Gambhir Singha) were invited to enter into treaties which turned them into British protectorates and assurance was also given that after the war, the native rulers would be reinstated. But regarding upper Assam 'the Company did not consider itself pledged by any engagement...to restore an Ahom prince to the throne' (Lahiri, 1954: 48-49).

Such rejection resurfaced itself when another military man, Alexander Bruce discovered indigenous tea growing in a continuous line across Upper Assam's tropical forests right upto Yunnan. He learnt the indigenous method of cultivating tea from the tribes like Singpho, Khampti and Namsangia Naga etc. He planted the trees in his own residential garden at Sadiya and when they thrived well, dispatched a portion of it again to Dr. Wallich and Captain Franchis Jenkins for confirmation in 1825. However, after three years of rigorous scrutiny, the former declared that the Assam plant was not authentic tea but a 'wild distant cousin of the pure Chinese variety.' Sharma (2002) argues that this rejection emanated from the British policy of imposing conceptions regarding the people of upper Assam upon its nature. Since they regarded the people as 'wild', 'troublesome', 'vindictive', so the plant was also designated as 'wild', unsuitable for the dignified British palates.¹³ It was a different matter that Alexander Bruce did not quit his zeal and kept on buliding experimental tea gardens. Yet, till 1833, when the monopoly fell, he did not dare to reveal his venture owing to the repeated rejection of (upper) Assam and her tea. In the meanwhile, another military official Andrew Charlton posted in Sadiya, procured and cultivated the indigenous species with the help of his native gardener and sent the specimens to Dr. John Tytler of Agricultural and Horticultural Society in 1830. But this attempt too was rebuffed by Wallich.¹⁴ However Charlton did not succumb. Receiving the grim situation of the Company as an opportunity; he again dispaatched fresh specimens for the second time in 1834 with detailed information that the most intelligent natives of upper Assam were already in possession of knowledge about tea and that Assam tea was similar to Camellia plants across the world which had been propagated by using the Chinese variety. In fact he himself manufactured 'drinkable tea' by using the indigenous plant and preparing methods for the convenience of the CBG. This proved to be of greater importance at a point of time when the district commissioners of the Himalayan regions could provide

nothing. Yet the British were so obsessed with *Camellia Sinensis* as the only authentic tea that Bentinck himself took initiatives to import cuttings of the plant and the Tea Committee dispatched a delegation under an opium trader J. G. Gordon to smuggle out tea seeds and plants out of China which Borah designated as the symbol of 'British Dependency syndrome' (Borah, 2015: 35).

Assam, for the first time found mention in the report of the Tea Committee submitted on 15 March 1834, as a suitable place for producing tea. But again it was not the first preference of the Committee, and positioned in the second place while the Himalayan regions of Nilgheery, Dehra Dun, Nainital, Darjeeling etc. won the first position. But Mann (1918: 5) clarified the fact that by the term 'Eastern Frontier' (under which Assam was supposed to be placed) the Committee might have referred to Rungpore, Cooch Behar etc. of Bengal (which were already marked as excellent by Banks) and not Assam. It was only when the directly threatening words of Captain Jenkins and suspicions over the scientific credibility of Wallich reached CBG, that the Committee ultimately recognised Assam plant as authentic on 10 December 1834 (qtd. in Burrell et al., 1877: 205). This declaration was further strengthened when Jenkins found out in 1836 that tea produced in Assam (in the Southwest of Nagaon district) was already a commodity of trade with China. These teas had a great demand there due to their coarse and bitter taste and merchants bought upto 7-8 maunds in the moist state of the plant (Kar, 2002: 34-35). Moreover, the tea seeds which Gordon smuggled out of China did not thrive well in the much appreciated Himalayan destinations. Contrary to that Alexander Bruce emerged successful in 1835 in manufacturing the first batch of locally produced tea from indigenous plants which could be exported to auctioneers and dealers in London. The Tea Inspectors there approved the Assam tea as of 'good quality.' The Select Committee on the EIC produces noted: "In 1835, a small quantity of tea; not exceeding 1lb., was forwarded to the court...taken from the wild shrub in the neighbourhood of Suddeeya...Tingri, Chabuwa, Gohyne and Muttock and being submitted to the London Tea brokers, favourably reported as holding out a promise that good tea might be procured from the province of Assam."¹⁵

The Tea/Opium War and Assam

Even in 1835, some of the officials of the Company did not soften their attitude toward upper Assam. Hence, when Purander Singha was reinstated in 1834 as a tributary king of the region; the Court of Directors of the Company reprimanded the then Governor General, “you had been enjoined in no case to conclude a permanent settlement in any part of our territory without the previous sanction of the home authorities.”¹⁶ However, as the prospect of tea loomed large in upper Assam, the attitude of the home authorities changed dramatically upto the point that now the higher authorities themselves dispatched Captain Jenkins to the region with the special object of ousting the last Ahom king and bringing the entire region under the command of the Company Government (Baruah, 1998: 536). The Captain emerged successful in portraying the king as of ‘oppressive character’ a misgovernor, who extracted ‘extorbitant extortions’¹⁷, and dethorned him on 16 September 1838.

In the meanwhile, being oppressed by the continuous illegal opium supply by the Company, Zexu ultimately arrived in Guangzhou to inspect the ban in 1839. He arrested 1,600 Chinese dealers, siezed and destroyed tens of thousands of opium pipes and demanded the British to turn over their supplies of opium. But the latter rejected to comply and Zexu stopped all foreign trade and quarantined the whole area compelling the British to submit after six weeks. They turned over 2.6 million pounds of opium in 20,000 chests. Zexu hired 500 Chinese to destroy the opium by admitxturing it with lime and salt and dumping into the bay. He even pressurized the Portugese who possessed a colony near Macau to expel the uncooperative British and push them back to Hongkong (Aitchison, 1929). Enraged by such invasions upon the ‘dignity’ of the British, the Queen calculated war to be a viable option than halting the opium or tea trade. British naval reinforcements were immediately deployed and thus the first opium war broke out which Liu (2000) termed as the ‘Tea War.’

Although Britain won the war but their unfair means were exposed to every Chinese citizen and hence they stopped dealing with any British trader. Thus, by 1839 cultivating tea in Assam became the ‘urgent national need’ of Britain as the editor of *Friends of India* wrote: “The most effective revenge we can take on

China is to push the cultivation of tea in Assam. It is in that country that arrogance of the imperial court can most effectively be conquered.”¹⁸ One British officer wrote, “If a portion of the capital, which is now jeopardised in China, be carried to the British provinces in Assam...(it would) do more to teach the Chinese sounder notions of political economy than the canon of British man of war.”¹⁹

Accordingly the last Ahom swargadeo was deposed and the region which was once recognized as the most unwanted, was included in the empire.

Conclusion

‘Assam tea was valued as a means of breaking China’s monopoly’- this statement of Robinson (1841) was realised when just two decades after initiating tea venture in Assam, Britain became capable of exporting tea across the globe. In 1864, 1865 and 1866, it exported 13,000,000, 11,000,000 and 10,000,000 tonnes of tea respectively. By 1890, large quantities of tea was exported to Germany, South America and the Baltic provinces.²⁰

In 1870, China’s amount of export was 184,087,000 lbs contrary to India’s (or Assam’s) 13,046,000 lbs. But the situation changed dramatically by 1900 when China exported a total of 184,530,000 lbs whereas India’s amount stood at 192,310,000 lbs. From this time onwards, the British tea industry surpassed the Chinese whose situation began to deteriorate day by day. By 1920 China exported just 40,846,000 lbs while India exported 287,525,000 lbs (Gardella, 1994: 111).

Thus, although Assam appeared to be one of most wild regions the British had ever encountered it was in the wild mountains of this region that the article more precious than gold and silver grew abundantly (M'Cosh, 1837: 31).

Notes

- ¹ The term was first used in 1788 by the President of the Royal Society Sir Joseph Banks followed by Alexander Bruce. See “Autodidact Adventures- History of Tea: Tea in Assam Part 8”. Retrieved from: <https://autodidact-adventures.tumblr.com/post/173253938390/history-of-tea-part-8-tea-in-assam>, and Derek Perry, Larry Brown and Paul Tucker (comp.), “An Account of Manufacture of Black Tea as Practiced in Suddeya in Upper Assam by Charles Alexander Bruce,” 13 December, 2011, retrieved from: <http://www.kio-hai.com/Default.aspx?id=549029>

- ² “Autodidact Adventures.”
- ³ Parliamentary papers (Pp) 1839, no.63; “Proposition to the honourable directors of the East India Company to cultivate tea upon the Nepaul hills and such other territories of the East India Company as may be suitable for its growth,” by John Walker; National Archive of India (NAI), New Delhi.
- ⁴ Pp 1839, no.63; “Observation on cultivation of tea plant for commercial purposes in the mountainous parts of Hindustan, drawn up at the desire of Rt. Honourable C. Grant by Nathaniel Wallich, NAI, New Delhi.
- ⁵ Pp 1812-1813, vol.VIII, p.233 cited in Bowen, H. V. ‘The Integration of the Asian Cotton Textile Industry: Trade, Empire, and British Exports of Raw Cotton from India to China during the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries.’ Retrieved from: <https://www.lse.ac.uk/Economic-History/Assets/Documents/Research/GEHN/Helsinki/HELSINKIBowen.pdf>, Accessed on: December 27, 2020.
- ⁶ Ain-E-Akbari by Abu’l Fazl Ibn Mubarak, Fatiya-I-Ibriya by Sihab-Ud-Din Talish, Bahiristan-E-Gahyabi by Mirza Nathan etc. were also at the forefront of spreading such information. Sharma (1950: 41) claims that right at the moment when Garinath Singha appealed for assistance, the Company could have annexed Assam. The only reason why they did not do it was the extensive warnings against entering into Assam made in the English translation of Ain-I-Akbari by Vansi’tart.
- ⁷ In Assamese society, those days are still remembered as ‘Maanor Din’ or the days of the Maan when people were deskinning alive, boiled or burnt, women were raped on a massive scale. See Pamberton, R. Boileau (1835) *Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India*, Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press and Edward Gait, *A History of Assam*, pp.202-03.
- ⁸ From the unpublished diary of captain Wilcox, October 10, 1822; cited in Sharma, *Maniram Dewan*, p.41.
- ⁹ Quoted in Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates: Third Edition, Commencing with the Accession of William IV; 6^o Victoria, 1843; third volume of the session (London: Thomas Curzon Hansard, Paternoster Row: Longman and Co., 1843): 387-96.
- ¹⁰ Pp 1834, no.63; Extract India Revenue Consultations, 1 February 1834; “Proposition to the Honourable Directors of the East India Company to Cultivate Tea in upon the Nepaul Hills and such other Territories of the East India Company as may be Suitable to its Growth,” by John Walker; NAI.
- ¹¹ Pp 1839, no.63, “Observation on Cultivation of Tea”, by Wallich.
- ¹² Pp 1839, no.63; Extract India Revenue Consultation, 7 January 1835: From Tea Committee to Revenue Department, 24 December 1834, NAI.

- ¹³ Joseph Banks rejected all the possibilities of validating Camellia plants found in Burma and Siam or Thailand because they were consumed by people of 'lower grade', or the wild tribes whose taste was also lower and did not suit the refined taste of the British. See Chambers, *Letters of Sir Joseph Banks*, p.115.
- ¹⁴ Letter to H. H. Spry, Esq., M. D., (No.1). Secretary to the Agricultural and Horticultural Society of India; from Lieutenant Charlton, in Anonymous (1841) *Correspondence Regarding the Discovery of the Tea Plant of Assam*, Calcutta: E.P. De Beaufort, Star Press 13, Tank Square, p.3
- ¹⁵ Report from the Select Committee on East India Company Produce; Together with the Minutes of Evidence, An Appendix and Index, Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed, 21 July 1840, pp.39-40. The quotation is a part of Evidence taken before J. C. Melvill, Esq., 16 March 1840; question no.663; answered by Richard Jenkins.
- ¹⁶ Indian Political Department, file no.14; 3 December 1834, para 34 (OIOC E/4/742), NAI.
- ¹⁷ Quoted in https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac/bitstream/10603/61133/9/09_chapter%204.pdf , p.22. and Sharma, 1950: 86.
- ¹⁸ *Friends of India*, 14 March 1839, p.356; cited in https://sodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/68403/7/07_chapter%202.pdf , p.14; accessed on 27 July 2020.
- ¹⁹ Quoted in Anonymous, 'The Tea of Assam: Information on the Discovery and Character of the Tea Plant in Assam,' reprinted in the Asiatic Journal of Bengal (1839) London, p.1.
- ²⁰ "Consumption of tea in the United Kingdom," *Journal of Society of Arts*, 23 August 1872: 574; cited in Borah, *A Region in a Mobile World*, p.50.

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Religious Discourse Ascertaining Gender Positioning in Haryana

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This paper is an effort to understand the representation of women in religious texts of Hinduism (with special reference to Manusmriti). The introductory part of this paper highlights the interface between religious discourses and gender positioning. An effort has been made to relate the moral guidelines of sacred texts with findings from fieldwork done in Haryana. The methodology is based on qualitative data and descriptive annotations of the sacred texts of Hinduism. An effort has been made to know how gender stereotypes are created and sustained through religion, with special reference to Connell's theory of masculinity. The last part of the paper puts forth some suggestions for the upliftment of women with the help of religion.

Keywords: Manusmriti, gender, religion, masculinity, patriarchy

Introduction

Gender is a socially constructed delineation of sex based on various cultural norms and expectations. It also acts as a yardstick to analyse the relationship between men and women regarding their differences in access to power and life opportunities. Gender discrimination against women and girl children stems from deep-rooted patriarchy and manifests itself in the widespread form of son preference. A female child is seen as a burden, while a male child is seen as the future of the household as he will continue to support his parents. As a result, the opportunity cost of investing in a daughter's well-being in terms of health, education and overall growth is often outweighed by the future potential returns associated with a son (UNFPA, 2003). Such disparity is evident worldwide, but its severity increases in low-income groups, castes and religions.

Religion as a Carrier of Patriarchy: Construal with Special Reference to Connell's Theory of Masculinity

Connell (2005) put forth the hierarchical division of masculinity and femininity. The theory elucidated that hegemonic masculinity is at the top of the hierarchy, which overrides all other masculinities and femininities in society. Hegemonic masculinity is at the top of the hierarchy because it is regarded as the perfect model of manhood, encircling all the desired qualities in men. A few ideal types of hegemonic masculinity include violence, aggression, emotional restraint, courage, physical strength, risk-taking, and rational behaviour.¹ Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) also explained that only a few men in society have hegemonic masculinity whilst a large number of men benefit from such masculinity.² Connell takes the concept of hegemony from Gramsci (1971) and defines hegemony as the concept of social dominance of a certain group, exercised not through brute force but through the cultural dynamic which extends into private life and social realms. Thus, hegemonic masculinity can be seen as a masculine approach to upholding the economic, political and sexual subordination of women and 'lesser' men (Connell, 2005).

Next to hegemonic masculinity is homosexual masculinity, which has been seen as antithetical to the idea of a real man. Thus, it is stigmatized and placed at the bottom of a gender hierarchy for men. Connell also describes various forms of femininity and how they are formed in a position of subordination to hegemonic masculinity. One such form of femininity is emphasized femininity, which is oriented to obliging the interests and desires of men. Thus it has been characterized by love, nurturance and empathy. It is associated with sexual receptivity among young women while, among older women, it implies motherhood. Finally, there are subordinated femininities that refuse the interpretation of emphasized femininity of love, nurturance and care. Women who have developed non-subordinated identities and lifestyles include feminists, lesbians, prostitutes and manual workers (Connell, 2005).³

Connell further defines that gender relations are produced, reproduced and sustained in the system with the help of cultural dynamics and social power that men hold through patriarchy. However, he opines that gender relations are not

fixed since western society has undergone various changes due to legislation on rape, domestic violence and women's rights.

Research Methodology

The state of Haryana was selected for the propose of the study as it has the lowest sex ratio as well as child sex ratio in the country as per the 2011 census. It also happens to be a state which has a large number of Hindus, i.e., 87.46 %. For the content analysis of written texts, reflecting guidelines for Hindu people, *Manusmriti* has been selected. The rationale for taking this religious text was that it has been considered to be the divine text, guiding the appropriate code of conduct for Hindu people. There are other religious texts as well, but *Manusmriti* is the sole text that completely describes the code of conduct for Hindus. English translations of *Manusmriti* by Bhuler (1886) and Olivelle (2010) have been taken for content analysis.

Objectives of the Present study

This study attempts to:

1. Delineate the verses in *Manusmriti* reflecting the vulnerable status of women;
2. Study the perception of family and community about women in the light of *Manusmriti* to gauge the prevailing cultural norms;
3. Suggest recommendations to improve the status of women in rural Haryana.

Interface Between Religious Discourses and Gender Positioning

Gender inequality is the most prevailing form of social inequality that exists all over the world. This disparity is mainly due to culture, traditions and the religious norms which predominate in society. Religion is deep-rooted in peoples' experiences and influences the socio-economic and political direction of societies (Stump, 2008). Religion is one of the most significant identity markers of communities across the globe and plays a decisive role along with other social factors such as caste, class, and ethnicity in constructing gender identity (Leslie and McGee, 2001). Research has demonstrated associations between religious

beliefs and patriarchal attitudes (Acevedo and Shah, 2015; Brooks and Bolzendahl, 2004; Moore and Vanneman, 2003; Seguino, 2011). It has always been an ongoing topic of debate that the status of women in society is an outcome of the interpretation of religious texts and the institutional setup of religious communities (Klingorova, 2015). Thus, an effort has been made to study the important text in Hinduism i.e. *Manusmriti*.

***Manusmriti* as a Carrier of Patriarchy: A Reflection from Fieldwork**

An effort has been made to study the status of women throughout their lives in light of the religious text *Manusmriti*. Description of *Manusmriti* by various researchers such as Boss (2010) and Buhler (1886) depicts the vulnerable status of girl child and women. One of the verses in the text says, "In childhood, a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her sons; a woman must never be independent" (Buhler, 1886, IX 3). "Nothing must be done independently by a girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged one, even in her own house" (Buhler 1886, IX, 3).⁴

It has been observed that people still follow these religious teachings in rural Haryana. It has been found that the decisions about dress, language, movement and education of young girls are completely controlled by the men in their families. Right from childhood, socially and culturally prescribed norms of behaviour are strictly imposed upon girls. Once they attain puberty, control over their life increases, with a greater role played by the male members, irrespective of age and education. In villages, men in the immediate family and even those in the extended family exercise considerable control over the physical mobility and other activities of adolescent girls.

The perception of elders is entirely different for boys and girls. While boys enjoy the freedom to move around and play, girls, once they reached puberty, are expected to remain within the home and perform household chores with perfection, irrespective of whether they attend school or not. It is observed that even though education is now seen as a must for girls, restrictions on them persist. Girls, in their adolescence, are only allowed to attend school within the village. Mixing girls with boys is not tolerated at all. Another aspect highlighted during group discussions was that girls are considered less capable and essential than

boys. The reasons given by male members are that “Financial returns come only from boys,” and, “Girls will leave the parental house and boys look after family needs.”

The message of Manu from the verses mentioned above and data collected via fieldwork clearly shows that women are not considered equal to men. Manu, with his writings, provides a solid normative framework for the support and continuation of patriarchy in Hindu society. It is not surprising then that women writers such as Pinkham (1941) identify Manu as the primary agent for the declining position of women in India.

Menstruation is considered a polluting physiological phenomenon in Indian society. Various restrictions are imposed upon girls during the period of menstruation as it is considered to be polluting. Several cultural taboos are associated with menstruation, relating to concealment, communication and activity (Williams, 1983). Irrespective of religious affiliation, menstruation is considered impure. Among Hindus, women and girls are not allowed to visit a temple, pray, or cook during menstruation. They are not allowed to touch religious scriptures and are forced to stay away from the kitchen because they are treated as impure.

The researcher interacted with women and priests to understand the concept of impurity related to menstruation. Mothers believed that menstruation was an unclean thing as per religious texts. However, mothers could not give an exhaustive explanation about the concept of impurity related to menstruation. Therefore, to gain insight, the Hindu priests were contacted. In Hinduism, menstruating women are not supposed to enter the temple because they are ‘unclean’, and they are supposed to keep away from sacred spaces and objects even within their homes.

A Hindu priest mentioned during an interview that in Indian philosophy, there are three *gunas* (or qualities) these are: *Tamas* (black), *Rajas* (red) and *Sattva* (white). Anything excreted from the body, i.e., sweat, blood, tears, etc., is toxic and classified under Tamas. Menstruating blood is excreted from the body, so it is considered as Tamas, which is impure. In *Manusmriti*, menstruating women are included within lists of individuals to be avoided and are likened to ‘low-caste’

individuals. It can be traced that verse 85 says, a Kandala, a village pig, a cock, a dog, a menstruating woman and a eunuch must not look at the Brahmanas while they eat (Buhler 1886, verse 85).⁵ Menstruating women are compared with animals and Kandala (people who deal with corpses). Manu did not mention anywhere the reason for considering menstruating women as impure. Thus, such moral guidelines are followed by people without any questioning which ultimately leads to the undignified position of women in society.

In addition to this, various duties and restrictions are mentioned in the verses of *Manusmriti*, such as "She must always be cheerful, clever in (the management of her) household affairs, careful in cleaning her utensils, and economical in expenditure" (Bhuler, 1886). Similar duties are observed during fieldwork. Women and girls are supposed to show complete commitment to household chores. In fact, household work done by girls is a matter of pride for their parents. Therefore many parents put pressure on girls to perform household chores. The majority of people perceive that a girl with less education would still be accepted, but without any expertise in household work, she could not be accepted by her matrimonial family. Stereotyping in gender roles is therefore evident. Women are supposed to perform household chores, while men indulging in domestic work are ridiculed. The community members pick on the ones who want to help women with household chores. This kind of attitude is found to place a double burden on the women who are gainfully employed and have to manage both home and work.

In addition to this, stress is laid upon maintaining virginity and sexual purity. Women are perpetually placed under a strict vigil of male as well female members of the family. The slightest suspicion against the girl is sufficient to condemn and shame her, and such a girl has to be married off quickly, irrespective of the suitability of the match, just to save the family's honour. *Manusmriti* translated by Olivelle, (2010) also defined edicts on women's movement and the character of a woman.

"It is the very nature of women here to corrupt men. On that account, prudent men are never off guard in the presence of alluring young women" ⁶

"He must not sit alone with his mother, sister, or daughter; the array of sensory organs is powerful and overpowers even a learned man".⁷

"Day and night men should keep their women from acting independently; for, attached as they are to sensual pleasures, men should keep them under their control".⁸

It was observed that men, especially young boys, are more conventional when it comes to girls' freedom. They control the freedom of girls by imposing restrictions on their movement, forcing them to wear appropriate clothing, etc. A majority of the boys believe that girls should wear salwar suits (Indian attire for women) only. They hold a view that younger girls could wear any clothes but, after puberty, girls should not wear short dresses and jeans. It is believed by the community members that girls should not wear tight-fitting clothes because boys get attracted to such kinds of clothes. There are strict restrictions about how the girls should dress up to avoid attracting boys. The opinion of boys was also sought through group discussions. Majority of them believed that girls should wear suits. They firmly believed that if girls wore tight-fitting or short clothes they would be teased by boys.

One of the young male respondents said,

"Aise kapde pehan kar bahar niklegi tou ladke chaidege nahi kya. or ladko par ilzaam aata hai ki wo chedte hai"

[If a girl would wear this type of clothes, definitely, she would be teased by the boys and boys are blamed for teasing].

(25 years, male, Haryana).

One of the boys said, *"Jeans tou shehar mein hi achhi lagti hai"*
(*Jeans look good only in urban areas*).

(19 years, male, Haryana).

Women are often blamed for attracting men by wearing inappropriate clothes. The male gaze has never been questioned, instead, numerous restrictions are put on women and girls. Bizarrely, women too admitted that no girl could escape eve-teasing. Vulnerability increased to eve-teasing if the nature of her dress is not according to the community norms. Unnecessary movement and interaction of women/girls is also discouraged by men. Brothers constantly put pressure on their sisters to stay indoors and focus on education and household chores. They are more conservative when it comes to their sisters. They also use defensive measures to deter the mobility of the girls.

Marriage: The Ultimate Goal

Bhuler (1886)⁹ described that a woman who can control her thoughts, speech and actions dwells with her husband (after death) in heaven. The world recognises such a woman as a faithful wife. However, for disloyalty, a wife is censured among men. In her next life, she will be born in the womb of a jackal and tormented by diseases. Another verse says, "Let him wed a female free from bodily defects, who has an agreeable name, the (graceful) gait of a hamsa or an elephant, a moderate (quantity of) hair on the body and the head, small teeth, and soft limbs" (Bhuler, 1886).¹⁰ A prudent man should not marry [a maiden] who has no brother, nor one whose father is not known, through fear least (in the former case)" (Olivelle, 2010).¹¹ Such verses are found in *Manusmriti*, but strangely no duties regarding marriage and the chaste character of the male are given in this religious text.

It is evident from the qualitative data that right from their childhood, girls in this part of India are trained to set their priorities right. It is most important for them to learn cooking, stitching, cleaning and taking care of cattle and the sick and the old within the family so that they prove to be ideal housewives. The girl's parents' whole focus is found to be on her marriage, even when she is too young to understand the meaning of marriage. During fieldwork, both young and old community members, men and women, make it clear that a girl must not be over-dominating, argumentative and assertive. Instead, only submissive, patient and beautiful girls are preferred. Several male and female respondents also approve of using violence against girls if they do not fall in line and try to deviate from prescribed cultural norms.

One of the boys said,

"Ghar ki izzat ma behan se hi hoti hai, tou unko apne daayre mein rahna chaiye"

(The honour of the household is dependent on the mothers and sisters, so they should stay within their limits).
(27 years, male, Haryana).

Another parent said,

" Muje bohat chinta hai mere beti kali hai, shadi kaise hogi "

(I am very worried about my daughters' future. She has dark complexion. Who will marry her?).

(45 years, female, Haryana).

The analysis of data from the field highlights that people follow the laws of Manu; thus, they act as carriers of patriarchy and gender stereotypes. The religious verses define righteous norms and values for men and women. Hence, such religious texts and their manifold explanation by religious leaders (mainly men) ultimately leads to the inferior position of women in society and the family.

The question arises: Why has India's traditional structure not changed much? Why do modernization, development, laws and public policies not change the situation of women in India? India is a traditional society and gives utmost importance to religion. The delineation of the role of women in *Manusmriti* and other religious texts also supports this legitimization of gender inequality. Data collected from fieldwork also supports that the teachings of Manu are still prevalent in rural parts of Haryana. Therefore, *Manusmriti* is a discourse in Indian society that defines women's status and duties towards men. Foucault (2020 et al.) also explains that groups that promote such hegemonic discourses become the hegemonic group in society. Therefore, men create and promote such religious discourses and gain powerful authority by creating a patriarchal setup. Manu, a man, wrote the discourse that reflect the importance and guarded the interests of men. People have accepted this patriarchal setup supported by religious and cultural norms without much resistance.

Conclusion and Suggestions

From data collected during fieldwork, it can be concluded that the teachings of Manu are still prevalent, especially in the rural setting of Haryana. Hence, there is an urgent need to work on this aspect. Religious texts influence people's way of thinking and living; hence it is the need of the hour to sensitize religious leaders. Religion can act as a solution instead of the problem by "engaging" traditional and religious leaders. It has also been observed that various verses in *Manusmriti* favour women's welfare. Hence, an effort must be made to discuss and change

cultural norms that discriminate against women. Furthermore, religious leaders must propagate the positive texts mentioned in sacred texts related to women.

It has also been suggested that rural people should be sensitized and made aware of the grave consequences of violence and discrimination against women and girls. In order to do so, community outreach programmes must be organized by the government and non-government departments to sensitize people. Plays and programmes reflecting issues related to women must be presented. Religious explanations related to female sexuality, character and restrictions must be questioned in the form of street plays, group discussions and workshop programmes. To build confidence among women and girl children, community outreach programmes must share local/national-level positive examples. Achievements made by girls and women at the local level must be celebrated and shared at the community level. It will build confidence among girls and change the perception of local members, especially men, that women are made for household duties. Thus, such small changes can bring a positive transformation in the status of women.

Notes

- ¹ Connell, R. (2005). *Masculinities 2nd revised edition*. University of California Press.
- ² Ibid.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Buhler, G. 1886. *The Laws of Manu*. Trans. Clarendon Press: Oxford.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ Olivelle, P. 2010. *Manu's code of law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Manava – Dharmasastra*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ Ibid
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ Ibid.

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The Spectre of Hastinapur: Excavating *Mahabharata* in Search of Krishna's *Bharatavarsha**

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The fabric of Hindu culture and nation is woven with characters, struggles and values of heroes from the great epic that is led by a great political visionary Krishna who percolates the *Mahabharata* as a mystical hero. He manoeuvres the destiny of those around him and as an insightful philosopher, envisions a celestial order of reality where an individual, the clan and groups, as well as chieftains and kings, have their operational freedom and roles. Krishna envisioned a nation and a king who will strive for dharma and establish a world order of moral righteousness and civility. He ultimately became the plot-maker in the *Mahabharata*, a formidable doctrinaire energy in the orchestration of political power and autonomy. But his vision crumbled before his own eyes and God retired to the solace of a jungle to die a death that he ordained for himself. The paper is a deliberation of how a fallible god strove to build an infallible nation and how that nation sustains in the contemporary times.

Keywords: *Mahabharata*, Krishna, nation, jurisprudence, *dharma*

What we have been saying would have a degree of validity even if we should concede that which cannot be conceded without the utmost wickedness, that there is no God, or that the affairs of men are no concern to Him.

-Hugo Grotius in *Prolegomena*, 11.

Since *Mahabharata* gains its permanence and continuance to the staggering belief of almost all the Indian people that the incidents described in the epic actually happened in prehistoric times and hence are part of the ancient Indian history, many scholars and philosophers have been led to explore and excavate the epic as

the genesis and the genus of Indian political ethics and philosophy.

A close scrutiny of the text shows that it is not necessarily religious and pedantic. *Mahabharata* offers plenty of instances to grapple with moral and social dilemmas. The epic exhibits a wide array of agreements between legal philosophy and its tenets of jurisprudence and nation building, and is a powerful treatise of political structuring aimed at bringing about socio-political order and administering propriety, both moral and social. The anthropological movement of the epic begins from communal, religious and organizational modes based on *Swa-dharma*, leading to a federal system of political administration in the entire *Aryavarta*.

The nation in *Mahabharata* has been viewed as an extensive, territorial relation of nativity and this viewpoint has gained currency since Dharamvir Bharti first published *Andha Yug* in 1962. The epic, with its consideration of the tendency of humans to assert distinctions, also asserts to unify humanity. Through a fratricidal war, a deal of making a nation is being brokered between God and men. A simplistic exploration of the structure of the epic would entail a triadic structure of *itihāsa* (history,) *ākhyāna* (story literature) and the classical *kāvya* (poetry). The epic is a meditation on the socio-political chaos moving unto a tentative establishment of a federal system of nation which dissipates into a chaotic war and strife, finally to stabilize and settle into a political order regulated by austere mysticism and religious resilience. Though the epic is not critically focused, well charted or structured, yet it reaches its highpoint of a political vision at the Battle of Kurukshetra, where the birth cries of war will usher in a new nation.

From *Manusmriti* onward, Vedic theory does not view king as either the source or repository of the law. He is rather subjected to the law and failing to abide by it, he can be destroyed by it. The king's ambition and arrogance are restrained by various precepts and edicts of religion, custom, pragmatism and natural justice. The right to overthrow a bad king comes to be recognized and is championed by Krishna, first in slaying Kamsa and later by becoming an ally of the Pandeva's in their claim to the throne of Hastinapur. Krishna is determined to save *Aryavarata*, the whole world as he knew it, from that minority of vain-glorious persons who take pleasure in exercising power over others (Kamsa, Dhritrashtra, Duryodhana)

by naturally aiding and endorsing any determined pre-emptive defensive responses from others (Pandavas) to overcome the pride of the aggressors (Kauravas). A similar view is also embraced by the Hobbesian contract theory.¹ In *Mahabharata* too Hobbes's methodological construction can be glimpsed when political principles while appealing for a fraternity of rational, free, and equal persons still advocates for submission to the authority of an absolute, undivided and unlimited sovereign power.

One of the earliest statements of political theory that prevailed during *Mahabharata* was that the state of nature was one of might and war, and that the state and the ruler were created to destroy anarchy which came to be known as the doctrine of the fishes i.e., *Matsya Nyaya*.² Krishna seeks to annihilate the Kauravas because of their allegiance to abuse, assault and violence, and their repeated violation of the social compact and moral covenant of Dharmic Law, be it the arson of *Laksha-graha*³ or disrobing of Draupadi. It is not that Krishna espouses tyranny or domination by force but he knows that only a sword will break another sword, as Prafulla Kumar Mohanty writes in the article 'The Mahabharata: A Reading in Political Structuring':

The trauma of displacement and the indignity of uprooted cultural defeatism was an agonizing experience for Krishna, which he could not shake off from his mind and memory. The contemporary political situation revealed to Krishna as an exploitative power obsession among the ruling elite class in small kingdoms (147).

An examination of the epic further supports its reliance on contract and utilitarian theory. Although the *Mahabharata* considers absolute monarchy as the sole Vedic theory of governance or jurisprudence, yet writers have demonstrated that the monarchy was not the supreme sovereign body but was aided by an assembly or a *Sabha* of Elders. Hence, Indian polity and its nation building have always been aided and abetted by federal and feudal tendencies. Hindu jurists have generally subscribed and dwelled upon the theory of social contract regarding the origin of the Indian state. Krishna operates within this political nexus. During the Draupadi *Vastraharan* at the *Dhyuta-sabha*, where the autonomy and authority of not just King Dhritrashtra, but of the entire body politic was not only challenged but dismantled, first by Draupadi by asking the infamous question "*Whom did you lose first, yourself or me?*" and later by Krishna who came to her aid, realizing the

Kshatriya code of honour had failed her. This was Krishna's refutation of what Hobbes refers to as a condition of mere nature where each decides for oneself how to act, and is judge, jury and executioner in one's own case. The *Dhyuta-sabha* for Krishna personified that state of apathetic private judgment with no agency of recognized authority (King Dhritrashtra) to arbitrate disputes and effective power to enforce its decisions.

One's reluctance to acknowledge mythology as the genesis of nation building will only result in a misapprehension of nation in human affairs. Myth exists because man exists. The story of the Hindu Code of Manu⁴ and Moses' Ten Commandments is strikingly similar. The unanimously acknowledged assumption of the old textbooks of Hindu law is that the law is eternal and shall forever subsist. The primary sources of the law are the scriptures: the Vedas. As per the socio-political conventions and religious decree, it is man's own conscience that is paramount in determining the validity of laws. Krishna upholds and supports the view that there is no assumed distinction between legal duties and moral duties, and hence one should not take precedence over another or ever be in conflict. Law embraced all of life and was, therefore, synonymous with virtue.

The final stage in the evolution toward the ancient Hindu law is the *Dharmasutras*, which comes close to being the lawyer's law, even today in Hindu jurisprudence. The Dharma Sastras⁵ cover both civil and criminal law (in *Vyavahara*), but also social and religious observances (in *Acharya*) and expiation for sin (in *Prayaschitta*). *Mahabharata* steers clear of interpolating nationalism on nation. Through its set of beliefs about *rajya* (state), *rajana* (kingship), *sabhajana* (civility) and *naitikta* (morality), the epic debates how *Bharatavarsha* and its constituent states will contain differing views about its socio-political character and thus, for any nation or kingdom, be it Kurus or Yadavas. These precepts of prudence, according to Hobbes, function as divine commands, or moral imperatives upon which the foundation of the political authority in *Bharatavarsha* was laid.

There will always be different and competing beliefs which will manifest themselves as political differences and if they are not reconciled, it will take us back to the battle ground of Kurukshetra. While the Kauravas envision the nation

of *Bharatavarsha* as an extension of their own individual liberty, the Pandavas, under the tutelage of Krishna, are willing to sacrifice that liberty for future security and prosperity. The Indian nation is still reeling under this altercation. This disagreement of sacrificing the present for the future has been given a jingoistic hue by political, dogmatic members who have a narrow, intolerant view and definition of nation, adhering to the theological insistence that one nation should have only one religion, Hinduism. Krishna would have scoffed at this woeful theistic attempt of nation building, for national identity is not negotiated via religion but is a simple assumption of humanism. It is an enterprise of a lifetime which requires no exoneration and validation by any royal decree but is self-ordained, as personified by the life Krishna led. Hobbes refers to this as the right of nature or rather a principle of practical rationality where people adopt what they see to be the necessary means to their most important ends and the nation they build is also an extension of this impulse of self-preservation. In *Bhagavad Gita*, he opines:

श्रेयान्स्वधर्मोविगुणः परधर्मात्स्वनुष्ठितात्।
स्वभावनियतं कर्म कुर्वन्नाप्नोति किल्बिषम् ॥ 47॥

[It is better to do one's own dharma, even though imperfectly, than to do another's dharma, even though perfectly. By doing one's innate duties, a person does not incur sin.]

-*Song of God*, Chapter 18, Verse 47.

Strife between kindred to stake the claim of lineage influences the forces of nation-building in the epic. This sort of exclusionary nationalism (Pandavas who continuously came back from exile and disguise, and the Kauravas who continuously banished them from the city and civilization) is an implacable enemy to one's own nation, the present and the future as proven by the apocalyptic war which followed this deception between the cousins. Both Pandavas and Kauravas struggle to reconcile their claim of bloodline not only the existent nation (Hastinapur) but also the familial state (*Aryavrata*), much like Krishna who killed his maternal uncle Kansa to become the ruler of Mathura. To Krishna, exclusive and inclusive identity in the context of conflict prevention was of particular importance. He ardently sought to reconcile this identification of oneself with a social group (Yadavas, the Puru lineage) and the exclusive identity

which emphasizes role differences while also acknowledging the degree of dissimilarity between individuals (Pandavas and Kauravas). Hobbes contends that when conflict arises out of something as mundane as what respect one merits to serious disagreement in religious views and moral judgments, one is compelled to act on one's best judgments and to decide and determine the behaviour of everyone as well, enforcing one's views on others to achieve some reconciliation. Hobbes refers to this state of nature as a war of all against all. Krishna operated from this position and accepted the imperative of war to achieve peace.

Krishna never views one's own nation and its relation to other nations in a fragmented manner. The act of seeking out and laying a claim to a past and its location (spearheading the founding of Indraprastha and its subsequent inhabitation) establishes continuity between that past (Hastinapur) and its location with the present (Indraprastha). The problem which spurred the conflict was the combination of sentiments of self-interest and self-sacrifice on the part of Kauravas. The Pandavas under the tutelage of Krishna attempt to maintain the territorial community of the *Bharatavarsha* nation by endeavouring to preserve the cultural familiarity (their submissive demand of five villages) and loyalty between these two alternatives while allowing self-rule, both for themselves and their jealous cousin. Krishna realized, what the French sociologist Dominique Schnapper⁶ observed, that there exists a duality to the nation (Schnapper and Greaves 72). The two impulses in conflict here are the tendency to appeal to the temporal continuity of a territory and an inordinate significance attributed to territorial relations as a consequence of birth, both of which account for the character of the nation as a territorial community of kinship (asserted by both Pandavas and Kauravas). Krishna acknowledges this duality (of being a native of both Mathura and Dwarka, a cowherd and a king) as the acceptance of a limiting yet encompassing tradition that distinguishes one nation, one character from another. In *Mahabharata*, there is the uneven coming together of previously distinct localities and identities into a national territory and an exclusive status and existence. This amalgamation is propagated by a developing self-understanding conveyed through the recapitulation of history, of nation and oneself.

A distinctive trait of Hindu nationalism is the belief that the nation is the only goal worthy of pursuit – an assertion that often leads to the belief that the nation demands unquestioned and uncompromising loyalty. Krishna, in his sermon to Arjuna, contends that the war is only worth fighting so that it may accomplish the building of a nation which shall be the beacon of righteousness and morality, but which would never come to pass as long as Kauravas are alive. Krishna seeks to fulfil this agenda earlier too, when upon establishing the city of Indraprastha, he encourages Yudhishtira to complete the *Rajasuya Yagya* successfully, which is to be the triumphant point in Krishna's life and his greatest achievement as a political philosopher. He succeeds in forging an empire, ruled by Yudhishtira, which is a federal trust of all kingdoms of the then India with a benevolent ruler as the protector of dharma. He gives *Aryavrata* political stability, order and righteous administration without claiming the laurel crown for himself. Hobbes too espoused divine command or mentorship where virtue, ethics, psychological egoism and a form of projectivism guides and steers the political juggernaut to ensure continued stability and ruthless suppression of any rebellion and defiance that might undermine such a regime. Hobbes further reiterates this when he asserts that political legitimacy depends not on how a government comes to power, but how effectively it protects those who consented to obey it and hence shall sustain it. Machiavelli also affirmed that political obligation ends when protection ceases. Millennia later, Chanakya does the same.

When such a belief about the nation becomes dogmatic with vain glory and hubris, it can threaten individual liberty and prudence. Bhishma's vow to secure and protect Hastinapur makes him oblivious to the faults of those who rule it, and instead makes him a slave to the conceited and egotistic arrogance of Dhritrashtra and later Duryodhan. This bondage also manifests in King Dhritrashtra's ambition which instigates Duryodhan's aspirations arising from the resentment and bitterness of being ignored by a blind father and a blind-folded mother. This acrimony ends in reducing Hastinapur to a bloody wasteland, haunted by widows and orphans. Krishna revolts against this self-sabotage of a nation by the haughty and the proud. He asserts that:

श्रेयान्स्वधर्मो विगुणः परधर्मात्स्वनुष्ठितात् ।
स्वधर्मे निधनं श्रेयः परधर्मो भयावहः ॥ 35॥

[It is far better to perform one's natural prescribed duty, though tinged with faults, than to perform another's prescribed duty, though perfectly. In fact, it is preferable to die in the discharge of one's duty, than to follow the path of another, which is fraught with danger.]

-*Song of God*, Chapter- 3, Verse 35.

The concurrent political situation as revealed to Krishna is a maniac quest by the ruling elite class of the small kingdoms of exerting one's ruthless and exploitative power obsession. Although dharma or righteousness is supposed to be the paramount principle of royal administration, boastful hereditary kingship and conceited power exertions wilfully sacrifice dharma over domineering self-projection. Krishna realises that the history of the consolidation and stable existence of *Aryavrata* will be a transformation ushered through the effective exercise of sovereignty over a territory (Hastinapur). Krishna generates a territorial community of kinship, which flourishes over time. Hastinapur may only be a constituent of Bharatvarsha, but is a pivotal point in heralding the political edifice of *Dharma – Rajya*⁷ rather than blind adherence to *Rajya-Niti*. Prafulla Kumar Mohanty, in the article 'The Mahabharata: A Reading in Political Structuring', elucidates:

Although dharma or righteousness was supposed to be the central principle of royal administration, hereditary kingship and power struggle always sacrificed dharma for wilful self-projection. Military power, manipulative expertise and ruthless exploitation were an end in themselves. Power vested in the crown and not the head wearing it; and power never devolved to the common man. In Krishna's consciousness, thus, the personal and the cosmic, the private and the public responses to the power situation grew into an intellectual passion (147).

A nation requires a relatively extensive history that both asserts and is expressive of a temporal continuity, and a relatively uniform culture that is often based on a common language, religion and law. None of these characteristics is found to be absolute or complete in the *Mahabharata*, rather, they are privy and vulnerable to the interests, practices and institutions of the outsiders, further beset with ambiguities and tensions. This can be seen in the anti-thesis of Krishna i.e., Shakuni. Although Shakuni is considered to be evil, negative and destructive, he too is a crusader in his own right. In Vyasa's *Mahabharata* no specific motivation is given for the evil contrivance of Shakuni's mind except his self-inflicted physical deformity and his hatred for order and familial harmony as a villainous

trait for his morbidity. But in other versions, Shakuni is given a motive, a cause to uphold which glosses over his villainy to give him a heroic stature.⁸ He enters the Hastinapur household to control the destiny of the heartland of *Aryavarta* with a crooked pair of dice and becomes an intellectual, political and strategic counterpoint to the genius of Krishna. Unlike Bhishma who embodies himself as the living emblem of Hastinapur, never dwelling on whether what he protects so fiercely is even worth protecting; Shakuni with his single-minded determination pursues his revenge, just like Krishna chases his dream. The political corruption and moral decay of Hastinapur supports him and he further perpetuates the chaotic situation by manipulating events. He ultimately becomes the plot-maker in the *Mahabharata*, a formidable contrapuntal energy to Krishna in the orchestration of power. It is apparent to the aficionados of the story of *Mahabharata* that Krishna and Shakuni are the two minds manipulating the politics of power in the epic, pulling it in opposite directions. Hence nation and its destiny are often thwarted by the intentions of the persuasive.

The philosophy of Mahabharata, especially its meditations on nation and kingship like the theory of natural law is acutely empowering. It places the agency on humans. Unlike formalist exclusive positivism, it does not believe that law of the state has an authority and hence there is an obligation to obey law qua law. It does not argue that a norm would lose its authoritativeness and its relevance if its subjects decide to debate and regularise it. Mahabharata does not reflect nor deflect a black and white worldview of right and wrong. It takes cognizance of all the shades of grey that make up man's psyche and soul. Indeed, grey is ubiquitous and synonymous to the persona of Krishna. Neither Mahabharata nor Krishna has any intention to fully settle the disputes of dharma. The opening verse in Bhagvada Gita is "*Dharmakshetre Kurushetre*" which indicates that it is not mere war but a just war with humongous moral connotations and political ramifications for the entire Bharatavarsha (*Bhagavad Gita* Chapter 1: Verse 1). Krishna realizes that the competing claims and postulations towards the throne on the part of the Kauravas and the Pandavas are dubious next to the destiny of *Bharatavarsha*. A nation's fate is not contingent to any man or even a god's ambition. As in human life so in law made by humans, there is a constant struggle between competing evils. The political jurisprudence in *Mahabharata* grapples with choosing

between the lesser of the two evils. Does the nation of Hastinapur lose its political legitimacy and the battle of Kurukshetra its strategic validity since the Kauravas representing all what is wrong with the world were defeated through subterfuge?

The upshot of dharma in *Mahabharata* is complex. Like Kaushika⁹ who chose the dharma of *satya* (truth) over *ahimsa* (non-violence) but was condemned to hell, humans too are cursed since the agency of interpretation may lie with them, but it does not necessarily guarantee accurate understanding of critical morality. Nevertheless, through the nature of Krishna, *Mahabharata* demonstrates that human reason is capable of exploring the truth called dharma. Slavery and sati may have been part of conventional morality in India's past. It is however arguable whether there were any deliberations or whether these bigoted practices constituted critical morality or dharma. Sati and slavery were abolished not because of a Bhishma-like approach of avoidance but owing to society's ability and willingness to combat ills through a reasonable approach.

Mahabharata is not a mere epic or a great poem of lofty themes, super human characters and devastating wars culminating in a synthetic peace, nor is it a moral and religious discourse woven around a long narrative as many scholars normally espouse. Krishna is more than the greatest archer, prolific charioteer, a great lover, political strategist, a lover of art and above all a great thinker and philosopher. He is the God who wielded the cosmic dice to transform the universe and lived among men to teach them how to live in accordance with God's intentions or decree. He is the most powerful sovereign, maker of kings, due to his intellectual and spiritual superiority, which he acquired after tremendous hardships and atrocities. Krishna in his moral consciousness and spiritual awakening assimilates and transmits two layers of experience, one intensely personal and the other perceptually objective. The nation he builds too reflects these tendencies. Dwarka may have sunk, but the spectre of Hastinapur remains. *Mahabharata* must be scraped and peeled until the precepts which it harbours are not extricated. Otherwise, we are doomed to misinterpret it forever as a heroic dream of superhuman efforts of hate and love by great and noble figures. One will always remain befuddled by what Iravati Karve unimpressively asks:

[If] All human effort is fruitless, all human life ends in frustration — [then] was the *Mahabharata* written to drive home this lesson? (Karve, 9).

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Notes

- ¹ Social contract theory, nearly as old as philosophy itself, is the view that persons' moral and/or political obligations are dependent upon a contract or agreement among them to form the society in which they live. Hobbes is famous for his early and elaborate development of what has come to be known as “social contract theory”, the method of justifying political principles or arrangements by appeal to the agreement that would be made among suitably situated rational, free, and equal persons. He is infamous for having used the social contract method to arrive at the astonishing conclusion that we ought to submit to the authority of an absolute—undivided and unlimited—sovereign power. Prior to the establishment of the basic social contract, according to which men agree to live together and the contract to embody a Sovereign with absolute authority, nothing is immoral or unjust – anything goes. After these contracts are established, however, then society becomes possible, and people can be expected to keep their promises, cooperate with one another, and so on. The Social Contract is the most fundamental source of all that is good and that which we depend upon to live well. Our choice is either to abide by the terms of the contract, or return to the State of Nature, which Hobbes argues no reasonable person could possibly prefer.
- ² Matsya Nyaya is an ancient Indian philosophy which refers to the principle of the Law of Fish. It is described as the fundamental law of nature explained by the proverb of the big fish devouring the smaller fish, hence strong devour the weak. It can be equated to the 'Law of the Jungle'. However, in spite of best intentions it continues to prevail in internal and international politics. Society is bound together by dharma (justice), which is the great protecting principle, and economic prosperity, moral welfare and cultural advancements are the functions of justice. Kautilya also subscribes to this view and says that if danda is not inflicted, the law of matsyanyaya (force, authority or coercion) will prevail because in the absence of the chastiser, the strong devour the weak.
- ³ Lakshagriha or 'House of Lac' features in one of the most important episodes in *Mahabharata*. According to the story, Kauravas built the palace out of lac so as to burn the Pandavas alive. The Pandavas, though, managed to escape the house of lac through a secret tunnel. The palace was built on the orders of Duryodhana, the eldest Kaurava. The architect Purochana, who was also a minister under the Kauravas, was called to build the palace. Thus, a palace made of lac came up in the village of Varanavat. The Pandavas were invited to visit Varnavrat and stay in the house for a few days. Duryodhana planned that the death of the five Pandavas and their mother Kunti would pass off as an accident. Meanwhile, Vidura managed to inform the Pandavas of the imminent threat on their life. Vidura's warning to Yudhishtara are described as *Mahabharata* Adi Parva. Vidura also sent a miner who dug a tunnel for the Pandavas. The tunnel opened near the river Ganges. The tunnel took six months to complete. One night,

when the Pandavas saw the chance, they escaped the palace via the tunnel and also set the palace on fire. While the Kauravas thought that the five brothers were dead, this incident gave the Pandavas time to prepare for the war without the Kauravas suspecting anything.

- ⁴ Manu-smriti, (Sanskrit: “Laws of Manu” or “The Remembered Tradition of Manu”) also called Manava-dharma-shastra (“The Dharma Text of Manu”), traditionally the most authoritative of the books of the Hindu code (Dharma-shastra) in India. Manu-smriti is the popular name of the work, which is officially known as Manava-dharma-shastra. It is attributed to the legendary first man and lawgiver, Manu. The received text dates from circa 100 CE. The Manu-smriti prescribes to Hindus their dharma—i.e., that set of obligations incumbent on each as a member of one of the four social classes (varnas) and engaged in one of the four stages of life (ashramas). It contains 12 chapters of stanzas, which total 2,694. It deals with cosmogony; the definition of the dharma; the sacraments (samskaras); initiation (upanayana) and the study of the Vedas (the sacred texts of Hinduism). It also deliberates on matters of juridical interest, divided under 18 headings, after which the text returns to religious topics such as charity, rites of reparation, the doctrine of karma, the soul and hell. The text makes no categorical distinction between religious law and practices and secular law. Its influence on all aspects of Hindu thought, particularly the justification of the Hindu state, has been profound.
- ⁵ Dharma-shastra, (Sanskrit: “Righteousness Science”) ancient Indian body of jurisprudence, is the basis, subject to legislative modification, of the family law of Hindus living in territories both within and outside. Dharma-shastra is primarily concerned not with legal administration, though courts and their procedures are dealt with comprehensively, but with the right course of conduct in every dilemma. Some basic principles of Dharma-shastra include the propositions that duties are more significant than rights and that the king (i.e., the state) must protect the subjects from all harm, moral as well as material. The Dharma-shastra literature, written in Sanskrit, exceeds 5,000 titles. It can be divided into three categories: (1) sutras (terse maxims), (2) smritis (shorter or longer treatises in stanzas), and (3) nibandhas (digests of smriti verses from various quarters) and vrittis (commentaries upon individual continuous smritis). The nibandhas and vrittis, juridical works intended for legal advisers, exhibit considerable skill in harmonizing divergent sutras and smritis.
- ⁶ In her critically acclaimed work titled *Community of Citizens: On the Modern Idea of Nationality* (2017) sociologist Dominique Schnapper offers a learned and concise antidote to contemporary assaults on the nation while asserting that modern nation represent at once a learned history of the national ideal of the past as well as the contemporary struggles of establishing a liberal democracy for the future. Both these impulses are contentious and coterminous to each other. She contends that ethnicity is a sympathetic contrast to the rationality and abstraction of modern-state. The unending dialectic between the personal and the political will be inevitable marked by affect and passion. It is the rationalisation of the ideal rather than the emotionality of the social which should dominate the dynamic of nation-building. See Haller, M. (2019). *Toward a European Nation? Political Trends in Europe* -

East and West, Center and Periphery. United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis and Schnapper, D. (2017). *Community of Citizens: On the Modern Idea of Nationality*. United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis.

- ⁷ Dharma Rajya is the Ideal State or Nation based on the principles of dhrama — the State constituted according to the principles of Indian polity, where the organic groupings of the people function unhindered, where the order and discipline inherent in these groupings is protected. In such a Rajya the forces of nature also remain in their benign aspect, all is well ordered, everyone is healthy, happy and cared for. It is a non-sectarian State and not a theocracy. Dharma sets forth an ideal to strive for, an ideal for all humanity; dharma is a universal ethic, which evolved over time as an eternal satyam (truth) which should govern every human endeavor which should result in the good of all living entities, *bhutahitam*. Refer to <http://veda.wikidot.com/dharma-rajya>
- ⁸ Bhishma in his wilful haughtiness imprisoned the entire royal family of Gandhar, including the king and his hundred children. He used to send only a fistful of rice a day for the entire family. In desperation, the Gandhar clan decided that if they shared the one meal sent to them all would die in a week or two; they should therefore allow one member of the family to eat that meal and survive to take revenge on Bhishma's clan, he so zealously sought to protect. Shakuni, due to his forbearance, was the fateful person selected by the family to survive as the avenger, who shall destroy the Kuru clan. The torment that Shakuni suffered, having to see the shrivelled death of his starved family was suppressed by a simulated grin, which he wore as a veritable mask. He was intelligent, well-read, good with a sword, but he limped his way across Aryavarta to destroy Bhishma and the entire Kuru clan, using his nephew Duryodhana as a pawn. He was an artificial, a subversive intelligence without any affinities and allegiances to family, friends and vision. He merely wanted power to use against the powerful and for that his monarchical ambitions for Duryodhan were a surrogate for his own goals of chaos. He developed a set of dice with the bones of his father and made it the most potent weapon to manipulate and subvert the political reality of his times, ruining all who dared to play his game. Pandavas and Kauravas were merely pawns who made calculated moves to their own destruction
- ⁹ Krishna in *Karna Parva* contends that dharma is more important than truth and tells Arjuna about the story of a sage Kaushika. A group of robbers was chasing a few people and they had taken refuge in a bush near that hermit's ashrama. Now that hermit had the reputation of telling only the truth. The thieves knew it and they asked the hermit about their victims. Kaushika replied truthfully that they were hidden behind the bush. The robbers killed every one of those victims. Later when he died, Kaushika went to the deepest darkest hell despite his truthfulness as he was directly responsible for the slaughter of so many innocent people.

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भारतीयता के लिए उपस्थित चुनौतियों की शिनाख्त करती धूमिल की कविता

वीरेंद्र सिंह

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भारत की परिकल्पना उसकी समृद्ध सांस्कृतिक विरासत के बिना असंभव है। यह एक देश का नाम भर नहीं, अपने आप में एक विचार-सरणि है जिसका फलक इसकी भौगोलिक सीमाओं से कहीं ज्यादा विस्तृत है। सम्पूर्ण विश्व को अपना परिवार समझने वाले इस देश की अस्मिता पर अंतः-बाह्य न जाने कितने ही हमले हो चुके और हो रहे हैं लेकिन कुछ बात है कि हस्ती मिटती नहीं हमारी। समकालीन हिंदी कविता इन चुनौतियों के प्रति सजग होकर अपना दायित्व बखूबी निभा रही है और इसकी एक मजबूत कड़ी है— धूमिल। इस कवि को प्रथम दृष्टया वामपंथी कहकर इनके साहित्य का आंकलन होता रहा है लेकिन इनके साहित्यिक चिंतन को इस सीमित दायरे में नहीं बाँधा जा सकता। रास्ते जो भी हों, उनका अंतिम ध्येय भारतीयता की रक्षा करना है और इस निमित्त उनकी कविता देश के अंदर उपस्थित चुनौतियों की पहचान कर उनसे सख्ती से निबटने का मार्ग भी सुझाती है और यही इस शोधपत्र का उद्देश्य भी है।

बीज शब्द : भारतीयता, संस्कृति, समकालीन हिंदी कविता, सर्वसमावेशी, सामाजिक विसंगतियाँ।

भारत अपनी 'वसुधैव कुटुंबकम्' की स्वर्णिम सांस्कृतिक विरासत के लिए जाना जाता है। यहाँ की संस्कृति पर कितने ही हमले होते रहे किंतु कुछ तो बात है कि हमलावर मानसिकता भी यहाँ आकर इसके ही रंगों में ढलकर तदाकार और तद्रूप हो जाती है। कितने ही मुस्लिम लुटेरे आक्रांताओं ने इसकी आभा को धूमिल करने की कोशिश की किंतु मुगल अंततः इसे ही अपना घर बना बैठे। अंग्रेज भी आततायी मानसिकता लेकर आये थे लेकिन सैंकड़ों बरस इस आबोहवा में रहकर चले गए। प्रसाद के नाटक 'चन्द्रगुप्त' में कार्नेलिया यूँ ही नहीं कहती— 'अरुण यह मधुमय देश हमारा / जहाँ पहुँच अनजान क्षितिज को मिलता एक सहारा'। जो देश आततायियों को भी खुले दिल से अपनाता है; शरणार्थियों

को अभय देता है, वह दोस्ती का हाथ बढ़ाने वाले को तो पलकों पर बैठाता है। दुर्जन का भी मंगल चाहने वाली संस्कृति का समूल नाश करने के हर प्रयास विफल साबित हुए हैं और इसका कारण है इस संस्कृति का वह वैश्विक स्वरूप, जिसे हम भारतीयता कहते हैं।

भारतीयता की अवधारणा को अलग-अलग दृष्टिकोणों से समझा जाता रहा है— जैसे मूल्यवादी, नृजातीय, ऐतिहासिक आदि। भारत की परंपरागत चिंतनधारा इसे आध्यात्मिक और नैतिक मूल्यों का समुच्चय मानती है जबकि विद्वानों का दूसरा वर्ग इसे ऐतिहासिक और नृजातीय दृष्टि से देखता है। कुछ लोग इसे आर्य संस्कृति के रूप में, तो कुछ आर्य-अनार्य संस्कृति के मिश्रण के रूप में देखते हैं। समन्वयवादियों की चिंतनधारा मानती है कि हिन्दू और मुस्लिम यहाँ के अलग-अलग सांस्कृतिक प्रवाह होते हुए भी भारतीय संस्कृति के अभिन्न घटक हैं और इस संस्कृति की निर्मिती इन दोनों के समभाव से होती है। 'मिली-जुली संस्कृति' या 'गंगा-जमुनी संस्कृति' जैसे मुहावरे इसी संदर्भ में प्रयुक्त होते हैं। कवि मैथिलीशरण गुप्त की कविता 'मातृमंदिर' की ये पंक्तियाँ भी इसी ओर इंगित कर रही हैं—

सब तीर्थों का एक तीर्थ यह, हृदय पवित्र बना लें हम,
आओ आज अजातशत्रु बन, सबको मित्र बना लें हम।

मार्क्सवादी चिंतक इस अवधारणा को आर्थिक संरचना से जोड़कर देखते हैं और भारत को विविध जीवन-पद्धतियों का अजायबघर मानते हैं। समन्वित रूप में भारतीयता अपने आप में एक वृहत्तर और सर्वसमावेशी अवधारणा है, जो किसी भौगोलिक क्षेत्र, संस्कृति, भाषा, जाति, धर्म, सम्प्रदाय आदि की संकीर्ण सीमाओं से मुक्त है। इसके सर्वसमावेशी स्वरूप में हिंदू, मुस्लिम, सिख, ईसाई; वामपंथ, दक्षिणपंथ, लिबरल, डेमोक्रेट; गुजराती, बंगाली, कश्मीरी, तमिल; ब्राह्मण, क्षत्रिय, शूद्र, वैश्य; इतिहास, भूगोल, विज्ञान, संस्कृति— सब कुछ समा जाता है। हरिश्चंद्र व्यास के शब्दों में, "अखंड चेतना का पर्याय है भारत। यह मात्र एक भौगोलिक इकाई नहीं, जिसे नदियों, पहाड़ों, मैदानों या समुद्र तटों से परिभाषित किया जा सके। यह तो संस्कृति की सनातन-यात्रा का यायावर है। इसे हम आलोक का महापुंज भी कह सकते हैं। 'भा' का अर्थ प्रकाश ही तो होता है। भारत यानि प्रकाश में रत, प्रकाश में लवलीन या यूँ कहें कि प्रकाश को अपने में समाया हुआ देश" (2010: 7)। इस अवधारणा में 'भारत' शब्द आवश्यक रूप से जुड़ा है, इसलिए स्थूलतः अपने समग्र रूप में यह भारत की भौगोलिक सीमाओं के अंदर एक ऐसे अखंड भारत का निर्माण करता है, जो भौगोलिक सीमाओं में बंधा होकर भी इनसे मुक्त है।

जब हम छोटे-छोटे विरोधों-प्रतिरोधों, संकीर्णताओं, मतभेदों से ऊपर उठकर मानवहित की बात करते हैं, तब हम मानवीय प्रतिमा के रूप में अखंड भारत की बात करते हैं और यही भारतीयता है। निजी स्वार्थ और अभिमत के ऊपर देशहित और उससे भी ऊपर मानवता के कल्याण को अधिमान देना भारतीयता है और इसीलिए पाश्चात्य 'नेशनैलिटी' शब्द इसके आगे बौना साबित हुआ है। नेशनैलिटी में कट्टरपन है, संकीर्णता है और निपट स्वार्थ है जबकि भारतीयता एक व्यापक और विराट संकल्पना है, जो बिना किसी भेदभाव के खुले दिल से मानव मात्र का हितसाधन करती है। राष्ट्रीयता, यद्यपि, एक पवित्र भाव अभिव्यक्त करता शब्द है लेकिन भारतीयता जैसी व्यापकता यहाँ भी नहीं है।

समकालीन हिंदी कविता में कवियों की दृष्टि आमजन और भारतीयता की पक्षधर रही है और इसके दायरे में विश्व के किसी भी कोने में बैठा मनुष्य स्वतः ही आ जाता है। यह जनपक्षधरता हमें निराला, अज्ञेय, नागार्जुन, मुक्तिबोध, त्रिलोचन, सर्वेश्वरदयाल सक्सेना, रघुवीर सहाय, धूमिल, केदारनाथ सिंह आदि वर्तमान काल के कमोबेश तमाम कवियों तक 'एक्सटेंड' होती दिखाई देती है। इन सभी में भारतीयता के प्रति एक गहरा लगाव और चिंता साफ देखी जा सकती है और यही धूमिल की कविता का भी मूल है। धूमिल की कविता में आग और राग, दोनों मौजूद हैं लेकिन इसमें से केवल एक पक्ष को छोटकर उन्हें वामपंथी घोषित कर दिया गया है। हमें यह समझना होगा कि यह आग भारतीयता के लिए उपस्थित खतरों के विरोध में है, न कि किसी विचारधारा विशेष के समर्थन में। किसी भी लेखक की अपनी विचारधारा हो सकती है, लेकिन लेखनी का फलक लेखक की विचारधारा से कहीं ज्यादा विस्तृत होता है। धूमिल की कविता में भारतीयता ठीक उसी तरह समाहित है— जैसे सागर में मोती, और लोग हैं कि सागर की उद्दाम लहरों पर सवार हो अपनी सवारी का आनंद ही ढूँढ़ते हैं।

भारत वह देश है, जिसे सभ्यता और संस्कृति का प्रथम आचार्य माना जाता है। यह ठीक है कि इस देश की संस्कृति पर मुस्लिमों और अंग्रेजों ने खूब हमले किये और इसे अपने मनमाफ़िक ढालने की भरपूर कोशिश की, लेकिन यह यहाँ की संस्कृति की उदारता ही है कि अपने वजूद को बनाए रखते हुए उसने बाह्य संस्कृतियों के तत्त्वों को भी अपने कलेवर में यथोचित स्थान दिया। यहाँ की संस्कृति की कई सूक्तियाँ आज भी बड़े उत्साह से उद्धृत की जाती हैं, लेकिन आज ये महज जुमले ही क्यों साबित हो रही हैं? भारतीयता के उज्ज्वल पथ से भारतीय भटक क्यों गया है? कभी समृद्ध और खुशहाल रहे इस देश में

आज हाहाकार क्यों है? राजनीति यहाँ भ्रष्टाचार और व्यभिचार का ही पर्याय क्यों हो गयी है? जहाँ देखो वहाँ बाबूगिरी हावी क्यों है? इन सभी बिंदुओं पर धूमिल की कविता सिलसिलेवार तार्किक पड़ताल करते हुए कुछ तीखे सवाल खड़े करती है, जिनपर आज चिंतन—मनन की सख्त आवश्यकता इसलिए है, कि हम भारतीयता के भाव को अक्षुण्ण बनाए रख सकें।

यह सही है कि हमारे देश के पास एक स्वर्णिम सांस्कृतिक विरासत है, लेकिन आज जो परिदृश्य नज़र आता है, उसमें धूमिल भारतवर्ष को ठीक ही 'हिमालय से लेकर हिन्द महासागर तक फैला हुआ जली हुई मिट्टी का ढेर' कहते हैं और इस दुःखद स्थिति के लिए जिम्मेवार कारणों की भी पहचान करते हैं। वे जानते हैं कि आजादी के बाद भी यहाँ शोषक, शोषित और दलाल— तीनों मौजूद रहे हैं और इनके चरित्र पहले से कहीं ज्यादा उघड़कर सामने आये हैं। भारतीयता के लिए जितने ख़तरे मुस्लिमों—अंग्रेजों ने उपस्थित नहीं किये होंगे, उससे कहीं ज्यादा आजाद भारत के तथाकथित सुराजियों ने उपस्थित किए हैं। इस देश में सामाजिक विसंगतियाँ और विद्रूपताएँ आज गहनतर सुस्पष्ट हुई हैं बल्कि यूँ कहा जाए कि सुराजियों के चेहरे ज्यादा नंगे हुए हैं। कवि इन सब दृश्यों को बेलाग और बेबाक स्वर में बेपर्द करते हुए इसके प्रति अपना पुरज़ोर विरोध भी दर्ज़ कराता है जोकि अधिकतर संयत, नियंत्रित और अनुशासित है। आजादी के बाद एक लंबा अरसा गुजर गया, लेकिन जब न तो कुछ बदला और न बदलने के लक्षण दिखे, तो कवि अपने—आप से ही सवाल करता है कि भाई, जानवर बनने के लिए आखिर कितने सब्र की जरूरत होती है? और आवेश में आकर जब धूमिल यह कहते हैं कि— 'मामूली तौर पर क्रूरता भी आज /जिंदा रहने के लिए /एक जरूरत बन गयी है' (1984: 28) तो कुछ लोग उन्हें नक्सलवाद का पोषक और वामपंथ का अंधभक्त घोषित कर देते हैं, जबकि ऐसा बिल्कुल नहीं है। प्रताड़ित किये जाने पर तो साँप भी डंक मारता है, वही भाव धूमिल की इन पंक्तियों का समझना चाहिए। यह सही है कि सामाजिक विसंगतियों और कुरूपताओं के खिलाफ धूमिल की कविता एक मजबूत और बुलंद आवाज़ का पर्याय है, लेकिन ग़लत का विरोध और सही का समर्थन ही तो भारतीयता है। आज मानवता को पथ से भटकाने वाले बेतरतीब, लक्ष्यहीन जलूसों में शामिल लोग किसी गाइडेड मिसाइल की तरह काम करते हैं इसलिए जलूस में पीछे छूट गए उनके चेहरों की याद दिलानी पड़ती है और वही धूमिल ने किया। 'अकाल दर्शन' कविता में यहाँ की चुन्ना राजनीति के धिनौने चेहरे को नंगा करते हुए वे लिखते हैं—

उस मुहावरे को समझ गया हूँ
जो आजादी और गांधी के नाम पर चल रहा है
जिससे न भूख मिट रही है, न मौसम / बदल रहा है
(लोग)... जलसों—जलूसों में पूरी ईमानदारी से / हिस्सा ले रहे हैं और
अकाल को सोहर की तरह गा रहे हैं (2013: 18)

यह सोहर—गान आज भी क्या बदस्तूर जारी नहीं है? तब उन्होंने लूटा था, आज तुम लूट रहे हो; फर्क कहाँ है साहिब? जनता फुटपाथों पर भूखों मरती है और माननीयों की तिजोरियाँ भरती जाती हैं, यही तो है आज का जनतंत्र। जनता को दूसरों की ठंड के लिए अपनी पीठ पर ऊन ढोने वाली भेड़ धूमिल ठीक कहते हैं। इस अनचाहे सच के विरुद्ध आम जनमन आक्रोशित तो है लेकिन परमुखापेक्षी जनता के चरित्र को धूमिल जानते हैं और उसका ही क्यों, आर्थिक सहायता के लिए पश्चिम का मुँह ताकती भारत की सत्ता का भी यही सच है—

मेरा गुस्सा— / जनमत की चढ़ी हुई नदी में
एक सड़ा हुआ काठ है
लंदन और न्यूयार्क के घुंडीदार तमसों से
डमरू की तरह बजता हुआ मेरा चरित्र
अंग्रेजी का 8 है। (वही: 28)

मतलब साफ है— आजादी से पहले यह देश पूँजीवाद का गुलाम था, आज यह फिर उसके नियंत्रण में है। तब गोरे लूट रहे थे, अब उन्हीं के इशारों पर अपने लोग लूट रहे हैं और इस लूट में दक्षिण, वाम, समाजवादी, प्रगतिशील, लोकतांत्रिक; सब बारी—बारी शामिल हैं। 'मुँह में राम—राम बगल में छुरी' मुहावरे को उलट दीजिये, तो इस बिरादरी पर सटीक बैठेगा क्योंकि दिनभर एक—दूसरे को गरियाने के बाद शाम ढलते ही ये किसी फाइव स्टार होटल में बैठ अगली सांझी लूट की कार्ययोजना पर चर्चा करते हैं। राजनीतिक मंचों पर से परस्पर धुर विरोधी जताकर ये भोले जनमन को आसानी से अपना भक्त बना लेते हैं। इस लूट में आमजन को ऐसे मनमोहक सब्जबाग दिखाए जाते हैं, कि उनकी चकाचौंध में मुग्ध हुए लोग अपने नायक को पूजने लगते हैं जबकि सच धूमिल जानते हैं—

सिरकटे मुर्ग की तरह फड़कते हुए
जनतंत्र में / सुबह—
सिर्फ चमकते हुए रंगों की चालबाजी है (वही: 15)

रंगों की चालबाजी दिखाने के लिए उनके पास अनेक अचूक हथियार हैं और इनमें सबसे कारगर है— भाषाई हथियार। उनके पास एक ऐसा लुभावन शब्दकोश है, जिसके तरकश में हर तरह का अचूक तीर सजा है। वे भाषा की एक ऐसी रात उपस्थित करते हैं, जहाँ कुछ अस्पष्ट ध्वनियाँ सुनाई देती हैं लेकिन दिखाई कुछ भी नहीं देता। आम जनमन इस भूलभुलैया में स्वयं को एक अजीब पसोपेश में पाता है और इसीलिए कवि आमजन और नेता के बीच के यथार्थ को इस तरह कहता है—

मैं अपनी सम्मोहित बुद्धि के नीचे /उसी लोकनायक को
 बार-बार चुनता रहा /जिसके पास हर शंका और
 हर सवाल का /एक ही जवाब था
 यानि कि कोट के बटनहोल में
 महकता हुआ एक फूल /गुलाब का (वही: 102—103)

राजनीति एक ऐसा कीचड़ है, जिसमें जो भी उतरा, गंदला होकर ही बाहर निकला। यूँ तो देशधर्म का जुनून लिए कितने ही मतवाले इस कीचड़ को साफ करने के इरादे से बड़े जोश-ओ-खरोश से उतरे, लेकिन अब तक कोई इस कीचड़े दरिया को सक्षेम पार न कर सका। ऐसा नहीं कि देशभक्ति का उनका जोश कुछ नकली होता है, किंतु राजनीति के दलदल ने उसे ऐसा ही साबित किया है। भारत की राजनीति के इतिहास का एक विहंगावलोकन करें, तो पाएँगे कि स्वतंत्र भारत में चुनिंदा ऐसे नेता हुए, जो आज भी देशहित में स्वच्छ राजनीति की मिसाल हैं और इस क्षेत्र में नयी पीढ़ी के लिए किसी लाइटहाउस की तरह उम्मीद की किरण निरंतर जलाये हैं। अटलबिहारी वाजपेयी, प्रणब मुखर्जी, सोमनाथ चटर्जी आदि ऐसे कुछ नाम हैं। प्रश्न यह है, कि भारत की जनता ने इन्हें भी आखिर दिया क्या? एक को कभी पूर्ण बहुमत नहीं मिला, दूसरे को देश के नेतृत्व का अवसर नहीं। फिलहाल तो यही अंतिम सत्य उभरता हुआ सामने आता है कि नेकदिली को भारतीय राजनीति और जनमानस कभी अंगीकार नहीं कर पाया है। स्वीकार किया गया उन्हें, जो आमजन को गुमराह कर मुगालते में रखने की कला में सिद्धहस्त हैं। इसलिए धूमिल यहाँ की राजनीति को 'पेशेवर भाषा के तस्कर संकेत और बैलमुत्ती इबारतें' बिलकुल ठीक कहते हैं। यहाँ की जनता को इसी पेशेवर भाषा और इसके दाव-पेंचों में कैद रहना पसंद है, अन्यथा क्या कारण है कि हिमाचल प्रदेश की राजनीति में सबसे काबिल मुख्यमंत्री शांता कुमार को ही लोगों ने चुनाव में पटखनी दे दी? उन्होंने 'काम नहीं तो वेतन नहीं' की नीति को लागू करना चाहा, तो यहाँ के 'कर्मठ कर्मचारियों' को यह रास न आया। अपने छद्म स्वार्थ के लिए देशहित को दाँव पर लगा देना तो भारतीयता नहीं है। आज के

मध्यवर्ग का यह चरित्र समकालीन कविता के केंद्र में हमेशा से रहा है और धूमिल की कविता 'कुत्ता' भी इसी ओर संकेत करती है—

वहाँ, हृदय की लचक है / लोच है / नमी है
मगर मत भूलो कि इन सबसे बड़ी चीज
वह बेशर्मी है / जो अंत में
तुम्हें भी उसी रास्ते पर लाती है / जहाँ भूख
उस वहशी को / पालतू बनाती है (वही: 72-73)

दुम हिलाने वाली जनता ने इन नेताओं को तो पथभ्रष्ट किया ही, अपने पाँव पर भी कुल्हाड़ी मारी है क्योंकि पृथ्वीराज चौहान की पराजय जयचंद को मुहम्मद गौरी से अभय कभी नहीं दे सकती लेकिन आमजन को जब तक यह सच समझ आता है, तब तक बहुत देर हो चुकी होती है। 'सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः सर्वे सन्तु निरामयः' पर चलने वाली भारतीयता अपने टुच्चे स्वार्थों की खातिर दलाली करना कभी नहीं सिखाती। यह स्वार्थलोलुप चरित्र ही हमें सिद्धांतों से समझौता करना सिखाता है, इसलिए इस मार्ग से भटकने वाले मध्यवर्ग को आईना दिखाते हुए धूमिल भी 'बारिस में भींगकर' कविता में लिखते हैं—

और यह भी सही है कि बारिस में भींगकर
चमड़े की हर चीज अपनी औकात से
औसतन, कुछ ज्यादा हो जाती है
क्योंकि चमड़े पर बजने वाली सुविधा
जल थुलथुल मसक-मसलन मादा हो जाती है (1977: 43)

भौतिक सुविधाओं का यही मोह तो हमें भारतीयता के मार्ग से भटकाता है। किसी के जीवन-सिद्धांतों को ध्वस्त करना हो तो उसे सुविधाओं का लॉलीपॉप थमा दीजिये और यही बड़ी कुशलता से आज की राजनीति करती है।

राजनीति अपने आप में इतनी बुरी चीज भी नहीं, जितना मान लिया गया है। इस परिदृश्य के लिए केवल नेता को ही जिम्मेवार ठहराया जाना सही नहीं होगा। नेताओं और राजनीति को हम चाहे कितना ही गरियाते रहें, लेकिन जब हम एक उँगली सामने की ओर उठाते हैं, तो चार अन्य उँगलियाँ हमारी ओर संकेत कर रही होती हैं, जिसपर हम ध्यान नहीं देते। गहन चिंतन और आत्मविश्लेषण कर देखा जाए, तो भ्रष्टतंत्र की जड़ें आमजन के चरित्र में भी कहीं गहरे धँसी हुई हैं और इन्हीं से आज का तंत्र आबोहवा पाता है। मन में झाँककर

देखिये, तो भंगार ही दिखाई देगा। आवश्यकता है तो उसे पहचानकर सुधार करने की। राजनीति अगर कीचड़ है, तो उसमें कुछ योगदान हमारा भी है। इसकी पुष्टि के लिए बहुत बड़े स्तर पर जाने की जरूरत नहीं। पंचायती राजव्यवस्था के तंत्र को ही समझ लीजिये। एक पंचायत प्रधान के चुनाव में आज लाखों खर्च कर दिया जाता है, और फिर यह उम्मीद भी की जाती है कि वही प्रधान ईमानदारी से काम करे। क्यों भाई? यह सही है कि चुनाव जीतने के लिए पानी की तरह पैसा बहाना, लोगों को मीट-दारू की दावतें देकर वोट बटोरना असम्भव है। तो सवाल यह भी है, कि कौन खुशी-खुशी इतना सब फिजूल खर्च करना चाहता है? लोग क्यों भीड़ लगाकर उनकी दावतों के चटकारे लेते हैं, क्यों उम्मीद लगाते हैं कि नेता के घर उनकी आवाभगत होनी ही चाहिए, अन्यथा यह मान लिया जाता है कि जो चाय-पानी नहीं करवा सकता, विकास के काम वह क्या खाक करेगा? वैसे चाय-पानी तो भारतीय समाज में बुरी तरह बदनाम हो चुका है और इसमें मुख्य भूमिका आमजन की है। धूमिल भी साफ-साफ यह प्रश्न करते हैं कि—

सहसा हम क्यों चाहने लगते हैं, हमारे सिरों पर

छत हो / (जनतांत्रिक) — वर्षा में धुली हुई

क्या यह खुली सड़क काफी नहीं है (वही: 42)

जिस नैतिक साफगोई की अपेक्षा धूमिल इस भारतीय समाज से रख रहे हैं, वह कोई दूसरी ही दुनिया का यथार्थ हो सकता है। यहाँ के संस्कार इस संदर्भ में धुर से ही खोटे हैं क्योंकि यहाँ बचपन से ही जो औपचारिक तालीम दी जाती है, वह वायवीय है। व्यवहार में उसका कोई आधार नहीं।

दूसरा सवाल यह है कि जब कोई खालिस ईमानदार व्यक्ति उम्मीदवार बनकर चुनाव में उतरता है, बिना मीट-दारू की दावत के वह लोगों से ईमानदार व्यवस्था के हित में वोट की अपील करता है, तो उस बेचारे की जमानत तक ज़ब्त क्यों हो जाती है? जबकि भ्रष्ट नेता से यदि हमारा स्वार्थ सधता है तो उसकी चरणधूलि हम सर-माथे सजा लेते हैं? ऐसा भी नहीं, कि भ्रष्टतंत्र के खिलाफ आवाज़ न उठाई जाए। वह निहायत ज़रूरी है, लेकिन उसके साथ-साथ हम आत्मशोधन भी करें, क्योंकि कोई भी बदलाव अपने आप से ही आरंभ होता है। हमें पहले तो सही और ग़लत में अंतर करना आना चाहिए और फिर ग़लत का विरोध और सही का साथ देने की हिम्मत भी होनी चाहिए। यही संकेत करते हुए धूमिल अपनी कविता 'लोकतंत्र' में लिखते हैं—

वे घर की दीवारों पर नारे / लिख रहे थे
 मैंने अपनी दीवारें जेब में रख लीं
 उन्होंने मेरी पीठ पर नारा लिख दिया
 मैंने अपनी पीठ कुर्सी को दे दी
 और अब पेट की बारी थी
 मैं खुश था कि मुझे मंदाग्नि की बीमारी थी (1984: 42)

इसलिए कवि ऐसी परिस्थितियों में आह्वान करता है कि हमें पेट, पीठ या दीवार— कुछ भी नहीं बनना बल्कि एक विचार बनना है, एक धधकता हुआ विचार। तभी इस देश के सूरत—ए—हाल बदल सकते हैं।

ऐसा भी नहीं है कि राजनीति बिलकुल अछूत है या कि उसकी कोई आवश्यकता ही नहीं। राजनीति और नेता क्यों जरूरी है? इसका एक महत्वपूर्ण कारण है, कि यही नेता और राजनीति आमजन को बाबूगिरी के खौफ और शोषण से बचाए हुए है। कल्पना कीजिये कि राजनीति का कोई नामोनिशान न होता और केवल अफसरशाही और बाबूगिरी होती, तब क्या रामराज्य होता? लालफीताशाही राजनीतिक भ्रष्टाचार से कहीं अधिक मारक और खतरनाक है। यह एक ऐसी स्थिति को जन्म देता है, जो प्रशासन को राजशाही और कुलीनतंत्र के करीबतर ले जाता है। विक्टोरिया काल का फिरंगी शासन इसका ज्वलंत उदाहरण है। अफसरशाही अपने आप में एक ऐसा खौफजदा माहौल तैयार करती है, कि आम आदमी में उससे कोई सवाल तक पूछने की हिम्मत नहीं रह जाती। जहाँ अफसरशाही नियंत्रण से बाहर होगी, वहाँ कुलीनतंत्र की स्थिति मजबूत और लोकतंत्र की जड़ें ढीली पड़ती चली जाएँगी, इसलिए राजनीति से दूर भागना कोई समाधान नहीं। राजनीति की अवधारणा लोककल्याण के मद्देनजर आई है, अतः आज उसके विपथित चरित्र पर विचार करने की ज़रूरत है।

एक बेहतर राष्ट्रीय परिदृश्य की निर्मिती कैसे संभव हो सकती है? धूमिल की कविता इस पर भी गहराई से तर्कसंगत विचार करती है। उनका स्पष्ट मानना है कि वर्तमान परिदृश्य में 'सहमति एक समकालीन शब्द नहीं है' क्योंकि 'हत्यारी संभावनाओं के नीचे / सहनशीलता का नाम / आज भी हथियारों की सूची में शामिल नहीं है' (2013: 97)। इसलिए बालिगों को इसकी तालीम नहीं दी जानी चाहिए बल्कि जहाँ कहीं भी कुछ विपरीत घटित हो रहा है, वहाँ 'गीली मिट्टी की तरह न जी कर जड़ पकड़ने' का आह्वान करते हुए कवि कहता है—

ओ देश के पोर-पोर में दुखते हुए जुनून!
क्रोध की अकेली मुद्रा में / उफनते हुए सात्विक खून!
आ, बाहर आ, / मैं एक अदना कवि- तेरी भाषा का मुँहताज,
मुझे अपनी बोली में शरीक कर! (वही)

धूमिल जानते हैं कि अव्यवस्था को उखाड़ फेंकने की हिम्मत तो दूर, उसके विरुद्ध उफ़ तक करने की हिम्मत लाचार आमजन में नहीं और विरोध के आह्वान का भी क्या लाभ जबकि कविता कान से नहीं, पेट से सुनी जा रही हो। कवि आमजन के इस डरपोक चरित्र की भी ख़बर लेता है लेकिन इस फटकार में भी दुत्कार नहीं, अपनत्व का ही भाव है। ऐसी जनता को एक अबोध बालक मानकर धूमिल उसे स्नेह सहित आईना दिखाते हुए कहते हैं—

और मैं सोचने लगता हूँ कि इस देश में
एकता युद्ध की और दया / अकाल की पूँजी है
क्रांति- / यहाँ के असंग लोगों के लिए
किसी अबोध बच्चे के- / हाथों की जूजी है (वही: 20)

भारत अपने जीवनमूल्यों के लिए जाना जाता है बल्कि कहा जाए तो जीवनमूल्यों का अजायबघर है लेकिन जिस जनमन को 'जेल के बगल की नागरिकता और बूचड़खाने के सामने की सज्जनता' विरासत में मिली हो, उसके लिए तो संस्कृति के ध्येय वाक्य और शब्दावली आकर्षक जुमले ही हो सकते हैं—

जनतंत्र, त्याग, स्वतंत्रता...
संस्कृति, शांति, मनुष्यता... / ये सारे शब्द थे
सुनहरे वादे थे / खुशफ़हम इरादे थे (वही: 102)

कवि ऐसा इसलिए कहता है क्योंकि आज यहाँ सहानुभूति, दया, करुणा, प्रेम, सहयोग, ममत्व— ऐसे सभी जीवन मूल्यों के मानी बदल गए हैं। इन सब की आड़ में छद्म हो चुके भारतीय राजनीतिक चरित्र को धूमिल ने सही पहचाना है—

तुमने पहचाना नहीं— मैं हिंदुस्तान हूँ...
एक अजीब—सी प्यारभरी गुर्गाहट
जैसे कोई मादा भेड़िया / अपने छौने को दूध पिला रही हो और
साथ ही किसी मेमने का सिर चबा रही हो। (वही: 112)

अपने—पराये की भेदबुद्धि से ऊपर उठकर समाजहित के लिए काम करना भारतीय संस्कृति की वह पहचान है जो गुमनामी में कहीं खो गई है। आज तो भाई—भतीजावाद का दौर है और जहाँ की राजनीति एक परिवार की ओर ही मुँहबाएँ देखने को अभिशप्त हो, वहाँ और उम्मीद भी क्या की जा सकती है।

आधुनिकता, विकास और शहरीकरण की अंधी दौड़ में मनुष्य घुटन, अकेलेपन और अजनबीपन का शिकार है। गाँव का भ्रातृभाव, सहयोग और अपनापा शहर आते ही परस्पर असुरक्षा के भाव में जाने क्यों बदल जाता है? कवि की दृष्टि में—

रिश्ते हैं ; लेकिन खुलते नहीं हैं
और हम अपने खून में इतना भी लोहा / नहीं पाते,
कि हम उससे एक ताली बजवाते
और भाषा के भुन्ना—सी ताले को खोलते। (1984: 37)

निजी जीवन की आपाधापी और राजनीति के चक्रव्यूह में आज का सामान्य व्यक्ति इस कदर गिरफ़्तार है कि जब भी स्वयं को आईने में देखता होगा, खुद को ही पहचान नहीं पाने की स्थिति में खुद पर ही मुस्करा देता होगा। असल में वह मुस्कराहट है याकि मन का रुदन, वह स्वयं नहीं जानता लेकिन धूमिल उसकी इस उलझन को बख़ूबी समझते हैं—

भूख ने उन्हें जानवर कर दिया है
संशय ने उन्हें आग्रहों से भर दिया है
फिर भी वे अपने हैं... / अपने हैं... / अपने हैं... (2013: 121—122)

ऐसे लोगों को उनकी तमाम अच्छाइयों—बुराइयों, राग—द्वेषों, न्यूनताओं—उच्चताओं, आग्रहों—दुराग्रहों के बावजूद यदि कवि उन्हें घृणा की दृष्टि से देखने की बजाय उनसे अपनत्व का भाव रखता है तो इसीलिए, कि वह सच्चे मायनों में भारतीयता को जानता, मानता और बरतता है। उसका देशप्रेम कोई पोस्टर या नारेबाजी नहीं बल्कि—

अपने देश की मिट्टी को आँख की / पुतली समझता है
वर्ना, रोटी के टुकड़े पर
किसी भी भाषा में देश का नाम लिखकर
खिला देने से / कोई देशभक्त नहीं होता है। (वही: 98)

इसलिए कहना न होगा कि धूमिल को कोरा वामपंथी घोषित करना उनके लेखन की तोहीन है। ऐसे बहुत से लेखक देखे गए हैं, जो वामपंथ की अंधभक्ति में अपने देश और

यहाँ की सांस्कृतिक विरासत को गाहे-बगाहे गरियाते रहते हैं और इसी में अपने कार्य की इतिश्री समझते हैं लेकिन धूमिल साफ कहते हैं कि—

अन्य लोगों की तरह
मैं इतना कृतघ्न नहीं कि उस जमीन को— धिक्कार दूँ
जिस पर मेरा जन्म खड़ा है। मेरे लिए मेरा देश—
जितना बड़ा है : उतना बड़ा है। (1977: 13)

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**Rethinking Kinship and Environmental Ethics: An Eco-Critical
Reading of Rita Chowdhury's *Chinatown Days***

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Kinship implies human relationship based on consanguinity and biological affinity. Western anthropologists assume 'blood' as the sole referent to define coherent kinship among human beings as distinguished from non-human organisms. Critical kinship studies calls into question this humanist account of kinship based on the anthropocentric binary and takes into consideration the interaction between human beings and non-humans. In the ecological network, both human beings and non-human organisms co-exist and forge a symbiotic bond that upholds environmental ethics of sustainability. This sense of interconnectedness, mutual sympathy and synergy transform ecospheric relations into a form of kinship. But this coherent interaction is obstructed in the process of rampant human encroachment and the capitalist conversion of natural entities into forms of human capital marking gross violation of environmental ethics and ultimately leading to environmental degradation. Drastic climate change coincides with transformed ecological relations leaving both human and non-human organisms vulnerable to ruthless exploitation. Capitalist exploitation in north-east India occurs in the form of indentured labour, geo-cultural displacement and predatory encroachment into the wild, forested landscape. Violation of environmental ethics causes rupture in the throbbing kinship between human beings and their surrounding environment. Taking Rita Chowdhury's *Chinatown Days* (2018) as a case-study, this paper aims to explore how human encroachment, 'jhum' agriculture and capital-intensive economy have disrupted the ecological interconnectedness in Upper Assam. This paper also examines the violation of environmental ethics, displacement of people and transformed ecospheric relations to usher in eco-literary consciousness to reaffirm and sustain kinship between human beings and surrounding environment.

Keywords: kinship, human and non-human, ethics, exploitation, transformation

Kinship implies a relationship based on consanguinity and biological affinity, and kin primarily refers to a “blood” kin as against “fictive” or “adoptive” kin. The western model of kinship studies, founded by Louis Henry Morgan in his seminal texts, *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family* (1870) and *Ancient Society* (1877), is based on the fundamental assumption that ‘blood’ is thicker than ‘water’. ‘Blood’ is always already an important signifier for the naturalization of biological relationship among human beings. The humanist understanding of kinship excludes all non-human organisms and some humans as well through the naturalization of certain human kinship practices that prioritize ‘nature’ over ‘culture’. David Schneider explores the nature-culture interplay and traces the gradual shift in the anthropological understanding of kinship from “reflection of nature” to “an artefact of culture” (Riggs and Peel, 2016: 5). But this definitive and assumptive idea of kinship does not take into consideration various manifestations of multi-layered kinship.

Kinship is considered as a normative system for grouping or classifying people in the line of descent since the “biological” model of kinship studies is premised on the binary between nature and culture, and human beings and non-human organisms. But this distinction is anthropocentric and arbitrary where one category is always privileged over the other. The hierarchizing of categories is part of the essentialist approach to kinship that obstructs the correspondence between the “self” and the “other”. Janet Carsten in *After Kinship* (2004) emphasizes the impossibility of the proper understanding of kinship formation through prevalent cultural practices since the naturalization of human culture only leads to the binary conceptualization of the human and the non-human. The anthropocentrism underlying the cultural construct of the ‘human’ in relation to other species transforms non-human entities in the environment into ‘objects’. Critical kinship studies upholds the fluidity of the term – ‘kinship’ and include both human beings and non-human organisms in a wider network of kinship. Damien W. Riggs and Elizabeth Peel in their book, *Critical Kinship Studies* opine: “critical kinship studies seeks to examine how technologies of human kinship are part and parcel of the construction of humanness (which is positioned in opposition to those who are not considered human), and thus to be ‘critical’ when we study kinship is to interrogate the anthropocentrism that is at the core of

humanist accounts of kinship” (2016: 11).

The relationship between human being and his surrounding environment is a form of kinship and especially in the Indian cultural context, the existence of human beings is conceptualized as being shaped by close interaction with nature. In the ecological network of North East India, both human beings and non-human organisms co-exist and nourish each other. This symbiosis, mutual sympathy and realization of ethics related to the environment transform the affective bond into kinship. Environmental ethics reiterate the values of sympathy, peaceful co-existence, and holistic development that preserves both human beings and other species in an eco-friendly environment. Sudhir Kakar (2019) in an article entitled, “What is Indian-ness?” published in *The Times of India* points out:

Every civilization has its own view of the world and man’s place in it, values that leak into the psyche of its members. Sympathy has been a dominant value in the world view of our own civilization.... Sympathy, as I understand it, is the feeling of kinship, a sense of ‘we’ that extends to beyond what is our kin. And this feeling of kinship is not limited to human beings but extends to the natural world (12).

This co-existence of human beings and non-human organisms sustains ecological balance and preserves bio-diversity but their separation, promoted largely by Western philosophy and culture, is considered by deep ecologists as the root cause of environmental degradation. Greg Garrard in *Ecocriticism* calls into question the anthropocentric perspectives that “take an instrumental approach to nature, arguing for preservation of natural resources only for the sake of humans, deep ecology demands recognition of intrinsic value in nature” and further “demands a return to a monistic primal identification of humans and the ecosphere” (2004: 21). This “identification” blurs the arbitrary borders and opens up space for according values to both human beings and other species. The ecosphere constitutes the totality of living organisms and their environment instead of being limited to any particular species. The unobstructed correspondence between all these organisms can maintain the ecospheric relations and restrict the scope for ‘objectification’ of other species in the process of defining what constitutes the ‘human’. The continuity of ecospheric relations depends on eco-centric rather than anthropocentric approach to nature since the sustainability of economy ultimately depends on ecology.

The prioritizing of human greed instead of human need makes the existence of various organisms vulnerable while disrupting the environmental ethics of mutualism, ecological co-existence and holistic development. Human encroachment and arbitrary spatialization, for example demarcation of human and non-human space, and the capitalist tendency to convert natural entities into forms of human capital, mark the gross violation of environmental ethics which ultimately leads to environmental degradation. Timothy Morton in *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence* notes: “The concept of space was always a constant-presencing machine for making things appear consistent and solid, to make them easier to colonize, enslave and plunder. Constant presence was part of an anthropocentric colonization protocol” (2016: 10-11). Robert Bruce’s predatory gaze at the Singpho beverage and his entrepreneurship in Upper Assam as portrayed in Rita Chowdhury’s *Chinatown Days* (2018) leads to the rampant destruction of the “constant” (Morton, 2016: 11) wild forested space as well as its rich biodiversity, and the enforced migration of indentured labourers from Southern China and across different parts of India to Upper Assam.

Human encroachment leads to unsustainable development, inequity in the distribution of extracted capital at the cost of ecospheric relations and natural resources in the colonised, underdeveloped spaces. Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee points out: “The rhythm of *overaccumulation* and *underdevelopment* means that capitalism is compelled to reorganize space, to expand geographically, and to insert itself unevenly across the globe” (2010: 13; my emphasis). This ‘overaccumulation’ and humanist reorganization of space violates the ethics of ecological cohabitation while widening the gap between rich and poor, human beings and non-human organisms, developed and the underdeveloped countries resulting in the drastic change in environment, transformation of ecospheric relations and rapid exploitation of resources. The kinship between human and non-human is redefined as a relationship between the consumer and the consumed.

The exploitation of nature also coincides with the debasement of living conditions that also transforms the site of mutual interaction into a site of antagonism. The snapping of the kinship ties between human beings and their surroundings leads to the global environmental and economic crisis. In the socio-ecological context of

North-east India, the mode of exploitation is not limited to the colonial period, rather it continues in the post-independence India raising critical issues of deforestation, industrialization, violation of environmental ethics and displacement of poor people. It foregrounds the characteristics of the “Anthropocene”¹ when the capital-intensive economy reshapes the dynamics of relations in the ecosphere. Taking Rita Chowdhury’s *Chinatown Days* (2018) as the case study, this paper aims to explore how colonial encroachment, ‘jhum’ agriculture, and capitalist exploitation in Upper Assam transform ecospheric relations. This paper would examine the “slow violence”² vis-à-vis the displacement and exploitation of poor indentured labourers to usher in an eco-literary consciousness to sustain kinship harmony between human beings and surrounding environment. While focusing on the diasporic migration of people, this paper would further explore the possibility of an eco-cosmopolitan approach.

Rita Chowdhury’s historical novel, *Chinatown Days* (2018)³ is the English translation of her native Assamese novel *Makam* (2010) which in Chinese means ‘Golden Horse’. *Chinatown Days* weaves, in Amitav Ghosh’s review of the novel, “a moving saga about a terrible injustice wrought upon a group of blameless people” (2017). Set mainly in Upper Assam, the novel zeroes in on two narratives belonging to two different historical periods – the first narrates the British colonial encroachment in Assam, the protracted starvation and mass scale migration in Southern China in the 1800s while the second unravels the ensuing tension among the Sino-Indian people during the 1962 Indo-Chinese war.

The geographical as well as the cultural landscape of Assam is configured by the continuous movement of people across the border, the diversity in cultural practices, the cross-cultural communication among people, and the changeability of topographic borders. The geo-cultural diversity of Assam is the microcosm for the entire North-east. In *Discrimination, Challenge and Response: People of North East India*, Sanjoy Hazarika reiterates this diversity embedded in North-east’s geo-cultural landscape: “The region is a magnificent and tragic tapestry of people, events and nature. ... There are many truths here, conflicting realities, especially in terms of perceptions” (2020: v). In her narrative, Rita Chowdhury echoes this ‘perception’ of geo-cultural reality through her portrayal of cultural contact as well as conflict among people belonging to diverse ethnic orientation.

The ethno-cultural diversity of Assam also corresponds to nature that represents not only rich biodiversity of the region but also ecological ‘interconnection’ between human beings and other species: “The dense forests of the region were home to wild animals, poisonous snakes and unknown insects with venomous stings. Everything about the region suggested that the natives of the land were an unconquerable lot” (Chowdhury, 2018: 13). In spite of this biodiversity, the inter-community relations, and the interaction between human beings and their surroundings are always already redefined by politics and war. The narrative maps how the humanist reorganization of space initiates the process of mass displacement and the capitalist conversion of natural entities making the existence of both human beings and non-human organisms vulnerable in Singpho kingdom even before the arrival of the East India Company: “The area, consisting of both hills and plains, was interspersed with dense forests. Between the forests were patches of cultivated land. Robert looked around curiously. The fields were being cultivated by people who had been brought here as slaves from Assam” (Chowdhury, 2018: 17).

The novel charts the histories of four generations of Chinese-Assamese immigrants who forge emotional affinity with the alien surroundings in a remote corner of Assam. The existing bond with their surroundings is under constant threat from both the British colonialism and the capitalist tendency of nation-state. The British entrepreneur, Robert Bruce initiates the colonial enterprise in Upper Assam by transforming the wild, forested eco-geographical space into forms of human capital i.e. tea estate in order to challenge Chinese monopoly in the global tea trade. Robert’s ‘gaze’ at virgin forest accelerates objectification of non-human organisms and anthropocentric bifurcation of cohabited space: “Sipping hot tea from his mug, Robert looked at the captivating beauty of the forests on both banks of the river” (Chowdhury, 2018: 14). The throbbing tea cultivation goes hand in hand with the British mission of civilizing the warring native tribes and turning them into “tea-tribes” for extraction of capital. The exploitation of human beings and nature is part of the capital-intensive economy that thrives on the perpetuation of anthropocentrism. The cultivation of tea in Upper Assam stems from human greed to consolidate control over global economy rather than human need since “Tea had changed the socio-economic and political order of Assam and the other

small countries of the region” (Chowdhury, 2018: 48). The commodification of both ‘tea’ and ‘tea-tribes’ snaps the ecological kinship making drastic change in the environment.

The predatory nature and trade interest of the East India company erode the rich biodiversity of Upper Assam and obstruct the symbiotic bond between human beings and nature. Robert Bruce’s unconscious desire to end Chinese monopoly over tea trading is part of the colonial policy to over accumulate wealth at the cost of environment and kinship relations in the underdeveloped areas of the East. Robert’s successful entrepreneurship and his discovery of Assamese tea from Singpho beverage [*Phalap*] paves the way for expansion of tea gardens by practising the ‘jhum’ agricultural technique as the narrator points out: “Charles had discovered that, by cutting down the big mature trees and setting them on fire, new plants could be grown from the stumps” (Chowdhury, 2018: 49). Robert’s vicious adventure results in deforestation, displacement of people from their native land, migration of indentured labourers rendering them rootless like the helpless trees, and exploitation of both natural and human resources which ultimately lead to the transformation of the ecosphere: “The men had come from distant countries like China and Europe to change the future of this region and its quiet way of life” (Chowdhury, 2018: 47). The drastic rupture in environmental ethics and holistic development initiates “slow violence” followed by the cumulative destruction of the natural habitat of both flora and fauna: “The scenario in Upper Assam had changed drastically. Large tracts of dense forest had been cleared and tea gardens had been set up” (Chowdhury, 2018: 64).

Avijit Gupta in *Ecology and Development in the Third World* traces the unsustainability underlying the developmental agenda in third world countries:

Third world countries are trying to improve the living conditions of their citizens. However, the steps taken to achieve this – the logging of timber, the extraction of mineral resources, the expansion and intensification of agriculture, the establishment of industries – may all occur simultaneously with a progressive deterioration of the environment. (1998: 1)

The cultivation of tea in Upper Assam occurs at the cost of ecological kinship since it leads to a gradual deterioration of ecological interconnection as well as the socio-economic condition of poor people. In the inhuman process of

extraction of capital, what is lost, is the sympathy towards the poor and their environment since human need is superseded by human greed. People from China and Central India are forcefully migrated to the tea gardens of Keheng, Tingrai and Naoholia to work as bonded labourers whom Annu Jalais terms as “dispensable citizens” whose ‘vernacular landscape’ is colonized and plundered by the “official landscape” to extract more capital. (Nixon, 2011: 17) Rita Chowdhury reflects: “A huge workforce was needed to clear the forests for digging, planting, weeding and plucking. ... a large section of unemployed Kacharis were compelled to work in the tea gardens. Other tribes, including the Nagas, joined as well” (2018: 49-50). The commodification of natural resources as well as tribes marks the gross violation of Indian values that uphold the spiritual essence of both human and non-human organisms.

The pathetic situation of indentured workers from China, for example, Ho Han, Ho Yen and others is evocative of rampant exploitation of both human and natural resources. With the violation of environmental ethics and snapping of kinship ties, the eco-geographical space of Upper Assam is drastically transformed and rendered vulnerable to human encroachment: “The jungle was enveloped by the smoke that rose from the fallen trees. The sounds of cutting and felling trees, the cacophony made by the elephants and their mahouts and the men shouting out instructions turned the forest into a noisy place” (Chowdhury, 2018: 48). It echoes queen Supayalat’s apocalyptic vision of extensive exploitation of resources in *The Glass Palace*:

In a few decades the wealth will be gone – all the gems, the timber and the oil – and then they too will leave. In our golden Burma where no one ever went hungry and no one was too poor to write and read, all that will remain is destitution and ignorance, famine and despair. (Ghosh, 2000: 88)

In spite of the gross violation of environmental ethics, Chowdhury reposes her faith in individual sanity to restore kinship and mutualism. The shared experience of dislocation and the ensuing mutual sympathy facilitates the formation of kinship among people and their surroundings. Ho Han’s words are evocative of a sympathetic bond that establishes the ecological interconnection between human beings and non-human organisms: “A tree which was as tall as four men put together is cut to the size of half a man. ... The tree did not die. It lived. We too have to live” (Chowdhury, 2018: 92). There is a correspondence between the

suffering of the trees and the pathetic situation of indentured labourers in Upper Assam. The ecological symbiosis among human beings and other species not only resists anthropocentrism but also opens up the possibility for holistic development.

The descendants of indentured labourers gradually forge kinship with the native Assamese people and their natural surroundings in Upper Assam. N. K. Das in an article entitled “Making of Tea Tribes in Assam: Colonial Exploitation and Assertion of Adivasi Rights” writes:

The workers were denied contacts with their kinsmen in native place. As a result of this denial the descendants of tea garden labourers in Assam have in course of time settled there permanently and have become a part of the local populace as well as the composite culture of the Assamese society. (2016: 2)

They show, in Schneider’s phrase, “enduring, diffuse solidarity” towards people irrespective of linguistic, regional and cultural barriers (1980: 52). This form of kinship that binds people across geo-cultural borders, does not erase the memories of home and painful displacement, rather it reinforces the process of cultural contact in the space of dislocation. The cross-cultural thoroughfare among people belonging to diverse ethnic orientations transforms Makum into their ‘home’. The affective inclusion of the Chinese people in the Assamese family through inter-community marriages is congruent with the Indian ethics of inclusivity. The marriage between Mei Lin and Pulok Barua and the thoroughfare between these people and their surroundings in Makum underscores ‘eco-cosmopolitanism’ which is “capable of uniting people across the world without erasing important cultural and political differences” (Clark, 2015: 17). The eco-cosmopolitanism is a bulwark against the predatory nature of colonial and neo-colonial forces since it foregrounds the global values of sympathy and affective intimacy which are the basic tenets of Indian philosophy. The Sino-Indian people successfully cross the biological as well as ethno-national borders to reaffirm kinship and sustain symbiotic interconnectedness: “Here, one did not feel like an outsider, but as if they had been here for ages. The bones of their ancestors were buried in this soil” (Chowdhury, 2018: 129).

In spite of the plundering of “vernacular landscape” (Nixon, 2011: 17) in the form of marginalization and enforced deportation of the Chinese people from Makum after the war of 1962, the Sino-Indian people resist the hegemonic forces by preserving the cultural memories of home and kinsmen: “The memories remained. ... There was the love for their birthplace” (Chowdhury, 2018: 388). The rootless transfer their innate awareness of the environment and interconnectedness to their next generations. Mei Lin successfully overcomes her sense of loss and separation, and realizes an emotional affinity with the Assamese author, Arunabh Bora: “I feel as if I have met someone who belongs to my family, someone who is my very own” (Chowdhury, 2018: 11). Even in China these rootless people, despite their wistful nostalgia for Makum, ruminate: “Still, it didn’t feel entirely unknown. Somehow the climate, the air, the nature and the people, was similar to Assam” (Chowdhury, 2018: 335). This similarity perceived between the familiar surroundings of the home and the cultural space of dislocation underscores the interconnectedness between locales that are otherwise geographically and culturally disparate.

The translocating of ‘home’ upholds the spirit of eco-cosmopolitanism that blurs the arbitrarily imposed borders and situates human beings in the larger ecological and global network. The enforced migration of people vis-a-vis the diasporic “relationality” transforms their world view and inculcates environmental ethics that conceptualizes the world beyond geographical and ethnic borders. The sense of togetherness integrates the dislocated Sino-Indian people with their surroundings. The rootless learn the art of negotiation with multiple eco-geographical spaces instead of being confined to any discrete culture: “Hong Kong gave them security and an environment in which they could grow and develop” (Chowdhury, 2018: 388). In spite of being caught in the crossfire of politics, trade and war, the hapless people find solace in nature that reciprocates their feelings. The cross-cultural affinity redeems the ‘self’ and unites people across the border. Ahlin’s love for Ananta Baruah echoes the spirit of eco-cosmopolitanism that upholds global unity among people irrespective of their ethno-cultural orientations: “Even after so many years of enforced exile, her love for Ananta remained alive and pure” (Chowdhury, 2018: 394). The ecospheric relation depends solely on the uninhibited correspondence between human beings

and non-human organisms marking the need for a holistic approach that can preserve ecological balance and biodiversity as well.

The ‘slow violence’ resulting from the anthropocentric separation of human beings from ecosphere primarily affects the poor people of developing countries. Though the issue has been explored in the socio-ecological context of Assam, it raises global concerns regarding deforestation, displacement of poor people, exploitation of human and natural resources, since the sustainability of global economy depends on ecological kinship between human beings and their surroundings. In the context of 21st century, the utmost priority should be given to the interconnection between human beings and other species in the wider socio-ecological network to reaffirm the environmental ethics of holistic development. The throbbing kinship relations at the global level would inculcate the values of eco-cosmopolitanism instead of rampant anthropocentrism. People should be more humane towards non-human organisms, and their compassion should facilitate the creation of contiguous spaces for ecological co-existence. In North-East India, eco-centrism is essential in sustaining biodiversity, ecospheric relations, and preserving what is left behind in the marginalized and underdeveloped geo-cultural locations.

Notes

- ¹ Timothy Clark in *Ecocriticism on the Edge: The Anthropocene as a Threshold Concept* notes: “the processes culminating in the Anthropocene include events that predate the advent of capitalism, primarily the invention of agriculture, deforestation, and the eradication over centuries of large mammals in all continents beyond Africa as humanity expanded across the globe” (2015: 3).
- ² ‘Slow Violence’, according to Rob Nixon, is “a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales” (2011: 2).
- ³ Rita Chowdhury’s *Chinatown Days* (2018) moulds the fragments of history of the Chinese community in India into a moving saga. The novel vividly portrays the rise of anti-Chinese rhetoric during and after the Sino-Indian war of 1962, and the humiliation, ostracism and displacement as experienced by the Chinese community. The narrative also encapsulates the Burmese invasion of Assam, arrival of the East India company and the protracted starvation in Southern China during the First Opium war in 1840.

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Performance Evaluation of Tea Industry in Kangra District of Himachal Pradesh

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Tea industry in India is about 170 years old and over time, the art and science, knowledge and application of tea cultivation practices has passed from generation to generation. India is the second largest producer of tea in the world and consumes 75 to 80 percent of tea itself. The tea industry is a labour-intensive industry and provides employment to thousands of people. It is also a substantial source of foreign exchange and generates a sizeable amount of revenue for the government. Tea cultivation in Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh was started by Dr William Jameson in 1849. Due to its amazing taste and fine quality Kangra tea received gold and silver medals in 1886 and 1895 in London and Amsterdam respectively. But after 1905, due to a devastating earthquake, the tea industry of H.P. has been struggling due to lack of government policies and effective support system. Through this paper, an attempt has been made to examine the production and growth pattern of tea estates situated in Kangra region of Himachal Pradesh. The study covers the time period of 2012 to 2021 and different methods of ratio analysis and percentage method have been used for analysis and interpretation of collected secondary data.

Keywords: gross profit (GP), net profit (NP), return on asset (ROA)

Introduction

Tea cultivation was started in Himachal Pradesh at Kangra district which is situated in the Western Himalaya. Kangra valley is a popular tourist destination that houses the Masroor rock cut temple (also known as “Himalayan Pyramids”) and numerous tea gardens.

Tea plantation in Kangra region was started in the middle of 19th century and the first tea garden was established in 1852 in Holta near Palampur. After the success of Palampur tea garden, the British started tea plantation in Bhawarana and Nagrota in the mid-1850s. In the 1880s, Kangra tea was considered to be superior tea and was brought to Kabul and Central Asia. It was the golden period of Kangra tea and it enjoyed the pride of place on the best tables of Europe.

However, in 1905, an earthquake destroyed this streak causing loss of life and destruction of factories. It gave a death blow to the Kangra tea industry. European planters sold the estates either to their workers or local businessmen and left the valley. New entrepreneurs had no technical knowledge of tea farming which led to a degradation of quality. The state government offered support for industry during the period 1964-1983 by setting up four co-operative factories in Bir, Palampur, Baijnath and Sidhbari and bringing more area under tea cultivation (Sood, 2016). As per a government survey report, 3200 hectare area was found suitable for growing tea in Chamba district, which comprises the valley of Chowari, Banikhet, Sihunta and Chamba, on the basis of soil and climatic condition. Over the last fifty years, the state government of Himachal Pradesh and Tea Board of India have been of the view that they have made lot of efforts to revive Kangra tea.

Objective of the Study

The main objectives of the study are:

- To study the production and growth pattern of major tea establishments in the region i.e. Palampur Cooperative Tea Factory and Mann Tea Estate, Dharamshala;
- To examine the financial and operational efficiency of these tea establishments.

Literature Review

Many studies have been done in different parts of the country on the tea industry, but very few studies are focused on the tea industry of Himachal Pradesh. From several studies i.e. Waheed, Hasid, Ahmad and Khan (2002), Saikai (2008), Hussain and Hazarika (2010), Hazarika (2011), Majumder and Roy (2012), Arya

(2013), Gogoi (2014), Verma and Gupta (2015), Sood (2016), Shah and Patel (2016), Chawla, Road and Highlands (2016), Baishya (2016), Kishori and Nivetha (2017), Dass and Zirmire (2018), and Raja and Krishnaveni (2019), it was found that tea gained popularity as an industry and employment also increased in the sector in tea growing states, but the Himachal tea industry showed relatively poor performance. These studies also reveal that in order to improve the performance of tea industry, there is a need to provide technical training to tea farmers and financial assistance to small-scale tea gardens. Through this study, an attempt has been made to evaluate the reasons which are responsible for the poor performance of tea industry in Himachal Pradesh. Beside this, it also provides useful information on the success story of tea industry in Himachal Pradesh.

Hypotheses of the Study

After a review of literature in line with the objectives of the study, the following hypotheses are formulated and tested:

Ho: There is no significant difference in the production and growth pattern of major tea establishments in the region i.e. Palampur Cooperative Tea Factory and Mann Tea Estate, Dharamshala.

Ho: There is no significant difference in the financial and operational efficiency of Palampur Cooperative Tea Factory and Mann Tea Estate, Dharamshala.

Research Methodology

Sources of Data

For the purpose of this study secondary data has been used. Financial data has been collected via personal visit to two major tea producers of the district i.e. Palampur Co-operative and Mann Tea Estate of Dharamshala. Other information related to performance has been collected from various sources like newspapers, magazines, journals, books, annual reports of the companies and various other publications from the department of planning and statistics (Gupta, 2020).

Tools and techniques

To measure the financial and operational efficiency of Palampur Co-operative and Mann Tea Estate of Dharamshala following profitability ratios has been used:

- Gross profit Ratio
- Net Profit Ratio
- Return on Assets Ratio

Gross profit is the profit after deducting the cost of goods sold from net sale (revenue). It evaluates the operational performance of the business. A high gross profit ratio is the sign of good and effective management while low gross profit ratio is the indicator of high cost of goods sold due to firm's inability to purchase at favorable terms. The gross profit ratio may increase due to the following reasons:

- 1) Higher sale price where cost of goods sold remains constant;
- 2) Lower cost of goods sold where sale price remains constant;
- 3) Increase in the proportionate volume of higher margin items;
- 4) Combination of variations in sale price and cost of goods sold

The gross profit ratio can be calculated as:

$$\text{Gross profit} = \frac{\text{Gross profit}}{\text{Net Sale}} \times 100$$

Net profit is the remaining profit after deducting the cost of production, administrative expenses and income tax from sale. The net profit ratio ascertains the overall profitability of the business and also shows the efficiency of operating. This ratio indicates what portion of sale revenue is left with the owner after all operating expenses are met.

A higher ratio reflects better profitability. If over a period of five years gross profit increases but net profit decreases, it indicates that administrative expenses are slowly rising.

$$\text{Net Profit Ratio} = \frac{\text{Net Profit}}{H = \text{Net Sale}} \times 100$$

The return on asset is a profitability measure of a business in relation to its total assets. Return on asset gives an idea to the management, investors and analysts how efficiently a company's management is using its assets to generate profit.

Higher return indicates more productive and efficient use of assets by the company to produce greater amounts of net income. Return on asset is also used to monitor or measure a company's performance in the light of industry performance (Narayanaswamy, 2021).

$$\text{Return on Asset} = \frac{\text{Net Profit}}{\text{Average Total Asset}} \times 100$$

Analysis and Interpretation

Production and growth pattern

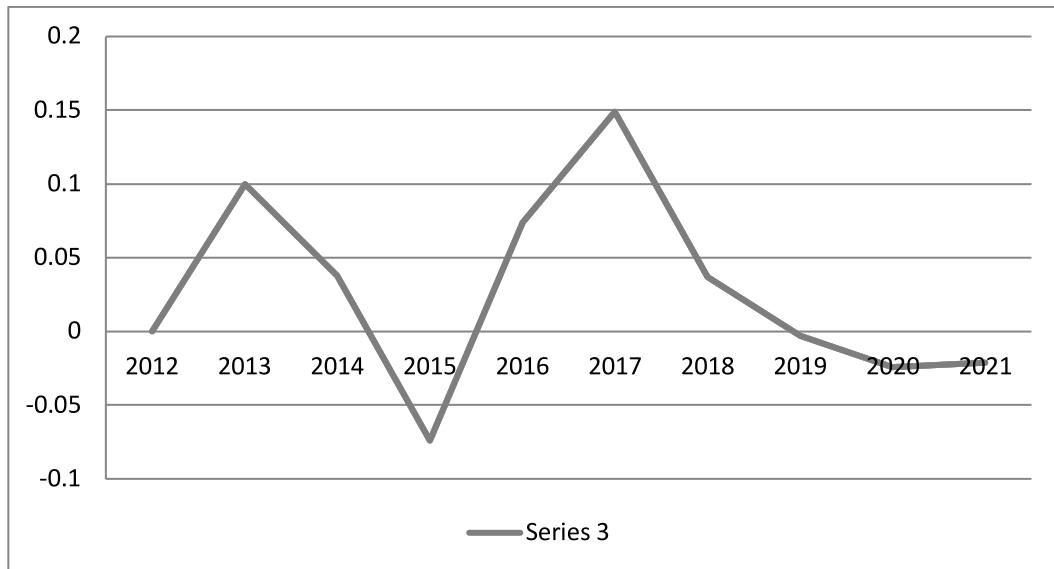
Years	Production(Kg)	% Change
2012	214877	—
2013	236345	9.99
2014	245340	3.80
2015	227185	(7.39)
2016	244045	7.4
2017	280405	14.9
2018	290691	3.7
2019	289812	(0.3)
2020	282748	(2.4)
2021	276903	(2.1)

Source: Data computed from financial statement of Palampur Cooperative tea factory

Table 1.1: Production of Palampur Cooperative tea factory

Table 1.1 reveals that from 2013 to 2014 production of the factory has registered a growth rate of 9.99 percent and 3.80 percent respectively, but in 2015 a sudden negative growth of 7.39 percent has been recorded. The table further shows that

from the year 2016 to 2018 a growth trend of 7.4 percent, 14.9 percent and 3.7 percent has been recorded respectively, thereafter from the year 2019 to 2021 a continuous negative growth rate has been recorded. The above discussion leads us to conclude that the demand of Kangra tea is not steady which needs immediate attention from concerned stakeholders.



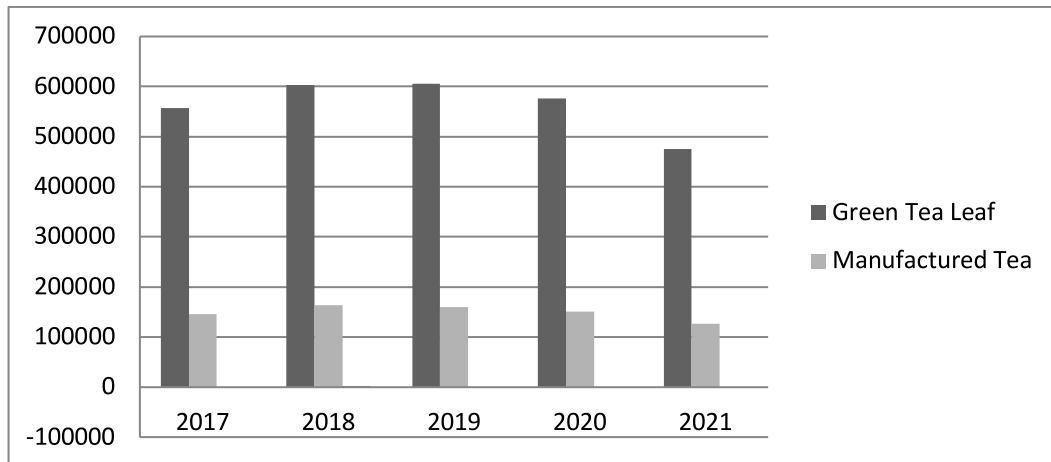
Years	Green Tea Leaf With % Change		Production With % change	
	Green Tea Leaf (kg)	% Change	Production (kg)	% Change
2017	556666	---	146405	---
2018	603024	8.33	164036	12
2019	605760	0.45	160024	(2.4)
2020	576206	(4.88)	151200	(5.5)
2021	475303	(17.51)	126015	(16.7)

Source: Data computed from financial statement of Mann Tea Estate

Table 1.2: Production of Mann Tea Estate

Table 1.2 shows green tea leaves purchased and the tea production of Mann Tea Estate, Dharamshala. The table shows that in 2019 the estate purchased 0.45 percent more leaves in comparison to 2018 but recorded negative production

growth rate of 2.4 percent during the year. In the years 2020 and 2021, continuous negative growth rate was recorded in both purchase of green tea leaves and their conversion into tea. This discussion leads us to conclude that continuous shortage in green tea leaves and their impact on final production is a great matter of concern for the estate.



Financial and operational efficiency

- Palampur Co-operative Tea Factory

Year	Gross Profit Ratio	% Change
2013	36.35	---
2014	30.61	(15.79)
2015	24.65	(19.47)
2016	28	13.59
2017	25.96	(7.28)
2018	24.18	(6.85)
2019	19.33	(20.05)
2020	26.76	38.43
2021	25.28	(5.53)

Source: data computed from financial statement of tea factory

Table 1.3: Gross Profit Ratio

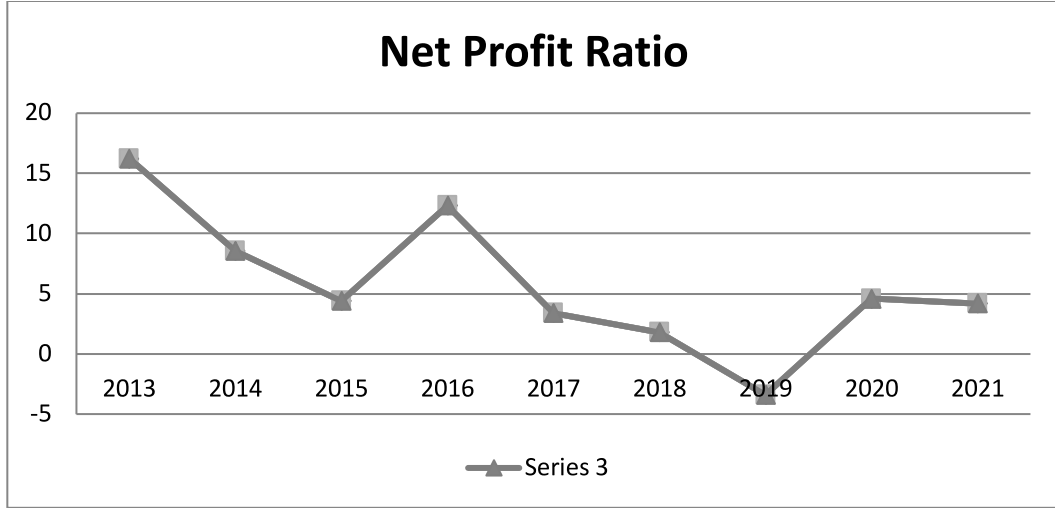
In cooperative tea factory, the gross profit ratio has been recorded in the range of 25.28 percent to 36.35 percent with an average of 24.30 percent. Table 1.3 reveals that steady negative growth rate has been recorded in most of the years except 2020 when it was 38.43 percent. The table also shows that from the year 2013 to 2021 the gross profit ratio fluctuates continuously and comes down from 36.35 to 25.28. From the discussion, it can be concluded that the gross profit ratio of this company is good as it has always been between 19.33 and 36.35 percent, but management has to give serious attention towards fluctuating gross profit of the company.

Year	Net Profit Ratio	% Change
2013	16.23	---
2014	8.55	(47.31)
2015	4.40	(48.53)
2016	12.33	180.22
2017	3.4	(72.42)
2018	1.8	(47.05)
2019	(3.40)	(288.8)
2020	4.6	35.29
2021	4.2	(8.69)

Source: Data computed from the financial statement of Palampur tea factory

Table 1.4: Net Profit Ratio

Table 1.4 shows the positive growth in net profitability for the research period except the year 2019, where negative growth rate of 3.40 is recorded. But on the other hand, fluctuations in the percentage change have been recorded with the highest 288.80 percent in 2019. Apart from this, net profit has been very low in all the years, which shows that the factory is incurring very high administrative expenses. Therefore, the factory has to focus on avoiding unnecessary expenses.



Year	Return on Asset	% Change
2013	12.24	16.13
2014	16.32	33.33
2015	9.58	(41.29)
2016	38.38	300.62
2017	10.88	(71.65)
2018	5.60	(48.53)
2019	(10.32)	(284.28)
2020	14.26	238.17
2021	12.14	(14.86)

Source: Data computed from the financial statements of Palampur tea factory

Table 1.5: Return on Asset Ratio

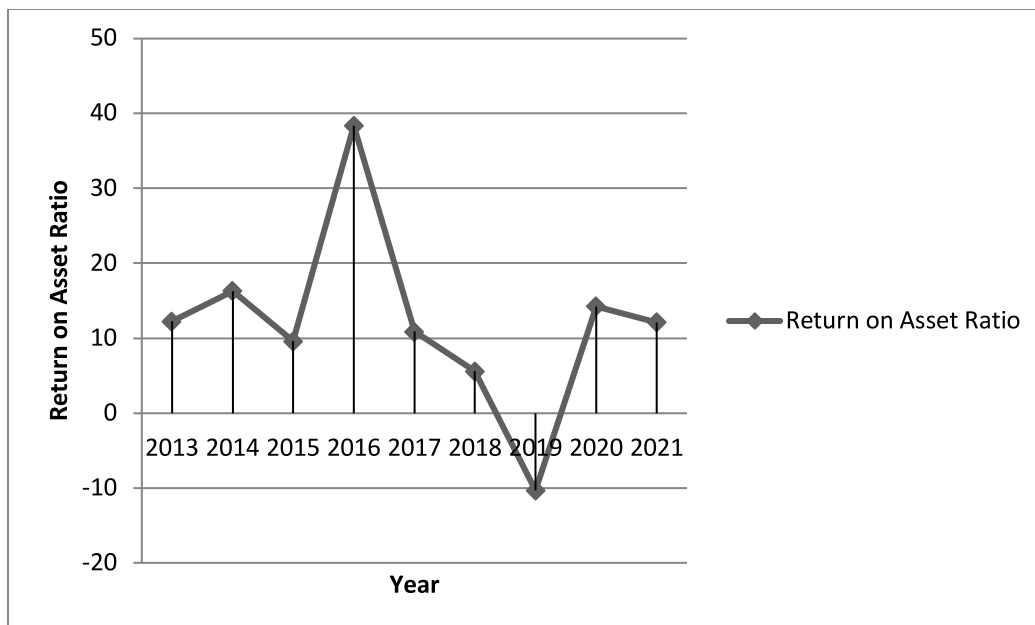


Table 1.5 shows return on asset ratio and percentage change of ROA. During the study period, the highest point of return on asset was in the year 2016, when it reached at 38.38 percent and the lowest point of ROA ratio was in the year of 2019, when it became negative 10.32 percent. The reason behind negative ROA was the net loss that year.

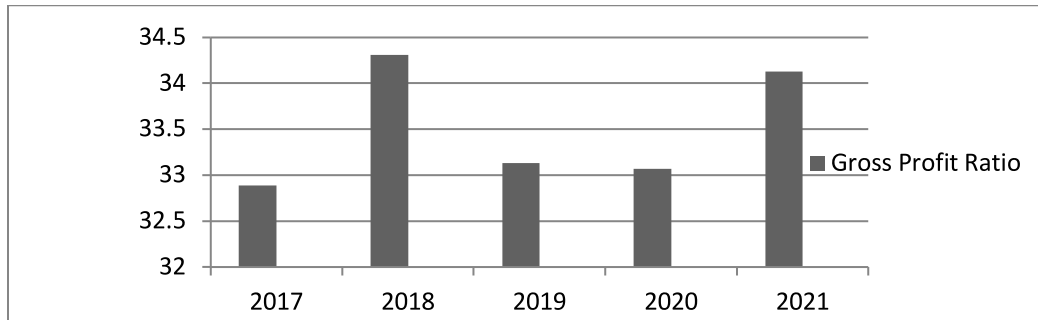
- Mann Tea Estate, Dharamshala

Year	Gross Profit Ratio	% Change
2017	32.89	---
2018	34.31	4.31
2019	33.13	(3.4)
2020	33.07	(0.18)
2021	34.13	3.2

Source: Data computed from financial statement of tea estate

Table 1.6: Gross Profit Ratio

Table 1.6 represents the gross profit ratio and percentage change. The gross profit shows very low fluctuations during the study period and has satisfactory results. It also shows more stability with an average ratio of 33.51.

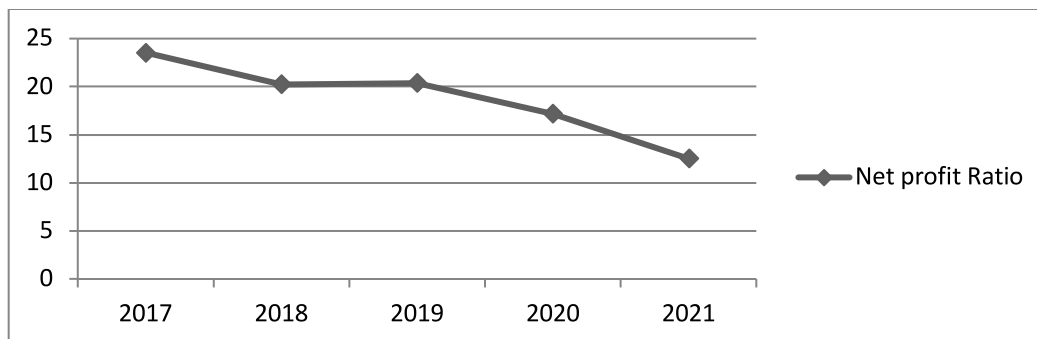


Year	Net Profit Ratio	% Change
2017	23.54	---
2018	20.23	(14.06)
2019	20.38	0.74
2020	17.17	(15.75)
2021	12.51	(27.14)

Source: Data computed from the financial statement of Mann tea estate

Table 1.7: Net Profit Ratio

Table 1.7 shows that the net profit ratio of Mann tea estate was recorded 23.54 percent during the year 2017, which came down to 12.51 percent in the year of 2021. The data leads us to conclude that a continuous downward trend was recorded for the study period with an average ratio of 18.77 percent.

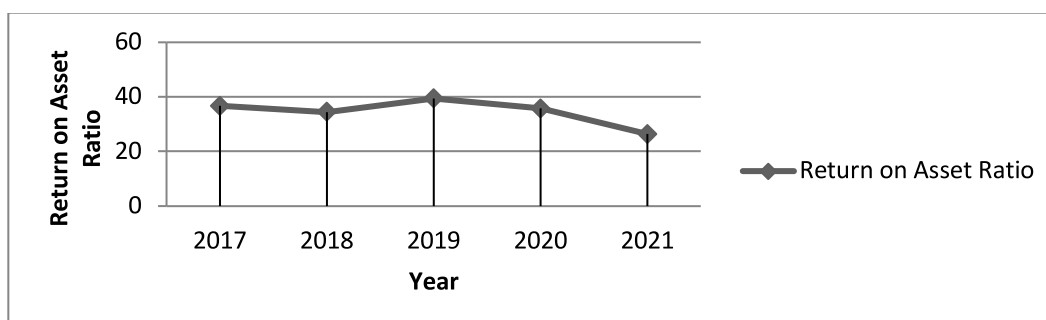


The above figure represents the net profit ratio. The line chart depicts that the slope of the net profit ratio line is left to right which indicates decreasing trend of net profit.

Year	Return on Asset	% Change
2017	36.66	---
2018	34.42	(6.11)
2019	39.42	14.53
2020	35.80	(9.18)
2021	26.41	(26.23)

Table 1.8: Return on Asset Ratio

Table 1.8 shows that in the year 2017 ROA was 36.66 which came down to 26.41 in the year 2021 with the highest percentage change of 26.23. Overall, during the study period return on asset ratio provides satisfactory results and does not fluctuate much.



The above figure is the graphic representation of ROA. As shown in the graph the slope of ROA curve goes down after 2021.

Findings

After evaluation of the data, it was found that both major producers of tea i.e. Palampur Cooperative Tea Factory and Mann Tea Estate in Kangra region have witnessed good growth in production with slight fluctuations over the years. On the front of gross profit and net profit, Palampur Cooperative Tea Factory needs to work towards maximum utilization of available resources. The gross profit of the company is fluctuating very fast and to maintain it, the company must reduce the cost of production and increase the sales, whereas to increase net profitability, they must reduce the administrative cost and avoid unnecessary expenses for a few years to get the stability. Mann Tea Estate is working well on the front of gross profit by maintaining stability over the years. However, net profit of the estate is continuously decreasing which needs immediate attention of the management. Further, Palampur Cooperative Tea Factory has enormous fluctuations in the Return on assets (ROA) over the years, which shows that while its assets are being managed well to earn profits in a year, the trend is not being maintained subsequently. Contrastingly, ROA of Mann Tea Estate is declining with very low fluctuations, which shows that management of the estate is trying very hard to make its assets earn profits.

Suggestions

The main suggestions and recommendations of the study are as follows:

- The government has to give a boost to tea the industry by providing subsidy, reduction in taxes and long-term loans with low interest.
- Tea industry is labour-intensive, so there is a need to carefully plan and review the policies for purchasing fixed assets.
- The Kangra tea industry faces stiff competition in the international market. In order to gain a strong position in the international market, it is necessary to carry out tea marketing and promotional activities.

- In the present day most consumers are health conscious and this opens a new door for tea industry. Tea producers can think about a new area i.e. production of organic tea which will also fetch get higher price.
- The Kangra tea industry needs to work on improving the quality of its tea and for this purpose research and development can be carried out.
- Tea industry plays a significant role in generation of foreign exchange and also provides employment to thousands, especially those from backward classes and tribes. Therefore, the government should take appropriate steps to develop and promote the export of tea.
- The government and Tea Board of India should organize training and development programs for small-scale tea farmers from time to time, and also provide knowledge about new technologies and use of agro-chemicals.
- Inadequate finance is a major challenge faced by the tea industry. Therefore, banks and financial institutions must come forward and provide timely finance to tea industry.
- Certain parts of the India are famous for beautiful tea gardens such as Assam, Darjeeling etc. The Kangra district could also be promoted for tea tourism, which will generate revenue and create opportunities for selling the tea at premium prices.

Conclusion

The discussion leads us to conclude that the tea industry of Himachal Pradesh is playing a very important role in the economic development of the state. But, unfortunately, the production of Kangra tea is continuously decreasing. Horticulture experts say that tea production in the study area has been falling drastically in the last 20 years with a very small number of producers who are engaged in tea production. They are also of the view that the government initiative is imperative to alleviate the collapsing tea industry in the state.

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**Interface of Gender and Nature: Analyzing Divakaruni's
*The Forest of Enchantments***

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The present paper seeks to ascertain strands of spiritual ecofeminism in *The Forest of Enchantments*. It attempts to study feminist and ecological lessons embedded in Divakaruni's retelling of the *Ramayan*. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's spectacular novel, *The Forest of Enchantments*, is a refreshing and compassionate retelling of the *Ramayan*. The novel is told in the voice of Sita. In the prologue to the novel, Divakaruni points out that Sita calls her story "the Sitayan" (4). By placing Sita at the centre of the novel, Divakaruni transforms the great Indian epic into a narrative of pluralities and possibilities. As the narrator and definer of her own story, Sita attempts to rupture the dominant patriarchal discourse. This modern-day retelling opens new spaces within the traditional androcentric discourse, enabling women to question the masculinist paradigms of the 'grand narrative'.

Keywords: ecofeminism, ecology, nature, spirituality, Indian women writers, religion, mythology

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's spectacular novel, *The Forest of Enchantments*, is a refreshing and compassionate retelling of the *Ramayan*. The story is told as a first-person narrative of Sita. In the prologue to the novel, Divakaruni points out that Sita calls her story "the Sitayan" (2019: 4). By placing Sita at the centre of the novel, Divakaruni transforms the great Indian epic into a narrative of pluralities and possibilities. The very act involves "a rethinking of thinking" itself (Held, 2006: 60). As the narrator of her own story, Sita attempts to rupture the dominant patriarchal discourse. This modern-day retelling opens new spaces

within the traditional androcentric discourse, enabling a questioning of the masculinist paradigms of the 'grand narrative'. The present paper seeks to ascertain strands of spiritual ecofeminism in *The Forest of Enchantments*. At this juncture, it is imperative to mention that Divakaruni's writings challenge the status quo by foregrounding a spiritual standpoint that embraces nature while dismantling the doctrines of patriarchy at the same time. The spiritual ecofeminist strain is strongly evident in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's writings as her female protagonists attribute meaning to their existential conditions through their involvement with the natural world. Her female characters invoke feelings of ecological wisdom and cosmic wholeness in the reader. Through their belief in earth-centric spirituality, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's women etch out a sense of self by breaking away from patriarchal domination. Hence, my paper attempts to study feminist and ecological lessons embedded in Divakaruni's retelling of the *Ramayan*.

In *The Forest of Enchantments*, Divakaruni extends the story beyond its traditional mould, liberating it to a space where redefining conventional epistemes becomes possible. As Patricia Yaeger posits: "As women play with old texts, the burden of tradition is lightened and shifted; it has the potential of being remade" (1988: 18). As Divakaruni reconceptualizes tradition in her novel, her work becomes a fascinating blend of fiction and activism.

In the novel, Divakaruni offers an interesting account of Sita's mystical connection with the natural world which reshapes her identity from an ecofeminist perspective. The mystical affinity between nature and women has been the hallmark of ancient civilizations. In the traditional folklore, Sita was hailed as the daughter of Mother Earth. In the novel, Sita briefly details how King Janak accidentally discovers her in a furrow while tilling the field beside his palace:

The morning I was found, he'd gone to till the field beside the palace, to level it for a yagna that was to occur soon.

That day, however, only a few steps into his ploughing, he was forced to a standstill. A baby lay in his path, naked and newborn, glistening in the young sun as though it was a mirage. (Divakaruni, 2019: 6)

The paper intends to examine Divakaruni's novel using the ideals and beliefs of

neo-pagan thinker and foremother of the Goddess movement, Carol P. Christ. The Goddess movement calls for a renewal of the ancient matriarchal cult of the “Goddess Mother” in order to subvert the present ecological crisis. Though Divakaruni and Christ belong to different religious and spiritual backgrounds, they are bound together by their vision to challenge the androcentric mode of thinking. Both of them propound ideals of ecological conscience and symbiotic association in order to override masculinist hegemony. Their writings are a reflection of their belief in circularity, reciprocity and symbiosis of the cosmic whole.

Carol Christ has sought to create a comprehensive account of the religious and ethical worldview implied by the Goddess thought and practice. Her work is seminal to Goddess studies and scholarship. She was drawn to the Goddess movement as a source for her spiritual quest. Subsequently, she began to voice her rejection of Christianity in favour of the Goddess in various academic meetings. Her early work on religion and literature was intended to connect theology to her experiences and those of others. It led to the resolution of her uncertainty as to whether the Goddess was simply a metaphor for oneself or the sum total of an indifferent “nature” or whether the Goddess stood for an embodied personal power within and beyond us who deeply cares for us. Christ decided to embrace the latter view (Ruether, 2005a: 285-87).

Christ puts forth a new critical framework to challenge the unexamined presuppositions in Western theology. She calls her critical paradigm “the Goddess hypothesis” which recognizes women as important historical and religious actors. The Goddess hypothesis provides a potent critical framework to challenge well-established theories about nature and origin of religion (1997: 72-73). Christ venerates Goddess religion for its “effort to resurrect the egalitarian harmony between humans, men and women, and nature of prepatriarchal times” (Ruether, 2005b: 99). Goddess religion endeavours to reintegrate the alienating hierarchical dualisms of patriarchal theology in a life-affirming communion. It does not simply reverse the patriarchal subjugation of women, nature and the nonhuman world. In fact, it re-establishes these dualisms in interactive harmony within the matrix of life.

A deeper analysis of *The Forest of Enchantments* will show that Divakaruni's characters echo Christ's radical ecofeminist notions and concerns. Like Christ, Divakaruni also believes in the reciprocity, circularity and symbiosis of the cosmic whole. Both believe in life-affirming values which envision all beings as deeply connected in the web of life. Like Christ, Divakaruni's ecological and feminist ideals are rooted in her strong and non-conformist self. Both share the urge to give voice to the marginalized and oppressed sections of the society. Both attempt to dismantle patriarchal hegemony in religion. Both view their activism as an extension of their feminist work. Indeed, Christ and Divakaruni have a common meeting place in the overarching similarity of their views regarding ecology and religion. The main purpose of this paper is to examine how Divakaruni's novel intersects with Christ's Goddess scholarship.

At the core of Christ's writings is the belief that the entire spectrum of life ought to be nurtured and celebrated. This vision is the very antithesis of the linear mode of thinking which promotes the ideal of hierarchical transcendence. Christ's holistic ecofeminism can become a mode of healing in today's ecologically strenuous times. Like Christ, Divakaruni's creative epistemology seems to spring from her deep reverence for Goddess-based religion. In the novel, Sita presents a vivid account of the temple of the Goddess:

The temple of Parvati was smaller than one might have expected to find in a palace: a single, windowless room built of rough-hewn stone. But the plain spire thrust itself unapologetically into the sky, demanding to be noticed by the heavens. No one knew when it had been constructed. Perhaps it was built by one of the earlier Janaks, or perhaps, as certain tales claimed it, it rose fully formed from the earth. Whenever I stepped into it, I felt I was entering a space of power where the relationship between men and gods remained intimate and primeval. (Divakaruni 18)

The above lines bear testimony to Divakaruni's belief in Goddess religion. They establish her theological stance as a liberative one. They also demonstrate how Christ and Divakaruni are bound together by shared interests in Goddess religion. Divakaruni's Goddess seems to redress an imbalance by redefining the divine-human relationship. Her counter-discursive ideology is clearly reflected in her description of the Goddess. She seems to be inspired by the myths and symbols of the Goddess culture in her spiritual leanings. According to Lithuanian-born archaeologist Marija Gimbutas, "In Neolithic Old Europe, as in the Paleolithic

societies that preceded it the Goddess was worshipped as the Giver, Taker, and Renewer of Life” (1997:55, qtd. in Christ). She is of the view that the primacy of the Goddess can’t be negated. She painstakingly catalogued the symbolic elements of Goddess worship in old European civilization. However, her work has been contemptuously dismissed by scholars who seek to preserve male supremacy in theology. In the words of Christ:

Gimbutas interpreted the civilization of Old Europe as “matristic”, worshipping the Mother and honoring women, and “matrilineal”, with family ties being traced through the female line. Because of the centrality of the symbol of the Goddess, from evidence of cult scenes found in shrines . . . she hypothesized that women played central roles in the creation of Old European religion and probably also the leading role in its rituals. (1997: 56)

Divakaruni’s representation of the Goddess is in contradistinction to the normative view of divine power as an unrelated and aloof spectator. In its deepest sense, it is a reflection on the essence of divinity itself. Here, the Goddess stands for an egalitarian view of divinity. It challenges the patriarchal masculinist paradigms of theology. Unlike the patriarchal male deity, Divakaruni’s Goddess does not demand passive submission. In proposing an ontological shift, Divakaruni seems to reinterpret the texts and symbols of her inherited religion. Above all, Divakaruni’s Goddess is not detached from the worldly realm. Vandana Shiva, a leading Indian ecofeminist, attempts to dismantle patriarchal hegemony in her works. Her epistemology has many similarities with spiritual ecofeminism. Like Divakaruni, her ontological vision is rooted in the symbolic association of women with nature. She argues that “[w]omen in India are an intimate part of nature, both in imagination and in practice” (2016: 39). In her works, she turns to traditional Hindu cosmology to explicate the worldview that is needed to restore ecological harmony and balance. She calls for the recovery of the “Feminine Principle” to counter the vicious forces of Western maldevelopment. She speaks of this recovery, not in the Western sense of a dichotomous understanding of masculinity and femininity as polar binaries. Rather, it is a dynamic interaction of creative energy. According to Shiva, female *Shakti*, together with male form (*Purusha*) produces *Prakriti* (nature). She further states that in Hinduism, both *Shakti* and *Prakriti*, have been viewed and venerated as feminine. To further cement her point, she adds that Hinduism celebrates

women as key agents in the maintenance of life (Ruether, 2005:107). Similarly, Divakaruni's Goddess seems to share a fundamentally relational and intimate relationship with all beings. She seems to embody a deep concern for the earth and all its people. Her power can be felt within one's deepest self. It is a profound metaphoric shift from the male-dominated theology. Divakaruni redefines the basic theological symbols in a gender-inclusive manner. She uncovers ancient traditions of the celebration of the female spiritual power by subtly critiquing patriarchal appropriation of divinity. Her distinctive feminist theological voice has the potential to resacralize both women and nature.

Divakaruni draws upon the Goddess religion as a clarion call to create peace on earth. Christ exhibits similar views when she says:

Knowing the harm male images of God have done, why insist on female metaphors? We must remember that the Goddess is emerging at a time when women, women's bodies, and nature have been devalued and violated for centuries. In this context, the metaphor of the Goddess has the power to shatter long-standing cultural attitudes and prejudices about women and nature. (1997:94)

According to Christ, "We need to develop a new understanding of being human, in which the body is given a more equal footing with the intellect and the human connection to nature is positively valued" (1986: 129). This worldview will comprise of an integrated, non-androcentric ideology in which the differences between body and mind are not perceived in a hierarchical manner. The description of Sita's special kinship with nature seems to be a manifestation of Christ's egalitarian vision. Sita's sense of oneness with the natural world is an integral part of the narrative framework of the novel. Her deep connection with nature comes to the fore once again when her palanquin is making its way through the forest to Ayodhya:

I wanted to climb out and run my hands over bark and stem, smell the sap. I wanted to walk barefoot through the tickle of grass, find bird-nests and fox-liars, and rare and precious healing herbs. (Divakaruni 57)

Beneath Divakaruni's use of a simple and lyrical language, there is a deeper message to overturn the rampant destruction of nature. It inspires feelings of deep respect and reverence for the Mother Earth. It evokes in us a profound sympathy

for its harmony and well-being. The novel is remarkable for its exuberant endorsement of the intrinsic ties between women and nature.

Christ says that sometimes the Goddess rituals are “simple and solitary” like the timeless ritual of tending one’s garden. Christ argues that creating a thing of beauty out of nature is a shared vocation of women across borders. By following in the footsteps of their mothers and grandmothers, women do their bit to add to the sacrality of nature. Working in the garden is a means for them to express their care and concern for Mother Earth. In her adopted home in Greece, Christ saw women working inside their homes, filling their balconies and courtyards with geraniums, roses and jasmine. Perhaps, they were shaping the universe in the image of their personal conception of beauty (1997: 26-27).

In the novel, Sita oversees the garden in Dasharath’s palace. By doing so, she is carrying forward the legacy of her solicitous work in her maternal gardens. It is her favourite responsibility without a shadow of a doubt:

My favourite responsibility, the palace garden, was very different now from Dasharath’s time, when everything had been planted in strict rows and tied to stakes so they stood at attention. My garden flowed along gentle lines, the way nature intended it to. It surrounded the palace on all sides, and a brook wound its way through it, babbling merrily. (Divakaruni 303)

Sita’s act of giving shape to the palace garden is in solidarity with Christ’s view of gardening as one of the Goddess rituals embodying care for Mother Earth. For Sita, tending the palace garden seems to be a sacred activity. At a deeper level, it reflects her commitment to nurture life which in a way resonates with one of the nine touchstones of Goddess religion as explicated by Christ. Christ is of the view that tending a garden is one of the many ways to nurture life. She argues that cultivating an ethic rooted in the nurturing of life has a lot in common with the “ethic of care” described by psychologist Carol Gilligan. Gilligan calls it a female mode of ethical thinking. Christ believes that if men start engaging actively with the nurturing of life in its entirety, we will start recognizing the ethic of care as a human mode of moral behaviour (1997: 167, qtd. in Christ).

Moreover, Sita’s ability to fathom the curative potential of plants and herbs clearly demonstrates strands of nature-oriented spirituality. As an embodiment of the Goddess, she sustains all life-forms and finds spiritual fulfillment within

nature. Her ability to unravel the mysteries of nature is in harmony with her conception as a divine being which grounds and sustains the process of life itself. It also shows that the Goddess is no longer sleeping. She is very much awake and rising. Her spirituality is embedded in her inborn alliance with nature. Similarly, Sita's spirituality is closely linked with the healing arts which is again a reflection of her earth-based theological worldview. When Ram banishes Sita from his kingdom to Valmiki's ashram, she refuses to let despondence engulf her soul. She closely observes her newfound community to figure out the best way to be of service to them:

In my current state, I was no good at cleaning or cooking or carrying heavy pots of water back from the river. But their medicine woman, Dharini-Ma, who was old and half-blind, was glad for my help, more so when she realized how much I knew about healing herbs.

Word travelled through the forest that the pregnant woman who had suddenly appeared at Valmiki's ashram had the touch, and more and more tribals came to us for help. (Divakaruni 323)

Sita welcomes the diversion of working side by side with Dharini to help the people of the ashram. It takes her mind away from her own pain and gives her the courage to heal herself (Divakaruni 323).

Christ further quotes Jewish theologian Martin Buber to articulate her deep sense of connection to all beings in the web of life. Buber asserts that "we do not need to have a complete rational explanation of a tree's relation with us to know that it exists". He also says that moments of pure relation with a piece of mica, a tree, a horse, and other people are the "cradle of actual life". In his opinion, such connections unravel the mystery of being (qtd in Christ, 1997: 114). Buber avers that our relationship with others is a twofold phenomenon in which all the participants are transformed by the encounter. It is safe to say that Buber's views are germane to Christ's Goddess scholarship. Christ claims Buber as an ally in her endeavour to challenge the traditional theological beliefs inherent in Christianity. She states:

Buber's God as "Eternal Thou" is clearly relational and intimately related to the world. Human beings too were understood to be so fundamentally relational that the question of the existence of other minds could not arise. For Buber, the other person as "thou" is as real to me as my own "I." Buber also understood that [human] relationships with nature . . . could also be I-thou relationships. (2004: 31)

According to Buber, such connections are an essential aspect of human existence. They are key to creating communities that are kind, holistic, compassionate and empowering. They can prove to be our greatest assets. They foreground powerful ways of relating to other creatures and life-forms in the web of life.

Christ too does not want to name this unnameable bond of ineffable reciprocity. She feels the formidable urgency to re-examine the traditional theological ideas pertaining to humanity's relationship with nature. Christ is of the view that the rigid hierarchical distinctions between "God, man, and nature" are responsible for jeopardizing the web of life on planet earth. She states:

The supreme relativizing is to know that we are no more valuable to the life of the universe. The ethic that would follow from this vision is that our task is to love and understand, to live for a time, to contribute as much as we can to the continuation of life, to the enhancement of beauty, joy, and diversity, while recognizing inevitable death, loss, and suffering. (1989: 321)

The Forest of Enchantments shows that Sita shares a more mutual and less hierarchical relationship with nature. Her kindred spirit makes her sympathize with the "ailing" plants and trees in the pleasure gardens of Ravan. In an act of "supreme relativizing", Sita too feels their sympathy due to her anguish as Ravan's reluctant captive. To extrapolate, Sita enters into an "I-thou" relationship with nature. It unfolds a new relational dimension of overwhelming mutuality. Sita feels for the natural world in much the same manner that the natural world feels for her:

The walks brought me a little solace. The plants and trees were innocent and beautiful. When I touched them, I could feel their sympathy for me. If they were ailing, my touch cured them. And thus we grew to love each other. (Divakaruni 187)

Apart from the natural world, Sita also shares profound encounters with certain inanimate objects in her life. The most prominent encounter among these is the one she experiences with Lord Shiva's bow, the *Haradhanu*. Sita is merely nine years old when she first encounters the majestic-looking bow. From that day on, Sita shares a special bond with the bow. She experiences unprecedented joy whenever she catches a glimpse of the bow. The bow conveys to her deep "mysterious truths" on multiple occasions. Sita knows that her marriage will only be solemnized with the man who will string this great bow. All her encounters with the bow add to her inner strength and spiritual resilience. They prepare her for her overwhelmingly arduous future:

I spent many afternoons polishing the bow, telling it my thoughts, singing to it. Although my voice was unremarkable, it seemed to please the bow. Some days it grew magically light in my hands, allowing me to lift it with ease.

‘I’m making you stronger’, it said, and that was true. Not only did my muscles grow more powerful, and my bones sturdier, but I felt a thrumming energy passing from it into my body. When I mentioned this, the bow sounded pleased. (Divakaruni, 2019: 26)

In a similar vein, Sita also experiences an “I-thou” kinship with the mysterious Pushpak chariot. Vibheeshan offers it to Ram to travel back to Ayodhya. However, no one is able to enter the imposing chariot. Whenever they try to get into the chariot, they are “stunned by a scalding burst of power” (Divakaruni 254) that emanates from it. At last, Trijata reveals to Sita the secret of the mythical chariot. She tells her that the chariot will only obey the person with whom it has a connection. Trijata asserts that the Pushpak chariot will obey Sita as it feels that it owes her something (254-55). The very next day, Sita decides to test her theory by climbing the mountaintop in order to enter the chariot:

My heart shook with excitement and fear as I walked up and placed my palm, tentatively, on its carved door. It swung open at my touch. I climbed into it and felt the purr change into a pulse, the beat synchronized with my heart.

‘Will you take us home, Pushpak?’ I whispered. In response, the chariot took off into the air with a burst of speed. (Divakaruni 256)

According to Christ, the Goddess speaks to us through the natural world, through human relationships, through communities, through dreams and visions, articulating her desire to manifest life in all its fullness and glory. Similarly, human beings can also speak to the Goddess in song, meditation, prayer and ritual, expressing their desire to harmonize themselves with her rhythms, to enter into joyful communion with the body of the earth and all beings in the web of life. In other words, the Goddess is a fully immanent entity. She is completely embodied in this finite, ephemeral world of ours. She can be as easily felt in rocks and flowers and in the human heart, just as in our revered theologies (1997: 106).

In the novel, Sita experiences vivid dreams and visions on numerous occasions. Each of them has a symbolic significance which cannot be overlooked. After Ram slays Ravan, Sita recounts one of her visions to Ram in which their divinity is revealed to her:

‘You are exactly who the gods declared you to be,’ I ended, ‘though having taken on this human birth, you’ve forgotten what that is. That’s how Maya works. But don’t worry too much about it. Just be yourself. Then you’ll find yourself naturally aligned with your own divine self.’ (Divakaruni 263)

To encapsulate, this paper has shown how Divakaruni’s novel explores the interconnections between ecology and feminism in a holistic manner. Her contemporary retelling of the *Ramayan* predates as well as anticipates much of the ongoing debates on ecofeminist theology and spirituality. The characterization of Sita as an ecologically conscious personage will inspire many to make mindful efforts to repair the web of life. Moreover, the novel builds on the belief that we need both inner and outer change to awaken ourselves from the sleep-fog of apathy and inaction as we cannot possibly remain indifferent to the impending environmental apocalypse.

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Effect of Organic Vapours on Activation Energies of Metal Phthalocyanines Dispersed Glasses

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Metal Phthalocyanines (MPcs) and their related derivatives have the tendency to alter their electrical properties on interaction with organic vapours depending on the central metal site, ligand attached and functionalized substituent group. In the present study, interaction mechanism of methanol and benzene vapours with Nickel phthalocyanine tetrasulfonic acid tetrasodium salt (NiPcS) and aluminum phthalocyanine hydroxide (AlPcOH) has been probed by studying variations in their activation energies after vapours exposure. For this purpose MPcs have been dispersed in the porous sol-gel glasses to allow the vapours to diffuse uniformly and efficiently at the surface of MPcs for proper charge transfer interaction and hence increasing sensing efficiency. AlPcOH was found to be insensitive to methanol but NiPcS showed some variation in its electrical property with methanol exposure. Benzene exposure showed variations in activation energies of both AlPcOH and NiPcS dispersed glasses. The sensing of methanol is attributed to the presence of functionalized substituent group on NiPcS unlike the case of AlPcOH. Benzene sensing is dependent on the electron-affinity of the central metal atom of MPc ring. NiPcS dispersed glass has been found to exhibit better sensitivity as compared to AlPcOH dispersed glass for both organic vapours.

Keywords: activation energies, phthalocyanines, organic vapours, dispersed glasses.

1. Introduction

Metal Phthalocyanines show a number of special properties such as versatility, architectural flexibility, chemical and thermal stability, optical, electrical, optoelectronic and low cost of preparation. These properties and possible applications of these materials in photovoltaic devices [1], photodetectors [2], organic transistors [3], organic devices [4] and sensors [5] have attracted the interest of researchers. However these phthalocyanines show strong tendency to aggregate in solution which deteriorates their catalytic activity and other related properties like sensing and efficient optoelectronic properties [6]. Therefore, a monomolecular distribution of MPcs is favorable for obtaining maximum activity and efficiency of a particular property and application. Dispersing MPcs in sol-gel glass form is one of the ways to prevent aggregation of MPcs and to achieve uniform distribution of MPcs so as to exploit its properties to maximum extent [7-9]. Their architecture flexibility allows the modification of their crystal as well as molecular structure that enable them to be sensitive and selective to various organic vapours. This is because by changing various molecular parameters (Fig. 1) like replacing the central metal atoms, adding a ligand to the central metal atom, functionalizing MPcs macrocycles with various substituent groups or by combining various MPcs, they can be made to sense and discriminate different gases [10-12]. The gas sensing mechanism of MPcs with organic vapours may be attributed to adsorption or desorption of gas molecules or organic molecules acting as donors or acceptors leading to charge transfer between them and MPcs under study [13-17]. In addition, the electrical properties of MPcs are extremely sensitive to the effect of electron accepting and donating gases, so their gas sensing properties have been widely explored in recent past [13-17]. Therefore depending upon these gases it undergoes charge transfer mechanisms leading to variation in its electrical and optical properties.

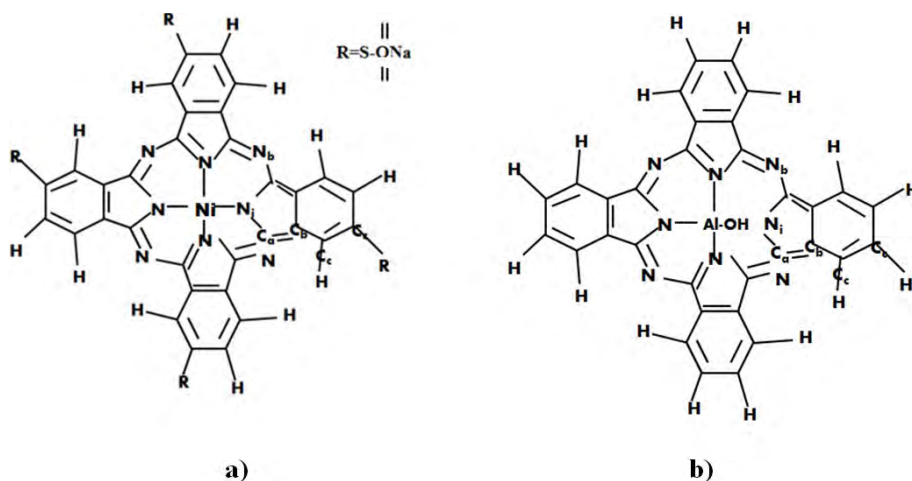


Fig. 1. Structure of Metal Phthalocyanine with Functionalized groups (Tetrasulfonic tetrasodium salt; 4 groups of =S-ONa in case of a) NiPcS and H in case of b) AlPcOH).

To study the effect of ambient gases or other organic vapours/ reducing or oxidizing gases, stable form of phthalocyanines is preferred. This is because the conductivity and adsorbing power of organic gases strongly depend on the crystal form and crystal size of the materials. In the present work, the effect of methanol and benzene vapours on activation energies of aluminium phthalocyanine hydroxide (AlPcOH) and nickel phthalocyanine tetrasulfonic acid tetrasodium salt (NiPcS) dispersed glasses is studied. The surface morphologies of dispersed MPcs glasses are also analyzed.

The activation energies of the materials are calculated using Arrhenius type equation, $\sigma = \sigma_0 \exp(-\Delta E/KT)$ (1)

where ΔE_0 = Activation Energy σ = Electrical conductivity σ_0 = Constant

K= Boltzman Constant T= Absolute Temperature

The value of activation energy is calculated from the slope of $\ln \sigma$ vs $1000/T$.

2. Experimental details

2.1 Materials Used

NiPcS (Nickel Phthalocyanine 4, 4', 4'', 4''' tertrasulfonic acid tetrasodium salt) and AlPcOH (Aluminium Phthalocyanine hydroxide) were purchased from Sigma Aldrich. To form the silicate solution, tetraethyl orthosilicate (TEOS), ethanol and concentrated HCl were purchased from Sigma Aldrich. The MPcs solutions were prepared in deionized distilled water which was used throughout the experiment. These chemicals were used as purchased without further purification.

2.2. Preparation of Silicate solution

In order to prepare silicate solution, 15 mL volumes of ethanol and TEOS were added into a beaker with 50 μ l of HCl and 3 mL distilled water as supporting dopants. The obtained solution was stirred for around 3 hours at room temperature to obtain a clear and transparent silicate solution.

2.3 Preparation of AlPcOH dispersed glass

To prepare the solution of AlPcOH powder, 5 mg of AlPcOH powder was dissolved in 4 ml distilled water. The solution was sonicated for about 15 minutes to obtain uniformly dispersed solution. Thereafter, it was added to the prepared silicate solution and the resultant solution was heated and stirred at 340 K till the formation of the gel (formed after about 2 to 3 hours). Finally the obtained gel was allowed to dry for around 12 hours, resulting in the formation of AlPcOH dispersed glass.

2.4 Preparation of NiPcS dispersed glass

Simultaneously dispersed glass with NiPcS has been prepared in a similar manner as described above except AlPcOH is replaced with NiPcS.2.5.

Fabrication of device

To study the effect of organic vapours on the activation energies of MPcs dispersed glasses, the device structure as shown in Figure 2 has been used. It shows the schematic architecture of the device used for the study of variation of

current after exposure to methanol and benzene vapours. Silver (Ag) electrodes were used as a top as well as bottom electrodes onto the MPcs dispersed glasses using silver paste. A copper strip (27.8 mm×12.2 mm) of thickness 0.41 mm was placed below the device in order to allow the contact of the bottom silver electrode with that of the respective two probe set up used for the current measurements. The separation between the top and bottom Ag electrodes and also thickness of MPcs dispersed glasses were approximately 1.68 mm. The area of each silver electrode was approximately $3.14 \times 10^{-7} \text{ m}^2$.

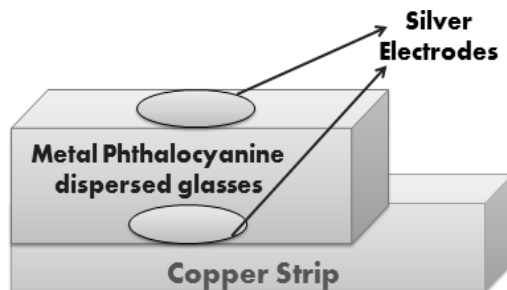


Fig. 2 Device design and fabrication

To find the activation energies of as prepared and vapours exposed AlPcOH dispersed glass, voltage of 50 V is applied in the temperature range of 348 K to 423 K. The reason for choosing this temperature range lies in the fact that AlPcOH dispersed glass was found to be insensitive below this temperature range. Similarly for determining the activation energies of as prepared and vapours exposed NiPcS dispersed glass, 100 V is applied in the temperature range of 326 K to 423K as it was found to be sensitive within this temperature region. The vapour sensing properties of the dispersed MPcs glasses have been studied using home constructed stainless steel test chamber of 0.5 liters capacity as used in our previous work [18]. Before sensing studies, the dispersed glasses were conditioned at room temperature under vacuum conditions for around two hours to remove undesirable pre-adsorbed organic and water molecules. The electrical currents of the dispersed glasses were recorded using Keithley 6517A electrometer and DNM-121 nanoammeter. The surface morphologies of the prepared materials

were studied using Hitachi SU8010 model Field Emission-Scanning Electron Microscopy (FE-SEM).

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. FE-SEM Results

Figs. 3a and 3b shows the FE-SEM images of AlPcOH and NiPcS dispersed glasses. From Fig. 3a, we observe rod like shape of AlPcOH dispersed glass of size around 454 nm that are randomly and non-uniformly arranged. In Fig. 3b, white and granular shaped flakes of size around 163 nm are observed for NiPcS dispersed glass. The surface morphologies are different for the two materials because of the presence of different metal atoms at the centre and the functional group attached to the macrocyclic ring of NiPcS [18-20]. The white granular flakes of NiPcS dispersed glass are comparatively more uniformly arranged as compared to AlPcOH dispersed glass. This uniformity enables better and efficient adsorption of organic vapours into the respective dispersed glasses under study [9, 15-16]. It results in efficient charge transfers between the organic vapours and MPcs and hence increases sensing. Accordingly the electrical conductivity of MPcs dispersed glasses shows variations depending upon the charge transfer mechanisms.

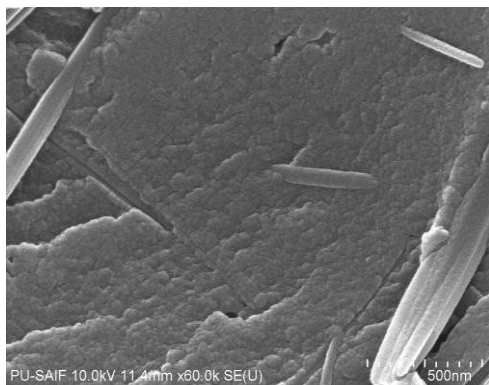


Fig. 3a FE-SEM images of AlPcOH dispersed glass

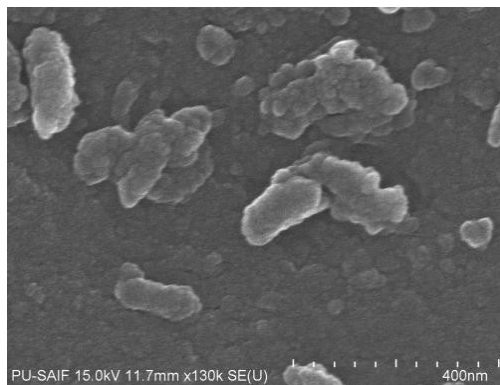


Fig. 3b FE-SEM images of NiPcS dispersed glass

3.2. Electrical studies

The current-voltage (I-V) studies of AlPcOH and NiPcS dispersed glasses have been made and variation is found to be linear, which indicate the ohmic conduction in these dispersed glasses. Arrhenius plot of electrical conductivity of these dispersed glasses are shown in Figs. 4a and 4b. Fig. 4a gives the electrical conductivity plots of as prepared AlPcOH dispersed glass as well as methanol and benzene exposed AlPcOH dispersed glass. The calculated values of activation energies using equation 1 are listed in table 1. The electrical conductivity (σ) has been calculated using formula $\sigma = IL/VA$ (2), where I is the current of the sample, L is the distance between electrodes, V is the applied voltage and A is the area covered by the sample. The graph has been plotted between $\ln \sigma$ and $1000/T$ using equation (1) in order to calculate the activation energies of as prepared MPcs dispersed glasses as well organic vapours exposed MPcs dispersed glasses. From Fig. 4a and Table 1, we observe that the activation energy of AlPcOH dispersed glass is not changed significantly with methanol exposure indicating that AlPcOH dispersed glass is insensitive to methanol vapours. This may be due to lack of any charge transfer between the adsorbed methanol vapours and AlPcOH dispersed glass [10]. A slight variation in its activation energy has been observed after benzene exposure but this is not significant enough to conclude an efficient sensing mechanism. Fig. 4b and Table 1 give the values of activation energies of NiPcS dispersed glass with and without organic vapours exposure. From Fig. 4b and Table 1, we find that significant variations in the activation energies are observed for NiPcS dispersed glass after methanol and benzene exposure. The conductivity plots also show extreme deviations for methanol and benzene exposed from that of as prepared and unexposed NiPcS dispersed glass. This indicates that NiPcS is sensitive to methanol and benzene vapours and exhibit charge transfer phenomena with them. This charge transfer mechanism between the adsorbed organic vapours and NiPcS dispersed glass is responsible for altering the electrical conductivity of NiPcS dispersed glass and hence variations in the activation energies [10, 21].

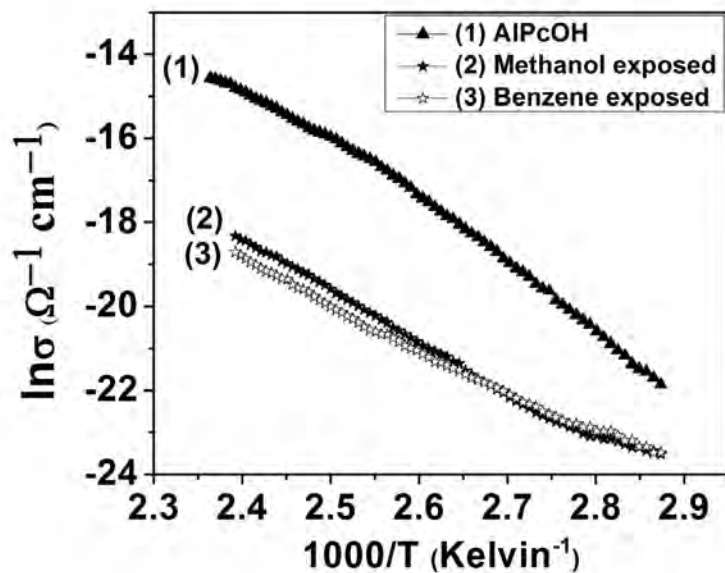


Fig. 4a Arrhenius Plots of AIPcOH dispersed glass with and without exposure of vapours.

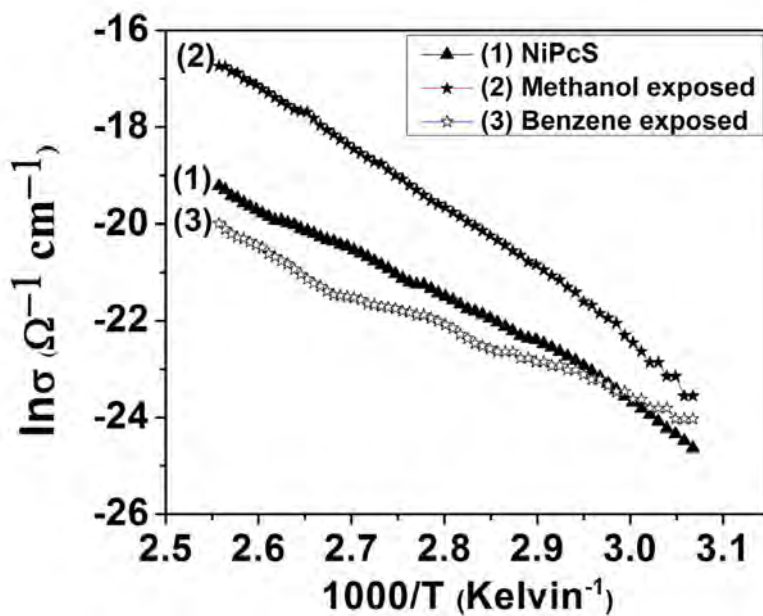


Fig. 4b Arrhenius Plots of NiPcS dispersed glass with and without exposure of vapours.

Material	Activation Energies [in eV]		
	As prepared	Methanol exposed	Benzene exposed
AlPcOH dispersed glass	0.105	0.102	0.099
NiPcS dispersed glass	0.096	0.122	0.076

Table 1. Calculated Activation energies of AlPcOH and NiPcS dispersed glasses with and without organic vapours exposure using equation (1).

4. Conclusion

The surface morphology has been found to be different for AlPcOH and NiPcS dispersed glasses due to the presence of different metal atoms and the functional groups in the two MPCs. Electrical studies show semiconducting behavior of MPCs dispersed glasses with and without exposure of organic vapours. The graph between activation energy and temperature shows single activation energy corresponding to the intrinsic conduction for both AlPcOH and NiPcS dispersed glasses. NiPcS dispersed glass has been found to exhibit variations in its activation energy after organic vapours exposure, whereas AlPcOH does not show any significant variation.

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**Customer's Perception Towards Bank Selection Criterion:
An Empirical Analysis**

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The purpose of the paper is to evaluate the criteria employed by customers while selecting a bank. It focuses on identifying the factors of bank choice criteria among customers of selected Indian banks. Data was collected from a sample of 264 customers using purposive sampling technique. The results of exploratory factor analysis revealed that six factors: responsiveness of the bank, financial benefits for customers, professional attitude of employees, convenience, special services and assurance emerge as important determinants of bank selection criteria. The findings of this study can add to the existing literature and can be used as a starting point on which future studies can be built. This study can also help bank selection decision among prospective customers. It can also help banks in devising appropriate marketing strategies for reaching and attracting new customers.

Keywords: bank, factor analysis, selection criteria, responsiveness, assurance

Introduction

Indian banking industry faces increasing competition from international banks which are experts in implementing effective and new marketing strategies in developed and developing economies. Maintaining the market position and profitability becomes a big challenge for Indian banks. Due to unpredictable

economic and financial environment, it becomes important to understand the customer and their choice criteria towards selection of bank. Banks must understand their strengths and weaknesses through customer's opinion about their quality of service. Many experts have analysed and determined various factors affecting the choice decision criterion. Reputation of bank, availability of credit on easy terms, friendly behaviour of bank employees, service charges on checking own account, friends' recommendation, and many more factors influence the customer base in their choice regarding a bank (Anderson, Cox and Fulcher, 1976). Other studies suggest high tech-services such as internet banking, SMS banking and phone banking play an important role in retaining current customers (Hedayatnia and Eshghi, 2011). Safety of funds and appropriate availability of technological services are major choice criteria for customers (Aregbeyen, 2011). Generally commercial banks are evaluated by customers based on their knowledgeable, dynamic, cooperative and friendly bank employees (Kaynak and Harcar, 2005). In case of students who are customers, rate of service charges, proximity and ATM play a crucial role in bank selection criterion (Khaitbaeva, Al-Subaiey and Enyinda, 2014). The issue of "how customers select banks" has been given considerable attention by researchers (Anderson et al., 1976; Evans, 1979; Hegazi, 1995; Kazeh and Decker, 1993; Kaynack and Yavas, 1985; Metawa and Almossawi, 1998; Ross, 1989). The present study focuses on the identification of factors of bank selection criterion among customers of selected Indian banks.

Literature Review

To analyze the issue deeply, it is required to refer to previous studies with similar research problems. Many researchers have conducted studies across the countries to identify the important factors which create a base for bank selection criteria. In 2004, Devlin and Gerrard, analysed trends in choice criteria in retail banking in the UK. They found certain other factors significant, such as incentives offered by banks, range of products, interest rates, fees etc. They considered corporate social

responsibility initiatives adopted by the banks as an important factor. In Islamic countries, banks are chosen based on quality in services, good corporate social responsibility practices, convenience and product price. In 2011, Hedayatnia and Eshghi examined factors affecting bank selection criteria in the Iranian Retail Banking Industry. They extracted 38 factors from literature as well as experienced managers of various banks. Factor analysis and Friedman analysis were done to select important factors with their ranking. They found some important factors such as quality of services, new banking methods, responsiveness of bank, innovation, friendliness of staff, confidence in manager, price, cost, staff attitude and convenience of bank location and services. In 2014, Aregbeyen (2011) examined the determinants of bank selection by banking and business customers in Nigeria and extracted different factors like safety of funds and the availability of technology-based services as becoming relatively more important. Preece (2013), explored retail banks' selection criteria through case study method among University Students in North Wales. The facility of E-Banking was chosen as the most effective factor by students due to speed of transaction and no waiting time for small transactions. Other important factors were service efficiency, financial benefits, whereas least important were attractiveness and third-party influence. Factors found attractive towards choice of commercial banks among Pakistani students studying in public sector University of Faisalabad were services provided by the bank like opening account online, more ATMs near the University, easy access to foreign exchange as well as parking facility (Iftikhar et al, 2014). To determine criteria of bank selection among undergraduate students of University of Ghana interactive group discussions as well as personal interviews were conducted which revealed that convenience, employee customer relationship, financial benefits/banking services were significant for them (Hinson, Osarenkhoe and Okoe, 2013). Parking facilities, employee courtesy, loyalty programs initiated by the bank, brand name, security system and low charges levied by bank were considered important by Rao (2010) who conducted empirical analysis on bank selection criterion. They also considered few factors which play significant role

such as responsiveness, value added services, convenience, speedy services, good rate of interest, zero balance account facility etc. Rashid and Hassan, (2009) found that customer demographics affected bank selection criteria, preferences and market segmentation in the domain of domestic Islamic banks of Bangladesh. They controlled demographics such as gender, marital status, age and educational qualification to run regression analysis and found that some factors play an important role in customers' decision-making process such as Core- Banking Services, Corporal efficiency, confidence etc. Aregbeyen, (2011) found safety of funds as an important factor as discussed earlier whereby Khaitbaeva, Al-Subaiey and Enyinda (2014) concluded that lower service charges are important factors for the customers to select bank.

Location of bank and its image among customers are important selection criteria as per various studies. Kaynak and Harcar (2005), Khaitbaeva, Al-Subaiey and Enyinda (2014) and Devlin and Gerrard (2005) studied customer choice criteria and multiple banking in Britain.

From the review of literature, it can be seen that many studies were conducted on bank choice criteria. Customer's preferences and banking business are changing with time. In today's set-up customers have so many choices and to retain and gain customers, banks have to be constantly be responsive and hands on. This paper will give bankers access to such information which will help them identify suitable marketing strategies and areas (factors) to attract new customers and retain existing ones. The purpose of this paper is to explore the choice criteria of customers while selecting a bank by focusing on selected Indian Banks.

Research Methodology

In order to analyze the factors of bank choice criteria of selected Indian Banks the study was conducted using the survey method with a sample of 264 respondents. The universe of the study comprised of customers of selected Indian Banks, i.e. State Bank of India, Punjab National Bank, ICICI Bank and HDFC Bank. 300

questionnaires were distributed and responses were received on 280 of them. For each bank, about 66 respondents were randomly selected. Universe of the study covered Chandigarh Capital Region which included Chandigarh, Mohali and Panchkula, Zirakpur and New Chandigarh. The sample was selected on the basis of snowball sampling method. Sequence of collection is given in Table 1.

Banks	Obtained number of sample items
SBI	70
PNB	67
ICICI	73
HDFC	70
Total	280

*66 respondents were taken from four selected banks

Table 1: Bank wise Composition of Sample

Demographic Profiles of Customers

Table 2 indicates that out of 264 respondents, 122 (46.2 per cent) were males while 142 (53.8 per cent) were females. 88 (33 per cent) respondents belonged to the younger age group (Less than 20 years), 45 (17 per cent) belonged to 21-35 years, 36 (24.6 per cent) respondents belonged to the middle age group (36-50 years) and 66 (25 per cent) respondents belonged to older age group (Above 55 years).

Hence, demographic distribution of the customer's shows that majority of respondents are females, professionals, post-graduates and monthly income more than Rs.50000 per month.

Variables	Categories	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Gender	Male	122	46.2
	Female	142	53.8
Education	Undergraduate	47	17.8
	Graduate	49	18.6
	Post- Graduate	62	23.5
	PhD	61	23.1
	Professional	45	17.0
Age	Less than 20 years	88	33.3
	21-35 years	45	17.0
	36-50 years	65	24.6
	Above 50 years	66	25.0
Occupation	Student	33	12.5
	Professional	129	48.86
	Business/Self Employed	47	17.8
	Retired	25	9.46
	Housewife	30	11.38
Income (Per Month)	Less than Rs. 10000	27	10.2
	Rs. 10001-20000	50	18.9
	Rs. 20001-30000	45	17.0
	Rs. 30001-40000	16	6.1
	Rs. 40001-50000	56	21.2
	More than Rs. 50000	70	26.5

Table 2: Customers' Profile

Results

Factor analysis is a general name denoting a class of procedures primarily used for data reduction and summarization. In marketing research, there are large numbers of variables, most of which are correlated and which must be reduced to a manageable level. Relationships among the sets of many interrelated variables are examined and represented in terms of a few underlying factors (Malhotra, 2008: 639-40). Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy is an index used to examine the appropriateness of factor analysis. High value (between 0.5 and 1.0) indicates the factor analysis is appropriate (Malhotra, 2008: 642).

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.922
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	6547.423
	df	528
	Sig.	.000

Table 3: KMO and Bartlett's Test

To find out the factors of bank choice criteria among customers of the selected Indian Banks, the responses were obtained on a five-point scale ranging from 5, 'Strongly Agree' to 1, 'Strongly Disagree'. In total, 33 variables were used to identify the major factors of bank choice criteria among customers of the Indian Banks.

In all six factors (accounting for 69.190 % of the total Variance) were extracted: responsiveness of the bank, financial benefits for customers, professional employees, convenience, special services and assurance.

F1: Responsiveness of the Bank

This is the most important factor as it accounts for 18.389% of the total variable. Table 4 gives the composition of this factor along with the factor labels and loadings. Responsiveness of bank means ability of bank to respond to customer requirements timely and flexibly. The customer choice criterion is always certainly influenced by the responsiveness of bank and it is one of the important factors that influence selection of the bank among the customers (Hedayatnia and Eshghi, 2011; Rao, 2010; Mokhlis, 2009).

Label	Variables	Loading
V 14	My Bank services charges are lower than other banks.	.780
V 12	Bank provides a feeling of safety and security of funds.	.747
V 11	Bank internal and external layout always catches my attention.	.727
V9	Bank provides 24-hours availability of ATM service at convenient locations.	.691
V 16	Employees give timely response to correspondence.	.686
V10	Adequate drinking and sanitary facilities are available.	.664
V 13	Bank helps me plan my investments.	.659
V6	Bank provides good customer services to its customers.	.627
V 15	Bank imposes charges on Minimum Balance.	.563

Table 4

F2: Financial Benefits for Customers

The second factor that has emerged from the analysis is the ‘Financial Benefits for Customers’ and it accounts 15.711% of the total variance. In total, eight variables have loaded on this factor. Customers always like to do business with banks that provide maximum financial benefits. The banks that demand lesser fee on credit card, have less time consuming and cumbersome procedures to apply for credit and debit card, resolve complaints sooner and have all products and services available under one roof attract more customers as compared to others.

Label	Variables	Loading
V32	Bank provides credit cards with lesser annual fees.	.779
V28	Bank provides all the products and services under one roof.	.729
V31	Easy to apply for debit and credit cards.	.707
V30	Bank does not provide phone/mobile banking services.	.701
V29	I chose this bank because it’s near my home or workplace.	.680
V27	Bank has good complaint handling procedure.	.671
V33	I prefer this bank due to efficiency of employees to complete the transaction in minimum waiting time.	.649
V 20	Bank offers a complete range of services.	.559

Table 5

F3: Professional Employees

The third factor accounting for 14.629% of the total variance is the ‘Professional Employees’. The variables composing this factor along with its label are given in Table 6. Seven variables have loaded on this factor. Having friendly, sensible, punctual, sincere, regular, honest, prompt and co-operative employees is a modest means of attracting more and more customers towards bank.

Label	Variables	Loading
V 23	Employees infuse confidence in customers through sensible behavior.	.858
V 22	Bank employees are punctual, regular and sincere.	.817
V 24	Bank gives safe and secure internet banking facilities to their customers.	.717
V26	At the month end bank timely provides me accurate bank statements.	.682
V 19	Bank enhances its technological capability like computerization to serve customers more effectively.	.673
V 21	Bank employees always refer you a relevant person to serve you personally and promptly.	.668
V 25	It’s easy to open an account with bank.	.653

Table 6

F4: Convenience

The fourth factor accounting for 7.929% of the total variance is ‘Convenience’. Three variables are loaded on this factor shown in Table 7, along with labels and loadings. Convenience is one of the most important factors influencing customer

choices which includes variables like convenient bank timings, adequate parking facilities and convenient accessibility (Renman and Ahmed, 2008; Mokhlis, 2009; Sharma and Rao, 2010; Hedayatnia, 2011)

Label	Variables	Loading
V4	It has reputation of superior service quality.	.750
V3	Access to the bank is inconvenient.	.743
V5	Bank provides online banking facilities.	.648

Table 7

F5: Special Services

The fifth factor that has emerged from the analysis is the ‘Special Services’ and it accounts 7.459% of the total variance. In total, four variables have loaded on this factor namely; “Bank offers me overdraft privilege” (.745), “Employees of the bank are friendly in their approach towards customers” (.692), “Bank has branch locations in the most of the places” (.582) and “Information provided by bank is accurate” (.537). The banks that are offering something extraordinary in comparison to other banks always retain and attract new customers.

Label	Variables	Loading
V7	Bank offers me overdraft privilege.	.745
V8	Employees of the bank are friendly in their approach towards customers.	.692
V 17	Bank has branch locations in the most of the places.	.582
V 18	Information provided by bank is accurate.	.537

Table 8

F6: Assurance

The sixth factor accounting for 5.037% of the total variance is the ‘Assurance’. Two variables are loaded on this factor shown in Table 9, along with labels and loadings. Assurance defines the act or action of assuring someone or something. Customers are inclined to prefer the prospect of long lasting relationships with bank which provides them assurance of good services (Beckett and Hewer, 2000; Aregbeyen, 2011). Banks which give guarantee or assurance to their customers about performing well fare better with customers over time.

Label	Variables	Loading
V1	Bank Timings are convenient for me.	.729
V2	Parking facilities are adequate.	.649

Table 9

Conclusion

The paper investigated the factors of bank choice criteria among customers of selected Indian Banks. Survey gives the respondents a list of variables which are important to them for selecting their bank. The result of factor analysis reveals that six factors (accounting for 69.190% of the total Variance) namely; responsiveness of the bank, financial benefits for customers, professional employees, convenience, special services and assurance can be extracted. Responsiveness of the bank is most important factor as it accounts for 18.389% of the total Variable. The customers always want that bank should respond to their requirements timely and flexibly. Financial benefit for customers is the second important factor that accounts for 15.711% of the total Variance. Financial benefits always attract customers to do more business with banks and they also increase the dependability of the customers. Special services of banks include overdraft privilege, 24 hours ATM facility, safety of funds and advice investment plans. The findings of this study can add to the existing literature and can be used as a starting point on which future studies can be built. This study can also help bank selection decision among prospective customers. It can also help banks in

devising appropriate marketing strategies for reaching and attracting new customers.

Finally, this study is limited to few cities of India. Although this segment of the market is important to study but other segments that have different set of customers with different selection criterion, should not be ignored. The study deals with Chandigarh Capital Region which includes Chandigarh, Mohali and Panchkula, Zirakpur and New Chandigarh. Although the findings can possibly be generalized to other parts of the country which may have common factors, it would be interesting to examine the applicability of the findings by replicating similar study in other areas.

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