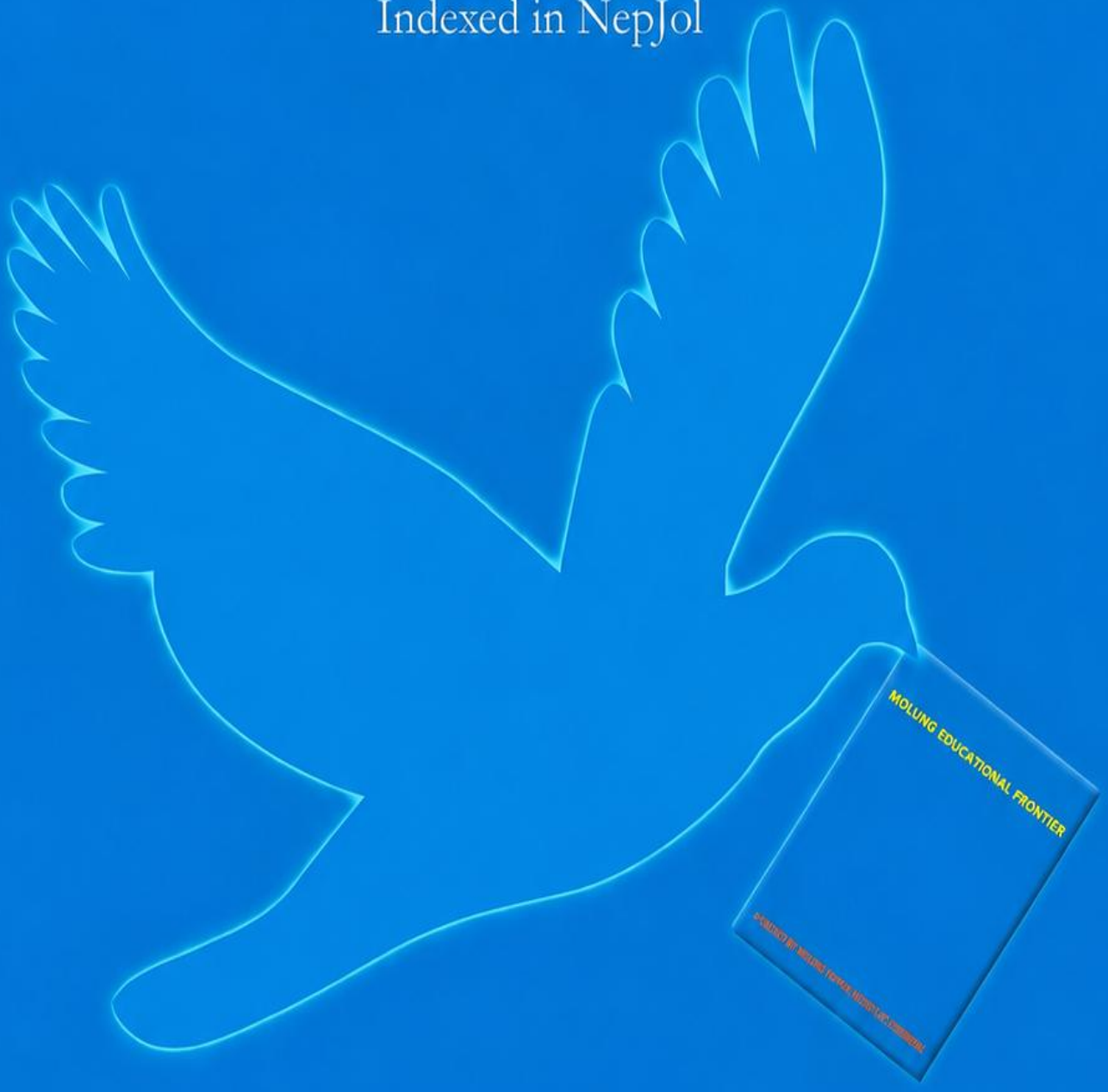
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Editorial

Heralding the age of modern linguistics, Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) explained the relationship between language and the world and proposed a groundbreaking model of the linguistic sign as a combination of a concept and a sound image. Since then, we have been studying language as a means of communication and, alternately, as a vehicle for ideology, as Edward Sapir (1884-1939) and Benjamin Lee Whorf (1897-1941) hypothesized.

Whether Saussurean or Sapir-Whorfian model of word-world relationship, one fact about language is that human beings cannot do without it. Language is present everywhere we go, and language is used for communication ranging from things and events related to the mundane world to the most profound philosophy. As Elizabeth Closs-Traugott and Mary Louise Pratt (1980) say, "It is around us everywhere, in speech, in writing, sign language, or simply in our minds as we dream, remember a conversation, or quickly think out a problem. It is a vehicle of power, a means by which we control, create, and preserve." This suggests that language is ubiquitous; there is no escape to language.

Although language does not reflect the world as a mirror does, it represents things and events of the world in a way that Saussure explains. It represents both the physical and virtual world. Of the various things that language represents, the imaginary world that an artist creates is an important one.

Literature is a verbal art that represents the imaginary world in two ways – by aiming to represent it just as it exists and representing it as it might be or ought to be. All literary writers have one purpose – to make the world look better than it actually is. Hence, literary writing is significant, not simply as a pastime of a writer, as many people might think. It is rather a true representation of nature and society – rivers, mountains, valleys, rocks, flora and fauna, as well as social aspects in terms of race, class, and gender. It is about politics, economy, and culture; it is about life and death, pain and pleasure, joy and sorrow; it is about everything that exists in the world. Hence, language and literature are both important objects of study; they are relevant issues of research.

Molung Educational Frontier is a multidisciplinary journal that publishes research-based articles. It is a scholarly journal that incorporates articles, book reviews, and research reports. This multidisciplinary journal accepts manuscripts from scholars worldwide that present original studies on themes and issues in the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, applied sciences, education, management, and law, all of which are connected to educational development and social change.

This volume is a special issue that focuses on the area of language and literature. It incorporates 10 articles ranging from paintings to nature to the environment to the whole cosmos. It also includes diaspora people, women's issues, ethics and morality, spirituality, and the status of language. While Anju Gupta's article is about Mithila painting as an important genre of art and literature, articles by Badri Pokharel and Tara Lal Shrestha deal with Buddhism as a spiritual path in life. When Dhundi Raj Niraula's article explores the issues of diaspora, Indira Acharya's article and Naba Raj Dhungel's article deal with gender issues. Equally interesting, Bishnu Pokharel et al. and Kul B. Khadka's articles deal with the nature-human relationship, planet Earth, and cosmic representation. Lastly, Tara Mani Rai explores the status of the indigenous Kirati language at the crossroads. Taken together, all articles included in this volume explore the relevant issues about life and the universe. In this respect, they are important articles that we hope will contribute to a better understanding of the world and the role of language and literature in making the world better.

Prof. Bhupa P. Dhamala, PhD
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Mithila Painting as Intersectional Visual Text: Women's Voice, Caste and Self-Representation

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Abstract

The Mithila/Madhubani painting tradition represents a critically important visual discursive process in which South Asian women negotiate their cultural work, express themselves, and form their subaltern identities. However, the institutional framing of Mithila/Madhubani art as decorative domestic folk art flattens Maithil women's experiences and obscures the patriarchal, caste, and economic pressures they face. Using the frameworks of postcolonial feminist theory, Dalit feminist standpoint, intersectionality, and visual social semiotics (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), the present paper argues that through the transition from ephemeral wall paintings to canvas/paper paintings, Maithil women recuperate visual practice by appropriating their own representational strategies. Analysis of seven exemplary paintings done in Kachni/Bharni (upper-caste) and Godna/Gobar (Dalit) styles reveals that paper raises anonymous ritual labor into an authorial act of agency within patrilocal cultures; that Dalit artists resist Brahmanical symbolism through politicization of subaltern labor and transformation of cow-dung material into art objects; and that contemporary painters reinterpret fertility symbolism in the face of violence against women and foeticide.

Keywords: Mithila painting, intersectional feminism, postcolonial feminism, Dalit standpoint theory, subaltern agency, caste hegemony, visual semiotics, self-representation

Mithila Painting as Intersectional Visual Text: Women's Voice, Caste and Self-Representation

Madhubani painting, historically known as Mithila painting, is a significant visual art tradition associated with the culturally unique Mithila region, covering the northern part of Bihar in India and the southern Terai region of Nepal. This painting tradition was traditionally practiced primarily by women in domestic and ritual spaces. For generations, Maithil women created paintings as temporary ritual events on the walls (bhitti-chitra) and courtyards (Aripan) of their houses. This type of visual art was tied to seasons, the agricultural cycle, and various life-cycle rites (samskaras), particularly the wedding ritual room (Kohbar ghar).

Table 1

Two Branches of Mithila Visual Tradition

Ephemeral Domestic Murals	Portable Public Canvases
• *Bhitti-chitra* & *Aripan*	• Paper, silk, and canvas
• Private, sacred *angan*	• Public market & global galleries
• Anonymous ritual obligation	• Named authorship & economic agency

It is evident that the socio-spatial framework of Mithila paintings underwent a transformation in light of the devastating drought that struck the state of Bihar from 1966 to 1968. Government officers and cultural activists, with the help of the All India Handicrafts Board, encouraged women to create Mithila paintings on handmade paper in order to earn income during this time of emergency (Jha et al., 2017). This drastic change in medium and institutional context resulted in a radical transformation in the essence of the genre.

Statement of the Research Problem

Mithila paintings have been celebrated institutionally and commercially from the middle of the twentieth century onwards, but much of the earlier writing, including work in art history, anthropology, and tourism, has described Mithila paintings as anonymous and apolitical "folk crafts," derived from an idealized Vedic era rather than as a contested site of cultural labor that is gendered and caste-based (Archer, 1949; Impart Encyclopedia of Art, 2022a; Rekha, 2010; Vequaud, 1977). Colonial and early postcolonial documentation, specifically, tended to describe Mithila murals mainly in terms of iconography, rituals, and auspicious motifs while largely ignoring the social location, conflicts, and conditions of the

women who created them (Archer, 1949; Rekha, 2010; Vequaud, 1977). Even contemporary writings from popular and tourism perspectives continue to reinforce such an apolitical and anachronistic view of Mithila paintings without adequately exploring how caste, patriarchy, and poverty affect the life and work of Maithil women (Impart Encyclopedia of Art, 2022a; Rekha, 2010).

In this dominant perspective, caste power dynamics have remained largely unexplored. Ethnographers and art historians observe that "upper-caste women, particularly Brahmins and Kayasthas, traditionally held sway over the Kachni and Bharni techniques of sacred imagery" (Rekha, 2010, pp. 5–6) and that Dalit groups like Dusadh and Chamar, who were restricted from depicting Hindu gods, developed new art techniques like Godna paintings (inspired by tattoos) and Gobar paintings (from cow dung washes) (Rekha, 2010; Impart Encyclopedia of Art, 2022a). However, these caste-specific practices and their implications have remained largely unexplored through intersectional feminist or Dalit feminist perspectives.

Thesis Statement and Hypotheses

Thesis Statement

The paper asserts that Mithila painting is an empowering yet contested space of women's self-representation and subaltern subject formation. Rather than being mere keepers of male-dominated folkloric art, Maithil women have strategically used their visual sign systems, transitioning from confinement within domestic spaces to placement on canvases, in order to construct subversive narratives against spatial, caste-based, and patriarchal oppression.

Research Hypotheses

H1: The change of material from mud wall at home (bhitti-chitra) to paper allows for a change in space, where anonymous domestic work changes to individual creation and economic empowerment.

H2: Artists from the Dalit subaltern group use different aesthetic approaches such as Godna and Gobar in order to undermine the dominance of Brahminical iconography by asserting their own perspective of the Dalit woman.

H3: Feminist painters belonging to the Maithil community in the present era consciously re-codify fertility symbols associated with marriage to highlight domestic violence, female foeticide, and structural inequality through domestic suffering and pain.

Literature Review

From a historical perspective, the documentation of Mithila painting through colonial administration officials and Western art historians took the form of a rare domesticated form of Hindu iconography (Anand, 1984; Archer, 1949; Vequaud, 1977). Archer (1949) made the initial formal documentation after the Bihar earthquake of 1934, documenting the wall paintings in iconographical terms, depicting the images of deities and auspicious signs found in the room along with their ritual significance, without giving much consideration to the painters as individuals in their own right. This iconographic approach, describing deities and auspicious signs and their ritual significance while leaving the painters themselves unexamined, persists into later literature; even art historians who individually profiled specific painters, such as Ganga Devi and Sita Devi, remained descriptive rather than analytical when it came to caste hierarchy within Mithila painting (Jain, 1998; Thakur, 1981).

In order for Mithila critical scholarship to be properly defined, it is necessary to turn towards a theoretical framework for using postcolonial feminist theory in South Asian visual and literary culture. Mohanty's (1988) critique of Western feminist scholarship is immediately relevant. According to Mohanty, an important strand of Western feminist scholarship has been the creation of "Third World women" as an already constituted category, constituted in terms of subjugation that erased the historical and contextual specifics of women's experience (Mohanty, 1988). This critique can be applied to Mithila painting and art criticism because craft-based travel literature and Western art history have done the same reduction by reducing the Maithil woman painter to an easily identifiable cultural type irrespective of her caste, class, generation, and other social locations.

In addition, the essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" written by Spivak (1988) offers the vocabulary necessary to ask whether it is possible for subaltern voices to speak on their own behalf in a structure of power that is not theirs. The concluding sentence of the essay, often quoted as the best summary of her argument, states:

> The subaltern cannot speak. There is no virtue in global laundry lists with 'woman' as a pious item. Representation has not withered away. The female intellectual as intellectual has a circumscribed task which she must not disown with a flourish. (Spivak, 1988, p. 308)

It is easy for such a move to be taken as a wholesale rejection of subaltern discourses, but if one understands the context from which Spivak makes her case, one must realize that the discourse is more specific in focus. The claim being made is quite simply that speech that is not understood using the models of comprehension provided by the dominant institution is

not even speech. This is not a question of the ability of the subaltern subject to speak but is a question of how the speech itself is comprehended (Spivak, 1988). In terms of the current investigation, this is a valuable insight, because it explains why the Methodology section views the discourse about the way that Mithila art speaks for Maithil women as an interpretive device on the part of the researcher and not an authentic articulation of artists' intentions.

Art historical analysis by Rozsika Parker about embroidery, "The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine", provides a structural analogy to help understand the current discussion. According to Parker (1984), the connection of embroidery to concepts like femininity, sweetness, passivity, and obedience has made embroidery be considered a minor and decorative art, but this is not really the case. As Parker says, embroidery is not a minor and decorative form of art since "the qualities demanded of an embroiderer include physical and mental skills, fine aesthetic judgement in colour, texture and composition; patience during long training; and assertive individuality of design (and consequent disobedience of aesthetic convention)" (Parker, 1984, p. 207). With regard to Mithila painting, the analogy by Parker helps to understand that what one can see as decorative and apolitical about Mithila painting due to its domestic nature and association with women is actually quite the opposite. Parker (1984) shows how women artists who create textile art redefine the domestic connotations of their medium by referring to the remarks of the embroiderer Kate Walker, who says she has "never worried that embroidery's association with femininity, sweetness, passivity and obedience may subvert my work's feminist intention", since all that is needed from embroidery are "physical and mental skills, fine aesthetic judgement in colour, texture and composition; patience during long training; and assertive individuality of design (and consequent disobedience of aesthetic convention)" (Walker, as cited in Parker, 1984, p. 207).

This theory looks at caste itself, a topic which cannot be adequately covered alone in postcolonial feminist discourse. The critique by Rege (1998) of the Indian women's movement begins by discussing political assertions of Dalit women of the 1990s in the context of the shortcomings of previous political efforts by both feminists and Dalits. Rege (1998) states:

> The assertion of autonomous dalit women's organisations in the 1990s threw up several crucial theoretical and political challenges, besides underlining the brahmanism of the feminist movement and the patriarchal practices of dalit politics

> […] Within such a framework of 'difference' issues of caste become the sole responsibility of the dalit women's organisations." (p. 39)

This passage presents two criticisms together. Mainstream Indian feminists are criticized for their unanalyzed upper-caste viewpoint, but, in parallel fashion, Dalit women's organizations are criticized for taking up a 'different' standpoint, which in effect might let everyone else off the hook when it comes to thinking about caste. It is the combination, the assertion of caste specificity with a resistance to isolation, that is central to the approach taken here to Godna and Gobar artists.

Intersectionality, as articulated by Crenshaw (1989, 1991), is the theoretical framework that makes possible these two frameworks: a postcolonial critique of homogenization of women of color and the Dalit standpoint, which stresses the necessity for the integration of caste specificity instead of its opposition to other forms of oppression. According to Crenshaw (1989), "a single-axis framework" limits inquiry to the experiences of otherwise-privileged members of the group, thereby erasing "Black women in the conceptualization, identification and remediation of race and sex discrimination" (p. 140). The author elaborates on this point by saying that it results in a distorted view of oppression, since "the operative conceptions of race and sex become grounded in experiences that actually represent only a subset of a much more complex phenomenon" (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140). When applied to the field of Mithila painting, however, this point makes it clear why an investigation restricted either to gender alone or to caste alone would give an incorrect picture of the situated realities of Maithil women. The basic premise of intersectionality is that different forms of oppression such as gender oppression, caste oppression, and economic oppression create situated realities which cannot be understood based upon a single axis alone. The decision in this paper to conduct an analysis based upon both caste and gender is motivated by this conviction (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical lens applies four different theories to analyze the strategies employed by Maithil women artists in crossing the boundary between their invisible ritualistic labor in the domestic space and public recognition through cultural artistry. "Maithil women" includes both upper-caste (Brahmin, Kayastha) and Dalit (Dusadh, Chamar) painters who practice various types of art such as Kachni, Bharni, Godna, and Gobar styles. This theoretical perspective rejects the assumption of a simple transition of Maithil women artists from "invisible domestic worker" to "visible cultural artist". The transition from wall paintings (bhitti-chitra) to paper is studied with an emphasis on how some artists manage to become

authors and market themselves in the male-dominated caste society (Jha et al., 2017; Rekha, 2010; Vequaud, 1977). From historical and art historical perspectives, there is evidence to show that Mithila paintings were originally created by women privately as a form of anonymous ritualistic work, while the use of paper post-drought enabled some artists to sign their paintings and make them available in national and international markets (Jain, 1998; Rekha, 2010; Vequaud, 1977).

No prior work sustains this kind of analysis on primary Mithila material. This brings together four separate intellectual traditions within one single analytical model: postcolonial feminist analysis, Dalit feminist standpoint perspective, intersectional feminist analysis, and social semiotics. The framework, by combining all these theories, covers both the large structures of social power relations (such as the caste system, patriarchy, market capitalism) as well as smaller forms of the artwork (motif, line, composition, etc.). Table 1 summarizes how each theoretical strand and its key authors map onto the analysis.

Table 2

Theoretical Matrix: Authors and Analytical Integration

Theoretical Focus	Key Authors	Integration Point in Mithila Art Analysis
Postcolonial Feminism	*Mohanty (1988, 2003)*	Critiques the monolithic "Third World woman" trope; elevates micro-agency and localized visual production.
Subaltern Studies	*Spivak (1988)*	Frames the difficulty of subaltern speech within dominant structures, cautioning against overstating recovered "voice".
Dalit Feminist Standpoint	*Rege (1998)*	Establishes aesthetic forms (Godna/Gobar) as situated sites of caste contestation and subaltern response.
Intersectional Theory	*Crenshaw (1989, 1991)*	Provides the framework for compound axes of gender, caste, class, and spatial location in artistic labor.
Visual Social Semiotics	*Kress & van Leeuwen (2006)*	Supplies formal tools to decode composition, line density, color, and spatial layout as social meaning.

Methodology

Corpus Composition and Selection Criteria

This primary collection comprises seven paintings from the Mithila tradition, purposively selected rather than through any random or census sampling procedures, because this is an investigation in theory building, not generalization, due to the thousands of

paintings found throughout markets, museums, and private collections of the world. There were three factors for this selective criterion: firstly, style variety (including both the upper-caste Kachni/Bharni style and the Dalit Godna/Gobar style); secondly, subject variety (providing balance of the three categories of themes examined: ritual/spatial as mode of authorship, the subversive use of iconography via caste categories, and contemporary social commentary); and finally, availability for documentation (the fact that all paintings had artist and approximate year, and style and current location identified).

Results and Discussion: Analysis of Primary Visual Texts

In this paper, the Mithila Paintings will be examined as images carrying social meaning, gender dynamics, and cultural memory. By departing from the standard approach to understanding art as anthropological and frozen within the art history canon, the images under examination will be subjected to analysis using an intersectional, postcolonial feminist theory, a Dalit standpoint perspective, and visual social semiotics, according to the aforementioned model of description followed by interpretation. Table 3 provides a corpus summary for the 7 main images presented.

Table 3

Primary Visual Text Corpus

Text#	Title & Artist	Style/Movement	Primary Theoretical Theme
1	*Kohbar on Paper* (Ganga Devi)	Classical *Kachni/Bharni*	Spatiality & Ritual Authorship
2	*Radha-Krishna in the Kadamba Grove* (Sita Devi)	*Bharni* (Saturated Fills)	Sacred Erotic Co-Equality
3	*Nag Kanya* / Snake Maiden (Baua Devi)	Mythological *Kachni*	Subverting Serpent Imagery
4	*Village Laborers on Cow-Dung Ground* (Jamuna Devi)	Dalit *Gobar* Wash	Elevation of Agrarian Labor
5	Female Foeticide / *Kanya Bhrun Hatya* (Dr. Rani Jha)	Activist Mithila	Womb & Medical Violence Critique
6	Gharolu *Hinsa* / Domestic Violence (Dr. Rani Jha)	Activist Mithila	Spatial Imprisonment & Silence
7	*Dahej* / Dowry Death (Pushpa Kumari)	Activist Fine-Line *Kachni*	Inversion of Marital Fire

Analysis of Individual Visual Texts

Visual Text 1: Kohbar on Paper (Ganga Devi, c. 1970s)

Central Motifs: Purbaina (lotus), vamsa (bamboo), paired fish, sun and moon

Spatial Frame: Rigid double-line border (hasiya)

Material Transition: Ephemeral mud wall → secular portable paper



This Mithila painting depicts a kohbar, the ritual marriage mandala, on a yellow background with a red and blue zigzag border. The central motif consists of a lotus wheel in blue along with fish, and is surrounded by peacocks on either side in a face-to-face position, symbolizing union. At the bottom, there is a depiction of a bride and bridegroom sitting with elephants and kalash pots, which is directly related to the ritual of marriage. This painting has been executed in flat Bharni style color with double line outline.

Using the visual social semiotic approach (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), the painting makes use of radial or central balance to position the lotus as a principal sign for female fertility, while bamboo acts as the phallic symbol standing for patrilineage.

As Ganga Devi produces this art on a portable surface, she liberates these visual symbols from their domestic tasks. This particular painting is personalized through signatures, thus transforming her domestic labor devoid of identity and acknowledgment into a commodity (Parker, 1984; Spivak, 1988). In this sense, it could be used as a medium between her ritual responsibilities and her new form of authorship.

Visual Text 2: Radha-Krishna in the Kadamba Grove (Sita Devi, c. 1975)

Central Motifs: Radha and Krishna under a Kadamba tree, peacocks, blooming flora

Spatial Frame: Saturated primary color fills with strong contours

Theoretical Focus: Sacred erotic co-equality and female desire



Sita Devi's canvas depicts the divine lovers Radha and Krishna standing beneath a flowering Kadamba tree, rendered in the bold, saturated Bharni style. The composition is filled with primary pigments: luscious red, mustard yellow, and green contained by solid black contour lines. Peacocks and blooming vines crowd the surrounding space, leaving virtually no empty background (horror vacui).

Sita Devi's composition differs from the practice within traditional Brahminical temple sculptures and court miniatures in that the Goddesses appear on equal footing with the male God, in contrast to the more common practice where consorts were often portrayed either at a diminutive scale or in a more subordinate position by standing at the feet of male Gods. This observation is in relation to the depiction of Radha in the current composition, wherein she is nearly at par with Krishna in both size and stature, standing about halfway in the center plane holding a lotus flower in an upright pose.

Feminist semiotic analysis reveals how Sita Devi's Bharni painting technique may be interpreted as producing a common erotically devotional space in which Radha and Krishna

exist on equal footing, potentially leading to a more reciprocal erotic relationship between the two lovers. Known for her role in popularizing the Bharni painting style through her approach of using colors to fill spaces instead of lines, Devi employs vibrant primary colors, clear outlines, and horror vacui flowers and animals to enhance emotional impact; the intricate pattern neither dissolves the figures but accentuates their erotic appeal, while the pose of Radha echoing Krishna's forms a space of equilibrium (Impart Encyclopedia of Art, 2022a, 2022b; Saffronart, 2013).

Visual Text 3: Nag Kanya (The Snake Maiden) (Baua Devi, c. 1990s)

Central Motifs: Hybrid woman-serpent figure, interlocking snakes, blooming lotuses

Spatial Frame: Dynamic curved lines and minimal color fill

Theoretical Focus: Re-coding serpentine motifs and female sovereignty



Baua Devi's Nag Kanya features a central hybrid figure: a woman whose lower torso merges into swirling, coiled serpents. Drawn with thick, expressive black outlines and minimal color application, the composition is packed with smaller interlocking snakes, blooming lotuses, and radiant sun motifs radiating from the edges of the canvas.

In South Asian mythology, there exists a symbolic association of snakes with narratives involving divine power and control. For instance, according to Hindu mythology, serpents are tamed and controlled by gods or by heroes, such as when Krishna dances on the multi-headed serpent Kaliya, making him submit. There is also a story of the divine eagle

called Garuda who takes the nectar of immortality from the snakes in order to liberate his mother from enslavement (Berkeley Art Museum & Pacific Film Archive, 2014; Sarmaya, 2019).

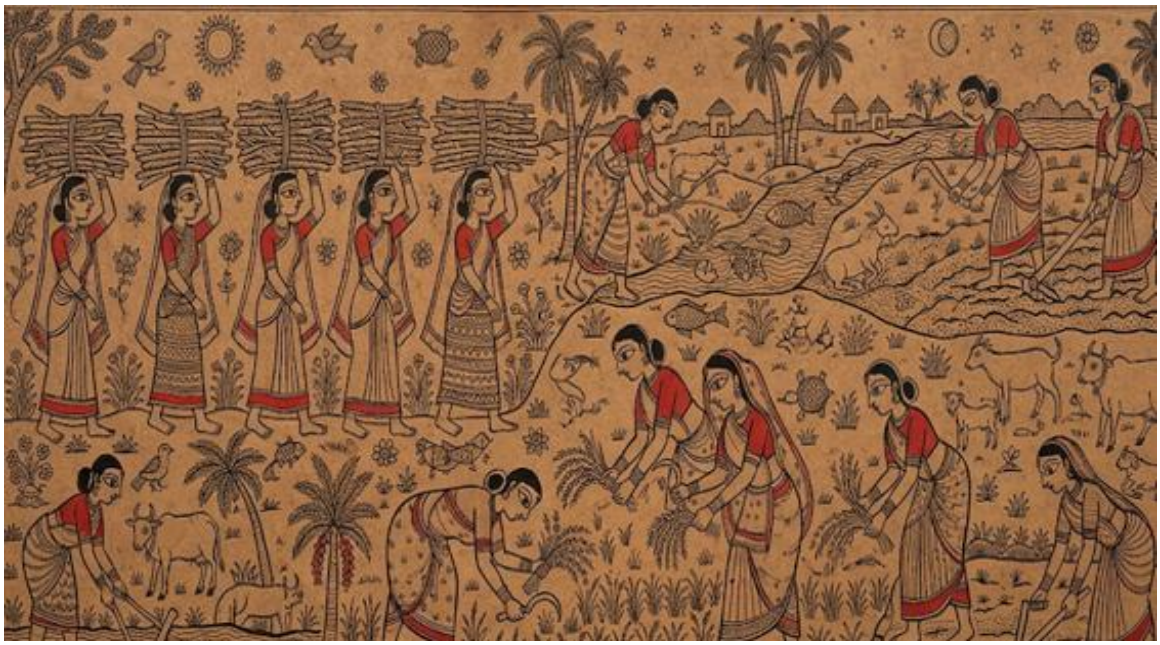
Nag Kanya by Baua Devi rewrites the tradition of snake-woman iconography, which has been associated with the powers of creation and destruction held by the Hindu goddess Manasa, by representing the hybrid creature in a vertical and frontal posture with snakes emphasizing rather than restricting her figure (Berkeley Art Museum & Pacific Film Archive, 2014; Sarmaya, 2019). Interpreting the painting in the context of postcolonial feminism, one can view the iconography of snakes as transformed from an image associated with taming by men to one affirming the power of native womanhood and nature. This feminist post-colonial reading of Baua Devi's Nag Kanya is the re-evaluation of the symbolism of serpents from threat to indigenous femininity. Manasa is a seven-hooded serpent deity who protects humans from attacks by snakes and blesses them with fertility and agricultural abundance. Increasingly, she has come to be seen as one who embodies "anti-establishment feminist ambition and power" (Rubin Museum of Himalayan Art, n.d.; Athena Journal, 2024, p. 85).

Visual Text 4: Village Laborers on Cow-Dung Ground (Jamuna Devi, c. 1980s)

Central Motifs: Women carrying firewood, harvesting, pounding grain

Spatial Frame: Earthy brown cow-dung wash (Gobar) background

Theoretical Focus: Dalit feminist standpoint and material re-appropriation



Executed on handmade paper washed with a slurry of cow dung (Gobar), Jamuna Devi's painting presents a textured, earthy brown surface. Over this organic background, the artist uses black linework and simple red highlights to depict Dalit women engaged in agrarian

labor: carrying bundles of firewood on their heads, harvesting rice, and working in rural fields.

The Dalit feminist standpoint is rooted in the lives of Dalit women, who conceptualize caste, gender, class, and sexuality as oppressive systems and sources of knowledge that are interdependent. According to Rege (1998), the standpoint "talks differently" from dominant feminism as well as from Dalit men's politics and represents a difference as an epistemic standpoint (pp. 39–41). "Material re-appropriation" refers to the subaltern redeployment of devalued material substances, such as cow dung and earth, which are used as aesthetic materials and thereby challenge art/craft hierarchy constructed by the Brahmans.

Semiotically, the image emphasizes Dalit women's cultivation labor as an aesthetic expression different from the Kachni and Bharni styles practiced by upper castes, building upon Guru's (1995) and Rege's (1998) contention that Dalit women ‘talk differently’ from an intersectional perspective of caste, class, and gender that rejects both upper-caste feminism and male Dalit politics (Guru, 1995; Rege, 1998). While neither theorist mentions Mithila paintings, their stress on situated knowledge allows us to read Gobar paintings in light of it. In terms of material production, the art subverts caste-gender hierarchies by rejecting upper caste practice of prohibiting Dalit women from making paintings of Savarna deities in the Brahmin/Kayastha styles of Kachni and Bharni and encouraging them to develop Godna and Gobar styles depicting agriculture, local epics, and using natural materials (Behanbox, 2023; Craftmark, n.d.; DailyO, 2018; Forward Press, 2020).

Visual Text 5: Female Foeticide (Kanya Bhrun Hatya) (Dr. Rani Jha, c. 2010)

Central Motifs: Female fetus in womb, medical syringes & scalpels, weeping veiled women

Spatial Frame: Inverted central Kohbar structure

Theoretical Focus: Critique of medicalized violence and sex selection



Using traditional fine-line Kachni work, Dr. Rani Jha places a female fetus inside a stylized womb at the center of the canvas. The womb is surrounded not by traditional sacred symbols, but by medical scalpels, syringes, clock faces, and dark, jagged lines. In the surrounding borders, weeping female figures hide their faces behind traditional veils (ghunghat).
The idea here is that through the employment of modern technologies such as ultrasound, amniocentesis, and abortion, there is identification and elimination of female fetuses, thus positioning sex selection abortion within a paradigm of gender-based structural violence. The traditional fertility theme found in Mithila painting is inverted and turned against itself by depicting the womb surrounded by instruments used for gender selection abortion. This is seen in works by Dr. Rani Jha.

One way this painting may be seen is as an inversion of the Kohbar (nuptial) mural form, with the subject matter being an inversion from one of celebration to horror. While the classical form celebrates female fertility and the joys that accompany this topic in marriage, this work is concerned with the practice of sex-selective abortion and female foeticide. From the perspective of semiotics, the veil (ghunghat), which is normally linked with modesty, is here seen as a signifier for hidden sorrow. The use of visual vocabulary by Jha that is both traditional and well-established in depicting a modern-day concern could be said to be an attempt to leverage that tradition and speak about something that was not traditionally represented through it in a manner of advocacy against sexual violence and sex selection.

Visual Text 6: Gharolu Hinsa (Domestic Violence) (Dr. Rani Jha, c. 2015)

Central Motifs: Crouched woman, broken bangles, looming male figure, window onlookers

Spatial Frame: Claustrophobic enclosed architectural border

Theoretical Focus: Demystifying the domestic courtyard (Angan)



Gharolu Hinsa, a work of art by Dr. Rani Jha, illustrates an interior design with decorative bordering on all sides. In the middle of the design is a woman figure squatting on the floor surrounded by broken bracelets, with a tall man figure looming above her and lifting his hands. In the architectural panels around the main design are several women figures looking through windows.

The above visual composition can be understood as being opposed to the idealistic notion of the domestic courtyard (angan) as a safe space through the juxtaposition of a physical attack scene framed by the traditional borders associated with religious rituals. The smashed bangles, which were traditionally believed to bring about the notion of good luck or good fortune within marriage (saubhagya), have been shown to be related to the physical act of violence.

Through an interpretation from the perspective of intersectional feminism, the group of women spectators observing from behind lattice windows instead of intervening becomes symbolic of silence in society regarding domestic violence in a patriarchal environment.

Through this understanding, one can say that the painting is bringing forward a topic, which is kept in the private sphere of the home into the public arena through this form of advocacy.

Visual Text 7: Dahej (Dowry Death) (Pushpa Kumari, c. 2012)

Central Motifs: Bride engulfed in flames, marital fire altar (Yajna), reaching hands

Spatial Frame: Monochrome black hatching with selective red accents

Theoretical Focus: Inversion of marital sacraments and economic exploitation



Using the technique of black Kachni hatching with red highlights, the painting by Pushpa Kumari shows a young bride who is caught in a fire emerging from the fire altar of marriage (yajna). The disembodied hands are shown grasping at gold coins and jewelry, whereas the family members are depicted in profile in the background registers.

This text could easily be considered an inversion of an important symbol in Hindu marriages. The yajna fire, which is usually taken to be the witness to marriage vows (Saptapadi), is now connected with injury due to economic pressures. The selective use of the color red, which is normally used in the form of sindoor on the foreheads of married women, has been transferred to the flames in this painting.

The thick, dark black linework in Kachni hatching produces an atmosphere where the viewer gets a feeling of confinement, and this can be interpreted as mirroring the economic problems created by dowries that have been highlighted through the title and iconography of the painting. In such an interpretation, Kumari's piece utilizes the use of lines in a traditional manner to produce a criticism of dowry-related violence.

Comparative Synthesis of Results

In these seven visual images, the analysis shows that there is much more beyond the traditional perception of Mithila painting as an ornamental and static art form, since in these images it functions as a place of discussion of castes and genders. According to the visual textual analysis, one can distinguish the presence of a triadic structure throughout these images. However, this does not imply that the same process applies to all works of Mithila art.

Table 4

Three Analytical Clusters Across the Primary Corpus

Cluster/Artists	Pattern Identified
Upper-Caste Spatial Transition *Ganga Devi, Sita Devi, Baua Devi*	Uncouples *Kohbar* motifs from mud walls to paper; associated with individual authorship and, in Text 2, a more co-equal treatment of divine male and female figures.
Dalit Standpoint & Material Re-appropriation *Jamuna Devi*	Centers cow-dung (*Gobar)* and tattoo (*Godna*) idioms as primary aesthetic materials; associated with depicting agrarian labor and oral epics historically excluded from upper-caste iconography.
Contemporary Activist Critique *Dr. Rani Jha, Pushpa Kumari*	Uses *Kachni* linework and inverted auspicious icons; associated with depicting female foeticide, domestic abuse, and dowry-related violence.

In considering the three categories presented above together, one gets the impression that the seven examples in this corpus use elements of Mithila art convention via a combination of several factors including individual iconographic inversions, caste-based material choices, and recontextualization of space.

Conclusion

Mithila paintings are a dynamic tradition of intersectional representation and subaltern resistance rather than static ornamentation. Using a combination of postcolonial feminism, Dalit standpoint theory, intersectionality, and visual social semiotics in this research paper, macro-level structures such as caste, patriarchy, market capitalism, etc., will be connected to micro-level art-making processes. The analysis of seven visual texts supports all three hypotheses: the transition from impermanent mud walls (bhitti-chitra) to paper made sacred motifs leave domestic spaces and thus secured named authorship and economic independence (H1), in the case of works by Ganga and Baua Devi; Dalit artists used Gobar and Godna

motifs to disrupt Brahmanical monopoly over sacred motifs and to raise agrarian work to the level of artistic subjects (H2); and modern Mithila artists subverted fertility/marriage motifs (Kohbar, Yajna, Purbaina) against female foeticide, domestic violence, and dowry killings (H3).

These works together lend validity to a three-level framework: the use of ritual symbols by upper-caste artists as an approach towards authorship; the appropriation of the cow-dung and tattoo idioms by Dalit artists in opposition to Brahminical iconography; and the reversal of marriage symbols by activists to challenge violence. Female artists from all castes negotiate with this tradition.

If confirmed on a wider corpus, such observations may have repercussions on art history and policy in South Asia. They challenge the divide between the 'fine' arts and their folk counterparts, confirming the already existent fears that market visibility will lead to a process of commercial depoliticization of artworks; thus, the importance of intellectual property protection. Future research may focus on conducting artist interviews to validate these claims, a comparative study between Nepali and Bihari artists due to their different patronage systems, and an empirical study of Geographical Indication along with digital technology's influence on the market power of Dalit artists.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the analysis is based on a small purposive corpus of seven paintings, which limits generalizability. Second, the interpretation relies on visual semiotic analysis rather than artist interviews or ethnographic data, meaning that claims about intentionality remain inferential. Third, the provenance of some artworks is not fully documented, which affects the reliability of attribution and dating. Fourth, the theoretical framework, while robust, is applied retrospectively to visual materials not created with these theories in mind. Future research should address these limitations through larger-scale corpus analysis, artist interviews, and archival verification of artwork provenance.

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The Ultimate Path to Buddhism for the End of Worldly Woes in Subedi's *From Life to Life*

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Abstract

This paper analyzes Abhi Subedi's play *From Life to Life* by applying Buddhist tenets. This play is written against the background of traumatized people living under the dictatorial regime of an arrogant king who supposes the citizens of his country are his subjects. People seen in the play are the means of carrying the Buddhist principles - suffering and the causes of suffering; whereas the presence of the Buddha in the play – the source of the elimination of all these sufferings has invoked the thirst for knowledge that each one needs to lead a meaningful life. On one side, there is the threat of the autocratic ruler; and on the other side, the refuge in Buddhism is for the release of human miseries and worldly woes, with the echoing sound of *Buddham Sharanam Gachhami, Dhammam Sharanam Gachhami, Sangham Sharanam Gachhami* signifying a purified life. The paper attempts to answer three questions: why do people suffer in this kingdom, what makes the king so arrogant, and how is Buddhism the ultimate path to get free from miseries? This paper attempts to answer these questions by applying the Buddhist tenets – the final exit from all worldly cravings.

*Keywords***:** autocratic rule, craving for power, worldly woes, Buddhism, salvation

The Ultimate Path to Buddhism for the End of Worldly Woes in Subedi's *From Life to Life*

Introduction: Beginning and Ending of Human Sorrows

This paper concerns the suffering of a woman who has lost her parents, husband, sons, and other relatives in living her life with a series of struggles one after another and losing hope to live a happy life. In this play, the main victim of the state, society, tradition, and above all destiny, is the protagonist Utpala, whose journey from one life having two sons, a loving husband, and rich parents to another life attaining *arhathood* under the patronage of the Buddha is a resemblance of His journey in search of enlightenment, facing many troubles on the way until attaining enlightenment under the *peepal* tree in Bodhgaya. This text reveals the harrowing and crippling aspects of human life, which is full of sorrows at every step, along with "destruction, sorrow, suffering, and trauma that are experienced as the consequences of war, abuse, illness, crime, family strife, etc. and how they disenfranchise us from one another, drive us into emotional isolation, and make us appear as less than human in the eyes of the other, be it the victim or the perpetrator" (Wright, 1987, p. 1).

Human minds "overcome by the wretched clinging thirst, sorrow, and unhappiness" (Shakya, 2002, p. 3) need to release from "imperfection to perfection, from unhappiness to perfect happiness, from ignorance to knowledge, from fear and anxiety to perfect security, from evanescent to ineffable, from a state of mental illness to a state of perfect mental health" (Jayatillake, 2008, p. 6), which becomes necessary to "develop a calm and tranquil mind within ourselves and then persuade others to abandon violence" (Piage, 2001, p. 153) to maintain peace and solidarity. In Subedi's *From Life to Life*, due to the worldly woes, suffering, misfortunes and above the anarchism of an autocratic king, the condition of the people has become very miserable as "due to the dictatorship of the king, every man and woman suffer; they are in trauma; they can no longer live happily; they are looking for freedom from his anarchy; and they decided to be monks and nuns" (Subedi, 2008, p. 53) being disturbed by "mental attitudes and reactions to circumstances, not by the objects or situations alone" (Rahaula, 2004, p. 8).

The victims of the circumstances always look for the means of "freedom from external limitations or restrictions, including freedom from limitations or restrictions placed by our fellow humans or nature" (Sivaraksa, 1998, p. 63) with "the virtue of patience or forbearance" (Harvey, 2000, p. 243). The main concern of the protagonist presented started a journey from her home to her parents' home "to make easy for delivering a child" (Subedi,2008, p. 64) along with her husband and a small son, is tormented when she finds that her husband has died from a cobra's bite. On the very spot, she bears another son, but while crossing the surging river, she loses both her sons and later knows her parents also die in the fire that destroys their home and property as part of "karma and

transmigration" (Mus, 1966, p. 818); besides, marrying three more times, being burnt and buried as part of *sati* along with her husbands and reliving with new troubles, she finally goes to the refuge of the Buddha for "the ultimate eradication of *dukkha*." (Harris, 2007, p. 77). Besides, the cruelty of the king – "murders of common people, burnings of monasteries, libraries, abductions of those who don't obey him and people living under the shadow of guns" (Subedi, 2008, p. 62), is a metaphorical reference of contemporary Nepal that witnessed very catastrophic and unbearable "destruction, displacement and gross human rights abuses" (Lawati, 2010, p. 3), and has been in the grip of the incidents like kidnapping, mass killing, extortion, harassment as well as mental sufferings - "reporting the bloody incidents, trying to understand the genesis and strength of the movement, and looking for a scapegoat either in political parties, the Maoists, or the palace" (Dasgupta, 2007, p. 9).

However, taking refuge to Buddhism for the freedom of worldly woes, the nuns including Anamika, victims of the king's anarchy feel "relieved and free from all the worldly as well as bodily woes" (Subedi, 2008, p. 61) and the instances of unbearable pain which need to be relieved in any way with the "virtues such as non-violence and compassion" (Keown, 2005, p. 3) by "de-toxifying the mind from greed, hatred and delusion, a revolution in the way the world is perceived, freedom from craving and liberation from the delusion of ego" (Harris, 2007, p. 77). One important panacea that the victims hear time and again whenever they are in trouble, "*Buddham Sharanam Gachhami* (I wish to go to the shelter of Buddha)*"* (Subedi, 2008, p. 63) delineates the allusion related to the birth and preaching of Lord Buddha to eliminate all kinds of suffering. Hence, my argument, based on this play as a testimony of the conflict victim – agonized victims, along with whom the traumatic fact of the agonized citizenry is narrativized- is an attempt at the initiation of the Buddhist path, a good route to achieve final salvation or the end of all sufferings.

Bringing out the significance of Buddhism and of refuge in Buddhism for the final denouement from all griefs people have due to the authoritarian rule of the king, this paper tries to focus on how, in writing about the sufferings of people in literary works, the dramatist Subedi has exonerated human greed – the sole cause of human suffering- from the teaching of Buddha; and is answering three fundamental questions: why do people suffer in this kingdom, what makes the king so arrogant, and how is Buddhism the ultimate path to get free from miseries? This paper tries to get the answer to these questions with the help of the basic tenets of Buddhism.

Literature Review

There are ample works written about war and conflict that remain an important field for many writers, as agonies, miseries, murders, rapes, and other atrocities have become a discourse about which aspiring people could imbibe the area of their research works. In such context, Nepal's decade-long insurgency and its consequences have also drawn the attention

of researchers. In the words of Shakya (2006), “Many joined Maoist force to avenge for the torture, disappearances, and deaths of family members and friends by the State forces” (p.6). She thinks that feudal society remained a crucial factor in ensuing the decade-long insurgency. However, based on the significance of the war, Weyermann (2006) puts forward, “logic of waging the war against each fighting group sounds rather different which illustrates, the logic of development agencies and the dynamics of the highly hierarchical Nepalese social system play on each other and reinforce each other's denial of chronic fear and extreme suffering” (p.iv). The kinds of conflicts and wars that happened in the past, as one can see from the past testimonies, have not given any fruitful consequences in society. In such conditions, peace, as needed every time by everybody impacted in the fights, is required, as in the words of Kitagawa (1962), who pleads for Buddhism as a sole panacea for relief from griefs, “Buddhism provides the symbol and inspiration for the building and strengthening of national life” (p.7). Besides, brotherhood, reconciliation, and harmony among the fighting groups, crucial steps to lead a peaceful life, are some common needs that Buddhist tenets always talk about.

People cannot live in terror all the time; to avoid destructive measures, everyone needs peace and solidarity that would always remain the other side of a coin; that is, Buddhism and its role, which has helped establish a peaceful society even after the massive destruction caused by cynical rulers. Harvey (2000) writes his ideas like this, “Buddhism has tempered the excesses of rulers and martial people, helped large empires to exist without much internal conflict and rarely incited wars against non-Buddhists. Moreover, in the midst of wars, Buddhist monasteries have often been havens of peace” (p. 239). In conflict, both sides would be responsible for destructive measures; it’s the middle path that can have some solution to bring them to the table of discussion, as Theresa Der-lan Yeh (2006) writes, “The Middle Path of non-violence and compassion provides a model for solving undoubtedly political problems outside the adversarial framework implicit in partisanship” (p. 52). It would be an important asset to end the long-lasting feud and ensure the path of everlasting reconciliation.

There are many works like this written about conflict and war as well as peace; however, this paper has tried to illustrate how Buddhist tenets can be applied in the conflict narratives and how they can illuminate a new dimension of ensuring a better life away from stress and agony. This paper introduces how, by reading a text written about war and conflict, one can feel different in reducing the destructive measures and increasing the assets of peace.

Statement of Problem

Since the world has seen many wars and conflicts from the very beginning, many works have been written about such terrible consequences, and a lot more has been done to bring back peace and reconciliation in the war-affected societies, but researchers have underestimated how Buddhism and its tenets can be seen in conflict narratives, which can illustrate the importance of peace and solidarity in the conflict-hit societies. Therefore, this paper has tried to fill this gap by answering some fundamental research questions: Why do people suffer in their own kingdom? What makes the king so arrogant? And how is Buddhism the ultimate path to get free from miseries?

Objectives

The main objective of this study is to bring out the importance of peace and reconciliation in the war-ridden society. The general objectives of this research paper are to see the causes of human suffering in society, observe the causes of their suffering, and to examine how Buddhist tenets can pacify both.

Significance

The paper analyses how Buddhist tenets are still significant to eliminate worldly woes of modern people who are distressed by their daily chores, from which one can find relief. The main character of this play, Utpala, a representative of all human beings of today's time – the victims of any circumstances, either of the cruelties of the statesman of this play or any other- can find a panacea by following the right path.

Methodology

The research design of this paper is qualitative and depends on the analytical aspects of the primary text – Abhi Subedi's play *From Life to Life*. Textual evidence has been interpreted and analyzed in light of theoretical insights from Buddhist perspectives. The paper has examined various aspects of Buddhist perspectives seen in the conflict narratives by applying the critical insights developed by Theresa Der-lan Yeh, Joseph M. Kitagawa, Glenn D. Paige, and the Dalai Lama as theoretical parameters. Der-lan Yeh's pragmatic use of Buddhist perspective to heal woes, Kitagawa's use of solidarity among warring groups, Paige's importance of ensuing peaceful society, and the Dalai Lama's perspectives on forgiveness for perpetrators have been used to delineate the way to understand the sufferings caused by the dictator rulers and the healing aspects, along with the ideas of harmony and reconciliation after the agony.

Limitation

As the propositions and limitations, this paper has assessed the consequences of

dictator rulers who have treated the people as their subjects and has never understood the importance of being human with other human beings. For this, Abhi Subedi's play *From Life to Life* has been interpreted with the Buddhist tenets developed by some notable critics like Theresa Der-lan Yeh, Joseph M. Kitagawa, Glenn D. Paige, and the Dalai Lama.

Results and Discussion

Roots of Oppressed Women's Griefs and Refuge to Buddhism

The world is full of suffering due to the cravings for physical materials one has in life to make it happier and more comfortable in comparison with others. Theresa Dar-lan Yeh (2006), in her essay "The Way to Peace: A Buddhist Perspective," has outlined two main precepts of the Buddha, "the first two truths discern the causes of violence and conflict and the suffering caused thereby: first, life inevitably involves suffering/dissatisfaction (*duhkha-satya*); and second, suffering/dissatisfaction originates in desires (*samudaya-satya*)" (p. 97). The craving, which is addicted to careless living, grows like a Maluva (A king of parasites) creeper and leaps from existence to existence like a monkey in the forest looking for fruits (Shakya, 2002, p. 3), which is the bottom of all troubles in this world. It is the root cause of avarice, anger, hatred, malice, rivalry, jealousy, envy, hypocrisy, deceit, pride, arrogance, and ignorance, and has ruined individuals and nations. The cravings of the autocratic king who believes in dictatorship over his subjects, committing crimes one after another in a way of extending his sovereignty from his ownership to the rule, invoke the thrust of authoritarian being obeyed and ruled over as "he thought he became the emperor" (Subedi, 2008, p. 52). The horizon of his ever spreading craving to exercise the excessive power to rule over his subjects can be seen from these lines "this is my kingdom where nobody can have any pleasures; it my right to kill my subject from elephants; I have my rights to hang them in trees, to kill them by stonning, to depose them from their own homes, to kill those who oppose me" (p. 53). The desire and the consequences that follow it mark a beginning of his and his subjects' worldly woes as "the men and women of his country suffer a lot" (p. 53) when they, not being able to appease themselves from the cruelties and prevailing dominations, "sought various ways for salvation, for that they wished to be Buddhist nuns and thought it is the sole way for freedom and safety" (p. 53). In doing so, the third and the fourth precepts of the Buddha prescribe the cure for this unpleasant way of living, that is, how to promote a peaceful way of living and "ultimately live in peace: third, suffering/dissatisfaction will cease if all desires cease (*nirodha-satya*); and fourth, this state can be realized by engaging in the Noble Eightfold Path (*marga-satya*)" (Yeh, 2006, p. 97). Their transformation is echoed with the chanting of "*Buddham Sharanam Gachhami,*

Dharmam Sharanam Gachhami, Sangham Sharanam Gachhami (I wish to go to the shelter of Buddha, I wish to go to the shelter of Buddha, I wish to go to the shelter of Buddha)" (Subedi, 2008, p. 53); which can be seen as "valuable in many contexts as methods of removing the power of these destructive emotions, and thus undermining the psychological roots of conflict" (Harvey, 2000, p. 243). The meeting of Anamika with Utpala, an *arhat* (attaining sainthood in monastery), whose past life was a turmoil with a series of hardships, mortifies her with attaining the Buddhahood as she asserts, "I realize your (Utpal's) story is of the story of all women; your journey and salvation is from one body to another, one life to another; so I am body, my body is moon, sun, wind, soil, fire, and water which I understood my life from your life" (Subedi, 2008, p. 76). In the same way, as seen in the mentality of Utpal in Utpal's dilemma, the surroundings, as mentioned in the play, explore even more complexities of the situation: "Utpal's journey is of her body; she is the life surging like a river;" (p. 77) in which she loses her two children and her husband to a snakebite; besides, the information of her parents' death and loss of their property delves into the maximization of her intense suffering as mentioned in the first two precepts of the Buddha. Even more tolerating power of her intense suffering can be seen in the extract:

> She got married again and had a child whom her drunkard husband chopped, fried and forced her to eat. Later, she ran away to Varanasi where she met a man who had come for the cremation of his wife. He got married with him, but he died shortly after that and she was burnt with her dead husband in funeral pyre as *sati*. But a thief stole her as he found her still alive and married her. The king ordered to butcher all the thieves, her husband was also killed and she was buried along with the remainings of her husband, but wolves took her out of the ground. She remained alive dying many times. She went into the surging river, into the depth of the earth, bore children, forced to eat them, but still remained tolerant. (p. 69)

The cycle of her life from one turning to another make her live very traumatic life which she could hardly bear as part of human sufferings with "an overwhelming experience of sudden of catastrophic events, in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled receptive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (Caruth, 1995, p. 181). However, her journey from this state to the haven where she, "with disheveled hair, without cloth in her body, dirt in her mouth with the chanting of "*Buddham Sharanam Gachhami* (I wish to go to the shelter of Buddha)" (Subedi, 2008, p. 71) meets the Buddha calling her "the moon surrounded by stars, councilor of love and peace, I, being naked and undergone a series of hardships, have come to deliver my agony to you" (p. 71). This

encapsulates her convergence to the arhathood, which confirms "a calm and tranquil mind within" (Paige, 2001, p. 153) and her self-evocation to the refuge to Buddha and "manifestations of Buddhas or bodhisattvas to save sentient beings and lead them to enlightenment" (Vollmer, 2006, p. 204) that can be taken as a threshold for the transformation in attitudes and behaviors. Then the realization of what she would like to be when the Buddha asks about her desire is a way of extinguishing the worldly woes and pleasures and opening the door to a new destination with the mentorship of the nun Prajapati, who would guide her. The journey Utpala has accomplished to the refuge is a resemblance of the Buddha's journey to enlightenment, which He says like this:

> The story of human journey is the story of knowledge; we all make journey to reach somewhere and to achieve something; I also took journey as knowledge and arrive here; and the journey of Utpala is also the same kind of journey of having sustained many troubles and finally arriving to threshold of enlightenment. She suffered, but along with suffering, she got the light too. There are many sufferings in life, how we accomplish them makes a difference. There are many ways, but we have to take the middle way. (Subedi, 2008, p. 72)

The preaching, along with the determination to achieve a goal, helps one grow a self-determination that even committing inhuman deeds in the past one can have "certain restraint of action considered integral to the religious life—both as a means of preventing harm and as part of the path of cultivating the awareness leading to awakening (Bodhi)" (Adam, 2006, p. 4). The state of awakening from anonymity to the enlightenment of the meaning of life with a hope "our deeds help us make our paths" (Subedi, 2008, p. 73) pertains the life cycle by "reducing or abandoning the negative reactions to an offense but increasing or fostering positive reactions such as taking the forms of compassion and generosity toward an offender - a proper way to reconciliation" (Dhammahoso, 2010, p. 6); from which, perpetrators or the victims can achieve the enlightenment even after murdering many people as Angulimala "led a life of simplicity and solitude and under the Buddha's guidance eventually attained enlightenment" (Dhammika, 2002, p. 72). The manifestations of Buddha enhance the power of tolerance and patience for transferring the hardened souls into the soft ones seen in human beings as well as Angulimala.

Buddhahood, as Lama (2012) confirms, is a destination which one can achieve through the practice of mind; then, one achieves enlightenment within his or her mind, as he argues, "Enlightenment is achieved with our mind, by purifying all our negative disturbing emotions individually one by one and actualizing all positive qualities one by one. This is

usually called the path" (p. 174); consequently, one tries to "correspond to Buddhist wisdom (prajna) while the transcending of the self to reach out to external existence which corresponds to the practice of compassion (maitri-karuna)" (Kawada, 2001, p. 104). The mental state of Utpala, which has been disturbed once she went through various forms of troubles and hardships in life to arrive from one life to another one, as seen in her saying "this way the nun Prajapati made me nun; I worked hard, did penance and got arhathood; now I can foresee past, present and future; I find this vision very pleasurable; now I don't have pain, rather salvation and ecstasy" (Subedi, 2008, p.74) is pacified with some positive qualities happening around her by purifying all contaminated cravings and accepting only positive qualities – "Buddhsit wisdom" (Kawada, 2001, p. 104). Nun Anamika and other nuns, in search of knowledge in the shelter of the nun Utpala, are able to realize what had happened earlier in their lives due to cravings and what has been accomplished so far, which is gradually transforming everyone's life, about which Utpala says;

> The path the nun Anamika has chosen is a way to salvation. In reality, she has understood the meaning and intention of religion. Now, you have understood actual happiness. The nun Anamika has also understood. She will accomplish all her duty understanding the world. She is another kind of bodhisatwa, who'll return to serve other with her knowledge. Nuns have to suffer more than monks because they have to suffer more because of their physique and get salvation sooner. (Subedi, 2008, p. 77)

The nuns, while looking for the ultimate salvation from the woes, have seen refuge in Buddha and, appealing to Him to release them as well as others, are looking for "inward peace (*ajjhatta-santi*) which results in harmonious living (or righteous living *dhammacariyā)"* (Nilamasuria, 2008, p. 2), which would make them feel relieved and bid farewell to all. The attainment of Buddhahood for them sounds like she has achieved peace as a panacea from the cravings and sufferings, which signifies maintaining the middle way (*Madhyamika*) to deal with woes in everyday life, as in the words of Chuang (2006): "Through chanting mantras, which are sacred sound capturing the cosmic energy, one becomes more in tune with one's own Buddhist nature and harmonious connection with the universe" (p. 11). This condition elucidates the states of enlightenment in these women's lives with the intense resemblance to the Buddha and his loving-kindness, as seen in the remarks of the Buddha:

> The life of nuns and monks is in search of knowledge and meaning of life. Having lived from one life to another which Utpala, Anamika and other nuns did is a way to attain *bodhisatwa*. They have achieved *bodhisatwa*. They are not afraid of living life now, rather understand the meaning of being free. To suffer does not mean that you

> have imprisoned yourself, rather one has to provide salvation to other being risen from the level of suffering as Utpala has done to others (Subedi, 2008, p. 79).

The presentation of attaining Buddhahood in the characters who were from a kingdom where people were panicked from the cruelties of a king whose excessive cravings of accomplishing more power to dictate others is reconciled with the chanting of "*Buddham Sharanam Gachhami"* (p.77) in the tormenting time when the meaning of life could become as an ultimate refuge to "Buddhist wisdom" (Kawada, 2001, p. 104) or path would only be right path to go on in life for final denouement from the complexity. People, whether in pain or happiness, along with the atmosphere of the world – domination, exploitation, manipulation of the powerful people like the king to powerless like Anamika and other nuns and many other malpractices, are in search of knowledge of life with the initiation of peace, love and compassion within each individual and towards all other beings as seen in the remarks of Coote (2007), "Let one's thoughts of boundless love pervade the whole world above, below and across, without any obstruction, without any hatred, without any enmity" (p. 1). The tenets of Buddhism – *nirvana, metta* and *karuna*, peace, concord or reconciliation and harmony among the politically and socially multifaceted people within a society remain important healing factors for those who have been suffering from the violence.

Conclusion: The Final Resolution

Subedi's play *From Life to Life*, a testimony of panicked women from one kingdom, who are in search of knowledge of life – how they should live their life either in the refuge to the Buddha in monasteries as *arhats* or by accomplishing the responsibilities one has to bear having taken birth in this earth, has delineated the initiation of comprehending the paths one has to take to achieve goals in life. On the one hand, the primary text shows a havoc destruction in kingdom due to the manipulation of power from a king, and on the other hand, a plea for peace taking shelter to the Buddha to get release from the worldly woes and solidarity, where each victim either Anamika, Utapala and others have been tormented by the consequences of their misfortunes and fed up with violence which always exonerates the possibilities of peace, hence, Buddhism, a living philosophy, focuses on eradication of human agony and evocation of peace, solidarity, reconciliation, compassion, loving kindness, righteousness, mindfulness, equality, brotherhood, justice among all living beings despite the fact whatever creeds they believe in. The great world wars or civil wars, i.e., the Israel-Hamas war, Russia-Ukraine war, and the like, the outcome of maximum level of cravings to have power to manipulate the populace, have never relieved any perpetrators; rather, they remain panicked for a long time. One important message one can foresee from the philosophy

which was envisioned more than two and a half millennia ago clearly delivers that no one should harm others; rather, love all living beings who share with us; and respect each other's sentiments, by eliminating the chances and occurrences of conflicts can open the door to achieving nirvana – the level of extreme ecstasy away from personal ego, duality, jealousy, hypocrisy, and other negative things.

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The Self-Governing Planet Earth: Cosmic Representation in Percy Bysshe Shelley's Poem "Mont Blanc"

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Abstract

This paper studies Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem "Mont Blanc" to examine how this poem projects the poet's vision of ecological awareness and concerns, strongly advocating for the cosmic self-governing power of the Earth through the evocative power of a local landscape. The place Mont Blanc is a miniature world and a symbolic representation of the global ecological mechanism. This article argues that human-centric activities exert unrelenting pressure upon the Earth, and anthropocentric thought needs to be revisited through the ecological concept that a single landscape stands for a bigger reality. This paper also contends that the planetary ecology has a self-regulating system, and it needs no human support for the continuation of its autonomous system. This paper is based on a qualitative research design and adopts an interpretative paradigm. The argument of the paper is informed primarily by Ursula K. Heise's theoretical concept of place and planet. The self-governing nature of the Earth is also reinforced by David Peeper and John Hannigan's theory of ecology. The analysis leads to the conclusion that the natural world is more powerful than the human world because of its inherent autonomous mechanism: it grows, decays, and is reborn. Through his poetic vision, Shelley generates awareness and due respect for the natural world, showing that a local place stands for the whole ecological system. Challenging the existing anthropocentric worldview, Shelley prioritizes the intrinsic value of the biotic and abiotic components, delivering the message that the landscape and the earthly components in the poem are the representation of the cosmic planet Earth and its underlying intricate system. Bringing inward the implication of the Earth's autonomous system generates respect for nature.

*Keywords***:** autonomous, cosmic power, ecological awareness, planetary ecology, Shelley

The Self-Governing Planet Earth: Cosmic Representation in Percy Bysshe Shelley's Poem "Mont Blanc"

Percy Bysshe Shelley composed Mont Blanc in the form of a travelogue during his visit to Mont Blanc in Switzerland in 1816. He shared his experiences with a friend. Ikeda (2008) etches out PB Shelley's observation of a vivid pictorial silhouette of the mountain: "P.B Shelley described Mont Blanc was before us but was covered with cloud, Pinnacles of snow, intolerably bright" (p. 20). P.B. Shelley explains the vivid image of snow-capped Mont Blanc, which is reminiscent of a white and bright pyramid. Furthermore, P.B. Shelley has used the term 'Pyramid' to paint a physical feature of Mont Blanc. Ikeda (2008) notes that the term 'Pyramid' embodies, "the sense of immortality implied in the watery source in the pyramidal mountain which will arrive at the poet's consciousness of writing" (p. 22). The pyramid stands for the amalgamation of water and ice that evokes a sense of immortality. Shelley's poetic imagination transcends natural beauty and envisions a comprehensive vision of Earth through the miniature world of Mont Blanc.

Shelley's "Mont Blanc" (1817) explores how specific rivers and mountains represent the cosmic world-regulating system, highlighting the planet Earth as an autonomous body having its own internal system. Due to the cosmic power of nature, it exists beyond human intelligence and control. Mont Blanc is a place that signifies the system of the whole planet Earth encompassing river, sky, the Himalayan range, and the total ecosystem. Shelley's awareness of the place indicates that human beings are only an infinitesimal component of nature and wilderness is the instructor to them. Highlighting Shelley's emphasis on the mechanistic system of Earth, Hartman (2010) reveals that the poem "deepens our understanding of his atheism" (p. 4). Hartman's approach is that of materialism, emphasizing that the whole cosmic system is informed by its own intrinsic self-sustaining energy.

However, Bolton (2016) notes that Mont Blanc represents the "first dumbfounded response into an extended meditation or the possibilities for agency and interchange between human and non-human forces" (p. 28). Bolton's post-humanist point of view is clearly indicated, showing a network of interconnection between human and non-human power. Heise (2008), an ecologist, contends that "local ecological and cultural systems are imbricated" (p. 11). She further shows how the local terrain is embedded in the global phenomenon. In the same line of thought, Shelley's poem "Mont Blanc" links the place to the planet to show biocentric connectivity among diverse entities that exist on the surface of the planet. The voices of the river and mountain transcend human voices, suggesting that nature's mystery is beyond the grasp of human intelligence and rationality. The poem conveys the

message to respect nature and generate awareness for nature conservation because sustainability is not an isolated phenomenon; it is tied up with the whole cosmic system. To maintain ecological balance, human-centric activities are to be minimized, and respect for biotic and abiotic communities has to be the intrinsic drive for making Earth a sustainable habitat for all the entities. Thus, this article problematizes the idea that Mont Blanc is just a material object. The problem is set against the idea that Mont Blanc is not a mere physical entity; it is a symbolic projection perceived through the poet's vision about the self-regulating mechanism of Earth. Mont Blanc is also an embodiment of a miniature world, which represents how a particular location mirrors the whole of Earth.

Review of Literature

Shelley's "Mont Blanc" elicits multifaceted thematic critiques. He has been the center of attention for most of the scholars for critical scrutiny since the publication of his poems. Scholars have analyzed them from different perspectives, ranging from social issues to that of psychology. One of his most discussed poems, "Mont Blanc" draws responses from miscellaneous perspectives for its dynamic, multilayered contents. In this regard, it is worth analyzing how Mont Blanc" has been discussed by previous researchers for its dynamic and multilayered contents.

For Leask, a mountain is a symbolic representation of beauty and awe, which provides a sense of pleasure to sensory perception and serves as an icon of a cultural heritage. Mountain is one of the most tantalizing cultural heritages as tourist destinations. Leask (1998) views Mont Blanc as a geological site of cultural significance. He views that "Mont Blanc is the contemporary cultural significance of the mountain itself, in 1816 one of Europe's prime tourist sites" (p. 184). Mont Blanc becomes a cultural hub in 1816 for European tourists. In that sense, Leask focuses on Mont Blanc's geological notion, emphasizing its cultural significance and promoting it as a site of tourist destination. In this sense, Leask examines Mont Blanc from a geological perspective, focusing on its cultural significance while promoting it as a site of tourist destination.

Elliott (2012) employs the term "androgynous union" (p. 7) to explain the relationship between man and nature as a feminine in his poems. Furthermore, Elliott (2012) elaborates on the term androgynous as one "in which the author attempts to find a balance between the masculine protagonist or speaker, and the feminine element (nature), usually by uniting elements of the two into a third party" (p. 7). The poem reveals the androgynous union where the poet, as a masculine being, encounters mother nature. It also represents the feminine

element, and they become one, creating another layer of transformation. In other words, for Elliott, Mont Blanc blends masculine and feminine attributes and forces.

Similarly, according to Adelman (2013), nature is the reflection of nature itself, and its changing form, like a mirror reflects human nature. When nature is serene and placid, it shows its variegated colors. Adelman (2013) uses the term "Kaleidoscopic" (p. 62) to examine the nature of the mountain related to the poem, "Mont Blanc". The shape of the mountain is that of a tube that resembles a mirror. Upon close examination, it reflects its multiple colors and its changing form. Furthermore, according to Adelman, "Mont Blanc" is similar to the kaleidoscopic expression through its reflection in the environment and its evolving nature. Likewise, Bolton (2016) approaches the poem from the proto-posthumanism perspective. He opines that "Mont Blanc" is the "search for liveliness and for the threads of connection binding humans and nonhumans," which, to him, reflects "the most appropriate approach to Shelley's proto posthumanism" (p. 34). Similarly, Schey (2018) points out that "Mont Blanc, because the poem is one of the Shelley's most labyrinthine and skeptical articulations of the relation between the everlasting universe of things and the human mind's imagination" (p. 59). These critical reflections make Shelley's poem intricate and dense in terms of meaning.

The concept of the mountain as a symbolic projection of a bigger cosmic phenomenon recurs over the years. The mountain seems an unalterable form, unchanging and fixed in a static position, but it has its own underlying system. Such a scenario includes the environment and landscape with a larger representation. On this score, Sette (2020) explains the form of the mountain: "The mountain is presented as an immutable form and showing on the surface no sign of social tension: an imperturbable realm mirrored by the narrative shape of long and dense stanzas constructed as compact blocks" (p. 152). For him, it is the illustration of the immutable and an enduring example of permanence. The word 'immutable form' refers to its solidity, which remains unchanged, immutable, and permanent. Such permanent form is impervious to human rationality and intelligence. The mountain gazes upon the outwardly visible matters apathetically, which distinguishes it from the other landscapes and terrains.

The poem "Mont Blanc" continues to take on symbolic import. McKeartin analyzes the poem's natural landscape and contrasts it with its European historical association and political significance. The rugged terrain, as painted in Mont Blanc and other surrounding mountains, was invested with deeper meanings. They are not viewed as a mere epitome of natural beauty or cultural heritage after the French Revolution. It became a symbol of

political affairs. In this regard, McKeatin (2022) remarks that Mont Blanc "became a contested space after the commencement of the French Revolution" (p. 84). In a line, the term 'contested space' denotes a geographical location that functions as a political power, dimension of control, and area of authority intervention. The beginning of the French Revolution in 1789 treated Mont Blanc as the political intervention due to its strategic location. In that way, Mont Blanc is treated as a location of war zones and for counterattacks. Although the status of the mountain is immutable, humans' attitudes towards it change from natural meaning to that of a historical and political significance.

Mont Blanc, for Hodgson, is a powerful evocation of Shelley's creative poetic vision. Hodgson (2022) reiterates this idea very assertively. Showing Shelley's power of imagination in the poem, he asserts that "Mont Blanc testifies to the power of the imagination through its very willingness to concede its weakness" (p. 667). Similarly, Deakin (2023) critically examines Shelley's poem, "as proto-Heideggerian and phenomenological in which human subject remains hermetically enclosed within the world" (pp. 51-52). Deakin (2023) further focuses on the relationship between human and nature: "Shelley's organic response to nature comes close to a proto Heideggerian stance, where the human subject remains hermetically enclosed within the world, or the great chain of Being, that is experienced thorough a particular form of world disclosure" (p. 52). Deakin's interpretation of Mont Blanc unravels the bond and interconnection that embeds the universe and human beings, where both flourish with a deeper interdependency.

In the same way, McGinnis (2025) remarks that "Mont Blanc, and its glaciers were for Shelley, a symbol of the enduring and indomitable force of nature" (p. 120). He attaches importance to the symbolic significance of nature. Shelley's value of nature is the critical concept of the critic. However, Brisman (2026) analyzes from a rhetorical standpoint and says that Mont Blanc is "Over texted with the weight of metaphor" (p. 21). He further asserts that the poem is the "philosophic cloud that only obscures the mountain" (p. 21). Brisman's analysis shows how the poem is overloaded with metaphor and philosophical dimension.

The above observations show that critical assertions analyze the poem through a multidimensional lens ranging from aestheticism to the rhetoric of the poem. Leask (1998) highlighted the human and non-human relationship. Moreover, the supremacy of imagination in the poem is the concern of Schey (2018). Another remark is about hermeneutics, encompassing the world. The use of symbols and dense metaphors is another point for the discussion of the critical remarks. Although the writers as cited above explore Mont Blanc's intricate and enigmatic dimension, the concept of how Mont Blanc stands as a cosmic vision

of the poet still remains unexplored. This article raises the novel issue that Mont Blanc stands for Shelley's poetic vision about the self-sustaining evolutionary mechanism of Earth, which is not discussed in the existing literature cited above. However, this study argues that Shelley's "Mont Blanc" represents the underlying unwavering ecological system which is sublime and globally acknowledged. Through the motion of the river, mountain, earth, wind, and human mind, the poem envisions global ecological concerns. Therefore, "Mont Blanc" typically indicates the significance of the cosmological ecological system. It conveys the message that humans are insignificant because they are one among millions of beings that maintain the chain, and hence they should avoid or minimize the exploitation of natural resources.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This research utilizes qualitative textual analysis and the interpretative paradigm. It uses Shelley's poem "Mont Blanc" as the primary text to examine the self-regulating power of the planet Earth and uses eco-criticism as a tool to analyze the poem. To validate this idea, the basic ecological theory is that of Ursula K. Heise. She shows how a utilitarian perspective on nature exploits the resources of the Earth to gratify the ever-proliferating yearning for modern consumerism. Despite repeated human effort for resource extraction from the Earth, harming the ecological balance, the planet Earth operates with its self-governing system. The other supplementary theorists are Peeper, Hannigan, and Glotfelty. The poem Mont Blanc is the primary source of data, and it is supplemented by secondary texts.

Research Questions

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. What is the response of the planet Earth to the natural system as depicted in the poem?
2. How does the poet portray the self-governing system of the Earth?
3. Why is ecological awareness through verse needed in the world?

Research Objectives

To respond to the research questions stated above, the study has the following objectives:

1. To identify the planet Earth's response to the natural system as specified in the poem
2. To analyze the poet's envisioning of the autonomous system of the Earth

3. To generate ecological awareness in the world suffering from global warming, pollution, and resource diminution as depicted in the poem

Theoretical Framework

Ecological studies generate awareness among people, developing the idea that there is intrinsic interconnection between plants and animals in the world. The protection of biodiversity maintains harmony in nature and well-being for all. However, globalization has prioritized politics and people more than environmental wisdom. Heise (2008) warns of the probable destruction of the Earth, "Planet Earth itself is about to be demolished" (p. 3) due to the high prioritization of people and less value for biodiversity. Heise (2008) further warns that this moment emerged due to the "Genocidal consequences of colonial invasion" (2008, p. 3). She further points out that "Globalization has emerged as the central term around which theories of current politics, society, and culture in the humanities and social sciences are organized" (p. 4). She critically remarks on the impact of globalization in biocentric interrelation. Moreover, Heise (2008) argues that "While studies of globalization tend to shift away from the aesthetic and cultural focus that dominated many analyses of postmodernism to a more economic and geopolitical emphasis" (p. 4). The economic and geopolitical priority made society completely profit-oriented. Consequently, there is a risk of a diversified and vulnerable environment.

To address the issues that emerged after globalization, Peeper (1996) argues for the importance of ecological study. He notes, "at the heart of the world's problems of pollution, resource depletion, and environmental deterioration are domineering and exploitative attitudes to nature" (p.10). Due to resource depletion, a large number of animals have disappeared, and many are on the verge of extinction. Peeper further critically remarks on the indiscriminate and reckless utilization of natural resources. He views, "Westerners see nature as an instrument to be used for endless material gain" (Peeper, 1996, p. 13). This longing for the use of resources to quench the thirst for material gain leads to severe resource depletion. His argument is not to take nature only from the point of view of material benefit, but rather to let it remain as a self-governing system. Peeper (1996) maintains that the nature of material gains has dehumanizing and debilitating repercussions, noting that "Our spiritual, emotional, artistic, loving and cooperative sides are neglected for this cold materialism" (p. 13). Peeper's (1996) ideas rest on the notion that to be in harmony with nature, one has to be in synchronization with the natural world: "If we are to live 'in harmony with nature', then social behavior and personal morality should observe ecological laws" (p. 16). Human activities need to be changed, concentrating on overall sustainable development rather than

giving importance to material benefit. Sustainable development is possible only by giving value to the biocentric worldview rather than a human-centered view. So, there should not be a disconnection between humans and nature; rather, biotic and abiotic elements should have an intrinsic relationship. Peeper (1996) asserts that "humans are intimately a part of the natural environment: they and nature are one" (p. 17). Thus, the interconnection of humans with nature, being a part of nature, guarantees sustainable development.

Furthermore, Hannigan (2014) elaborates Peeper's idea and advocates the importance of language and logic in relation to ecological awareness. According to him, "The language and logic of ecology was linked to rising concerns about radioactive fallout, pesticide poisoning, overpopulation, urban smog" (p. 45). His concern is to minimize the pollution of the Earth, which in the future is likely to be a severe weapon that humans fail to counter. The main issue raised by him is to maintain a fresh Earth. Moreover, he values maintaining the organizational whole to keep peace and harmony intact. According to him, "Ecology, then, was transformed from a scientific model for understanding plant and animal communities to a kind of 'organizational weapon which could be used to systematize, expand and morally reinvigorate the environment" (p. 46). The sense of responsibility automatically generates respect for nature and the natural environment. In the same way, Glotfelty (1996) asserts the interconnection between nature and culture: "Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture" (p. xix). Cultural diversity is directly connected to biodiversity. Thus, social awareness and responsibility for nature increase the significance of nature and minimize the lust for natural resource mobilization.

Thus, ecological studies conducted by Heise, Peeper, Hannigan, and Glotfelty critically focused on the human tendency for monetary and geopolitical prominence, discussing how human activities and human needs paralyze sustainability. Consequently, nature is, for them, an instrument and a way to gain substantial advantage. These eco-critics collectively assert the conservation of the biodiversity of the planet Earth to maintain underlying harmony. The conservation protects all the living and non-living organisms that automatically function in the underlying system of the Earth. Consequently, the original system operates in a self-governing way.

Analysis and Interpretation

Self-regulating Planet Earth in "Mont Blanc"

P.B. Shelley's "Mont Blanc" reflects his cosmic vision and shows that Earth has a self-regulating system because it is governed by its own internal mechanism. This is the reason that humans have to understand that they are subordinate to nature because nature is

the very cosmic force within which humans are just tiny particles. In the opening line, the poet proclaims the sovereignty and supremacy of whatever exists in the cosmos. The poem opens with an aura of permanency and invincibility of the universe as the poet asserts in the first line "The everlasting universe of things" (Shelley, 1817, line 1). The immutability of Mont Blanc is not only in its awe-inspiring physical form but also in its substances. Shelley further points out that nature "rolls its rapid waves" (Shelley, 1817, line 2) without any human influence. Nature and other systems of nature move within the vast cosmology of the mountainous terrains. This is the autonomous and self-governing power of the planet Earth.

The poem points out the mountain as the vast place of the earth as poem indicates, "dark, deep Ravine" (Shelley, 1817, line 12). This place incorporates the sense of the planet in totality. The unfathomable nature of the earth is the symbol of power, "Where Power in likeness of the Arve comes down" The river, which encompasses the sense of the planet, generates power within. This implies that self-generating strength lies in the earth. Nature is self-regulating: "Of lightning through the tempest; —thou dost lie" (Shelley, 1817, line 19). The lightning and tempest are forms of natural processes that are beyond human control. The vastness of the earth has been indicated through images representing light, river, and the tempest.

The natural forces are not amenable to human strength since they are not human-made but generated by Earth's self-regulating autonomous energy. Furthermore, the wind is another form of energy, as the poet asserts that the natural process of wind continues. The wind begins along with the creation of the Earth and remains dominant throughout. Nature has its own regulating system, as the wind also has the same system. The human function is to receive it rather than to react. Therefore, humans should not view nature as the source for the resources, "To drink their odors, and their mighty swinging" (Shelley, 1817, line 23). It moves so powerfully that it is not under the control of human agency since it has its own underlying regulating system.

Eternity of the earth, everlasting underlying motion of the earth, and the position of humans as the passive receiver of the ghostly images of the earth like "dark, deep, ravine"(Shelley, 1817, line 12). having "some phantom and some faint image" (Shelley, 1817, line 47). These images are some of the significant concerns of the poem to highlight the power of the earth. Human catastrophic activities boomerang and are met with a deadly response through depletion and pollution. The planet Earth gets wrapped up in infinity having the aura of eternity. Earth has its own vast eternal flow without the control of humans. The deep perpetual power lies within, discarding the artificial and human-made agencies: "A loud, lone

sound no other sound can tame" (Shelley, 1817, line 31). Humans have the illusion that they can tame nature. However, nothing can domesticate the natural strength because it delves into the depth of "that ceaseless motion" for the continuation of intrinsic wave. Thus, the underlying strength continues regaining and reinvigorating. However, the human mind is only the passive receptor rather than the intervening agent: "My human mind, which passively" (Shelley, 1817, line 37). receives the responses of the earth. But the human mind only the reactions of the earth. It receives only "Some phantom, some faint image" (Shelley, 1817, line 47). They only receive the palpable images and the images that are like the ghostly presence as reflected in the line, "Driven like a homeless cloud from steep to steep" (Shelley, 1817, line 58). This is the failure of the human mind to understand the earth beneath the surface. In the presence of nature, human consciousness "vanishes among the viewless gales" (Shelley, 1817, line 59). The disappearance of the gales for human mind is the failure of human intelligence for grasping the ultimate reality. Valleys, plains, rivers, and glaciers are so powerful that their outward physical appearance is possible but the underlying in-depth power is indiscernible.

The enthralling quality and sublimity of nature as shown in the poem generate an internal drive to encompass within the realm of that nature. Along with this, the voice of the wilderness and the preaching quality of nature entice humans. However, people fail to decode the clues of natural attenuation because it has constructive and destructive facets. The mountain as indicated in the poem, overwhelms the human mind: "Mont Blanc appears—still, snowy, and serene" (Shelley, 1817, line 61). The sublimity of Mont Blanc as a form of nature remains so powerful that human intelligence simply fails to capture it. Mont Blanc is a significant example of an autonomous and self-regulatory natural part: "A desert peopled by the storms alone" (Shelley, 1817, line 67). The storms cover up the natural setup for making the earth diverse. The poem also indicates that there is an insignificant role for people to modify nature and take it under their control. What they can do is extract resources because "The wilderness has a mysterious tongue" (Shelley, 1817, line 76). The wilderness of nature speaks the voices beyond human intellect due to which humans fail to perceive. Nature conveys knowledge and wisdom to humans due to its vastness and wilderness: "Which teaches awful doubt, or faith so mild" (Shelley, 1817, line 77). Humans get mysterious suspicion or faith from nature, which they cannot get from their fellow beings. Earth speaks louder and sharper than human voices, "Thou hast a voice, great Mountain, to repeal" (Shelley, 1817, line 80). Personifying the mountain, the poem indicates that it has a voice which is spiritually independent and stimulating as it generates from within. However, people

fail to receive the codes of the natural setup: “Large codes of fraud and woe; not understood” (Shelley, 1817, line 81). The failure to understand nature in totality leads to human vulnerability. Because of this, they are helpless in the face of nature: “The fields, the lakes, the forests, and the streams” (Shelley, 1817, line 84) signify the natural components. All these components are interdependent and natural processes have their eternal cycle, “Earthquake, and fiery flood, and hurricane” (Shelley, 1817, line 87). The fiery aspects of nature work autonomously without any external human influences: “Are born and die; revolve, subside, and swell” (Shelley, 1817, line 95). Humans and non-humans fall within the ecological system, having equal footing. Humans are vulnerable to grasp the full cycle of nature and underlying ecological system.

Humans do not have the privilege either to tame nature or to remain above the ecosystem. So, humans are insignificant in relation to nature: “Of man flies far in dread; his work and dwelling” (Shelley, 1817, line 118). Human achievement vanishes then and there without leaving a mark or imprint. The power of humans vanishes and disappears in the power of nature: “Vanish, like smoke before the tempest's stream” (Shelley, 1817, line 119). The poem symbolically presents that human effort vanishes shortly but nature is eternal and moves smoothly in cycle. But the mountain, as a typical place representing the planet Earth, remains unwavering: “Mont Blanc yet gleams on high:—the power is there” (Shelley, 1817, line 127). The river continuously flows in its own system, facing the internal flow as usual: “Silently there, and heap the snow with breath” (Shelley, 1817, line 135). Nature silently flows with its own system. Humans are embedded in the large ecological system because every living and non-living being has the same value as that of humans. Neither humans can boast for their achievement nor tame nature because they are helpless to grasp the underlying governing system of the earth.

Thus, the poem “Mont Blanc” eschews an anthropocentric view, validating the logic that humans are insignificant particles in the ecological system of the Earth. The earthly components, ranging from snow to mountains, rivers, and others, do have their own governing system with autonomous agencies. So, humans have to avoid depleting the resources. This paper endorses ecological awareness since the planet Earth is an immeasurable and powerful component in which humans are a tiny speck of dust. Humans’ longing to tame the Earth and use it only for resource extraction recoils on them in a far more catastrophic manner than imagined, dealing a severe retribution to humans through pollution, depletion of resources and the outbreak of fatal diseases. This paper conveys the message to

humans to abandon extracting resources for personal benefit and develop awareness for the conservation of diversity for the well-being of the millions of creatures.

Conclusion

Shelley's poetic vision in "Mont Blanc" is encompassing and universal in its planetary significance. Through this image-packed poem, Shelley presents his apocalyptic vision regarding the severe consequences of ever-burgeoning ecological disruption. Shelley encapsulates his vision of what humankind may confront in the future as a result of the ongoing environmental deterioration. This poem should be understood in the light of the poet's ecological anxiety and concerns. It is necessary to know that Mont Blanc does not indicate a material mountain that inspires awe and sublimity alone; it embodies a subtle form of symbol, representing the poet's imagination and apprehension. Through the miniature world of the mountain, the analysis shows Shelley's own deeply felt agony and rage over the reckless and selfish human exploitation of the ecology. On the basis of Ursula K. Heise's theoretical concept of place and planet, the paper examines how the poem Mont Blanc illustrates Shelley's poetic vision of an impending environmental catastrophe. This idea is also reinforced by David Peeper and John Hannigan's theory of ecology. The analysis and interpretation of the poem lead to the finding that a local place can convey a global message through a verse. Shelley's early ecological vision asserted that nature is a dynamic force with its own governing system. "Mont Blanc" presents a vision in which humans' vain effort to control the planet Earth proves self-defeating and self-annihilating. This study suggests that humans have to internalize that they are only one tiny being in a vast cosmology which operates with its own self-regulating and intelligible system. Apart from showing the indomitable and unsurmountable forces of nature, the analysis digs out the poem's emphasis on the interconnectedness of the human-nature continuum.

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Diasporic Liminality: An Immigrant Experience of Prem in *Yamapuriko Mahal*

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Abstract

This article scrutinizes how the protagonist Prem, a Nepali first-generation diaspora in America from Homanath Subedi's novel *Yamapuriko Mahal* (*The Castle of Hell*), stands at the cultural liminality between the Nepali homeland and American hostland. An exploration of his cultural liminality and its reasons is the prime concern of this study. Seeking opportunities for economic prosperity, Prem reaches America from the rural setting of the western hills of Nepal but falls into the quagmire of duality between cultures and nationalities. The researcher employs Judith T. Shuval's diasporic theory of double loyalties and Papastergiadis's concept of hybridity, connecting them to the context of globalization. In the study, using a qualitative method, content analysis and interpretation approaches are applied to explore the liminal position of the protagonist who undergoes a dilemma of assimilating and distancing. Many times, Prem criticizes not only his cultural homeland and its authority but also his host land, America, and its cultural as well as socio-political practices.

Keywords: cultural home, host land, diaspora, globalization, assimilation, immigrant

Diasporic Liminality: An Immigrant Experience of Prem in *Yamapuriko Mahal*

This research article aims to explore the first-generation Nepali diaspora's catch- 22 situation regarding culture, nationality, and traditions. They need to navigate the difficulties as well as the opportunities in the host land while retaining a powerful attachment to the cultural homeland. Homanath Subedi's novel *Yamapuriko Mahal* (*The Castle of Hell*) is under scrutiny in this study to reflect the diaspora's state of liminality at a time when the process dominates and regulates the world affairs and activities of the global population. Subedi himself is a first-generation Nepali immigrant living in America and expressing liminal displacement in literature. The novelist figures out a narrative of a Nepali immigrant who faces an array of hurdles while repositioning in a different destination. He also endures difficult experiences related to cultural disparity, job searching, and cultural adjustment. The thematic focus of the novelist seems to expose a description of identity fragmentation as well as the rough patch of the expatriate Prem coping with financial stress. His adjustment hardships reveal bigotry in personal relationships and the workplace. However, livelihood prospects allure him to tolerate any type of hardship in America.

Migrated from a low-income family and nation, the protagonist Prem strives for financial gains or seeks higher earnings to advance his impecunious financial status, working as a wage laborer in America from an economically challenged family and nation; he aspires to earn dollars to improve his lower financial status by working as a laborer in America. Such immigrant workers aspire for money, disregarding the low status of the job since these migrants from multiple international locations "… usually from low-income countries, are generally individuals who presumably care little about upward mobility within the country of destination. Instead, they are content to earn the income from these low-wage jobs because that income may be several times greater than the average wage in their home country" (Knight, 2007, p. 275). The protagonist, Prem, in *The Castle of Hell* cherishes the goal of earning dollars in America that will surely yield millions of Nepali currency at the highest conversion rate. In a highly developed and liberal location in America, Prem survives with his conflicted attitude. Naturally, international immigrants cultivate simultaneous liking and disliking of the homeland and the land of resettlement, inhabiting the in-between space.

It would be appropriate to cite some scholars' analyses of the novel. About the novel, Netra Atom (2067 B.S.) opines that the immigrant experience is marked by an inescapable longing for origins, and it perpetually haunts. Frequently oriented towards a lost or imagined homeland, diasporic life is painful at present; however, it was pleasant in the past. Atom

claims, "Nostalgia turns to be a medium to sustain life and take abreath of freedom. Prem, the protagonist, nostalgically recalls the moment of being kissed by his wife Laxmi Priya and feels blessed" (p. 35). Atom's assertion is that in alien lands, the past does not fade, but immigrants' nostalgic memory beats to the rhythm of the heart and heals the sense of lack of the blissful days in the painful present. In "Prakãshakiya (Publisher's Note)" Mohan Sitaula's estimation posits the novel as a definitive exemplar of Nepali diasporic writing. He underscores the observational strength of the novel. It is" . . . a cursory observation of the inner life of Nepali diaspora living in America" (Subedi, 2007, p. i). Sitaula stresses that the novel lends particular weight to the undocumented existence of Nepali migrants relegated to the periphery of American urban centers.

Govinda Raj Bhattarai, in "Nepali Diasporic Sãhityako Pratham Upanyãs *Yamapuriko Mahal* (*Yamapuriko Mahal* as the First Nepali Diasporic Novel)," claims the novel as an extraordinarily powerful work containing ultramodern sensibility that reshapes the boundaries of contemporary Nepali fiction. He marks it as the first Nepali diasporic novel and also asserts its far-reaching impact, which "... secures its position till the distant future in Nepali literature. Moreover, the novel is comparable with so many world-famous books written by the authors of the Third World after undergoing several tragic experiences in diaspora life" (Subedi, 2007, p. xxvii). Bhattarai appraises the novel not only as groundbreaking but as a work destined to exert a lasting effect.

After observing the opinions about the novel, the researcher tends to shed light on the liminal standpoint of the protagonist by applying diasporic theories of double loyalties and hybridity, since earlier studies have mostly made a non-theoretical, wholesale study of the novel. In the course of analyzing the novel, this study seeks answers to what a diasporic liminal stance is, why diaspora adopts such a stance, and how the protagonist, Prem. adopts liminality as a standpoint.

It is indeed relevant to define terms such as diaspora and hybridity since they carry distinct histories and theoretical weight. The classical connotation of diaspora is indeed weighted toward the negative: victimization, forced displacement, loss, and alienation. Nevertheless, the modern "usage of the term is generally in reference to a particular social form - one that consists of an identifiable ethnic group that has been forced to live in a country or state that is not its ancestral home but has nevertheless been able to maintain some form of social bond despite being dispersed" (Knight, 2007, p. 281). The forces of globalization act as both push and pull factors worldwide to inspire the global population to leave their homeland in pursuit of improved economic and academic opportunities. As a

result, the dispersed population comes to constitute a diaspora. Secondly, hybridity fuses contradictory elements into a new whole. Papastergiadis (2015) emphasizes that hybridity "creates a new social order through the principle of synthesis and combination of differences" (p. 261). It dislodges the subject from fixed and pure notions of origin. It dislodges the subject from the fixity and purity of origin.

The novel *Yamapuriko Mahal* primarily foregrounds the theme of cultural liminality by portraying Prem as an immigrant figure who embodies a double affiliation. In many cases, the cultural taboos in his homeland fade from their former vibrancy in the destination society. Liminality denotes the transition and ambiguity of the diasporic subject, suspended between cultures and anchored in neither.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The study explains how Prem, the protagonist of the novel Yamapuriko Mahal, adopts a diasporic stance of liminality as an immigrant in America, shaped by globalization. For theoretical support, the study draws on theorists and researchers such as Judith T. Shuval and Papastergiadis. They are vocal about the concepts of hybridity and its nature. Similarly, the researcher borrows Knight's liberal concept of diaspora, in which people are willingly dispersed. In the study, under the qualitative method, content analysis and interpretation approaches are applied to explore the fluid and liminal subjectivity of the protagonist.

Interpretation/Analysis

The protagonist Prem, in the novel *Yamapuriko Mahal* (*The Castle of Hell*), feels both love and resentment toward his cultural homeland. He holds his motherland in earnest reverence and implores her to release him from her embrace forever. In the age of globalization, "all of modern life is organized and structured by movement, both actual and potential" (Sheller & Urray, 2006, p. 212). Humans are inherently wandering creatures. Prem departs his motherland in pursuit of better economic prospects and, as an immigrant, oscillates between longing for and estrangement from his native land.

Diasporas undermine the concept of a singular nation-state and its sovereignty since they inhabit plural cultural and national identifications. Despite their origin in a single nation, the "notions of assimilation and loyalty to one nation are challenged by diaspora" (Shuval, 2007, p. 32). Their multiple allegiances render them transitional in matters of culture. Prem gives voice to his emotional turmoil," I salute my motherland with trembling hands. Let me bid it farewell forever. Your dear son has fallen into ruin, possessing neither position nor money" (Subedi, 2007, p. 10). He confesses further still, "I am a traitor to my beloved nation. May your womb not come to ruin . . . may your heart never decompose. Let

me roam unhindered. May your tear not trouble me...? I cannot live on as a bad son. Let me live in solitude and never return to my homeland" (Subedi, 2007, p. 10). He chooses to leave the motherland of his own accord to improve his economic standing. In the globalized world, he is prepared to accept the charge of betrayal yet does not relinquish his longing to go abroad.

According to Sinclair et al. (1996), the world is divided into multiple geo-linguistic regions, each encompassing global linkages with its own internal dynamics. They argue that programmed exchange circulates through overlapping global, regional, national and local circuits that interact in multi-faceted ways. In addition, they contend:

> [. . .] instead of the image of the West at the center dominating the peripheral world with an outward flow of cultural products, a number of regions which each have their own internal dynamics as well as their global ties. Although primarily based on geographic realities, these regions are also defined by common cultural, linguistic and historical connections, which transcend physical space. Such a dynamic, regionalist view of the world helps us to analyze in a more nuanced way the intricate and multi-directional flows of television across the globe. (p .5)

Even the most remote and marginal corners of the globe, which retain their internal dynamism yet are connected through global flows, lead hybrid lives, let alone diaspora communities and individuals. Prem, a Nepali citizen from the Western hills, reaches America, clutching an uncompromising dream of earning dollars and driving his poverty away.

The diaspora remains culturally poised at a fragile threshold of transformation. During a friendly chat, Prem asks his friend Tham Bahadur to swear an oath. Tham Bahadur answers, "I keep my promise. If I break it, may my sin be equal to eating beef" (Subedi, 2007, p. 11). For Tham Bahadur, a devout Hindu, consuming beef constitutes an unpardonable sacrilege before God. Prem responds with laughter, "This promise is already date-expired and ineffective" (Subedi, 2007, p. 11). Having migrated to America, a Christian nation, a man of Hindu background finds adherence to traditional religious codes impossible because the environment forces him to give up his strict practices and gradually assimilate into the new society.

In the American diaspora, Prem's subjectivity increasingly hybridizes. The centuries-old practice of abstaining from beef as a dietary taboo becomes obsolete. The moment cultures meet, the observant subject, especially one positioned at the periphery, begins to translate himself through hybridity. As Hall (1988) observes, all people generally "[. . .] speak from a particular place, out of a particular history, out of a particular experience, a

particular culture . . . ethnically located and ethnic identities are crucial" (p .5). Subjectivities are ethnically framed according to subjective experiences. However, once dispersed to alien lands, they acquire diasporic identities and begin to partially translate cultural behaviors from a space of liminality. Tham Bahadur's vow concerning beef consumption has already become outdated from Prem's standpoint.

Papastergiadis (2015) defines hybridity as "[. . .] a constant process of differentiation and exchange between the center and the periphery and between different peripheries as well as serving as the metaphor for the form of identity that is being produced from these conjunctions" (p. 276). Our identities are shaped by historical positioning, cultural circumstances, and political contingencies. Prem's early subjectivity was anchored in a Hindu religious milieu; later, his cultural world was conditioned at the intersection of Hindu and Christian culture in certain respects, in opposition. His changing cultural and geographical context prompts him to revise earlier beliefs about eating beef.

A diasporic subject lingers at the threshold of thought, feeling, and aspiration, oscillating in commitment from a liminal position. This borderline is where diasporic wavering persists. Prem alternately misses his homeland, its frailties, its inept governance, and dysfunctional politics. At other times, he displays a profound yearning for his native soil. Across the entire fictional narrative, Prem's dilemma recurs, and this very dilemma is a defining trait of the diasporic condition. He confesses the contradiction he carries:

> Even if this were heaven, I would not stay. Her love and her embrace would be enough for me even in hell. I never wish to barter myself for wages since employment is not my final purpose. Are the steep slopes not enough to sustain me? Why should I live in a foreign land as a slave stripped of basic rights, inescapable in court the moment someone unfairly strikes my cheek? (Subedi, 2015, p. 12)

Prem's mixed feelings of admiration and disdain toward both American and Nepali culture bespeak his liminal position between cultures. This resonates with Bhabha's (1994) claim that "the borderline engagements of cultural difference may as often be consensual as conflictual" (p .2). Prem's stance toward his hostland shifts repeatedly between critique and commendation. Such is the double-edged attachment that defines the diaspora's relation to the land left behind and the land of arrival.

For the diaspora, the initial bond with the homeland and its culture operates on an emotional level. Reaching America, Prem feels a sense of treachery to his motherland. Thomas Faist (2007) observes that homelands tend to view emigrants as "traitors who have abandoned their homeland and emigration country governments cast them as disloyal

citizens" (p. 245). Subedi's protagonist admits this treachery and disloyalty," I, a criminal, stepped on the ground" (Subedi, 2007, p. 14). Historically, nationalist discourses commonly cultivated in citizens a deep respect for the nation and its culture.

As Prem sinks into Ballston subway station, he reflects, "I got snapped, lost and misguided. I am no more. No one need search for me for I am not searching for myself. In a profound despair, I concealed myself" (Subedi, 2007, p. 14). An identity crisis seizes the protagonist in a foreign land. Meanwhile, a contradictory interplay of fascination and repulsion operates within Prem, an incipient diasporic subject mirroring his subjectivity at the liminal threshold.

The notion that diaspora is invariably defined by an ongoing connection to the homeland fails to capture the full complexity of diasporic existence. Shuval argues that diaspora's "sense of connection to a homeland must be strong enough to resist forgetting, assimilating or distancing" (2007, p. 30). Prem's affection for his wife and children intensifies upon reaching foreign land. He voices his anguish, "I was frustrated. I spoilt. I left my godlike children under the responsibility of my helpless wife. It would be better if we had not borne them. How lovely they were . . . I can't forget my Laxmi Priya even for a single minute if I forget my compulsion to earn money" (Subedi, 2007, p. 18). Torn between devotion to his family and the need to earn a living abroad, Prem inhabits a diasporic space suspended in swaying.

Positioning oneself at the threshold of new experiences is to encounter newness that defies the linear continuity of past and present. In Bhabha's formulation, "It [the encounter] creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent 'in-between' space that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present" (1994, p. 7). As an immigrant, Prem enacts this insurgent act of translation by preparing to eat beef in defiance of his Hindu Brahmin background. He proclaims, "Brahmins are not supposed to eat beef. I just found it a myth" (Subedi, 2007, p. 22). In this gesture, Prem refigures his past and locates himself in the in-between space of cultural translation, notwithstanding his Hindu Brahmin origins. During his early days in America, hunger drives him to be ready to eat beef.

In America's new social and cultural setting, Prem gradually becomes prepared to translate himself into American culture. His primordial Hindu Brahmin identity, rooted in the Indian subcontinent, proves inoperable within the altered context of the West. He also speaks critically of his compatriots at home. Diasporic people expect respect and self-esteem for

their contributions to both homeland and host land. Kasbarian (2009) succinctly writes,"[. . .] diasporan often wants appreciation for any effort he or she extends in service to what is after all a foreign homeland and on the other hand the local may resent the diasporan's self-perceived superiority. By extension, the diasporan wants to be viewed as more than an endless source of resources for the homeland; it is, it wants to be recognized as an equal partner" (p. 373). When the homeland withholds respect and honour, diaspora members would rather stay in the host land than return to their cultural home. Prem fears that deportation to Nepal would mean hell. He denounces, "I would be sent back to the hell of the backbiters" (Subedi, 2007, p. 23). When a diaspora's expectations go unmet in either place, they feel frustrated, caught on the borderline of cultures in a liminal subjectivity.

For Shuval, the diaspora's returning to the homeland is a traumatic experience. No banners are hung on the homeland's walls to welcome them. He contends that "when they [diaspora] have a choice, many people do not choose to return to their homeland and because it is often too disruptive or traumatic to leave the diaspora. In many cases, a homeland does not actually exist, or it is not welcoming to them politically, ideologically, or socially" (2007, p. 34). Because diasporic subjects recognize that the homeland may be unsupportive, they opt to remain in the host land. Prem articulates this tension: "In the basement, I pondered upon my quandary whether I should construct a building in Nepal with this income or try to suitably settle at diaspora" (Subedi, 2007, p. 65). Through cultural translation, his subjectivity shifts and loosens its hold on the motherland over time.

In an analogous manner, when diaspora translates from motherland culture to host land culture, a certain untranslatable foreignness persists. This liminal moment of translational encounter corresponds to what Benjamin (1986) calls the "foreignness of language" (p. 75). Prem's Nepali nationality in America is a 'foreignness' that he does not want to give up. When Hira asks where he is from, Prem utters, "I am from Nepa . . . Pakistan" (Subedi, 2007, p. 33). His evasion signals a desire to obscure his motherland's identity. His homeland nationality - his foreignness - remains, nonetheless, much dearer to him.

A distinction is commonly drawn between incipient and permanent diaspora. Incipient diaspora groups are much more at risk since they are still in a formative stage. Feron and Voytiv (2021) explain that long-distance nationalism scholars hold that permanent diaspora can engage in home-country politics more safely because host countries protect them and they avoid the direct results of such involvement, unlike those still living in the homeland. However, incipient diaspora like Prem go through frightening and uncertain experiences.

Permanent diaspora involve themselves in shaping the homeland's foreign policy and continue lobbying for special issues of concern.

Prem's terror stems from a double bind. He has been displaced from his homeland but not yet re-rooted in his host land. He belongs nowhere securely; neither the homeland nor the host land offers him refuge. He articulates this quandary: "If I send money to buy bricks for constructing a house in Nepal, one day I must be away from there. If I buy a house here [in America], no one can predict these great people. In the future, they might send me away from here . . . The limited amount of money keeps me neither here nor there "(Subedi, 2007, p. 52). His recent displacement and unfinished resettlement keep him frightened and suspended in-between. His predicament embodies the liminal diasporic identity.

Under globalization, the dream that pulls people from the Third World toward the First is above all the dream of economic ascent. An American dollar is worth more than a hundred Nepali rupees. The dollar becomes an object of frenzy as Prem's diary testifies, "I just want to sleep with dollar. I just want to madden with money. Who would regard me a human being in my society in absence of money? A product of rapacious society, I also want to be a rapacious" (Subedi, 2007, p. 68). Seeking both income and status, multitudes leave the Third World for richer nations. Prem's dollar mania is a by-product of a globalized economy dominated by the West.

The diaspora phenomenon is essentially a consequence of international migration, which is directly intertwined with globalization. Time and space compression gave birth to globalization, turning the world into a global village where social, political, economic, and cultural distances are narrowing. In this global age, people, technology, money, ideas, and commodities move across borders - a situation that produces a liminal mentality among diaspora populations.

Prem, a Nepali diaspora member, finds himself entangled in uncertainty about whether to orient himself toward the past or the future. He holds equal love for the land of his birth and the land of his dwelling. In an age of rapid globalization, cultures cannot survive by maintaining classical purity. Mutual distancing precipitates cultural extinction. Papastergiadis discusses the distanciation the colonizer maintained with the colonized - a strategy that served the colonial project well. But in the end, the same rigid distance hastened colonialism's own collapse. Judging Rudyard Kipling's position, Papastergiadis (2015) contends, "Kipling could never reconcile both his Western and his Indian selves…The relentless quest for purity and the historical burden of superiority never allowed Kipling to grasp the resilient dynamism of hybridity. So, he remained slightly detached from even his

most beloved subjects" (p. 266). The central message of Kipling's story is that culture must be transformational, shedding its quintessential rigidity.

For Papastergiadis, the refusal to hybridize is what ultimately undoes colonialism. Prem, the protagonist, relinquishes his cultural and national fixity to assimilate into a foreign land. He admits that he must leave his homeland for ten years and remain in exile. His past reminds him of his motherland and the future of his land of relocation. Perhaps the motherland is an ideal, and the land of relocation is the reality. He contends that reconciling the two is exceedingly tough. Prem's predicament exposes a tension between economic imperative and filial duty:

> I am powerless. With money, I have no family; with family, no money. If I go back to Nepal, I have no income. How long must I live this dull life for money? Was I born only for money? We have made a culture of life where failure to earn money is the meaninglessness of life. We have given high priority to money, and life is made insignificant. Money has been ends and life just means something for us . . . should I go home to see my octogenarian parents or stay here and keep on earning money? (Subedi, 2007, p. 69)

For the diasporic subject, successful hybridization of lifestyle amounts to successful existence. Prem prepares to blend his Hindu heritage with Christian culture. Financial pressure holds him at the intersection of two cultures and two nationalities. His willingness to eat beef signals his cultural hybridity, positioning him in a liminal space of in-betweenness.

Conclusion

This study offers a critical examination of the shifting diasporic consciousness of a first-generation Nepali immigrant in the United States. It illustrates how contemporary diaspora in an era of globalization migrates from developing world to developed nations, inhabiting a liminal space that shapes their thought and action. Prem, the protagonist in the novel *Yamapuriko Mahal,* is an archetypal opportunity seeker representing countless individuals within the global village. His stance oscillates. He alternately critiques the host society and his country of origin, questioning the cultural assumptions of each. Prem calls himself a traitor and a criminal who deceives his motherland. The Hindu taboo on eating beef becomes, for Prem, an outmoded myth in his land of destination where he has shed cultural orthodoxy. His ethnically framed subjectivity dissolves amid cultural alienation. He sometimes romanticizes his distant, sloppy hills, his faithful wife and innocent children, yet he also disparages his homeland's inhabitants as gossipmongers. These vacillations reveal the protagonist's liminal positioning - a defining trait of the diasporic condition.

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Embodied Exploitation and Gendered Labor: The Commodification of Women's Bodies in Mahasweta Devi's *Rudali*

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Abstract

In the feudal and caste-dominated rural society portrayed in Mahasweta Devi's *Rudali*, the bodies, feelings, and work of marginalized women are systematically and economically exploited. This paper examines the exploitation and commodification of women's bodies and labor in *Rudali* critically. It emphasizes especially the ritualization of mourning as affective labor, influencing the way that expressions of pain, grief, emotion, and body endurance are made "economic". Based on qualitative analysis of texts, the paper employs a Marxist feminist framework to explore the gendered nature of labor, class relations, and economic exploitation in the overlapping feudal, caste, and patriarchal systems. It also incorporates affect theory to explore grief as an emotion that is socially regulated and can be performed, mobilized, and commodified. The paper suggests that the experience of mourning enacted in *Rudali* is not only cultural or ritual but also affective and embodied labor through which women's grief is made exchangeable in the economy. It also illustrates the economic exploitation of the body, emotions, and affective potential of women in the process of commercialization of mourning. The paper theorizes ritualized mourning and the female body as affective and embodied labor and moves beyond the standard Marxist feminist interpretation of *Rudali* to shed light on the way gender, caste, and class collaborate to turn the suffering and emotional labor of women into economic value.

Keywords: embodied exploitation, gendered labor, affective labor, a commodification of emotion, Marxist feminism

Embodied Exploitation and Gendered Labor: The Commodification of Women's Bodies in Mahasweta Devi's *Rudali*

Mahasweta Devi's *Rudali* (1997) opens with the socio-historical context of rural Rajasthan, where caste-based power dynamics, feudal land ownership, and a patriarchal system shape the lives of the marginalized. The text is based on the realities of lived experience of the "denotified" and subaltern communities, who live at the bottom of the social and economic hierarchy. Traditionally, rudalis represent a group of women from oppressed castes, hired to publicly lament with a voice of sorrow for the funeral of an upper-caste landlord, particularly when the upper-caste families were not emotionally attached to the deceased or had female relatives capable of doing the ritual lamentation. This practice is a form of social order in which the act of grieving becomes a form of institutionalized work by the ones who are already deprived and excluded from their own lives.

This study is situated at the intersections of caste-based exclusion, feudal exploitation, and gendered dispossession, where women's bodies are not only 'laboring' but also 'affective' means of survival. *Rudali* is about the protagonist Sanichari, whose life epitomizes this situation as she lives in extreme poverty and social marginality. The institution of rudali uncovers the key locations where the process of mourning is turned into the business of service. Grief is not an individual, private, emotional reaction, but rather socially regulated and economically exchanged, showing the embedding of affective practices in material systems of inequalities. This transformation poses some pertinent questions about emotion, work, and life in subaltern contexts.

This study primarily scrutinizes how the definition of rudali embodies exploitation and gendered labor in caste and feudalism, what the nature and dynamics of the caste-ness experienced by the communities of rudalis is, how the caste-ness experienced by the communities of rudali is differentiated from the caste-ness experienced by others, how grief is re-made as a type of affective labor, and how the female body stands as a site of oppression and/or survival in the story. Therefore, in keeping with this context, the objectives of this study are to critically analyze the commodification of women's bodies and emotions, to examine the socio-economic structures that give birth to the concept of a 'rudali' as a profession, and to scan the concept of 'subaltern agency' in the text in the context of extreme marginalization.

The study employs a Marxist feminist approach to examine the intricacies of gender, labor, and political economy in the text. This way of thinking about women's labor is

emotional or reproductive labor as well as physical labor, which continues to maintain hierarchical structures of power. According to Marxist feminist scholars, capitalism and feudalism are dependent upon the unpaid or underpaid work of women, especially when it comes to social vulnerability situations (Federici, 2004). In *Rudali*, this is further exacerbated by the fact that grief itself is a form of work that creates value for dominant classes. To demonstrate this contradiction, the paper unveils how the subaltern women are economically indispensable, but socially needless.

Being a strong critique of the commercialization of suffering, this paper foregrounds the lived experiences of marginalized women. It illustrates how caste-based exploitation is embodied in the interaction of caste oppression, patriarchal control, and feudal economic relations in depth. The study, in this way, uncovers the figure of the rudali as a critical lens for a better understanding of the intersections of gendered labor, affective commodification and structural inequality.

Literature Review

The scholarship on marginalized women has also increasingly focused on the intersections between caste, class, patriarchy, and labor that underline the way women's bodies, emotions, and labor are formed by unequal social structures. Marxist feminists have argued that women's work is not only manifested in the formal sphere of economic production but also in the reproductive, emotional, and embodied sphere (Federici, 2004). Likewise, research on emotional labor and affect has demonstrated the social regulation and display, as well as transformation of emotions into valued ways (Ahmed, 2004; Hochschild, 1983). The subaltern feminist and post-colonial scholarship has also pointed to the ways in which the voices, bodies and experiences of women are silenced or mediated by dominant structures of power (Mohanty 1984; Spivak 1988). The above theoretical approaches give context to the understanding of the depiction of caste, gender and economic deprivation in Mahasweta Devi's *Rudali* and the conversion of women's emotional and corporeal pain to labor.

Following the publication of *Rudali*, the text has attracted extensive critical attention and generated a substantial body of scholarly reviews and interpretations. In *Rudali*, Mahasweta Devi is acclaimed for her powerful portrayal of caste, class, and gender oppression in rural India, which has led to its being extensively analyzed in terms of postcolonial, feminist, and subaltern studies. *Rudali* is well-known as a critique of the feudal-patriarchal system that normalizes the exploitation of marginalized groups. Spivak (1988) famously claims that the subaltern is “a subject position without identity” whose voice is

"systematically mediated and suppressed by dominant power structures" (p. 287). This conceptualization creates a preliminary point for interpreting *Rudali* as a story that emphasizes socially invisible women whose work and suffering are made so vital to the economy that they are socially invisible.

There is a large amount of research that has been done on the theme of caste, patriarchy, and structural inequality in the text. According to Sundari and Rashila (2020), *Rudali* demonstrates the intersectional oppression of caste and gender by which rural women live their lives. Verma and Krishan (2019) also stress the fact that the feudalization of rural communities engenders inherited inequality, and poverty is "not an individual limitation; it is a structural situation" (p. 142). A similar argument is made by Anciliyasuruthi (2024), who reads the figure of the rudali as representing the oppression of Dalit women in relation to their institutionalized subjugation by the upper caste. Their labor is socially devalued and institutionally exploited. The studies set the socio-political scene of oppression but tend to focus on the structural aspects of toil over the embodied and emotional aspects.

Other lines of inquiry focus on 'subaltern voice, silence and resistance'. According to Kalita (2021), Devi's story is a "heritage of survival and resistance," and emotional expression stands as a means of survival in extreme deprivation. In their conclusion, Visalakshi and Soundararajan (2021) make another statement about the collective forms of survival that are created by marginalized women in Rudali: "Shared suffering provides limited, but meaningful, agency in oppressive systems" (p. 2). In light of Agamben's theory of the *homo sacer*, who is outside the law and the social order and is continually exploited for his or her work, Sharma (2026) considers rudalis as images of "bare life" (p. 52). These readings focus on the agency and exclusion of the subjects of interpretation, and frequently they are based on a symbolic reading of resistance, rather than a focus on the embeddedness in economic structures of labor exploitation.

There has been a recent development of feminist and Marxist scholarship that has been increasingly devoted to work, commodification, and political economy. Bani and Bani (2025) argue that *Rudali* reveals the devaluation, exploitation, and invisibility of women's effort in the feudal-patriarchal economies. The arguments put forward in this reading build on the important theorization of the female body as a crucial site of capitalist control and reproduction developed by Federici (2004), who asserts that "the female body has been a key terrain of capitalist control and reproduction" (p. 16). On this basis, researchers like Ahmed (2014) highlight the politics of emotion, which reveals the dynamics of affect's social circulation and its entanglements in the power structures. Likewise, Berlant (2011) uncovers

modes of "cruel optimism" which keep subjects in a state of structural inequality by attaching them affectively to the act of surviving. The frameworks offer some light into the ways in which emotional labor is a means of survival and an economic tool in *Rudali* but are underutilized in existing research.

Affect, embodiment, and emotional labor are also fields of study that are currently being explored with *Rudali*. Kalita (2021) acknowledges that theories of grief as performative survival are not fully theorized in most studies. This is significant in the context of Butler's (2004) idea of "precarious life", which emphasizes the differential distribution of vulnerability in social hierarchies, but not many studies explicitly link this to the commodification of grief in the context of *Rudali*. Similarly, existing literature is not much concerned with the emotional performance and bodily suffering as a whole system of extraction of labor. Therefore, affective and embodied exploitation has not been sufficiently explored in terms of 'interdependence'.

Although there has been significant scholarship on the oppression of caste, patriarchy, class, subaltern, resistance, and women's labor, and there has been a great deal written about women's grief over the years, there has been relatively little focus on the systematic commodification of women's grief as affective and embodied labor. Some recent feminist and Marxist interpretations have recognized the exploitation and invisibility of women's work, but they have not explored the economic transformation of emotion, bodily endurance, and ritualized mourning into economically productive work in the caste-feudal economy. Most of all, the link between grief's performance and emotional exchange or its exchange value is under-theorized. So, there is a lack of literature on the intersection of Marxist feminist theories of labor and theories of the commodification of the body with affect theory, which would explain how marginalized women's emotions and bodies are made sites of economic extraction. This study aims to fill this lacuna by focusing on mourning in Rudali as a category of gendered, affective, and embodied labor in which grief is monetized, women's bodies and emotional capacities are utilized, and women's grief is made part of the caste-feudal political economy.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

Grounded in qualitative textual analysis, this paper unearths the phenomenon of embodied exploitation and gendered exploitation of labor in Mahasweta Devi's *Rudali*. This method allows an in-depth understanding of the literary representations of social reality in the context of caste, class, gender, and labor. Qualitative research is about how people "make sense" of a social/human problem as they understand it, according to Creswell and Poth

(2018, p. 43). In this context, text is used as a cultural document that not only reflects but also critiques the socio-economic situation of the marginalized women of rural India.

The research falls under the interpretivist paradigm that focuses on the construction of meaning in language, representation, and social context. Different from positivism, interpretivism asserts that there is no objective reality, seen from the fact that the object of the study is a reality that is socially constructed and can only be understood by interpreting it in the context and text. In his article, "What is Interpretivism?," Schwandt (1994) states that interpretivists believe that "to understand human action is to understand the meanings that people attribute to their action" (p. 118). The meaning of interpretivism enmeshes with the lived experiences of the subaltern women whose labor, emotions, and bodies are caught up in structural inequalities in *Rudali*. This paradigm can therefore be used to analyze the social production and economic regulation of grief and labor.

This study's theoretical underpinning is largely based upon the Marxist feminist theories which offer a critical perspective of the interconnections between gender, labor and political economy. Marxist feminist theory posits that women's work – material and reproductive forms – is critical to capitalist and patriarchal forms of accumulation and control. Women's embodied labor has been found to be crucial and devalued, in a similar manner as male workers' work is devalued in the factory, by Federici (2004), who remarks that "the body has been for women what the factory has been for male workers" (p. 16). In *Rudali*, the concept is expanded to affective labor, where the process of mourning is turned into a commercialized practice, turned into an economy of emotional pain.

The study adopts a Marxist feminist lens in addition to the perspectives of affect theory to gain a fuller understanding of the affective aspects of labor in the text. Affect theorists (e.g., Ahmed, 2014) draw attention to the role of emotions as social phenomena that are "circulated and organized socially" (p. 10). Likewise, Berlant (2011) creates the term "cruel optimism" that suggests that individuals will stay on with conditions that sustain their misery (p. 2). They are helpful in dissecting grief not just as a performance, but also as a form of 'survival labor' in terms of its economic and social structuring in *Rudali*.

Close reading and thematic analysis of the text are employed as the methodological procedure to dissect embodied exploitation and gendered labor in *Rudali*. Close reading allows for an exploration of language, symbolism, and structure of the story, and thematic analysis permits an examination of recurring themes around embodied exploitation, gendered work, and commodification of grief. In this way, the themes of performative mourning, suffering of the body, and economic survival are critically examined in the context of

caste/class structures. This balance between the text and the theory, while holding the analysis as textually grounded and theoretically informed, is achieved.

This methodological and theoretical approach ignite significantly to shed light on the relationship between gender, labor and emotion in structural inequalities. This study combines Marxist feminist and affect theory perspectives through an interpretivist lens to gain a holistic perspective of the representation of the commodity of women's bodies and emotions in *Rudali*. In the end, the study presents a critical examination of Devi's narrative as a socio-political critique of the affective economies of caste-feudal patriarchy as a literary text.

Results and Discussion

This study illustrates that the phenomenon of "embodied exploitation" in Mahasweta Devi's *Rudali* is no casual byproduct of poverty but is one of the many sub-segments created within the framework of caste-feudal patriarchy. The textual analysis reveals the physical and emotional suffering and endurance necessary for women's survival, with their bodies defined as sites of economic extraction. This discovery remains consistent with the Marxist feminist concept of Federici. Federici (2004) contends that the body has been to women what the factory has been to male workers. It implies that the embodiment of women is a place of productive labor exploitation. The study thus takes the position that gendered bodies are not neutral bodies but "socially produced infrastructures that labor". Devi's story can then be viewed as the critique of a system that relies on the "normalization of female suffering" as a way of sustaining economic systems.

This paper argues that grief in *Rudali* is institutionalized as affective labor, i.e., as a product of the selling of grief in the marketplace as opposed to being a private emotion. Professional mourning exemplifies that emotion is socially regulated and carefully laid out in terms of its economy. The mourning as labor is interpreted in this paper based on Ahmed's (2014) theory on emotions as "social and cultural practices" (p. 10). In the text, the idea of a rudalis is to provide entertainment for elite households in times of grief. The emotion thus becomes a product within an economic system of caste. This finding is based on the assumption that affect is not a thing of the inside, but that it is interior and economic. So, Devi reveals the ways in which the emotional life is conditioned by material inequalities.

The analysis also discovers a paradox of recognition/exclusion with subaltern women both being socially devalued and economically instrumentalized. Rudalis lack a dignified existence, and their emotional work is used for death ceremonies. Berlant (2011) explains the concept of "cruel optimism" in which subjectivity is bound to conditions which both sustain

and hurt them (p. 2). However, for people to survive in *Rudali*, they need to engage in oppressive and emotional economies. It further argues that oppression is reproduced through dependency. It is assumed here that in addition to being coercive, structural violence is also affectively necessary. The narrative ends: "Being alive" becomes a means of perpetuation of subordination.

The study presents that the ideology of caste is the one that is ingrained in the text to organize gendered labor and bodily exploitation. Women's labor is not only marginal in the economy, but they are socially marginalized according to the caste hierarchy. According to Spivak (1988), the subaltern cannot speak in a way that is recognized by dominant epistemologies, and this is echoed in the required and unacknowledged manner in which Rudali's suffering is spoken. The analysis is based on the premise that caste is not just a social category but also an epistemic structure (ability to see and to speak) that regulates visibility and the voice. In *Rudali,* lower-caste women's bodies are made legible only in the process of working, thus perpetuating the silencing of their bodies. It suggests that representation is a second process of exploitation.

This analysis uncovers that the female body is not just a place of oppression but also a place of survival. It is both a space of vulnerability and agency. Butler (2004) defines precarious life as an “uneven distribution of vulnerability across populations” (p. 30). It can help to explain vulnerability and agency of the body. In *Rudali*, physical pain is inflicted but at the same time is transformed into a means of earning a living via ritualized grieving. In *Rudali*, physical discomfort is not only inflicted, but at the same time turned into economic survival through ritual mourning. It is assumed that vulnerability does not consist in the passive but in the productive capacity of social organization. So Devi's text speaks to the notion of victimhood in ways that reveal how one is able to survive out of precarity. The agency presented in the narrative is not independent but rather limited.

The analysis also concentrates on the social penalization and economic coercion of emotional labor in *Rudali*. Hochschild (1983) designated the concept of emotional labor as the “management of feeling to create a publicly observable display” (p. 7), and it can be seen in the ritualized crying of the rudalis. The concept is developed by positioning emotional labor in caste oppression. The emotional labor is structured in the text to display social castigation and economic bullying. This paper assumes that emotions are not free or spontaneous but socially prescribed as dictated by power struggles. So, bereavement is not an expression of the self, but performance. It strengthens emotional labor as a key component for economic survival.

The study also unveils that the idea of body-work and emotional performance are amalgamated in the text, resulting in an embedded affective labor system. Mourning is an enactment as well as an affectation, showing the corporeal and the affective nature of labor. This goes in line with the Marxist feminist perspective that the most significant form of labor in economic systems is reproductive and survival labor (Federici, 2004). This paper contends that labor is not simply an aspect of production, but also a practice that involves the "embodied" emotional practice. *Rudali* thus extends the concept of labor to affective survival strategies, rather than just material labor. It reveals that the body is totally appropriated in the context of capitalist-feudalism.

The study also found that the feudal-patriarchal elites rely on the invisible labor of subaltern women to keep their social and symbolic power. The lower caste expression of grief is deprofessionalized in the name of observing the rituals of mourning of so-called upper-caste. As Spivak (1988) advocates, subaltern representation is at all times mediated, and here the mediation is accomplished by way of economic exchange. It implies that power is not 'highly' but relational, and it needs to be built through the exploitation of marginalized bodies. In this respect, the loss of grief is a symbolic source to reaffirm the hierarchy. It concludes that pleasure and hierarchy function at the cost of affective extraction.

Along with these, the analysis divulges some minor instances of subaltern agency that are being developed through collective survival strategies by the rudalis. Their agency is not unconstrained, but rather is realized in terms of shared labor and affective solidarity. Collective survival practices, according to Visalakshi and Soundararajan (2021), help marginalized women to withstand structural violence (p. 2). In this study, however, this agency is deemed as survival in the context of coercive systems and not resistance to them. This is an implication of agency in *Rudali* as relational, partial, and structurally embedded. Devi thus offers a vision of survival which is a negotiated state, not one of liberation.

Finally, the study validates the notion of grief in *Rudali* as a complex political economy of embodied suffering which is structurally linked with gendered labor and affective commodity. The study is based on a combination of Marxist feminism, affect theory, and literary theory, which shows that the act of mourning is not just symbolic but productive and material, within the caste feudal system. Ahmed (2014) and Berlant (2011) also argue that emotion is a part of the organization of social power, survival, and subject formation. In this regard, literature is a socio-political archive of embodied inequality. In the end, Devi's performances of the grievances of women become a critical tool to examine the systematization of female pain, which not only structures and represents their pain but also

stands as an instrument of exploitation in the process of economic organization and regulation of the politics of suffering.

Conclusion and Implications

The present study critically analyzed the concept of embodiment of exploitation and gendered labor with reference to the women's body and emotions in the context of caste-feudal and patriarchal social order in *Rudali* by Mahasweta Devi. The results reveal that poverty and marginalization are not only represented but demonstrate a system of organization where life itself is a form of extraction of endurance and of emotional performance. The analysis clarified that grief (in its mourning institutional form) becomes a controlled mode of work which does not only maintain economic hierarchy but also continues social dominance as well.

The study also posits that the female body in *Rudali* is a space of contestation, space of exploitation as well as space of survival. Women are exposed to systemic oppression on multiple fronts by intersecting caste and gender hierarchies, and by having their embodied oppression be converted to a source of economic continuity. The vulnerability of the subaltern subject is produced in the context of structural oppression. However, it is also a way of survival in oppressive structures. In this sense, expression isn't simply an individual, emotional experience, but a socially sanctioned, controlled process, and a tool of control and a medium of exchange.

In a broader theoretical perspective, the study supports that the concept of labor goes beyond the physical into psychological and emotional aspects in *Rudali*. The social organization and exploitation of emotion as a labor of grief has revealed that emotion is itself a form of labor. This reconceptualization of work expands its conventional boundaries by incorporating dimensions not traditionally recognized as labor, including emotions, survival strategies, and bodily pain, while foregrounding the intricate interrelations among them. The paper, therefore, argues that the study of caste, class, and gender cannot be discussed as separate entities since they interweave and are mutually constitutive in the context of the exploitation of subaltern labor.

This study has implications for literary studies, gender theory/sociocultural theory. It invites readers to read *Rudali* as a story of suffering but also as a critique of socio-economic systems where there is a commodification of bodies and emotions. Lastly, it suggests the use of the notion of “labor” to expand the conceptualization of structural inequality and the subaltern's survival to include emotion and embodiment.

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Female Agency in Suman Pokhrel's "Pranay Yog": A Feminist Reading of Desire, Wholeness, and Sacred Reciprocity

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Abstract

This article examines the representation of female agency in Suman Pokhrel's poem "Pranay Yog" through a feminist literary lens. While the poem appears, at first glance, to be voiced predominantly through a masculine "I," a closer reading reveals a complex negotiation of desire, autonomy, and subjectivity that foregrounds the woman not as a passive object of male longing but as an autonomous, complete, and sacred being. Drawing on feminist theory, gender studies, and South Asian philosophical symbolism—particularly the concept of Shiva–Shakti—the article argues that "Pranay Yog" reconfigures embodied, subversive, and erotic discourse by dissolving hierarchical binaries between man and woman. The poem envisions intimacy as a reciprocal spiritual praxis in which the woman retains her wholeness even within union. Through its insistence on consent and mutual becoming, it articulates a counter-hegemonic relational ontology grounded in equality. Through the affirmation of woman as Shakti—the source of energy and completeness—the poem further challenges patriarchal representations of femininity in romantic and erotic literature. Ultimately, "Pranay Yog" articulates a model of relationality in which female agency is preserved, celebrated, and rendered indispensable to existential and spiritual attainment. Through a close textual analysis, the article aims to answer how the poem preserves female autonomy in men-women relations and how it moves beyond gender binaries.

Keywords: erotic spirituality, feminist criticism, gender studies, Shiva–Shakti, South Asian Poetry

Female Agency in Suman Pokhrel's "Pranay Yog": A Feminist Reading of Desire, Wholeness, and Sacred Reciprocity

Romantic Literature and the Subjugation of the Feminine Self

The question of women's agency has long occupied a central position in feminist literary criticism. Literary texts—particularly those dealing with love, desire, and sexuality—have historically constructed women as objects of the male gaze, desire, and possession, often silencing their subjectivity in favor of masculine expression (Beauvoir, 1989; Millett, 1970). Within romantic and erotic poetry, this tendency is especially pronounced, as the lyrical "I" frequently assumes male authority while the woman becomes the silent terrain upon which desire is enacted. Even when women are praised for strength, vitality, or autonomy, such affirmations are often subsumed under a masculine framework that ultimately defines feminine worth in relation to male desire and fulfillment.

A revealing example of this dynamic can be found in Walt Whitman's celebrated poem 'A Woman Waits for Me' (Whitman, 1889). Although Whitman acknowledges the strength, vitality, and embodied confidence of the female persona, the poem ultimately frames her as incomplete without sexual union with the male speaker. The poetic 'I' positions himself as the necessary and rightful figure who completes the woman: "she contains all, nothing is lacking / Yet all were lacking, if sex were lacking, or if the moisture of the right man were lacking" (Whitman, 1889, pp. 1–2). Despite the speaker's apparent admiration, this assertion exposes an underlying arrogance, as feminine wholeness is contingent upon the intervention of the "right man." The persona's assertion reinforces a hierarchical structure in which masculine desire defines feminine meaning.

The woman's autonomy, though verbally affirmed, is subordinated to the speaker's phallic authority and reproductive logic. Whitman further elaborates this dynamic through an extended celebration of women's physical and existential equality: "They are not one jot less than I am, . . . They are ultimate in their own right." (Lines 15, 19). Though the speaker appears to affirm women as strong, capable, and self-possessed, their subjectivity ultimately remains secondary to the speaker's erotic mission. The speaker casts himself as the giver, whose phallic power confers meaning: "I brace myself effectually—I listen to no entreaties, / dare not withdraw till I deposit what has so long accumulated within me" (Lines 29 -30). Indeed, Whitman reduces women to the receiving end, where their agency is suspended in anticipation of male action. Gender reciprocity is invoked as necessary for erotic pleasure and procreation, but the voice remains overwhelmingly male-centered.

This privileging of masculine desire and the relegation of women to a secondary, objectified position can also be traced in Octavio Paz's (1987) “Maithuna,” one of the most celebrated poems of love and desire. In it, the erotic intimacy is structured through what Laura Mulvey (1989) theorizes as the male gaze—a mode of looking that positions man as the active bearer of vision and woman as the passive object of that look. Although “Maithuna” engages eroticism where sexual intimacy dissolves binaries such as self and other, body and consciousness, night and light—the poem paradoxically inscribes gendered asymmetry. The female figure is apprehended primarily through the speaker’s gaze:

My eyes discover you
Naked / and cover you
with a warm rain
of glances
(Paz, 1987, Lines 1-5).

Here, vision becomes an act of possession. The woman is discovered, unveiled, and visually consumed, while the male speaker asserts narrative and perceptual control. The female persona has been relegated to the passive position as “bearer not the maker of the meaning,” merely an object for the accomplishment of his desires (Mulvey, 1989, p. 15).

The dynamics of the male gaze further intensify in the poem’s erotic climax, where masculine activity and feminine receptivity are sharply polarized:

My day
exploded
in your night
Your cry
leaps in pieces
Night
(Paz, 1987, Lines 22-27).

The imagery of explosion, illumination, and penetration situates the male speaker as the initiator and producer of pleasure, while the woman’s experience is fragmented into cries and nocturnal receptivity. Her desire is not articulated from within but mediated entirely through his sensory and symbolic framework. As Mulvey (1989) notes, the male gaze secures pleasure through control—both visual and narrative—and “Maithuna” enacts this logic by granting the speaker erotic mastery while confining the woman to the role of a recipient.

Such privileging of masculine desire and the relegation of women to a secondary, objectified position is not unique to Whitman and Paz, but recurs across a wide range of

erotic and love poetry and other canonical texts. In contrast to such a trend, Pokhrel's "Pranay Yog," rooted in South Asian philosophy and the Shiva–Shakti paradigm, foregrounds feminine agency as both spiritually and erotically generative. Rather than asserting a dominant male gaze, the speaker asks, waits, and submits to the woman's will, repeatedly invoking consent through the modal verb "may": "may I be cradled beneath the shadow of your love / may I explore every curve of your desires" (Pokhrel, 2025, Lines 6-7). The male voice, thus, becomes a receiver rather than a possessor, and fulfillment depends upon the woman's decision. Written in a devotional tone, the poem emphasizes reciprocity, consent, and the preservation of feminine autonomy.

Through its invocation of Shakti, its rejection of binary hierarchies, and its insistence on woman's completeness, the poem reimagines intimacy as a site of equality and empowerment. By employing a feminist literary framework, this study seeks to demonstrate how Pokhrel's poem destabilizes conventional gendered power structures and offers a portrayal of woman as an active, self-contained, and sacred subject.

Literature Review: Feminist Literary Criticism and Female Agency

Feminist literary criticism emerged in response to the historical marginalization and misrepresentation of women in literary traditions dominated by male perspectives. One of the earliest protests against such misrepresentation of women was made by Mary Wollstonecraft (1971). In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, she argues that true freedom necessitates equality between the sexes and insists that reason, rather than emotion, should guide women's lives. Wollstonecraft challenges the assumption that traditional feminine virtues are synonymous with weakness and passivity. She strongly criticizes sentimental novelists who, "knowing little of human nature, work up stale tales," depicting men as active and rational while women are reduced to passive embodiments of beauty with little intellectual merit (p. 394). According to her, such novels mislead adolescent girls, encouraging them to seek happiness solely in romantic love and to refine their sensuous feelings at the cost of rational development. Wollstonecraft protests against these representations, asserting that they contribute to women's oppression.

Simone de Beauvoir (1989)'s *The Second Sex* offers a powerful critique of patriarchy by arguing that womanhood is not an innate biological condition but a product of social and cultural forces imposed by male-dominated civilization. Her famous assertion that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" underscores how femininity is constructed through education, myth, and social expectations rather than nature (p. 267). Beauvoir demonstrates that patriarchy sustains itself by mystifying women, attributing to them an aura of "mystery"

that justifies their confinement to symbolic and sexual roles while denying them full subjectivity. In the chapter "The Myth of Woman in Five Authors," Beauvoir examines how male-authored literary representations participate in the construction of cultural myths of woman, reflecting the broader opposition between man as the autonomous Subject and woman as the inessential Other. Her discussion of Stendhal further demonstrates how representations of women within narratives of love are shaped by male perspectives and desire, even as she acknowledges greater complexity in Stendhal's portrayal of female characters (pp. 246–255). Beauvoir concludes that patriarchal civilization systematically defines women as the Other, ensuring male dominance through myth, representation, and social structure.

Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* also reveals how literary texts encode and reproduce patriarchal power relations, particularly through representations of sexuality and desire. Like Beauvoir, Millett believed that women were subjected to an artificially constructed idea of femininity (as cited in Tolan, 2006). She argues that literature functions as a tool of patriarchal ideology because it recreates sexual inequalities and reinforces patriarchal values in society. To expose this infiltration of patriarchal values into literature, Millett (1970) has examined the works of four twentieth-century male authors, including D. H. Lawrence. Through her discussion of Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Millett reveals a misogynistic presumption of female passivity embedded within the text.

Later feminist scholarship complicated these early critiques by foregrounding questions of agency, embodiment, and relational autonomy. As an alternative, Elaine Showalter presents gynocriticism as a way to construct a female framework for the analysis of women's literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experiences rather than to adopt male models and theories. Showalter's gynocritical approach shifted critical attention toward women's lived experiences, women's literary traditions, and female modes of representation, thereby challenging androcentric literary canons (as cited in Tolan, 2006). Judith Butler's (1999) theory of gender performativity further destabilized essentialist understandings of femininity by arguing that gender is not an innate identity or a matter of individual choice but a repeated performance constituted through social norms. She contends that individual agency is never absolute; it is "constrained by culture," and what one can do is "conditioned by what is available to do within the culture, by existing practices, and by those practices that are socially legitimized" (p. 345). Butler reconceptualizes agency as a negotiated process that operates within normative structures. She offers a more complex understanding of power, resistance, and subject formation in feminist theory.

Within literary studies, agency is increasingly understood not merely as oppositional resistance but as the capacity to act, choose, and retain subjectivity even within intimate, relational, or socially constrained structures (Moi, 1999). In poetic texts, particularly lyric poetry, female agency may not always be articulated through direct speech. It often emerges through metaphor, symbolic positioning, and the ethical structuring of desire. Feminist critics, therefore, examine how texts negotiate consent, reciprocity, and relational power, highlighting subtle forms of agency that exist even when the narrative voice is masculine.

Pokhrel's "Pranay Yog" offers an illustration of these theoretical insights. The poem reconfigures erotic discourse by dissolving hierarchical binaries between man and woman. It envisions intimacy as a reciprocal spiritual praxis in which the woman retains her wholeness even within union. Through its emphasis on consent, mutual becoming, and the affirmation of the woman as Shakti —the source of energy and completeness—the poem challenges patriarchal representations of femininity in romantic and erotic literature. Yet its subversion of gendered gaze and ritualized intimacy remains underexamined in scholarly discussions. This research gap highlights the need for a critical analysis of the poem from a feminist perspective.

Erotic Spirituality and the Feminist Reinterpretation of Shakti

Erotic spirituality occupies a significant place in South Asian literary and philosophical traditions. Tantric texts, bhakti poetry, and metaphysical love poems frequently intertwine desire (kāma) with spiritual transcendence (mokṣa), challenging Western dichotomies that separate sexuality from the sacred (Channa, 2013). Within this symbolic universe, the Shiva–Shakti paradigm is particularly important, as it figures desire and embodiment as constitutive of cosmic and spiritual realization.

The first śloka of *Ānanda Lahari*, which constitutes the opening section of "Saundarya Lahari," presents the Supreme Reality as Shiva–Shakti, the inseparable unity of Being and Will, as articulated by Ādi Śaṅkarācārya:

> *Sivaḥ śaktyā yukto yadi bhavati śaktaḥ prabhavitum /na ced evaṁ devo na khalu kuśalaḥ spanditum api; /atas tvām ārādhyāṁ Hari–Hara–Viriñcādibhir api/ praṇantuṁ stotuṁ vā katham akṛta-puṇyaḥ prabhavati* [United with Śakti, Śiva is endowed with the power to create the universe; otherwise, He is incapable even of movement. Therefore, who—except those endowed with great merit acquired in the past—can be fortunate enough to salute or praise the Divine Mother, who is worshipped even by Hari, Hara, and Viriñci?] (as cited in Tapasyananda & Math, p. 27)

Shakti, thus, represents dynamic feminine energy and creative power, without which Shiva remains inert, *sab* (corpse).

This philosophical understanding of Shiva–Shakti as an indivisible and complementary unity finds a parallel expression in the concept of Ardhanarishwara in Hinduism, which symbolizes the inseparable fusion of Shiva and Shakti and the harmonious balance of masculine and feminine principles. Shiva, though often regarded as the holder of power, remains inert without Shakti, as emphasized in the statement: "Śiva is *Sab* (dead body) without Śakti. All that power in creation, maintenance, and dissolution rests with Śakti. However, the great mother does not exist without Śiva. When they become one, Ardhanareeshwara becomes a being of generative and constructive force" (Raveesh, 2013, p. 5). This union underscores Ardhanarishwara as the source of dynamic cosmic energy and creative balance.

Feminist reinterpretations of these traditions emphasize that erotic-spiritual union becomes genuinely empowering only when women's autonomy, desire, and subjectivity are preserved. Modern South Asian poets, such as Pokhrel, revisit Tantric and bhakti symbolism with renewed attention to consent, relational ethics, and gender equality. Within this critical and literary landscape, "Pranay Yog" reclaims Shakti, portraying erotic spirituality not as a metaphor controlled by masculine authority, but as an affirmation of women's inherent completeness, agency, and embodied desire.

Theoretical Underpinnings: Feminist Literary Criticism and the Shiva–Shakti Paradigm

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive methodology grounded in feminist literary criticism. The primary method is close textual analysis, focusing on linguistic patterns, metaphoric structures, and symbolic frameworks that shape representations of gender and desire in "Pranay Yog." Following Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore's (1998) formulation of feminist reading practices, the study examines "how [a text] represents women, what it says about gender relations, how it defines sexual difference" (p. 1). Rather than adhering to a single feminist framework, the study engages selectively with feminist critics whose work foregrounds women's agency, relational reciprocity, and ethical consent in relational and erotic contexts.

The Shiva–Shakti paradigm is interpreted through feminist reinterpretations that foreground equality rather than hierarchy. Accordingly, the analysis avoids frameworks that portray Shakti as merely supportive or subordinate, Shiva as a controlling principle, or that rely on metaphors in which feminine energy is consumed, absorbed, or disciplined,

recognizing such readings as social overlays rather than philosophical necessities. Instead, it adopts a woman-affirming, agency-honoring understanding of Shiva–Shakti that emphasizes co-eternity and mutual dependence, affirms feminine autonomy, and understands manifestation as an expression of creative choice rather than hierarchical control. This framework allows for a nuanced reading of "Pranay Yog," in which union does not negate individuality but affirms it. Together, these strands of scholarship—from Western feminist literary theory to South Asian feminist perspectives and the reinterpretation of erotic spirituality create a foundation for the close reading of "Pranay Yog" as a text that engages with these complex intersections of desire, embodiment, and relational equality.

The analysis deliberately avoids biographical speculation, treating the poem as a self-contained literary text.

Textual Interpretation: Breaking the Masculine–Feminine Dichotomy

The Nepali version of "Pranay Yog" was posted on *Goodreads*, while its English version was published on *Spillwords.com* in 2025 and also posted on *All Poetry*. On *Spillwords.com*, the poet provides a note clarifying the title of the poem. He explains that the title and the poem seek to reclaim a fuller meaning of love, "inviting readers into a sacred union of masculine and feminine energies—not merely as an emotion or bodily act, but as a spiritual path of surrender, devotion, and wholeness—merging into the greater Whole" (para. 1). The poet insists that the poem is not merely about physical lovemaking between the lover and the beloved; rather, it explores the sacred union of masculine and feminine energies in the form of Shiva and Shakti. The title "Pranay Yog" is a compound word derived from Sanskrit: prāṇaya, meaning love or deep affection, and yoga, meaning union or fusion.

The poet further clarifies that *pranaya* refers to love, devotion, and even lovemaking in its deeper emotional and spiritual dimensions, and that in Hindu scriptures it appears in the context of *Praṇayagītā,* symbolizing divine love and the state in which two beings become one through the intensity of their affection. Similarly, *yog* in the poem does not refer to its modern, posture-based usage but to the classical *Ashtanga Yog*—the eightfold path of self-realization and inner transformation (Pokhrel, 2025). The poet's explanation resembles Charles Johnston's (1912) interpretation of *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali,* which presents Eastern philosophy as a practical and spiritual guide to human transformation. According to Johnston, the purpose of life, therefore, is "the unveiling of the immortal man; the birth of the spiritual from the psychical" (p. 11). Through this interpretation, the Yoga Sutras are understood not merely as philosophical reflections but as a systematic path toward spiritual regeneration and self-realization.

Reading through this lens, "Pranay Yog" envisions wholeness not as the dominance of one principle over the other but as a reciprocal and egalitarian fusion of energies. By drawing on the classical understanding of *yog* as union and self-realization, the poem resists hierarchical gender binaries that privilege the masculine over the feminine. Instead, it imagines subjectivity as relational and co-constitutive, where Shiva and Shakti exist only through their mutual interdependence. This vision of unity functions as a subtle feminist intervention, challenging entrenched masculine–feminine dichotomies that have historically shaped gender roles and power relations. In dissolving these binaries and emphasizing mutuality rather than opposition, the poem resonates with feminist critiques of gender essentialism, echoing Beauvoir's challenge to woman as the "Other" and Butler (1999)'s interrogation of gender as a fixed, naturalized category. Such a framework prepares the ground for reading love itself—not merely as emotion or desire—but as a sacred, transformative practice capable of reimagining gendered identities beyond hierarchy and prescribed roles.

The Poetics of Desire and Unclaiming Possession

At the surface level, "Pranay Yog" appears to be structured around the speaker's repeated invocations of "May I," a linguistic pattern that could be misread as insistence or masculine assertion. However, a feminist reading reveals that this grammatical construction functions as supplication rather than command. Desire is articulated as a request, not as entitlement. The humility of the speaker and his unclaiming possessiveness of the female manifests from the very first stanza of the poem:

> As you reside in the flame of my desires,
> may I meet you in that same form each day
> may I dissolve into your being,
> as you are steeped in the ache of my longing. (Pokhrel, 2025, Lines 1-4)

The persona does not claim possession of the woman, but seeks a mutual dissolution of selves. The rhetorical question "may I dissolve into your being," subverts the patriarchal erotic tradition in which the male subject asserts dominance over the female body.

In the poem, desire is framed as shared vulnerability, where fulfillment emerges only through consent and mutual readiness. The lover acknowledges the beloved's sovereign subjectivity rather than attempting to subsume it. For instance, the lines "May I peel away the layers of your hesitance, / and untie the wings of your dormant zeal" (Pokhrel, 2025, Lines 12-13) demonstrate the speaker's awareness of the woman's interiority. Crucially, he does

not initiate action unilaterally or claim authority over her emotional state. Instead, he waits, listens, and seeks her response.

The speaker recognizes that hesitance and dormancy are not obstacles to be forcibly overcome but human emotional states requiring patience, care, and ethical responsibility. He does not devalue these emotions as feminine weakness; rather, he acknowledges them as integral aspects of human subjectivity. By refusing to assume automatic access to the woman's body or desire, the poem affirms her agency and emotional complexity. Femininity is not reduced to lack or passivity but is affirmed as a fully autonomous mode of being.

This poetic reconfiguration of gender aligns with feminist critiques of biological determinism. As Toril Moi (1999) argues, feminism must address women's lived realities rather than abstract or hierarchical notions of sexual difference, since "only such a feminism will be able adequately to grasp the complexity of women's concrete, everyday concerns" (p. 9). These concerns are historically shaped by gender hierarchies that present anatomical difference as value difference. Moi explains that "since male and female reproductive organs were not taken to be fundamentally different, anatomical differences were pictured as hierarchical as opposed to complementary. Man was on top and woman at the bottom of the same scale of values" (p. 9). "Pranay Yog" resists this hierarchical logic by presenting masculinity and femininity as complementary, fluid, and mutually constitutive rather than oppositional. As Johnston (1912) explains, the Patanjali Yoga Sutras teach that sensation should guide right action; thus, lust—including reproductive desire—arises when pleasure is sought for its own sake, and should instead be consciously directed toward higher spiritual purpose.

"Pranay Yog" dismantles the traditional man–woman relationship founded on domination and submission, thereby rejecting the Western patriarchal logic of gender essentialism and biological determinism. The poem deviates from the assumption that masculinity is inherently active, dominant, and authoritative, while femininity is passive and submissive. Instead, Pokhrel reimagines desire as an ethical, reciprocal, and dialogic process. The persona, who symbolically assumes the role of Shiva or Puruṣa in the South Asian Hindu worldview, emerges as benevolent, compassionate, and emotionally attentive. He approaches the feminine self not with authority, but with tenderness and humility. The persona's rejection of stereotypically masculine traits resonates with Virginia Woolf's (1929) observation: "It is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly" (p. 157). By consciously refraining from exhibiting stereotypically masculine traits such as aggression, forcefulness, and domination, the speaker embodies a masculinity

rooted in sensitivity and relational awareness. Importantly, this gentleness does not diminish his masculinity; rather, it reflects confidence and self-assurance grounded in equality. Through its poetics of desire, consent, and sacred reciprocity, "Pranay Yog" ultimately rejects essentialist gender binaries and offers a feminist reimagining of intimacy that imagines erotic fulfillment as a shared experience rather than an act of possession.

Feminine Agency Beyond Objectification

A feminist critical lens reveals how literary and cultural texts support, promote, or undermine patriarchal ideologies that define women as the "Other." This object position is defined in relation to the universal subject, man, as articulated by Beauvoir (1989): "Thus, humanity is male, and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being" (p. xvi). Unlike them, the persona in "Pranay Yog" does not perceive the woman as the other, who needs to be avoided or an object to be owned. Rather, he honours her as she is and approaches her with humility, recognizing her agency and subjectivity. This recognition of the woman as a participating self, constitutes the poem's central feminist intervention. He seeks a deeper connection and desires bonding. In this way, Pokhrel dismantles the hierarchical sexual economy common in patriarchal literature, where the man appears as the desiring subject and the woman as the object of desire. Instead, he establishes a horizontal relationship grounded in consent and reciprocity, in which intimacy emerges only through mutual willingness.

This ethic of reciprocity is evident in the speaker's conditional and attentive language, which evokes a meditative state akin to yoga sadhana. The slow, deliberate rhythm of lovemaking resonates with Purnima Jana's (2019) observation:

> Meditation in Yoga Shakti Sadhana serves as a bridge between the physical and spiritual realms. Guided meditation and visualization techniques help practitioners focus their minds and direct energy to specific chakras. This inner journey fosters a heightened state of awareness, paving the way for a deeper connection with the self and the divine. (p. 612)

Here, the female body is not objectified but rendered as a site of mutual exchange. Words such as "envelop," along with metaphors like "the nectar of your desires" and "the divine depths of your womanhood," frame intimacy as dialogue rather than domination, subtly critiquing the passive femininity common in contemporaneous love verse. The speaker's attentive engagement with the feminine self echoes Moi's (1999) claim that a woman "is a fully embodied human being whose existence cannot be reduced to sexual difference, whether that difference is understood as natural or cultural" (p. 78). Obviously, the poem

reimagines erotic encounter as a spiritually attuned, reciprocal practice that resists reductive gendered hierarchies.

The poem, thus, situates desire within ethical reciprocity, merging eroticism with spiritual and relational awareness. The repeated use of "may I" foregrounds permission rather than conquest, positioning desire as contingent upon the woman's readiness. The persona's humility and genuine request for sensual merging blur the boundary between masculinity and femininity, which supports Butler's (1999) contention that femininity and masculinity are not biologically sex-specific but fluid, situational traits constituted through repeated acts. As she asserts, "our acts do indeed define us; we are what we do" (p. 112). Erotic fulfillment is thus imagined as a shared experience rather than an act of possession. Such rhetorical humility challenges patriarchal erotic discourse, where women's reluctance is often romanticized as resistance meant to be overcome.

Although the erotic imagery in "Pranay Yog" is explicit, it remains notably non-objectifying. Feminist critics have long distinguished between eroticism that empowers and pornography that objectifies. If we lived instead in a non-patriarchal society, claimed Mary Daly, lust would have good meanings such as "vigor," "fertility," "craving," "eagerness," and "enthusiasm" (as cited in Tong, 2009, p. 64). Pokhrel's poem belongs firmly to the former category. When the speaker seeks to "enter the divine depths" of the beloved's womanhood, sexuality is elevated to a metaphysical plane without being divorced from bodily presence. Womanhood is not reduced to a site of consumption but affirmed as sacred and autonomous. The adjective "divine" does not sanitize sexuality; rather, it legitimizes it as an experience grounded in mutual reverence.

This representation aligns with South Asian cultural understandings of gender, where masculine and feminine qualities are not rigidly dichotomized. As Subhadra Mitra Channa (2013) notes, the South Asian imagination allows for fluid expressions of strength and tenderness, leaving little room for the Western ideal of the "macho" man or the fragile woman (p. 8). Within this framework, women are not inherently weaker, nor are men expected to assume an overly protective role. The concept of Ardhanarishwara in Hinduism symbolizes the inseparable unity of Shiva and Shakti, representing the balance of masculine and feminine principles. Shiva, though often regarded as the holder of power, remains inert without Shakti, as emphasized in the statement: "Śiva is *sab* (dead body) without Śakti. All that power in creation, maintenance, and dissolution rests with S Śakti. However, the great mother does not exist without Śiva. When they become one, Ardhanareeshwara becomes a

being of generative and constructive force" (Raveesh, 2013). This union underscores Ardhanarishwara as the source of dynamic cosmic energy and creative balance.

Similarly, the poem's vision of intimacy culminates in mutual incorporation rather than domination:

> May I live within you, as a part of you,
> melding you into a portion of myself.
> May you live in me,
> forever remaining the whole of yourself. (Pokhrel, 2025, Lines 47-50))

Here, giving and receiving function simultaneously; both lovers are at once subjects and participants. Crucially, even in union, the woman "remain[s] the whole of [her]self," affirming that intimacy does not require the dissolution of identity. Her desire—expressed through images of "thirst," "longing," and "fervour"—is acknowledged as autonomous and potent. By foregrounding female desire as active rather than reactive, "Pranay Yog" resists the cultural tendency to frame women merely as gatekeepers of erotic experience and instead affirms them as self-determining subjects.

Consent and Mutual Becoming

Beauvoir (1989) observes that within patriarchal literary traditions, women are frequently represented as rewards for male heroism: "Woman is a special prize which the hero, the adventurer, and the rugged individualist are destined to win" (p. 183). According to her, from ancient mythologies to chivalric romances, men are celebrated as conquerors and adventurers, while women appear as objects to be rescued, protected, or possessed. Such representations define women in relation to male achievement rather than as autonomous subjects. Beauvoir (1989) insists that once a woman is recognized as a person, she cannot be conquered by force; she must give her consent and be freely chosen. This ethical shift—from conquest to consent—forms the philosophical ground on which "Pranay Yog" constructs intimacy.

Consent in "Pranay Yog" is not articulated through explicit verbal agreement but embedded within the poem's ethical and linguistic structure. The repeated use of the conditional "may" foregrounds the speaker's recognition that union is contingent rather than guaranteed. Thus, the poetic persona does not assert masculine prowess; instead, he positions himself in a space of vulnerability and ethical restraint. This stance culminates in the poem's philosophical core:

> by melding each other within ourselves,
> may we evolve into an inseparable unified form —

Blended together in oneness,
may we dissolve the divide between
man and woman, and woman and man. (Pokhrel, 2025, Lines 22-26)

In the quoted lines, the union between man and woman is envisioned not as an erasure of difference but as a transcendence of hierarchy.

Feminist theory has long critiqued models of unity that subsume women into male-defined universals. However, Pokhrel's explicit naming of both "man and woman, and woman and man" (Line 26) suggests a reciprocal and symmetrical dissolution of boundaries, resisting the privileging of one gender over the other. In the line, "may we evolve into an inseparable unified form," (Pokhrel, 2025, Line 23) unity emerges as a process grounded in mutual recognition rather than domination. Once the otherness of the other is respected and both are accepted on an equal plane, genuine evolution becomes possible for both.

The poem's vision of dissolving masculine and feminine binaries in pursuit of ecstasy and wholeness is possible only through consent and the dismantling of hierarchy. This process aligns with feminist understandings of gender as fluid rather than essential. As Channa (2013) argues, in the South Asian philosophy based on Shiva–Shakti: "gender is not an essential dichotomy, embodied once and for all. The categories are not opposed but complementary… the two may merge and become one; and ultimately, one may realize… that they were not separate in the first place" (p. 5). In "Pranay Yog," union is not assimilation but co-becoming: each subject retains individuality even as they merge. This model of intimacy preserves female agency rather than dissolving it within a dominant masculine self. In this way, "Pranay Yog" reimagines love not as possession but as sacred reciprocity, where mutual becoming replaces domination and female agency is not merely preserved but centered.

Shakti and Feminine Wholeness

Feminist theorist Shulamith Firestone (1970) envisions a society in which conventional sexual categories would lose their significance, arguing that "a reversion to an unobstructed pansexuality—Freud's 'polymorphous perversity'—would probably supersede hetero/homo/bi-sexuality" (p. 11). In such a society, fixed gender identities and behaviors would no longer constrain individuals' sexual expression and interpersonal relationships. Firestone's argument challenges the naturalization of sexual difference and opens up the possibility of imagining intimacy beyond patriarchal gender hierarchies. This theoretical framework provides a useful lens for reading "Pranay Yog," which similarly resists fixed binaries and gestures toward a fluid, egalitarian understanding of desire and identity.

The poem's most explicit feminist intervention appears in its invocation of Shakti, the feminine principle in Hindu philosophy. Within Hindu thought, "it is the feminine principle that is the defining subjectivity, the core of existence as Śakti," (Channa, 2013, p. 15) manifested in multiple forms that transcend phallocentric definitions of sexuality. By addressing the beloved as "the form of Shakti that you are, / living as yourself, the embodiment of wholeness," the speaker recognizes feminine power as autonomous and self-sustaining (Pokhrel, 2025, 45-46). In Hindu cosmology, Shakti is the primordial energy that animates the universe, and by identifying the woman with this force, the poem positions her not as subordinate to Shiva but as essential, powerful, and complete in herself. As cited by Singh (2006), Abhinavagupta states, "mokṣo hi nāma na anyat svātma-svarūpa-pratyabhijñānam [Mokṣa or liberation is nothing else but the awareness of one's true nature"] (as cited in Singh, 2006, p. xxx). This realization culminates in the highest attainment, Śiva-consciousness, in which the entire universe is experienced not as something separate but as one's own Self, appearing as "I" or Śiva. In this state, the duality of subject and object dissolves, and all manifestation is recognized as the self-expression of divine consciousness. Such realization does not arise merely through personal effort but occurs through śaktipāta, the descent of Divine Śakti, also described as anugraha or divine grace, which awakens the individual to their inherent identity with Śiva (as cited in Singh, 2006, p. xxx).

Significantly, the speaker does not claim to confer this identity upon the woman; rather, he presents himself as the descent of Divine Shakti. He acknowledges that she already is Shakti, "living as yourself," independent of male recognition. This distinction is crucial from a feminist perspective, as symbolic elevation often masks continued denial of women's real agency. In "Pranay Yog," however, symbolic reverence is accompanied by ethical acknowledgment of autonomy. The poem thus avoids romanticizing feminine power while still affirming women's subjectivity as inherent rather than bestowed.

The concluding image of Shiva and Shakti existing in perpetual balance further reinforces this vision of egalitarian union. Feminist reinterpretations of this symbolism emphasize its potential to model relationships grounded in reciprocity rather than domination, provided it is stripped of patriarchal distortions. Daly cautions that under patriarchy, love can become "a form of total self-sacrifice or martyrdom" for women (as cited in Tong, 2009, p. 60). Pokhrel's poem counters this tendency by grounding spiritual symbolism in mutual respect, consent, and ethical restraint, as the speaker suggests, "may we live, ever becoming the complete whole" (Line 54). The union imagined is not one in which the feminine dissolves into the masculine, but one in which both coexist. Millett similarly argues that the

elimination of male control requires dismantling gender itself, including sexual status, roles, and temperament as constructed under patriarchy (as cited in Tong, 2009, p. 52). This project has also been central to South Asian feminist thought, which has sought to blur hierarchical boundaries between masculine and feminine.

Although the poem speaks through a masculine voice, it consistently decentralizes masculine authority; female agency is not granted but recognized as pre-existing and inviolable. The poem's final invocation— "May we live like this; perpetually— / in the unified form of Shiva and Shakti" (Pokhrel, 2025, Lines 51-52)—envisions unity beyond gender dichotomy. The benign and humble male figure blends with the passionate and resourceful feminine to achieve a wholeness that transcends binary opposition. As Channa (2013) explains, while the masculine principle is viewed as complete only in combination with the feminine, "the feminine exists and exists independently of the male" and is defined as Shakti, or power (p. 15). Sexuality, freed from domination and hierarchy, becomes most potent when it is no longer bound by desire rooted in control.

From a feminist literary perspective, "Pranay Yog" demonstrates that agency needs to be relational, dialogic, and spiritually grounded. Millett's vision of a society in which men and women exist as equals at every level of existence finds poetic realization in the poem (Tong, 2009). It suggests that true union is possible only when both partners enter the relationship as complete beings. This representation gains particular significance within South Asian literary and philosophical traditions, where women's sexuality has often been suppressed, idealized, or detached from agency. Drawing implicitly on Hindu gender ideology, the poem resonates with the Shiva–Shakti framework, in which masculine and feminine function as cosmic principles rather than fixed biological identities (Channa, 2013). By aligning erotic union with this non-hierarchical cosmology, Pokhrel reimagines intimacy as a space where desire, spirituality, and equality coexist.

Conclusion

This study has argued that Suman Pokhrel's "Pranay Yog" offers an empowering portrayal of female agency within erotic and spiritual union. Through its rejection of possession, its sustained emphasis on consent, and its invocation of Shakti as a symbol of feminine wholeness, the poem resists entrenched patriarchal conventions of romantic and devotional poetry. Woman in "Pranay Yog" is not an object of desire but a sovereign subject whose completeness enables, rather than threatens, intimacy. By foregrounding reciprocity and ethical restraint, the poem reconceptualizes love as a shared process of becoming rather than an act of conquest or self-erasure.

From a feminist literary perspective, “Pranay Yog” demonstrates that agency need not be oppositional or separatist; instead, it can be relational, dialogic, and spiritually grounded. The poem envisions unity not as the dissolution of selfhood but as a convergence of two complete beings who meet without hierarchy. In a literary landscape still grappling with gendered power imbalances, “Pranay Yog” stands as a compelling example of how poetry can imagine intimacy without inequality and desire without domination. It ultimately offers a model of love in which autonomy and union coexist in ethical and transformative harmony.

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Human-Nature Reciprocity in Deloria's *Waterlily* and Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider*: An Indigenous Ecological Critique

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Abstract

Scholars have often analyzed Native American novelist Ella Cara Deloria's *Waterlily* and Māori novelist Witi Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider*, exploring temporal and natural phenomena, and socio-cultural kinship behaviors, yet they tend to pay less attention to indigenous ecological perspectives in their criticisms. This study examines the primary texts*Waterlily* and *The Whale Rider*, exploring human-nature reciprocity through indigenous ecological insights. Focusing on the insights of Robin Wall Kimmerer's plant knowledge, Kyle Powys Whyte's kinship time, and Enrique Salmon's kincentric ecology, it employs a qualitative research design to examine how humans and nature are interrelated with each other. It demonstrates that the primary texts carry on kinship, land, memory, and ecology based on the indigenous ethos of interconnectedness and interdependence. It reveals that the texts share similar insights of relationality and lived experiences of the communities, although *Waterlily* embraces a human-nature bond, stressing kinship insights in relation to plants and hills, whereas *The Whale Rider* highlights human-nature harmony in relation to the sea and whales.The findings imply that Indigenous ecological perspectives, rather than temporal and transcultural concepts, might effectively operate to examine the human-nature mutuality in the texts. Comparing two different traditions of the Sioux and Māori cultures through an Indigenous ecological lens, the study might contribute to indigenous literary criticism and help disseminate the texts as testimonies that persuasively appeal for understanding the earth as an extended ecological community in which humans and nonhumans live in mutual partnership.

Keywords: Sioux and Māori communities, indigenous ecological perspectives, human-nature reciprocity, interconnectedness, kinship

Human-Nature Reciprocity in Deloria's *Waterlily* and Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider*: An Indigenous Ecological Critique

The first decades after World War II witnessed plenty of indigenous literary productions in America and New Zealand. Allen (2002) states that the early contemporary period in literature includes the time "from the post-World War II to the 1970s, an era of dramatic social transformations and unprecedented textual production" (p. 2). Against this background, Native American Sioux author Ella Cara Deloria's novel *Waterlily* was completed in 1947, but it was posthumously published in 1988. Just one year earlier, in 1987, New Zealand Māori writer Witi Ihimaera's novel *The Whale Rider* was published. In this way, these two narratives came out after the aforementioned early contemporary period. *Waterlily* is embedded in the Sioux culture and history. *The Whale Rider* delves into the Māori culture. In *Waterlily*, the title character Waterlily is a young major character whose name is connected with waterlily plants. Waterlily is the daughter of Blue Bird and becomes her mother's hope and confidence. She also finally bases her hope on her son named Mitawa. The novel embracing lots of connections of the characters with plants, and overall, to nature makes quest for harmony. In *The Whale Rider,* Kahu, a young major character, shows her marvelous competence by virtue of her capacity to communicate with dolphins and whales. The novel portrays the characters in relation to land, water, and whales.

In *Waterlily*, plants become very symbolic and meaningful in the lives and cultures of the people, whereas in *The Whale Rider*, whales, dolphins, and the ecosphere are significant in Māori lives and cultures. Therefore, the research title employs the term nature to refer to all the categories like plants, animals and water.

Indigenous people have had their own principles, beliefs, practices, and skills since time immemorial, which constitute indigenous knowledge. This knowledge, whether oral or written, is passed down to future posterity. In sustaining this knowledge, indigenous people embrace a close relationship with nature- plants, animals, land, and the whole surrounding. They treat them as relatives. In contrast, the mainstream or modern view of land is often associated with commerce and commodity, considering land merely as a geographical territory or a ground area. But an indigenous worldview presents land as reverence and a symbol of identity. Reed et al. (2024) argue, "Land in an Indigenous context is more than just a territory or a home, it is spiritual and relationship place grounded in interconnection, interdependency, and relationships" (p. 5). In indigenous ethos, land is relational and identity-based. It connects humans with the natural world. Against this background, it is relevant to

state what Kimmerer (2013) asserts: "In indigenous ways of knowing, all beings are recognized as non-human persons, and all have their own names. … Words and names are the ways we humans build relationship, not only with each other, but also with plants" (p. 12). Kimmerer's ways of seeing bring humans and plants close to each other. Calling a plant by its name seems to be like calling a person or friend by his/her name. This notion of treating plants like our friends and family members contributes to the comprehension of the human-plant/nature relationship.

Indigenous literatures adore kinship and emphasize good human relationships. Justice (2018) puts, "…it's Waterlily's camp that sets the standard for practicing what it is to be human, a standard embedded in an ethos of hospitality" (p. 47). Indigenous literatures prescribe a relationship between humans and more-than-humans; that is, they stress the eco-social/global perspective for the strong culture-nature association or the strong ecospheric relationship. Indigenous Literary studies point to the significance of ancestry and stress the passing of genes from generation to generation.

The available critical studies on these two texts focus on nature-based, transcultural, and critical literacy reading phenomena and also emulate the indigenous ethos like kinship; however, the present study extends the existing criticisms based on indigenous ethos by employing new lenses of indigenous eco perspectives to highlight indigenous people's relationship to nature. For that purpose, it attempts to answer these questions: How do *Waterlily* and *The Whale Rider* carry on indigenous knowledge regarding human-nature relations? In what ways do the texts inculcate interconnectedness and interdependence as per indigenous ways of seeing? What commonalities and divergences do these novels have in relation to human-nature reciprocity? The objectives of the study go as follows– to examine how the primary texts pursue indigenous knowledge strengthening human-nature bond; to identify the ways the texts deliver the indigenous insights of interconnectedness and interdependence; to identify how the texts embrace similarities and differences these novels embrace in relation to nature and to disseminate the texts as the testimonies advocating for human-nature reciprocity. The author, focusing on human-nature affinity, sets the scope that the two primary texts have been analyzed through plant, kinship time, and kincentric perspectives based on Indigenous Literary studies. The study includes and consults texts and insights based on indigenous epistemologies and aesthetics.

Literature Review

The study reviews the existing critical scholarship on the primary texts for knowledge related to the field of indigenous literary studies and for the purpose of identifying the

departure to locate the research in a new trajectory of plant knowledge, kinship time, and kincentric ecology. The review, based upon theoretical, conceptual, and empirical insights, underpins the significance of the primary texts and points to the need for further research. In the Sioux culture inherent in *Waterlily*, time is associated with connectedness and quality, signaling connotations with nature. Explaining the Sioux camp circle and sun dance, and also citing Walker's opinion, Young (2001) asserts, "In the traditional Lakota reckoning, time relates to natural phenomena: the sun, moon, and seasons. …in the traditional Lakota world "time more fundamentally expresses qualities and relationships, not quantities" (p.187). This criticism relates time to nature, which enhances an ethical standpoint of indigenous temporal phenomenon, and such a relational time signifies the concept of kinship time. In a similar vein, focusing on the indigenous phenomenon of reconstructing the past for the emergence of the present, Sandretto (2026) opines that the Western concept of time indicates that the past is passed and the future is in front, whereas, by Māori time concept, "…The past is conceived of as being in front of human consciousness, because only the present and the past are knowable" (p. 206). The critic, through the lens of critical literacy readings based on the consideration of the effects of texts, argues, "*The WhaleRider* …can be viewed as the reconstruction of Paikea, where Witi places the granddaughter Kahu as the heir to take up the position of Kahutia Te Rangi, or Paikea" (p. 204). Kahu manifests past, present, and future. She represents Paikea and the present generation, and signals continuity for possibilities.

All species have to carry out certain rights and responsibilities. This insight underlines the reciprocal roles and existence. Justice (2016) argues, "The tribal web of kinship rights and responsibilities that link People, land, and cosmos together in an ongoing and dynamic system of mutually affecting relationships" (p. 353). He makes a persuasive appeal to present generations to act with due responsibility in order to be good ancestors for future posterity. The primary texts, like all indigenous works, uphold Justice's concepts of humanness, good relationships, and the way of becoming good ancestors.

The earth is a common planet for all species. Indigenous knowledges prioritize coexistence and oneness, and regard even animals, birds, rocks, etc. as people. In this vantage, Adamson and Monani discuss indigenous cosmovisions or worldviews; that is, ancestrally the Earth is considered a person and all persons embrace an invisible and interdependent bond with her. They contend that since the early 1990s, ecocritical perceptions have been reconsidered, and they are now known as cosmopolitics, which signifies the survival and life rights recognition for humans and nonhumans. They cite Bruno Latour's argument, "… for 'the common good world'– that is, a world that brings together,

by ‘cosmopolitics’ or ‘due process,’ a pluriverse of peoples and natures (rather than a universe,) living in ‘a commons resilient enough to embrace the future’” (Adamson & Monani, 2017, p. 7). This perception stresses an eco-perspective in general for a quest for harmony.

In the nineteenth century, American society witnessed capitalist consumer culture and individualist phenomena rather than a collective ethos of communities. In such a society, *Waterlily* creates a world of humanity and kinship. Appreciating the novel, Kelsey (2008) cites Maria Eugenia Cotera’s argument, “… Deloria’s pedagogical role [in Waterlily] must be envisioned as having relevance not only for the project to decolonize dominant knowledge about Indians but also for the intellectual and political formation of Indian communities themselves” (p. 77). The criticism focuses on the role of Deloria to decolonize and enhance mutuality among Indian communities.

The Whale Rider relates land to sea. The land-sea relationship reminds one of a mythological glory. It deals with an eco-social relationship. Visser (2008) comments on the novel’s bridging of mythology with the present reality as: “Ihimaera’s novel connects the story of the mythological ancestor Paikea to the contemporary reality of ocean pollution and of related ecological dangers, such as the nuclear testing that threatens the natural habitat of the whales” (p. 65). The critic seems to emphasize a memory that indicates a happy past and to make people aware of the threatened ecology. From a different perspective, in terms of a female character’s instructive response to a man’s dominating remarks over her in the novel, Moura–Kocoglu (2011) contends, “The text reveals a powerful transcultural thrust, in that what is perceived as traditional practice is reconstructed… leaving its mark on a notion of Māori identification which draws as much modern as on traditional sources” (p. 149). This critic indicates that Māori culture is leaning toward a transcultural phenomenon.

The existing critical scholarship often focuses on temporal, nature-based, and transcultural phenomena, and critical literacy readings are valuable; however, the present study extends the existing criticisms, mainly based on indigenous epistemological and aesthetic insights, by shifting to a new trajectory of indigenous ecological perspectives to examine how the primary texts show the human-nature bond, especially with a focus on humans, whales, and plants.

Materials and Methods

This study, adopting a qualitative research design, analyses the primary texts to explore indigenous people’s relationships to nature. The primary texts can communicate multiple meanings according to culture, context, and the way of seeing as prevalent in the Sioux and

Māori communities. The study interprets various aspects like humans, plants, and whales, and the human-nature relationship as traced in the texts. It employs textual analysis as the texts inculcate themes and insights related to humans' bond with the natural world. Books, internet sources, previous studies, and journal articles available related to the title are reviewed, and their ideas and insights are employed in the paper. The analysis focuses on the materials and methods based on indigenous visions for enhancing harmony and mutuality.

The analysis of an indigenous literary text can be accurately done through a lens that does not just interpret for the sake of meaning but demonstrates respect for indigenous epistemologies, aesthetics, and values. To emphasize human-nature reciprocity, the present study employs Robin Wall Kimmerer's plant perspectives, Kyle Powys Whyte's kinship time concepts, and Enrique Salmon's insights of kincentric ecology as the theoretical and conceptual framework.

Kimmerer's plant ecological insights embedded in her books *Braiding Sweetgrass* and *Gathering Moss* emerge as very relevant for analyzing the primary texts, which do not state humans and nonhumans in isolation, but disseminate the insights of plant and human connection; they prioritize a sense of oneness. They foreground the roles of plants like water lilies and mosses for human-plant reciprocity. Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass,* embracing ecological insights with a focus on the lessons humans learn from plants, intersects indigenous spirituality and reciprocity, and emphasizes the participatory but not hierarchical presence of both humans and nonhumans together. She argues, "It (a braid of stories) is an intertwining of science, spirit, and story- old stories and new ones that can be medicine for our broken relationship with earth, … people and land are good medicine for each other" (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 12). Likewise, her *Gathering Moss*seems to be about the study of mosses, but in depth conveys the epistemological insights based on kinship and the human-nature relationship. This book stipulates that every living being endowed with certain gifts has a role to play: "Plant knowledge comes from watching what the animals eat, how Bear harvests lilies and how Squirrel taps maple trees. Plant knowledge also comes from the plants themselves. To the attentive observer, plants reveal their gifts" (Kimmerer, 2003, p. 102). Plants offer gifts to humans for their proper utilization with mutual and ethical care. A close observation of plants can enable one to identify their teachings and gifts.

Likewise, indigenous critics and theorists Kyle Powys Whyte's "Time as Kinship," included in *The Cambridge Companion to Environmental Humanities,* and Enrique Salmon's "Kincentric Ecology: Indigenous Perceptions of the Human-Nature Relationship" can provide relevant insights in the interpretation of the primary texts. Whyte connects kinship

time with climate change, associated with kinship relationships, which differs from linear time or clock/calendar time. Kinship time encourages responsibility for one another's safety and wellbeing. Whyte (2021) contends, "Time is told through kinship relationships that entangle climate change with responsibility" (p. 53). Kinship relationships inspire a society to be responsive to the wellbeing of its members. Enrique Salmon discusses kincentric ecology, a concept of kincentricity, that is, humans and nonhumans in the natural world have very close relations. Human practices burn and prune plants and trees, which promotes newness and togetherness. New grasses and plants grow, and consequently animals and birds are attracted. This kincentric phenomenon encourages reverence and balance among everything in the surroundings. Salmon (2000) argues, "A reciprocal relationship has been fostered with the realization that humans affect nature and nature affects humans. This awareness influences indigenous interactions with the environment. …that are manifestations of kincentric ecology" (p. 1332). Like all the natural species, people and plants together in their extended natural community support each other. The present study proceeds to examine the human-nature/plant relationship embedded in the primary texts by employing indigenous ecological perspectives as stated above.

Results and Discussion

The study shows that Deloria's *Waterlily* and Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider*, embracing the indigenous ethos of kinship and reciprocity, comprehensively disseminate indigenous people's respect and relationship with nature. In *Waterlily*, the title character comes from the name of a plant. Blue Bird remains alone and silently gives birth to a baby. The water lilies nearby thrill her so she names the baby Waterlily. The narrator asserts, "My daughter! My daughter!" she cried, "How beautiful you are! As beautiful as the waterlilies. You too are a waterlily, *my* waterlily." She sobbed with joy" (Deloria, 2009, p. 6). A plant is not merely a plant for indigenous people, but it is relational and spiritual, providing humans with hope and enthusiasm. In the excerpt, the beholder feels highly energized by the waterlilies. The new-born baby and the waterlily resemble each other in the eyes of Blue Bird, the mother. The waterlilies evoke a sense of hope and joy for Blue Bird. They appear as family members, supporters, or soothing forces for her.

Kimmerer's depiction of water lilies can be useful to stress the significance of plants in relation to humans. Once, Kimmerer, while boating alone in a lake, feels highly impressed by the shining water lilies. She calls the waterlily leaves green hearts on the water. She feels like the green hearts are beating with her own heart. The leaves on the water surface are old hearts and the young leaves originating from the rhizome in the water are young hearts. The

young and the old embrace connection and reciprocity and nourish their original root. Kimmerer (2013) puts, “But new inquiries revealed a flow we could have known by intuition if we had remembered the teachings of plants… New leaf to old, old to new, mother to daughter – mutually endures. I am consoled by the lesson of lilies” (pp. 112-113). This mutuality resembles the connection between Blue Bird and Waterlily. Like Kimmerer, Blue Bird in *Waterlily* can smell and feel the waterlilies; she can have hope to go ahead due to the reciprocity between her and her baby.

Blue Bird later with the baby walks until the noise of the festivities fades away and the camp circle gets unseen. She reaches a virgin ground where she performs a supernatural treatment of the baby. In the process, she also uses a hallowed otterskin her father had given and now it was in her purse. She prays to the Great Spirit (Wakan Tanka) in the rock. Her prayers are granted. She has chosen her own altar for prayers. In general, the people there choose altars of rocks and trees for prayers when in stress. Deloria (2009) states, “Those rocks and those trees had been set apart and consecrated; they were individual altars where people had prayed in times of stress. She was going to make her own altar now” (p.17). Likewise, Gloku, with Waterlily and Little Chief, visits Box Butte, a holy hill, as a shrine to pray to the Great Mystery for the children’s good health. Thus, the virgin ground and the holy hill become special natural locations for seeking blessings. Waterlily delivers, “What he said about Box Butte was entirely true, for Box Butte was a holy hill, a shrine where people went to pray for all sorts of blessings, but mostly for a long, good life” (2009, p. 38). As an indigenous text, the novel includes plants, trees, and rocks as sources to inspire, empower, and heal humans. This idea largely aligns with Justice’s critical scholarship stressing the interconnectedness of people with the natural world and extends the insights of the scholarship to connect humans mainly with plants and trees. In this context, Kimmerer’s plant knowledge perspective as a lens consolidates the revelation of how the narrative advocates for a human-plant relationship.In this light, emphasizing a phenomenon of interconnectedness, Young (2001) argues, “Everything has wakan or spirit” (p. 192). Indigenous literaturesoften treat everything in connection with spiritual significance.

In *Waterlily,* the notion of oneness significantly stirs the mind of a reader. To bear her child, Blue Bird opts to go to the place where trees emerge, hoping that she might get water and seclusion there. The girl child is born on a grassy place. The mother wraps the child in a fawnskin she has carried. She makes a neat bundle of the placenta and cord and settles it into a tree fork. The narrative states, “Of that she was vaguely aware as she picked it up from the soft grass on which it lay… Still dazed, she wrapped her child in a fawnskin” (Deloria, 2009,

p. 6). When a sense of oneness weakens, ecology worsens. It is ponderable to quote Whyte's argument, "As kinship-based interdependency declines, climatic disruptions can be experienced as abrupt and escalating because responsiveness becomes hard to achieve" (Whyte, 2021, p. 53). A sense of kinship relationality awakens people to ponder their responsibilities for a balanced ecological world.

Waterlily depicts an indigenous culture of the Sun Dance. This dance carnival also represents the human-nature relationship. In an indigenous community, time is associated with the sun and other natural entities. In the Sun Dance, plants are significant. Plants like sweetgrass and sage are thought to be holy and symbolic. Although indigenous groups have their own specific ways of seeing nature, they share similar ecological perspectives and implications in terms of relationality. This finding broadly resonates with the insights of critic Young (2001), who points to the five broad ecological themes: "Interconnectedness- We are all related; Reverence: All of life is spiritual; Mother Earth: The womb of life; and Imbeddedness: We are the land and the land is us. Reciprocity: Living in harmony" (p. 330), yet, the present study adopts Kimmerer's vision of plant significance. Indigenous spirituality and ecology intersect and indigenous people acknowledge everything in the surroundings.

Waterlily at different moments pinpoints the solace and joy the characters receive from plants or nature. Blue Bird's new husband is thinking about an ideal place for a campsite. Such a place deserves a plant environment for a tranquil stay. The narrator asserts, "…There only nature's sounds would reach the ear- the murmur of the water, the twitter of birds overhead, the call of coyotes in the hills- all pleasantly new and wild" (Deloria, 2009, p. 32). Nature serves as a warm lap for people who acknowledge plants as trustworthy spirits for all other spirits like humans, birds, and animals. In this vein, it is pertinent to refer to Geniusz (2015), who pinpoints her mother's opinions about plants, and contends, "…plants are thought of as beings with their histories, stories, beliefs, and ways of life. Anishinaabe protocols require us to introduce plants just as we would introduce another human being" (p. xiii). The critic inspires readers to treat plants as humans. The pursuit of this notion about plants can help humans to learn how to become more generous, responsible, and ethical.

Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider* delves into the ancestral indigenous integrity and harmony in connection with the human-whale relationship, and in the changed contemporary context, it reveals the reconstruction of Paikea as Kahu, who is able to ride the bull whale, representing human-nature association. In place of Paikea, currently, due to the need, Kahu emerges for the protection of culture, identity, and nature. The ancient whale still survives, but now humans are alienated from it; in other words, nature is neglected and undermined.

The death of many whales in the story signifies the loss and degradation of nature due to humans. In the ancient Māori traditions, humans could communicate with nonhumans. All, including animals, birds, plants, etc., could come in harmony and unity. Ihimaera (1987) delivers:

> He came riding through the sea, our ancestor Kahutia Te Rangi, astride his whale, and he brought with him the life-giving forces which would enable us to live in close communion with the world. …They were very special because among other things, they gave instructions on how man might talk with the beasts and creatures of the sea so that all could live in helpful partnership. They taught *oneness* (p. 31).

Paikea, Kahutia Te Rangi– the ancestor, connects Kahu- the present representative for directing a Māori future course. The oneness is the amalgam of the living and the nonliving alike. Randerson and Yates argue that Māori whakapapa, a meta-account of descent as described by Huhana Smith as per their quote, conveys the wholeness in cosmogony comprising humans, whales, trees, intra-/extraplanetary energies, etc. Whanaungatanga signifies this reciprocity known as a part of socio-cultural-ecological system. Randerson and Yates (2017) assert, "The Māori term tangata whenua ("people of the land") describes a cosmogony where humans and all other biotic and abiotic life are the progeny of Papatuanuku, the Earth Mother" (p. 23). As reviewed in this study, the criticisms by Sandretto (2026) and Moura-Kocoglu (2011), stressing the insights of cultural revival and transcultural dimensions, point to Paikea's reconstruction, and the present study moderately resonates with this line; however, it explores connection and interconnection for the ancestral and eco-social consciousness, and connects ancestry with the present generation, revealing a future trajectory through kinship time and kincetric ecological perspectives.

The bull whale in a herd recalls the ancient days when humans and animals embraced good mutual relationships, whereas, in the present, the herd fears man. This departure shows a modern catastrophic intervention over nature. However, the novel conveys a sense of optimism:*"'Very well', the ancient bull whale said. 'Then let everyone live, and let the partnership between land and sea, whales and all humankind, also remain'"* (Ihimaera, 1987, p. 159). It disseminates human-nature relationality, acknowledging Kahu as the heir to Paikea, the ancient whale rider. Indigenous knowledge informs that the responsibilities of every being are special gifts. By virtue of these gifts, all living beings come to be benevolent to each other. Kimmerer (2003) raises a question, "It's the time we should also turn ourthoughts to our own responsibilities. In the web of reciprocity, what is ourspecial gift, our responsibility that we offer to the plants in return" (p. 110)? Here arises an issue of the plants,

and overall, it is the issue of nature that connects every being, including the whales, the dolphins, etc. The question doubts man's role in nature; it can be an appeal of persuasion to prioritize the human-nature relationship, for which indigenous knowledge matters.

The study demonstrates that *Waterlily* and *The Whale Rider* share commonalities and contrasts in relation to human-nature reciprocity. Ethics and responsibility are important in this reciprocal relationship. In *Waterlily*, the plants, hills and campsites on the surface of the earth become inspirational, healing and helping relatives, whereas in *The Whale Rider*, the whales and the dolphins inside the sea become connecting, healing and helpful participants; yet, both narratives foreground human-nature reciprocity. In this sense, indigenous literary texts, although they represent different indigenous communities, share corresponding themes, trends and patterns. Viewing land and sea or plants and whales as equal relatives of an extended ecological family, Salmon (2000) argues, "The kin, or relatives, include all the natural elements of an ecosystem. …A cultural model of kincentric ecology is presented that illustrates indigenous relationships with the natural world" (p. 1332). This notion of kincentricity emphasizes the human-nonhuman relationship deep-rooted in both primary texts.

Waterlily depicts a steady and continuous human-nature bond, sharing kinship insights in relation to plants and hills, while *The Whale Rider* conveys that humans and whales reciprocate; later, ecological crises, as suggested by Visser in her criticism, tend to emerge, but again, humans are reconstructed to communicate with the whales; that is, the indigenous identity may be revitalized and sustained. If humans harm nature, nature harms humans. Indigenous literatures significantly impart this awareness. This study shows that human-nature reciprocity emerges in the primary texts when they are viewed through indigenous ecological lenses.

Conclusion

This study addresses the specified objectives by analyzing *Waterlily* and *The Whale Rider* through indigenous ecological perspectives of Kimmerer's plant knowledge, Whyte's kinship time, and Salmon's kincentric ecology. It reviews the existing criticisms of the narratives, which have employed temporal, transcultural, kinship, and critical literacy reading insights. It shows the relational presence of humans and the natural world. It also indicates convergences and divergences embedded in the primary texts in terms of the way human-nature relationships are articulated.

The findings show that human-nature reciprocity operates in the primary texts in a relational status and evokes a sense of oneness. Grounded in the two primary texts, the study

is limited to the indigenous ecological perspectives. It foregrounds ecological kinship, the benevolence of plants for humans, and relational temporality, which together bind humans, nonhumans, and the whole surrounding within an extended ecological family. In the future, scholars might extend the framework of indigenous ecological kinship to different indigenous texts foran intercultural outlook on human-nature harmony.

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Reimagining Morality Through Linguistic Counter-discursivity in Edward Albee's *The Goat, or Who is Sylvia?*

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Abstract

This article argues that Albee not only presents a conflict between moral and immoral behaviour but also reimagines morality through linguistic counter-discursivity, which functions as a dramatic strategy used to challenge established moral meanings and traditions by competing vocabularies, semantic reversals, interrogative dialogue, irony, taboo expressions, and conflicting voices. Frederick Nietzsche's critique of inherited moral values provides the major theoretical framework for the study, while the notion of counterculture by Christopher Gair and the concept of subcultures by Chris Barker contribute to the study. Through the study of dialogue and dramatic structure, this article shows that Albee uses language as a site for ethical struggle. Albee's play refuses the conventional moral verdict and appeals to the audience to reconsider how moral judgements and ethical standards are produced, circulated, defended and transformed through the use of language. It is found that morality is discursively produced, language is a principal site of moral conflict, and taboo creates counter-discursive space. This article concludes that Albee's counter-discursive dramaturgy does not eliminate morality but relocates it from the conventional system of prohibitions to a dynamic field of negotiation among power, language, desire, responsibility, and social norms and values. This study helps the countercultural movement, affecting and inspiring people around the world who love individual, real master morality based on freedom, justice, and equality, reconstructing moralities, meanings, truths, centers, and structures.

Keywords: morality, language, reimagining, counterculture, multiplicity

Reimagining Morality Through Linguistic Counter-discursivity in Edward Albee's *The Goat, or Who is Sylvia?*

Edward Albee's play *The Goat, or Who is Sylvia?* is an unconventional work of contemporary American theater as it provokes its audience with a burning ethical problem of traditional society: the protagonist of the play, Martin Gray, a successful husband, father, and architect, claims to have fallen in love with Sylvia, a goat. The play begins with an orderly domestic environment and professional success but gradually destabilizes the stable world through a series of revelations shocking Stevie, Martin's wife. His confession of his relationship with the goat initially appears as an unbelievable joke, but it changes into a serious ethical problem including marriage, sexuality, homosexuality, bestiality, incest, masculinity, and social decorum.

The play becomes a powerful tool to dismantle conventional morality as it refuses the audience the option to remain outside the moral problem. Instead of presenting Martin's behaviour as immoral, Albee creates a linguistic atmosphere where the meaning of morality becomes unstable. Martin always tries to differentiate love from conventional sexual categories; Stevie takes Martin's act as betrayal and violence; Ross endeavours to categorize it through socially recognizable vocabulary; and Billy's homosexual behaviour problematizes the distinction between socially acceptable and unacceptable sexuality. Therefore, the central conflict in the play is not between the characters but between the discourses and cultures. The title of the play, *'Who is Sylvia?* establishes a linguistic problem, as it is a question of identification gradually moving to philosophical and ethical issues: who or what can be taken as an object of love? Who determines the boundaries of morality and immorality? What factor makes one relationship natural and another perverse? Who determines the legitimacy of sexuality? Therefore, Albee's dramaturgy is basically interrogative.

Reimagining is the politics of dismantling the so-called universally accepted moral reality and establishing a new morality in order to establish equality, removing hierarchy in society. Society highlights the concept of standardization, moral civilization, discipline, high culture, and hetero-normativity, sidelining the new truths as uncivilized, low cultures. It strengthens and advocates standard language and heterosexuality and marginalizes colloquial dialects and free language of inner expression. Normally, aristocratic language carries and supports the so-called universally accepted high cultures and ultimate truths, whereas the so-called slang and vulgar language hold the new truths inclining to multiple truths and giving counter to the power-constructed truths, centers, cultures, and meanings.

The morality created by religion, traditional hierarchical culture, and so-called civilized society actually leads to slavery in society. It prevents the individual from acquiring self-identity, self-respect, self-reliance, self-realization, self-morality, and self-existence. It is none other than slave morality. However, the morality based on multiplicity, equality, and demolition of center-margin hierarchy establishes master morality that makes an individual a real independent human being with a real civilized society. But most of the common people run after the illusory morality made by society as master morality, which needs to be dismantled in order to disillusion them and initiate the real master morality. Society uses the so-called standard language as a weapon to create the hierarchy of morality and immorality, discipline and unruliness, high culture and low culture, civilization and wilderness, and so on. Moreover, terms like taboos, prohibitions, vulgarity, slang, lunacy, animalism, and perversion have been used by society in order to hierarchize and discriminate against the new truths the individual attempts to establish, challenging the so-called social norms, values, beliefs, and principles. Language can be used as a weapon not only to create hierarchy but also to dismantle it and establish equality in society. While talking about reimagining environmental ethics, Starlin Josaph (2025) writes, "Literature, as a medium of storytelling and imagination, offers a unique space to explore and reimagine environmental ethics beyond utilitarian and anthropocentric frameworks. Literature's imaginative power is indispensable for rethinking and revitalizing environmental ethics" (p. 659). It shows that literary language plays a vital role in rethinking ethical aspects of various sectors, questioning anthropocentric moral judgment and standards.

In the same vein, Edward Albee's play *The Goat, or Who is Sylvia*? attempts to question mainstream American culture in the late twentieth century through the use of slang language. It challenges the values of dominant cultural and social practices of the then American society. When the mainstream culture marginalized and sidelined them, the youths who were repressed by mainstream cultural values took part in unusual activities to draw the attention of concerned authorities. In other words, as mainstream American culture repressed the desires and wants of the people, their intellectual ideas were oppressed, excluded, and ignored; then they adopted unconventional styles, and their behavior was not accepted by mainstream society, so many youths practiced countercultural and subcultural values like gayism, lesbianism, and interspecies sexual relationships, celebrated open sex and alcoholism in an intensified way to get some sort of solace. The unusual social practices and vulgar language use of protagonists Martin and Billy are dramatized by Albee to challenge the dominant culture, which does not allow people to enjoy their rights freely and openly.

This article provides an alternative way of thinking about the complexity of morality through linguistic counter-discursivity, a process by which any literary text enters the prevalent moral discourse and dismantles its basic assumptions of social decorum, introducing different vocabularies, contradictory voices, semantic reversals, and disruptive inquiries. Albee, through his characters and circumstances, not only raises a voice about morality but also attempts to determine what words like *normal, family, love, goods, perversion, and betrayal* should actually mean in the contemporary world.

Objective of the Study

This article intends to examine how Edward Albee presents literature as an ethical site for struggle and morality as a linguistic and discursive construction through his play *The Goat, or Who is Sylvia?* It further investigates how Albee destabilizes the conventional master morality and disrupts the binary oppositions such as natural vs. unnatural, normal vs. abnormal, moral vs. immoral, human vs. animal, heterosexual vs. homosexual, and faithful vs. unfaithful. The major motive of the paper is to demonstrate how the disturbing and problematic subject matter functions as an instrument of philosophical inquiry, not only as a theatrical shock. This study aims at establishing linguistic counter-discursivity as a useful analytical model for contemporary plays.

Literature Review

Morality is discursive in nature, which means that it is established through power. For this, different discourses are constructed, leading to hierarchical relationships. Language is one of the appropriate tools to establish and destabilize the idea of morality. The so-called standard language is used to create a binary of master morality and slave morality. Edward Albee uses vulgar language in order to dismantle the ethics made by civilized language. The play depicts a family profoundly shaken by an unimaginable transgression and their desperate attempts to confront and resolve the resulting crisis (Eisenmann, 2004). As Albee explains, audiences are invited to "leave their prejudices in the cloakroom and view the play objectively and later – at home – imagine themselves in the predicament the play examines" (Albee, 2005, pp. 262-263). This audience engagement helps illuminate why the play functions as a modern tragedy—literally a "goat song," from the Greek tragōidia (Zinman 2008, p.147). Sofer (2017) contends that *The Goat* is fundamentally Sylvia's tragedy, yet more precisely a marital tragedy (p. 502), centered on the unraveling of Martin and Stevie's relationship. In contrast, Gainor (2005) interprets the play as an ecological tragedy, casting Martin as a neo-Nietzschean hero who propels the characters—and the audience—beyond

personal crises into "a more politicized exploration of some profound and far-reaching questions for the Western dramatic tradition and modern civilization itself" (p. 203)

Weitz (2009) examines the play as a tool to explore the outer boundaries of concepts such as sex and love, as well as civilization and barbarism. Ishida (2013) argues that *The Goat* challenges self-proclaimed "open-minded" individuals by confronting them with the ultimate foreignness of interspecies sex, prompting them to pause and reflect. Naseef (2023) contends that in *The Goat,* Albee critiques the material conditions and deviant behaviors prevalent in American society at the time, while advocating for greater devotion to human interactions, particularly within the family. Beetz (2005) defines the human-animal bond as "a mutually beneficial and dynamic relationship between people and animals that is influenced by behaviors that are essential to the health and well-being of both," encompassing emotional, psychological, and physical interactions among people, animals, and the environment (p. 98). Wagoner (2017) investigates how Albee employs the concept of definition as an asymptotic limit to explore tragedy as a dramatic genre (as cited in Qin, 2024, p. 21). In *The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia?* (Albee, 2002), the playwright presents an extreme scenario portraying the life of a character with zoophilia—a deviant sexual orientation in which an individual experiences romantic or sexual attraction to animals (Vaid-Menon, 2013, as cited in Ghaniem, 2019). The underlying essence of Martin's empathy in the play is his merciless intrusion of the human "language system" and, behind it, a flood of human implicative notions into the animal's "species-specific frame of behavioral meaning", which is fundamentally based on human subjective idealism (Bourke, 2020, as cited in Qin, 2024, p. 23).

The critics focus on different issues while analyzing Albee's play *The Goat*. However, the aspect of redefining the concept of morality through the use of language as a powerful tool seems unnoticed, which this research tries to explore. Actually, the playwright, by using slang and offensive language, endeavours to dismantle the grand narrative of master morality established through so-called standard civilized language. It is his anger and fury at elitist language and heteronormative morality through the use of human-animal relationship. This study, therefore, focuses on the fact that Albee's play reimagines morality not by replacing one fixed code with another but by displaying the instability of linguistic structures through which morality is produced and established. The playwright transforms dialogue into an ethical arena in which moral boundaries are continuously negotiated.

Research Methodology

This study attempts to show Albee's struggle to critique so-called master morality created by civilized standardized language, reversing the hierarchy and establishing the individual's new morality as master morality. To prove how Albee disrupts such philosophy, the idea of morality by Frederick Nietzsche (1844-1900), the notion of counterculture by Christopher Gair (1961-) and the concept of subcultures by Chris Barker (1943-2022) have been used.

Counterculture is a movement of dismantling the mainstream and reestablishing the marginalized. Talking about counterculture, Christopher Gair in his book *The American Counterculture* (2007) claims: ". . . the 'problem of the counterculture wasn't that it went too far- the typical view- but rather its libertinism and its elevation of that far-out masked the ways that the hippie subculture mirrored the values of the dominant culture, especially regarding women and gays' (p. 9). All the subculture and counterculture movements are affected and misled by the false consciousness and belief created and spread by the mainstream so-called standardized culture prevalent in society. Subcultures can be weapons to fight against the standard culture universally accepted and established. Albee's play counters heteronormativity through bestiality, homosexuality, human-animal relationships, and vulgarity, centering on the characters Martin and Billy.

Chris Barker, in his book *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice* (2007), depicts, "Capitalism expresses alienation and a profound loss of human scale. Consequently, the creative, expressive and symbolic work of subcultures can be read as forms of resistance" (pp. 413). Subcultures and countercultures can be a tool for resistance to the powerful canonical culture and language. Barker further claims, "subcultures arise as attempts to resolve collectively experienced problems resulting from contradictions in the social structures . . . they generate a form of collective identity from which an individual identity can be achieved outside that ascribed by class, education and occupation" (p. 411). Morality and truth created by class hierarchy can be demolished only by strengthening the subcultures. Albee's play, using linguistic counter-discursivity as a dramatic technique, subverts the notion of morality, suggesting alternative morality.

Friedrich Nietzsche, in his book *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887), claims that all judgments and understandings are destroyed by so-called standard language and morality. He finds that 'all modern judgments about men and things' are smeared with an over-moralistic language; the characteristic feature of modern souls and modern books is to be found in their 'moralistic mendaciousness' (*GM*, III, p. 19). In *The Gay Science* 115, it is noted how

humankind has been educated by 'the four errors': we see ourselves only incompletely; we endow ourselves with fictitious attributes; we place ourselves in a false rank in relation to the animals and nature- that is, we see ourselves as being inherently superior to them; and, finally, we invent ever new tables of what is good and then accept them as eternal and unconditional. For Nietzsche, it is largely the prejudices of morality that stand in the way of this; morality assumes knowledge of things it does not have. The task of culture is to produce sovereign individuals, but what we really find in history is a series of definitions and perversions of that cultural task. Thus, in the modern world the aim and meaning of culture is taken to be 'to breed a tame and civilized animal, a household pet, out of the beast of prey "man" (GM, I, p. 11), so that now man strives to become better all the time, meaning more comfortable, more mediocre, more indifferent, more Chinese, more Christian….' (GM, I, p. 12). Modern European morality is 'herd animal morality' which considers itself to be the definition of morality and the only morality possible or desirable (Nietzsche, 1886, p. 202); at work in modern thinking is the assumption that there is a single morality valid for all (BGE, p. 228). Nietzsche seeks to develop a genuinely critical approach to morality, in which all kinds of novel, surprising and daring questions are posed. We suffer from the democratic idiosyncrasy that opposes in principle everything that dominates and wants to dominate (Nietzsche, 1887). In Albee's play, therefore, the question is not simply whether Martin's behaviour is morally acceptable. The more Nietzschean question is: what historical, cultural, emotional, and linguistic conditions make the audience experience that behaviour as morally intolerable?

Textual Analysis: Linguistic Counter-discursivity as a tool for Revisiting Morality

The Goat or Who is Sylvia? disrupts the hierarchy of master-slave morality created by discriminatory, so-called standard civilized language. Albee's play demolishes and vulgarizes different kinds of authority. It rejects parental authority, goes against the rituals of marriage, having children, and responsibility towards the family. It rebels against political and social authority by violating their rules and regulations. It goes in favor of free love, sexual liberation, eco-friendly environmental practices, peace, personal freedom, enjoying homosexuality, drug use, and a careless life, just the opposite of mainstream culture, to subvert and revolt against academic tradition. The supporting character Billy who keeps homosexual relationship with his friends symbolizes the upcoming youths who would join their hand in the revolution of their existence of their culture.

Heteronormativity vs. Heterosexuality

Albee's play is a representation of how society suffers from mainstream culture and the rigidity of Christian morality. Martin's love story with Goat; Billy's act of homosexuality is not accepted by society. Stevie's act of killing Goat symbolizes the conservative ethical norms, which control people's freedom. Because Martin has carried suppressed desire, he could not control his extra –marital affair with goat tells to his best friend Ross. But Ross betrays his trust and tells Martin's wife, Stevie, about her husband's affair. But Ross doesn't take it as a betrayal because he is a member of mainstream culture, and he cannot tolerate it when someone goes against their legacy. After knowing about her husband's extramarital affair with a goat, Stevie got fierce and kills the goat. Hence, Ross and Stevie are the representation of contemporary society that wants to control society under mainstream culture and the structure of Christianity, whereas Martin's act of keeping a sexual relationship with a goat attacks their dominant culture. So, the issue raises an unusual social practice that is not usually accepted in mainstream American society and counters late twentieth-century American society.

The characters Stevie and Ross represent the mainstream authority desiring to control people under their clutches. Ross's act of nagging Stevie about Martin's love affair signifies that Ross cannot go against the mainstream culture and cannot tolerate activities that can violate traditional law. Likewise, Stevie's act of killing the goat symbolizes the conservative ethical act, which controls people's freedom. Her decision of killing goat is an even greater violation, which encroaches on Martin's freedom. Furthermore, her killing Sylvia (she goat) was an action more serious than Martin's affair because it damaged Martin's mentality, physically and psychologically. Stevie and Ross represent the social authorities that always suppress individual freedom in the name of morality. They advocate for the right to speak, work, and create without any control. If society bypasses the individual and freedom of expression, there will be revolt and disaster.

To undermine the so-called superior morality of hetero-normativity, Albee highlights homosexuality and interspecies sexual relationships, presenting the collapse of the normal. In the play, Martin, the father figure of the Gray Family, loves and has sex with the goat Sylvia, though he has an honest and loyal wife at home and the family is small and happy. He is newly promoted and awarded, and has been given a large project to design City Hall. He is successful in his individual career as well as in family life. However, he is involved with a goat, which is considered to be immoral and uncivilized by the Christian society. Similarly, the son, Billy, is also involved in homosexual behaviours, which is reflected in his passionate

kiss to his father. The homosexual practice, society believes, is against the social and human norm as it perverts humans and disrupts human morality, but Albee claims their activities to be the result of their inner new truths and so they are moral, not immoral. It is a reflection of their individual morality beyond the false social morality that enslaves humans.

Counter-discursive Signifier and Grammar of Shock

Albee disrupts the so-called superior standardized language of the aristocratic culture and society in the play. Martin uses the term love for his transgressive behaviour, which becomes a counter-discursive act. Albee's dialogue frequently moves between comedy and horror, and this tonal instability is itself a linguistic strategy. The characters Martin, Billy, and Stevie use vulgar language during their conversation. The author intends to vulgarize the language to question the so-called master morality of the Christian aristocracy. Billy is unhappy with his father because of his love affair with a goat, and his father is also not satisfied with Billy's homosexuality. Yet, continue their practices, thinking that they are right. They use vulgar words like fuck, fucking faggot, fucker, etc. to scold each other. The writer deliberately uses such language to subvert the standard language and morality created by it. Their heated discussions and arguments can be seen in their dialogues:

BILLY: Jesus Christ!

MARTIN: Don't swear.

BILLY: [scoffing laugh] Don't what?!

MARTIN: Don't swear; you're too young.

BILLY: [considers a moment, then] FUCK THAT!!

MARTIN: Billy! Your mother!

BILLY: [scoffing laugh] You're fucking a fucking goat, and you tell me not to swear?!

MARTIN: You know, your own sex life leaves a little too. . .

STEVIE: [still at window; ice] All right, you too!

BILLY: [to MARTIN] At least what I do is with . . . person!

STEVIE [turning into the room] I said, all right, you too!

BILLY: Goat fucker!

MARTIN: Fucking faggot! (p. 20, Scene II)

Martin charges Billy as a fucking faggot, whereas Billy charges Martin as a goat fucker. It subverts the so-called moral and disciplined relationship between son and father that should prevail. After knowing about Martin's such behavior, Stevie calls her husband a betrayer and deceiver. She threatens him and remains aware of what Martin does. Stevie

believes that a human being should have a relationship only with other human beings, not with an animal. Stevie thinks that Martin not only betrays her but also all human beings and their civilization. She does so because she represents aristocratic morality and is enslaved by such a concept of morality.

Subversion of Human vs. Animal Hierarchy

Albee challenges the hierarchical division of humans and animals through Martin. In a quarrel with Stevie, Martin claims that humans are also animals and humans fall in love with other animals like dogs and cats. He asserts that humans and animals cannot be separated, which Stevie rejects. She is guided by the civilized morality that humans and animals are different, where humans are superior, but animals are inferior. This kind of so-called master morality is named slave morality by Albee.

MARTIN: I thought I was; I thought we all were . . . animals.

STEVIE: [cold rage] We stay with our own kind!

MARTIN: [gentle; rational] Oh, we fall in love with many other creature . . . dogs and cats, and . . .

STEVIE: We don't fuck them! You're a monster!

MARTIN: [pinning it down] I am a deeply troubled, greatly divided . . .

STEVIE: [no quarter] Animal Fucker!

MARTIN: Sylvia and I

STEVIE: [hideous] You're going to tell me she wants you.

MAERIN: [simply put] Yes. (p. 34, Scene II)

Showing Stevie as a lover of his own kind, whereas Martin is a lover of the animals, Albee supports Martin's idea, criticizing Stevie's. He shows Martin troubled by the hierarchy and Stevie by Martin's behavior of equality. It proves that Albee, through the use of contrastive words of vulgarity and civilization, dismantles the aristocratic master morality and establishes the so-called slave morality as master morality.

Albee challenges the so-called civilized standard language through the use of the words beginning with "F". Such words come from the inner core, so they hold real truth and morality. The writer intentionally uses the words repeatedly throughout the play to mock the standard language and morality. When Ross and Martin talk with each other, they also use vulgar words:

ROSS: I came here to fucking interview you.

MARTIN: Fine

ROSS: To boost your ego even more than . . .

MARTIN: I have no ego.

ROSS: Bullshit! Even more than where it is already and you fuck that up.

MARTIN: fine. You say fuck a lot.

ROSS: you say fine a lot.

MARTIN: Words beginning with F. (p. 10, scene I)

The words fuck, fucking, and bullshit are very much used in their conversation, though they are friends and talking about themselves after a long meeting. They mostly use the words beginning with F. Such use of vulgar language challenges the standard language and morality produced and highlighted by it.

Politics of Vulgarity and Language of Social Normality

Albee's politics of using slang language to dismantle the standard language and so-called master morality can be seen in a conversation between Ross and Martin. When Martin shows the photo of the goat Sylvia with whom he is having an affair, Ross is surprised. Then he uses the word fucking instead of loving Martin uses. For Martin it is 'loving,' but for Ross it is 'fucking'. They have a debate on it:

ROSS: This is Sylvia……who you're fucking.

MARTIN: Don't say that.

ROSS: …. with whom you are having an affair.

MARTIN: Yes, Yes

……

ROSS: THIS IS A GOAT! YOU'RE HAVING AN AFFAIR WITH A GOAT! YOU'ARE FUCKING A GOAT!

MARTIN: Yes. (p. 13, scene I)

Ross, who represents mainstream society, views Martin's and Sylvia's relationship negatively, so he uses the term fucking. But Martin, who is in real love with Sylvia, calls it loving. Here, Martin fights for individual free morality, which is the real morality prevented by so-called civilized moral society.

Language is a political tool to fight against the established standard of language and morality. Albee forcefully uses slang language to drag the standard morality down proving it slave morality. Not only the male characters, but the female character Stevie also uses vulgar words when she is angry with Martin. When Stevie gets angry with Martin, she knows that he is having a relationship with the goat; he tries to convince her. He touches her butts furiously challenges him and says: "GET YOUR GOAT-FUCKING HANDS OFF ME!!!"

(scene2) Similarly, in a quarrel between Billy and Martin, the word fuck has been used repeatedly:

Billy: Now shut the fuck up!

Martin: Very good! Where did you learn that?

Billy: I go to school. Remember?

Martin: Ye, but still….

Billy: I said shut the fuck up! (p. 41, scene III)

In the quarrel, they use the words 'motherfucker', 'shit', 'fucking a goat', 'fuck up' 'you fuck', etc. Stevie also uses the words 'you goat-fucker', 'animal fucker', 'fuck you', 'goat-fuckers anonymous', 'what is he fucking?', 'what is she fucking?', 'the fucking of animals', 'fucking right we don't!', 'BULLSHIT', etc. These terms are not vulgar but powerful bombs to attack the so-called standard language and master morality.

Taboo as Counter-discourse and Semantic Destabilization

Taboo becomes one of the powerful linguistic tools for Albee. By keeping taboo directly in dialogue, he makes the audience face what social language normally suppresses. Moreover, Words and questions recur until their meanings become unstable. "Who is Sylvia?" is not answered once and permanently. Instead, the question reverberates throughout the play. Furthermore, by making father and son, Albee challenges the so-called moral hetero-normativity and advocates heterosexuality and interspecies relationships. At the ending part of the play, Billy reunites with his father though he was against Martin's unusual activity at the beginning and in favor of Mother. But when he listens to Martin's emotional story, his heart melts, reminding him of his childhood activities. Billy remembers his childhood memories; when he was a kid, he realizes that his father guided him the right way, and he has got caring, loving, and protective parents who never obstruct him in his way. The following lines, full of slang words, signify the reunion and love conversation between father and son:

BILLY: I love you!

MARTIN: Sure you do, you . . . you . . .

BILLY: Faggot? You faggot?

MARTIN: [enraged] That's not what I was going to say!!

BILLY: [so sad; so sincere] Dad! I love you! Hold me! Please!

MARTIN: [holds him; strokes him] Shhhhhh; Shhhh; Shhhhh now.

BILLY: [disengaging finally] I'm sorry; I didn't mean to . . .

MARTIN: No; it's all right. [Arms out] Here; let me hold you. (p. 40, Scene III)

The reunion of son and father in the ending part reflects Albee's step towards counterculture. He is anti-current and leads an anti-establishment movement. In the reunion conversation, father and son use so-called non-standard language like 'Shhhhhh; Shhhh; Shhhhh' by Martin and 'faggot' by Billy. Using such language to express the desire of father and son for each other, Albee sabotages the morality of hetero-normativity. This language of the play functions as an ethical experiment, as Albee makes the audience look at mainstream morality produced by standard language, which can be reproduced.

Conclusion: Morality as a Linguistic Product

To conclude, Albee dismantles the so-called master morality created by standardized aristocratic language and culture using vulgar slang language to depict inter-species sexuality and gayism as counter to hetero-normativity in his play *The Goat*. The hierarchy-based Christian society creates a gap between high culture and low culture, master morality and slave morality, standard language and vulgar language, center and margin, and powerful and powerless. It focuses on high culture, standard language, master morality, and single truth, meaning, system, and center, sidelining the others. This otherizing attitude of the powerful mainstream culture and society has been challenged by the playwright through the use of slang in the play. The people who go against mainstream culture have to suffer a lot as they are in the minority and unaccepted by the majority who believe in illusory reality. Albee raises the voice of the otherized and marginalized, voiceless and choiceless people using the aggressive and vulgar language which is real from the inner core. The play exposes the mechanisms through which moral categories are constructed, defended, contested, and reproduced.

Nietzschean notion of morality provides a ground for interpreting the play as it appeals to readers to examine the origins and functions of moral values rather than accepting them as timeless truths. Christopher Gair's notion of counterculture extends this insight by demonstrating how mainstream culture hierarchically forms conventional standards that can be challenged through linguistic counter-discursivity. Chris Barker reveals the concept of subcultures, which shows the conflict among competing moral voices.

The playwright reimagines morality, disrupting the so-called master morality prevailing in American society and reversing it as slave morality, as it is created by standard civilized language taming and enslaving people as animals. He subverts the hierarchical concepts of morality, civilization, humanity, discipline, and heterosexuality, highlighting homosexuality and human-animal sexuality in order to create equality, multiplicity, real humanity, morality, and civilization in society using slang language as the most powerful

deconstructive tool. Therefore, Albee's effort in the countercultural movement affects and inspires people of the whole world who love individual real master morality based on freedom, justice, and equality, reconstructing moralities, meanings, truths, centers, and structures.

The significance of Albee's dramaturgy lies in the movement from moral judgement to moral interrogation. In this sense, linguistic counter-discursivity does not destroy morality; rather, it reimagines morality as a continuing process of critical reflection. Finally, this study has pedagogical implications, as teaching the play through discourse, morality, counterculture and subcultures can encourage the students to distinguish between having a moral opinion and to critically examine the historical and linguistic foundations of the opinion.

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Witnessing 'walk for peace' from the birthplace of Buddha

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Abstract

This study explores media coverage of 'walk for peace,' a 2,300-mile collective journey across America undertaken by nineteen Vietnamese American Buddhist monks and a rescued dog named Aloka from late October 2025 to mid-February 2026. It examines how the much-admired spiritual activism 'walk for peace' engaged intellectuals in the birthplace of Buddha. The walk embodied a form of spiritual activism that applies mindfulness, compassion, and interdependence to reduce collective suffering. First, the study analyzes how the walk, led by Bhikkhu Pannakara and his team, transferred core Engaged Buddhist principles into public performative practice. Second, it examines international media coverage and academic talk forums, which framed the journey as traditional but innovative peacebuilding. Third, it critically investigates the response from Nepal, the Buddha's birthplace, revealing a striking absence of essential media coverage, intellectual commentary, or academic engagement. Drawing on recent scholarship that pluralizes and politicizes the concept of Engaged Buddhism, the paper argues that Nepal's silence reflects a tension between symbolic heritage identity and active participation in contemporary global Buddhist discourse. The study concludes by calling for a more reflexive, critically engaged Buddhist intellectual culture in Nepal, one that moves beyond preservation to address present-day suffering.

Keywords: engaged Buddhism, spiritual activism, walking meditation

Witnessing 'walk for peace' from the birthplace of Buddha

This study analyzes the 'walk for peace,' a 2,300-mile collective journey across America from late October 2025 to mid-February 2026 undertaken by nineteen Vietnamese American Buddhist monks and a rescued dog named Aloka through the lens of Engaged Buddhism, a contemporary movement that familiarizes classic Buddhist principles such as interdependence, compassion, and non-harming to address social, political, religious, and ecological crises (Green, 2018). According to Fuller (2022), Engaged Buddhism is "a term used to describe a form of Buddhism that focuses on politics, society and environment…an emphasis upon both personal and social transformation" (p. 1). It brings Buddha and Buddhism on the road (Jerryson, 2018). The walk embodied a form of spiritual activism that applies mindfulness, compassion, and interdependence to reduce collective suffering. We explored how a highly acclaimed spiritual activism 'walk for peace' drew intellectual attention in the birthplace of Buddha. The key objective was to explore the 'walk for peace' activism from a critical perspective: Engaged Buddhism, which connects common people with spiritual values and also encourages spiritual leaders to engage in politics of awakening and awareness, and equality and justice.

The concept of Engaged Buddhism evolved in Asia during the 20th century in reaction to colonial rule, war, hatred, ignorance, and systemic injustice; the movement later reached Western countries and then rolled back to its origins for Asian followers and practitioners. The prominent leaders Thich Nhat Hanh (who coined the term Engaged Buddhism), Sulak Sivaraksa (a Thai social activist), and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar (who devoted his life to fighting caste discrimination in India and to the social emancipation of the Dalits) played crucial roles in expanding the concept of Engaged Buddhism, which breaks down the old separation between worldly and spiritual values, encouraging monks to engage in politics and laypeople to pursue awakening and awareness. It combines daily mindfulness, social service, and activism for sentient beings, so some scholars elaborate it as a new "vehicle" of Buddhism alongside traditional ones. However, the concept of Engaged Buddhism is not undisputed (Keown, 2022). The term originated in Asia and spread in the Western academic world, noting that between roughly 1988 and 2009, a specific form called Academic Engaged Buddhism, which emerged largely as a Euro-American project, aimed at Western practitioners (Hsu, 2022). While it helped highlight progressive Buddhist activism, it often presumed that Asian Buddhism was inherently passive and required Western help to become

socially engaged activities, and it tended to present a unified, positive picture that ignored diverse or even nationalist forms of Buddhist engagement.

Amid geopolitical conflict, civil war as well as socio-ecological and economic crisis, and a world marked by unwholesomeness and unrest, a small, quiet movement emerged from a Buddhist temple in Fort Worth, Texas. Accompanied by a rescued street dog from India named Aloka, a group of nineteen Vietnamese American monks commenced a 2,300-mile 'walk for peace' across the United States. The journey spanned 120 days, from October 26, 2025, to mid-February 2026, crossing ten states before concluding at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. The walk's central motive was to promote awareness of peace, lovingness, kindness, and compassion across America and the world so that everyone would be in unity and live in harmony (Jordan, 2026). As a 'peace dog,' Aloka became an unexpected global symbol. The pariah dog was originally living on the street in India. The dog encountered the monk team during a 2022 pilgrimage, and despite being hit by a car and falling seriously ill, he repeatedly rejoined the walking procession. The monks espoused him and brought him to the United States (Czachor & O'Keefe, 2026). The dog and monks' interspecies companionship vibrated and resonated deeply, adding a layer of universal compassion to the walk's message. The walk influenced diverse groups: Buddhist communities, animal welfare supporters, social media followers, and laypersons. No organized opposition was reported beyond isolated online comments. It received widespread coverage from CBS News, NPR, *Rolling Stone*, *The Guardian*, and regional US media. It also drew the attention of the world community. The monks amassed over 575,000 Facebook followers, and Aloka's own accounts had some 210,000 followers (Baker, 2026). These and many other reports show the wide public concern on this spiritual activism, opening the floor to new discourses on Buddhism today.

Peace walks have a long tradition in Theravada Buddhism, where walking meditation (*cankama*) cultivates mindfulness and wholesomeness. The movement in Buddhism has also been associated with the creation of innovation and connecting different centers of the Buddhist world. Travel in Buddhism has not only been associated with the quest for spiritual potency but also with the gaining of knowledge. Pilgrimage has connected different centers of the Buddhist world, forming the exchange of texts, knowledge, and ritual practice (Maud, 2017). However, the 'walk for peace' represents something more specific: a transition from negative peace (absence of violence) to positive peace- the presence of justice, trust, and compassion (Bayerlein et al., 2024). The monks did not advocate for specific legislation;

rather, they cultivated inner transformation as a social force, but they spread the world of peace, harmony, mutual understanding, and social wellbeing, respectively.

Engaged Buddhism appeared as a critical angle embodying academic politico-cultural value. Scholars look actively to pluralize the term, recognizing multiple aspects of Engaged Buddhism and being spontaneous about the power dynamics between English-speaking academics and Asian Buddhist communities (Hsu, 2022). In her study of the Lama Tzong Khapa Institute in Italy, Benna (2025) further questions whether meditation practiced in certain settings might subtly condition individuals to accept systemic stress rather than challenge it, a critical insight we apply to the walk for peace. As Stone (2003) elucidates, sharp disagreements among scholars exist; as such, some argue that Engaged Buddhism is a genuinely new roadmap with historical roots in figures like Dōgen and Nichiren; others claim it misunderstands core ideas like *dukkha* (suffering) and *anatta* (no-self) and therefore may not be authentic Buddhism. In this sense, walking has high spiritual value in the quest for healing and salvation directly connected to the current complex politico-cultural context.

Our study does not resolve these debates but uses them as a lens to cross-examine how ‘walk for peace’ was established or overlooked in different contexts. Although Nepal holds a unique position as the birthplace of Gautama Buddha in Lumbini, scholars have noted that Nepal’s relationship with Buddhism is complex, shaped by centuries of Hindu influence and contemporary political dynamics. The countries with the largest fountain of sacred sites related to the Buddha’s life India and Nepal have relatively but small Buddhist populations today in the territory. Despite being the Buddha’s birthplace, Nepal has not always been at the forefront of global Buddhist discourse (Shinde, 2021). According to Shinde's elaboration indicates that Indian and Nepalese huge population's ignorance the Buddha's and his reputed philosophy push into corner relegating subalternity so that they don't care about any evident related to Buddhist activists. This study investigates a profound irony: how did the Buddha’s birthplace respond to a major global Buddhist peace initiative? The walk offered an opportunity for Nepali Buddhists to connect with a living Buddhist movement addressing contemporary suffering. The limited response, as this paper will show, suggests missed opportunities for dialogue, learning, and mutual enrichment.

Methodology

This study explores the 'walk for peace' from an Engaged Buddhism perspective. Engaged Buddhism puts emphasis on spiritual activism, advocating non-violent, mindfulness-based peacebuilding, and social wellbeing. Unlike direct political challenge, the

walk avoided protest entirely. It offered what might be called ‘pre-political peace building ': creating conditions for peace by making a role model of compassionate presence.

As Long Si Dong, temple spokesperson, explained, it’s a spiritual offering, an invitation to live peace through everyday actions, mindfulness steps and open hearts. We believe when peace is cultivated within, it naturally ripples outward into society (Associated Press, 2026). This aligns with the Engaged Buddhist understanding that inner transformation and social transformation are mutually supporting, a point Hanh (1993) made popular repeatedly. Engaged Buddhism and walking meditation will be associated with pilgrimage tourism. Pilgrimage tourism evokes peace and deep feelings and emotions, creating self-confidence, faith, mutual respect for the divine, and decreasing all stress, exchanging positive vibrations with each other among devotees (Gawlik et al., 2022). Pilgrimage can be presumed to also be a touristic activity that is related to meditative engagement for a long period, but the 'walk for peace' in the context of the American-Vietnamese Monks operation is absolutely related to world peace, prosperity, healing, compassion, and happiness, awakening to discourage the present violence-, hatred-, suffering-, and war-oriented world.

This study employs qualitative document analysis (Bowen, 2009) and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Data were gathered from international media, particularly from CBS News, NPR, *Rolling Stone,* KERA News, *The Guardian,* and Nepali media (*Ujyalo Online*, *The Annapurna Express*, *The Himalayan Times*), along with social media (official Walk for Peace Facebook and Instagram, Aloka’s accounts), key speeches (Bhikkhu Pannakara at the Lincoln Memorial, 2026), and institutional responses (Sri Lankan Embassy, Dalai Lama’s office). A systematic search was conducted for Nepali academic commentary, op-eds, university seminars (Lumbini Buddhist University, Tribhuvan University), and televised debates. Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke’s six phases. A comparative dimension was built to highlight contrasts in scope, depth, engagement with Buddhist teachings, and intellectual commentary. Ethical considerations included using only publicly available documents and protecting individual commenter privacy.

Results and Findings

International media framed the ‘walk for peace’ as a significant spiritual and cultural event. KERA News reported that the nineteen monks walked barefoot, and upon completion in Washington, D.C., Pannakara told crowds, “I don’t know what I did to deserve this, but I love you all. Thi,s is what we need in the world.” He often asked audiences to recite: “Today is going to be my peaceful day” (Greene et al., 2026). Thousands gathered at American

University and outside the Washington National Cathedral. Social media showed supporters standing or kneeling along roads, holding flowers and signs.

NPR reported that the journey faced challenges: two monks were injured when a truck hit their escort vehicle. Venerable Maha Dam Phommasan had his leg amputated but later rejoined in a wheelchair, stating, “He walks like how I run… we never gave up” (Bharath & Stanley, 2026; Press, 2026). In a CBS News interview, Pannakara reflected: “The first crowd was in Mississippi, Georgia… that is when I cry… it tells me I have chosen the right path” (Czachor & O’Keefe, 2026). The Lincoln Memorial address on February 11, 2026, was widely covered. Pannakara invited listeners to practice “five seconds” of mindfulness: loving-kindness, compassion, love, harmony, and hope (Neeg, 2026). This speech operationalized Thich Nhat Hanh’s notion of interbeing in a concise, public ritual. The Sri Lankan Embassy hosted the walk, presenting *atapirikara* and pinning their flag on Pannakara’s robe (Wijesinghe, 2026). Spiritual thinkers who believe in Engaged Buddhism commended their commitment to promote national healing, unity, social wellbeing, and compassion (Bharath & Stanley, 2026), as UCLA scholar Stephanie Balkwill commented, “When walking becomes a message, every step is a sermon” (Wolf, 2026). The question is: how Nepali intellectuals, media persons, and civil society responded to it. We found meager or no impact of this spiritual activism that demands critical angles from critical perspectives like Engaged Buddhism in academia and civil society in the birthplace of Buddha.

Engaged Buddhism as a contemporary movement emerged in the 20th century in Asia as the response to colonial rule, war, hatred, discrimination, and prejudices. It later reached Western countries and flowed back to influence Asian practitioners later. Core Buddhist teachings the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, the Three Poisons (greed, anger, delusion), and the Five Precepts are reinterpreted to promote collective as well as individual liberation. Concrete examples include Thai monks “ordaining” trees to prevent logging, Myanmar’s 2007 Saffron Revolution led by monks, and Japan’s Nipponzan Myohoji sect building peace pagodas worldwide (Green, 2018). However, according to Green, some Buddhist-majority countries have engaged in civil war, genocide, and anti-Muslim violence, demonstrating that Buddhists are not automatically free from greed, anger, and delusion. Engaged Buddhists are a small but morally influential minority working to support practice with peace, justice, harmony, and social wellbeing.

The frameworks developed by Green (2018) and Keown (2022) that emerged in Vietnam in the 1950s from the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh relating the ‘walk for peace’ exemplifies as the key Engaged Buddhist principles, first, it applies Buddhist teachings to a

social problem collective suffering and conflict without reducing that suffering to individual karma, second, it demonstrates interdependence (*pratitya samutpada*): the monks depended on communities for food and shelter; Aloka depended on the monks; the walk's success depended on millions of online followers and third, it cultivates compassion, harmony and loving-kindness as public, performative acts, fourth, it maintains non-violence not only as a tactic but as the message itself and last, it enacts the understanding that inner transformation and social transformation are mutually reinforcing. As Pannakara said, "With a condition that is not peace but will not last… if we become able to stay calm and cool and patient, that is when peace begins" (Czachor & O'Keefe, 2026). The "five seconds" speech is a direct application of Hanh's (1993) fourteen guidelines: choosing loving-kindness over reaction, compassion over judgment, hope over despair.

However, following Benna (2025), we might ask: does such a walk risk becoming a form of "therapeutic" peacebuilding that trains individuals to accept systemic stress rather than challenge structural violence? The monks did not advocate for any policy change, but they offered mindfulness as an end in itself. This is not a weakness but a distinctive strategy of Engaged Buddhism when Thich Nhat Hanh argued that, if or whether we take care of one small thing deeply, we take care of everything. However, the contrast with more politically confrontational Engaged Buddhist actions (e.g., the Saffron Revolution) highlights the diversity within the movement, what Hsu (2022) calls multiple Engaged Buddhisms.

Venerable monk Hanh (1993) invented the term "Engaged Buddhism," creating fourteen guidelines for practitioners and stakeholders; as such, they shouldn't blindly follow any doctrine ignoring suffering, wealth, anger, harmful work such as killing, and mistreating one's own body. His core idea is "interdependence" or "interbeing," that everything is connected. In a passage that directly speaks to the 'walk for peace,' Hanh writes that our real body isn't just our skin; the sun is our second heart outside our body, forests are our lungs outside our body (Powers, 2016). When we destroy trees, we destroy ourselves. Nothing exists alone; a flower contains the whole cosmos. Letting go of the illusion of a separate self gives us inner peace and real strength. If we take care of one small thing deeply and carefully, we take care of everything at once. The monks' walk, with each mindful step enacted this interbeing the wholesomeness and social wellbeing. Regarding Hanh's notions, Powers (2016) further elaborates in his paper, mentioning fourteen precepts based on the *Pratitya-samutpada sutta* for the betterment of engaged training related to Engaged Buddhism that veg out love, compassion, healing, mindfulness, positive vive valorizing social well-being and outer and innermost peace and prosperity. Hanh's fourteen precepts are to make true love,

generosity, right livelihood, reverence for life, true community and communication, protecting and nourishing Sangha, dwelling happily in the present moment, truthful and loving speech, controlling of anger, freedom of thought, compassionate and healthy living, awareness of suffering, non-attachment view, respectively. Among these precepts promoted by Hanh based on Buddha's five precepts and eightfold path, four noble truths, Eightfold Path being awareness of suffering is close to walking meditation and conscious breathing that avoid negative vive, anger, depression creating peace, harmony, mindfulness, compassion, joy and eudemonic world. The 'walk for peace' is a tradition in the Buddhist world to communicate and continue a peaceful and harmonious world, discouraging a world of war and tussle and hustle.

While Nepalese diplomatic agencies in America remained silent, Sri Lanka's embassy actively hosted the walk, corroborating the related program. The Dalai Lama issued a public endorsement, Western universities organized panels, and the Vietnamese American communities provided material and ethical support to the movement. These responses demonstrate that multiple Engaged Buddhism exist some state-affiliated, some diasporic academia get responsibilities towards the activities. Though Keown (2022) notes that there is a dark side of some self-identified 'Engaged Buddhist movements that promote violence knowingly or unknowingly, the 'walk for Peace', by contrast, was a clear example of non-violent, compassionate, wholeness- and eudaimonic-focused engagement of this era. But Nepal missed an opportunity for connection to the entire world, keeping silent about that significant movement for world peace and prosperity, which could be an opportunity to advertise for touristic development. Kristopher Queen (2003) documents the vicious debate over whether 'Engaged Buddhism' is a genuine development or a departure. Some contributors argue it is a completely separate path; others claim it misunderstands core teachings like *anatta*. Soucy, reviewing the volume, finds those criticisms too harsh and notes that they may reflect an orientalist assumption that "authentic" Buddhism is passive. Nepal's intellectuals, if they were to enter this debate, could offer a unique perspective from the Buddha's birthplace. Their absence is thus particularly regrettable.

Some critiques argue that Engaged Buddhism is part of Buddhist modernism, a trend from Buddhism's encounter with the West that emphasizes reason, science, meditation for laypeople, and often rejects all of the misunderstanding. Some other scholars dispute that Christian ideas of social service influenced it as of promoting the healthy and prosperous one. There is a lively but interesting argument: is Engaged Buddhism truly traditional or a new or modern phenomenon? Hanh asserts that Buddhism has always been engaged. Others argue

that traditional Buddhism was deliberately disengaged, as ancient texts warn that politics distracts from spiritual goals and proliferates hatred. In that view, social change comes from perfecting individuals, not reforming institutions. A dark side of existence is "ethnocentric engaged Buddhism," scenario of Myanmar's movement led by monk Ashin Wirathu promoted anti-Muslim violence and ethnic cleansing that somehow defames engaged Buddhist activities (Keown, 2022, p. 21). This violates the non-violence of the engaged Buddhists norms and values that raised questions about whether it counts as genuine engaged Buddhism or not concerned about the values of it. But Engaged Buddhism, through everyday meditative activities and walking meditations, awakens persons and society, creating a wholesome and eudaimonic environment.

Conclusion

The 'walk for peace' led by nineteen Vietnamese American Buddhist monks and accompanied by Aloka the Peace Dog represented a powerful form of spiritual activism rooted in Engaged Buddhism. By choosing mindful walking, loving-kindness, and interspecies compassion over protest or political advocacy, the movement demonstrated an alternative pathway toward global harmony. International media recognized this, providing extensive, analytical, and intellectually engaged coverage. Yet in Nepal, the birthplace of Gautama Buddha, the journey received minimal, superficial coverage and virtually no intellectual or academic engagement. We found no op-eds, public statements from Buddhist scholars, university seminars, or televised debates covered it in priority.

Thinkers including Hsu have traced how the term Engaged Buddhism rose and fell in Western academia and media centers, approximately, in 1988 and 2009; a particular form called 'Academic Engaged Buddhism' emerged largely as a project led by Euro-American scholars aimed at Western Buddhist practitioners. While it helped highlight progressive Buddhist activism, it often expected that Asian Buddhism was passive and required Western help to become socially engaged and revitalized, and it tended to present a unified, positive picture that didn't account for diverse or even nationalist forms of Buddhist engagement. More recently, scholars have moved toward terms like "Buddhist-inspired activism" or simply studied "Buddhist engagement" without relying on the loaded label. Some of the thinkers suggest we should pluralize the term, recognizing 'multiple Engaged Buddhism' and be more reflexive about what we are doing when we install the label, especially given the power dynamics between English-speaking academics and Asian Buddhist communities. We do not undertake that the 'walk for peace' represents "true" Engaged Buddhism or that Nepal's silence is simply a failure to capture the attention of meaning and importance.

Instead, we use the concept as a pragmatic to illuminate contrasting media ecologies and intellectual traditions, along with public concern with its norms and values. While the ‘walk for peace’ was undoubtedly a positive peace initiative, its reception in different contexts reveals how others can frame the same action as transformative spiritual activism by some and as irrelevant or distant. But, undoubtedly, the 'walk for peace' recently organized by some American-Vietnamese’s monks remained minimally engaged in Nepali academe, media, and civil society. One of the good information and continuity of Buddha's and his followers as engagement of walking meditation to communicate world of peace and prosperity among all of sentient beings remained ignored or insignificant in the birthplace of Buddha, where cooperated and corroborated thousands of people and dozens of countries and institutions prioritizing the campaign. How Buddha's birthplace and residents looked unknown and silent in such a walk for peace initiative demands further research.

This disparity raises fundamental questions about Nepal’s relationship with Buddhism. Buddha was born in Lumbini, Nepal. The philosophical center of Buddhism should be in Nepal. Yet the lack of engagement with a major global Buddhist initiative suggests that Nepal’s Buddhist identity is more cultural and symbolic than actively engaged with contemporary politico-cultural discourses. We urge a reflexive pluralization: there is not one angle on Engaged Buddhism, but many, and Nepal’s silence on it may reflect a particular configuration of media, intellectual, and politico-cultural priorities, which is not a simple failure. However, the missed opportunity remains as a platform to initiate discourse, inviting new activism.

The ‘walk for peace’ offered a chance for Nepali Buddhists to connect with a living movement addressing contemporary suffering. As the pioneers of Engaged Buddhism, including Hanh, affirm, we can take care of one small thing deeply and carefully, and we can take care of everything at once. Nepal has taken care of the “small thing” of pilgrimage sites and historic heritages. Now it must take care of the larger thing: engaging with Buddhism as a living, breathing response to the crises of the 21st century. As Bhikkhu Pannakara said at the Lincoln Memorial, the ‘walk for peace’ was not a protest, but a reminder that hope still exists when people are willing to care; we need to feel that hope is the final light that must never go out. For Nepal, the hope is that this light will illuminate not only heritage sites but also active, critical, and compassionate engagement with Buddhism in all its contemporary manifestations. It is necessary for ethical politico-cultural activism as well as ecological and economic wellbeing of the nation. Future research demands fieldwork and interviews with Nepali Buddhist scholars, media professionals, and Buddhist monks to understand the

barriers to engagement in concrete activism. It should also examine other contemporary Buddhist movements to see whether Nepal's silence is specific to this walk or reflects a broader pattern of disengagement from global Buddhist discourse.

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The Kirati Languages at the Crossroads: Assessing the Language Vitality

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Abstract

This study assesses the language vitality of the Kirati languages within the Extended Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS) using a comparative approach among the Kirati languages. The key findings show that the Kirati languages range from EGIDS 4 to EGIDS 8b (nearly Extinct). This indicates that the Kirati languages are still not included in public administration or higher education in Nepal. There is limited access to the Kirati languages in the mass media. In comparison to the other Kirati languages, Limbu/Yakthung appears to be more advanced than the others. The other Kirati languages, namely Wambule, Thulung, and Khaling, are classified as EGIDS 5 (Developing). There are only two languages, Bahing/Bayung and Koyee, which are categorized as EGIDS 6a (Vigorous). The other languages, namely Athpahariya, Belhare, Chamling, Chintang, Dungmali, Bantawa, Jerung, Kulung, Limbu, Sunuwar, Lohorung, Sampang, Puma, Yakkha, and Yamphu, are classified as EGIDS 6b (Threatened). This category covers the largest number of the Kirati languages. There are five languages, namely Hayu, Dumi, Chhulung, Nachhiring, and Phangduwali, under EGIDS 7 (Shifting). Tilung and Chukwa are classified as EGIDS 8a (Moribund), while Chukwa is no longer spoken. The vitality of a language can be enhanced not only by increasing the number of speakers but also through strengthening intergenerational transmission and expanding the domains of language use.

Keywords: Kirati languages, language vitality, vigorous, moribund, extinct

The Kirati Languages at the Crossroads: Assessing the Language Vitality

Nepal is a multilingual country with four major language families, i.e., Indo-Aryan, Tibeto-Burman, Austro-Asiatic, Dravidian, and Kusunda, an isolate language. The latest census, 2021, reports a total of 124 languages (NSO, 2023). The Indo-Aryan language is considered to have the highest number of speakers, while the Tibeto-Burman language family includes a large number of languages.

The term 'Kirati' refers to a jacket term that covers more than two dozen languages that belong to the Tibeto-Burman language family. Since the censuses of 1952/54, data on the languages have been systematically recorded. There was a broader category known as "Rai-Kirati" in the earlier censuses (Gurung, 1997). Over time, the Kirati languages were identified and listed individually. The latest census, 2021, lists the Kirati languages as 31 languages.

The Kirati languages belong to the indigenous languages that are not only the means of communication but also the repository of indigenous knowledge, oral traditions, ecological wisdom, and linguistic identity. Despite their invaluable linguistic significance, they are in decline. This decline is because of historical factors, the compulsion of 'one nation, one language,' and monolingual policies that remained until the restoration of the democracy in 1991. Consequently, many of the Kiarti communities shifted to the Nepali language, a wider communication in Nepal.

The Kirati languages belong to the Tibeto-Burman language family and primarily include the Rai, Limbu, Koĩch (Sunuwar), and Yakkha languages. However, communities such as the Hayu, Baram, Surel, Jirel, and Thami also claim Kirat identity. From a linguistic perspective, Hayu and Baram have been explicitly classified as Kirati languages by linguists (Rai, 2025). The Kirati languages are primarily spoken in eastern Nepal. Although these languages share common historical origins and certain typological features, they have distinct geographical distributions. They also vary in terms of the number of speakers, language documentation, literacy, and level of vitality. Some Kirati languages continue to be actively transmitted to children, whereas others are in decline or have experienced a serious interruption in intergenerational transmission.

Previous studies have made substantial contributions to individual Kirati languages. Most of these studies have focused on grammatical description and language documentation. Sociolinguistic studies were also conducted during the Linguistic Survey of India (Grierson, 1904) and the Linguistic Survey of Nepal, led by the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies

(Hanβon, 1991). More intensive sociolinguistic studies were carried out under the Linguistic Survey of Nepal (LinSuN) Project, led by the Central Department of Linguistics, TU, which continued for a decade. Almost all the Kirati languages were surveyed under this project. A few sociolinguistic surveys were also conducted by SIL International, Kathmandu.

The vitality of individual languages has been assessed using the UNESCO model. However, these studies have generally focused on selected individual languages or on the languages spoken across Nepal as a whole. There has been no comparative study specifically examining the vitality of the Kirati languages. This study applies the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS) to comparatively assess around three dozen Kirati languages. Therefore, a significant research gap remains in understanding the current status of the Kirati languages using EGIDS. To address this gap, this study aims to assess the vitality status of the Kirati languages using the EGIDS framework, compare their vitality levels, and propose ways forward for revitalizing the Kirati languages that are at a crossroads.

Theoretical Framework

A language is endangered when its speakers cease to use it, use it in rare domains, use fewer of its registers and speaking styles, and/or stop passing it on to the next generation (UNESCO, 2003). Rogers and Campbell (2015) also emphasize the criteria for language endangerment as lack of intergenerational transmission, decrease in the number of speakers over time, and decrease in domains of use.

A language remains vital when the language is used at home, in the community, and in educational institutions. If the children acquire the language without any interruption or restriction in the natural way, the language sustains and maintains vitality. To continue the language variable, the functional domains of language use. Since the early 1960s, models to assess the vitality of languages have been in practice. Krauss (1992) proposed the assessment systems of language vitality into four categories: a) Safe; b. Moribund; c) Endangered.

Later, the model developed by Fishman (1991) is not only widely recognized but also influential. He proposed the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) to assess language vitality, where he asserts that the long-term survival of a language depends primarily on uninterrupted intergenerational transmission within the family and community. Being based on the model of Fishman (1991), Lewis and Simons (2010) extended it further and named it the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS), from 8 stages to 0 (international) to level 10 (extinct), which is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Expanded Graded Intergenerational Scale (adapted from Fishman 1991)

	Label	Description	UNESCO
0	International	The language is used internationally for a broad range of functions.	Safe
1	National	The language is used in education, work, mass media, and government at the national level.	Safe
2	Regional	The language is used for local and regional mass media and government services.	Safe
3	Trade	The language is used for local and regional work by both insiders and outsiders.	Safe
4	Educational	Literacy in the language is being transmitted through a system of public education.	Safe
5	Written	The language is used orally by all generations and is effectively used in written form in parts of the community.	Safe
6a	Vigorous	The language is transmitted into children and widely used in everyday life.	Safe
6b	Threatened	Children still learn the language, but transmission is weakening.	Vulnerable
7	Shifting	The younger generation is no longer acquiring the language consistently.	Definitely endangered
8a	Moribund	Only grandparents and older adults actively speak the language.	Severely endangered
8b	Nearly Extinct	Only a few elderly speakers remain.	Critically endangered
9	Dormant	The language survives mainly as an ethnic identity marker.	Extinct
10,	Extinct	No speakers remain.	Extinct

Source: Lewis and Simons (2010)

Besides this, the model includes additional aspects like literacy, education, and functional domains of the language. As EGIDS is related to examining the language status classifications used in *Ethnologue*, it has been widely used to assess the vitality of minority and indigenous languages.

Research Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative comparative research design where the vitality of the Kirati languages is assessed on the basis of the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS). The data used in this study are from publicly available sources, basically the survey reports by the LinSuN project.

The data used in the study are compiled from multiple sources to assess the vitality of the Kirati languages. For this, Ethnologue (2026), National Population and Housing census reports (2021) by the National Statistics Office, reports, policy documents, survey reports,

governmental and non-governmental reports produced by government agencies, edited volumes, and published grammatical descriptions of the individual Kirati languages.

The assessment in this study has been made on the basis of intergenerational language transmission, domains of language use, literacy and written language development, educational and institutional support, and evidence of language maintenance or language shift reported in the literature.

The data were analyzed using content analysis and comparative analysis. The information related to the study was not only extracted but also organized and synthesized to analyze the EGIDS. When comparing language vitality, the indicators include speaker population, literacy development, educational initiatives, and institutional support.
Despite the fact that the reliability of this study is based on information and data from independent sources, this study has several limitations. First, the available data on the Kirati languages vary, as some languages have been studied extensively, whereas others have only very limited documentation. Second, the census data may not fully reflect the actual language proficiency of the speakers. Third, language vitality is dynamic and may change over time. The EGIDS levels mentioned in this study are based on *Ethnologue*, whose assessments are based on data that are approximately a decade old.

Results and Discussion

This section deals with the demography and distribution of the speakers, literacy and educational materials, intergenerational language transmission, functional domains of the language in general, and assessment of language vitality according to EGIDs in particular.

Demography and Distribution of the Speakers

Among the Kirati languages, Yakthung/Limbu is the language with 350,436 speakers, which covers 1.2% of the national population. The 'Rai language' is also enumerated in the censuses since 2011, which is not the real language itself but rather an ethnic group or an umbrella term that comprises a number of languages (Rai, 2026). Bantaw appears to be the largest language among the Rai Kirati languages, which have 138,003 speakers (0.47%). It is followed by Chamling (89,037 speakers; 0.31%). Except for Rai, these three languages constitute the majority of the Kirati speakers.

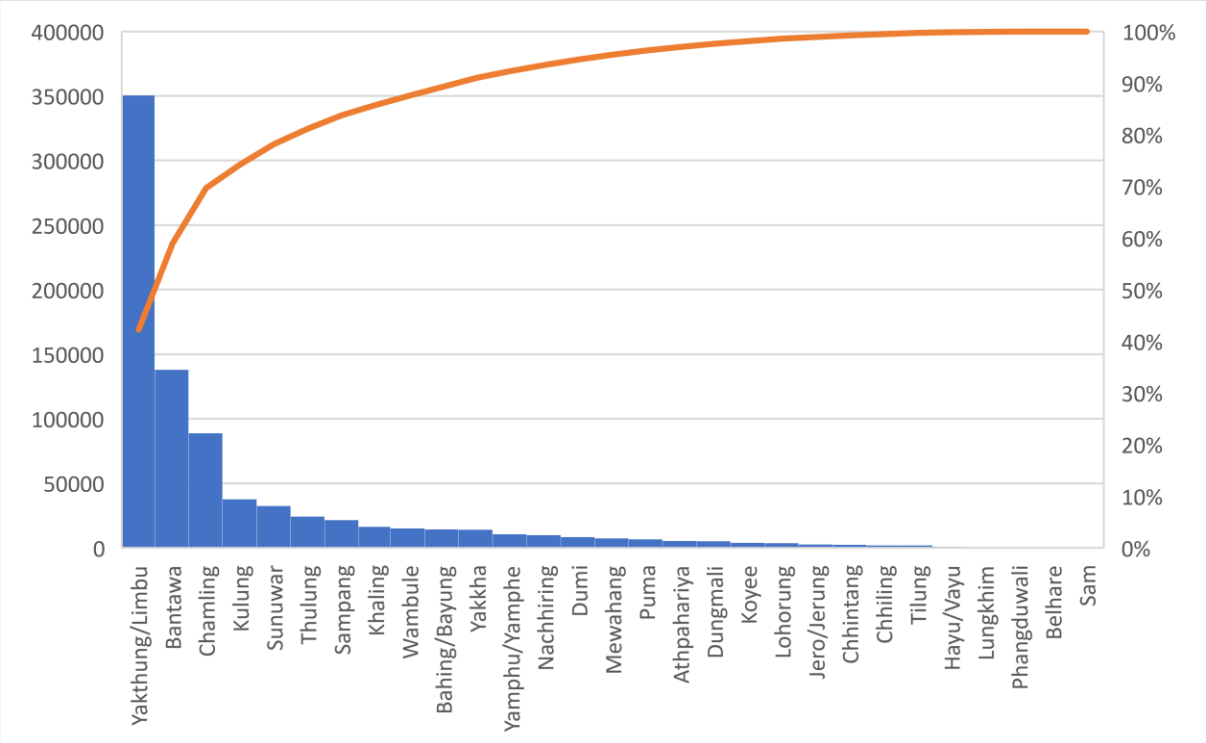
There are medium-sized speech communities ranging between 10,000 and 40,000 speakers. Among them, Kulung (37,912), Sunuwar (32,708), Thulung (24,405), Sampang (21,597), Khaling (16,514), Wambule (15,285), Bahing/Bayung (14,449), Yakkha (14,241), and Yamphu/Yamphe (10,744). All these represent less than 0.15% of the total national

population. This indicates that language vitality requires a strong model of intergenerational transmission.

The remaining third category of languages may be categorized into the small speech communities. In this category are Nachhiring (9,906); Dumi (8,638); Mewahang (7,428); Puma (6,763); Athpahariya (5,580); Dungmali (5,403); Koyee (4,152); Lohorung (3,884); Jero/Jerung (2,817); Chhintang (2,564); Chhiling (2,011); Tilung (1,969); and Hayu/Vayu (1,133). They represent fewer than 10,000 speakers, of which a number have fewer than 5,000 speakers. The number of speakers indicates that there is increasing vulnerability to language shift. Moreover, languages like Lungkhim have only 702 speakers; Phangduwali, 247; Belhare, 177; and Sam, only 106 speakers. This shows that these languages are at a very high risk of language endangerment. It is reported that languages like Chukwa, Poing, and Lambichhong have already disappeared (Yadava & Turin 2006). Figure 1 shows the demographic status of the Kirati languages, while Annex 1 represents the speakers' population of the Kirati languages (see Annex 1).

Figure 1

Demographic Status of the Kirati Languages



Source: NSO, 2023

Literacy and Educational Materials

If we observe the stages of language documentation among the many Kirati languages, there is a growing indication of progress (see Annex 2). In comparison with language documentation (phonemic inventory, glossary, dictionary, sketch grammar, and descriptive grammar); literacy development (literacy materials, curriculum/textbooks); literary production (literature and non-fiction); and mass media (magazines, FM Radios, television, and movies), language documentation has the highest coverage among all the indicators. Glossaries are available for most languages, covering around 80% (24 languages) of the 30 languages. As of now, dictionaries in the Kirati languages have been prepared for 18 languages. There are 19 languages that have sketch grammars. Writing descriptive grammars is growing and is most needed, as most of the Kirati languages are preliterate or undescribed. This may be because many languages are currently under documentation, and descriptive grammars have now been prepared for 19 languages.

In fact, documentation cannot guarantee language maintenance. However, it may help foster positive attitudes and loyalty toward the mother tongue. Reading materials, such as primers, alphabets, reading books, and orthographies, cover around 60% of the total Kirati languages. Literature indicates whether a language is actively used in written communication. Literary works are being produced, and their number is increasing in about 80% of the Kirati languages, including folktales, songs, ritual language, poetry, and so on. Among the Kirati languages, Yakthung/Limbu dominates in almost all literary genres.

The use of mother tongues in mass media exhibits inequality. Around 30% of the Kirati languages have access to magazines, many of which are not published regularly. This is largely due to community efforts rather than government support. However, six languages have been published in the "*Bahubhasik Pristha*"(multilingual page) of *Gorakhapatra* (NSO, 2025, p.18). Very few of the Kirati languages have access to television programs or have produced movies.

The Kirati languages have entered school education as mother tongue education, but they have not yet been introduced into higher education. Curricula for only a few Kirati languages have been developed by the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC), whereas the curricula for the remaining Kirati languages listed in Table 1 have been developed by local governments through community efforts. Among them, Limbu/Yakthung, Bantawa, Chamling, Kulung, and Khaling have been included in the CDC curriculum, whereas the others have not.

Of the Kirati languages, the curriculum of Limbu/Yakthung has been prepared up to Grade 10, and the textbooks are being produced. Recently, the curricula (grades 6- 8) of Bantawa and Chamling have been endorsed, and the textbooks are being produced.

After Nepal entered the federal system, the rights of the local languages were bestowed upon the local governments via the [Local Government Operation Act, 2019] and the constitution, and some communities became aware of their languages. So, the local governments, with the consent of the speech communities, especially through the initiatives taken by Kirat Rai Yayokkha, a social institution for the languages of the Rai group, introduced around a dozen Rai languages as subjects of their mother tongues. Table 3 presents the curriculum in the mother tongue education of the Kirati languages prepared by the CDC and the local governments.

Table 2

Curriculum in the Mother Tongue Education of the Kirati languages

S.N.	Language	CDC	CDC	Local government/Community initiatives
1.	Limbu/Yakthung	1-10	√	
2.	Bantawa	1-8	√	
3.	Chamling	1-8	√	
4.	Kulung	1-5	√	
5.	Khaling	1-5	√	
6.	Thulung	1-3		√
7.	Puma	1-3		√
8.	Nachhiring	1-3		√
9.	Mewahang	1-3		√
10.	Dungmali	1-3		√
11.	Sampang	1-2		√
12.	Dumi	1-2		√
13.	Koyee	1-2		√
14.	Tilung	1		√

Source: Eppele et al. (2012); NSO (2025)

Overall, documentation appears to be substantially stronger than educational implementation. Educational implementation is very poor, whereas literacy production remains limited to the

larger speech communities. Mass media is still underdeveloped, and disparities among the Kirati languages are clearly evident, as they range from sustainable to nearly extinct.

Assessment of the Language Vitality among the Kirati Using EGIDS

Following the EGIDS framework, the Kirati languages were assessed to determine their levels of language vitality. For this purpose, previous studies, particularly sociolinguistic surveys of individual languages and the *Ethnologue*, were consulted. Table 2 presents the levels of language vitality among the Kirati languages.

Table 3

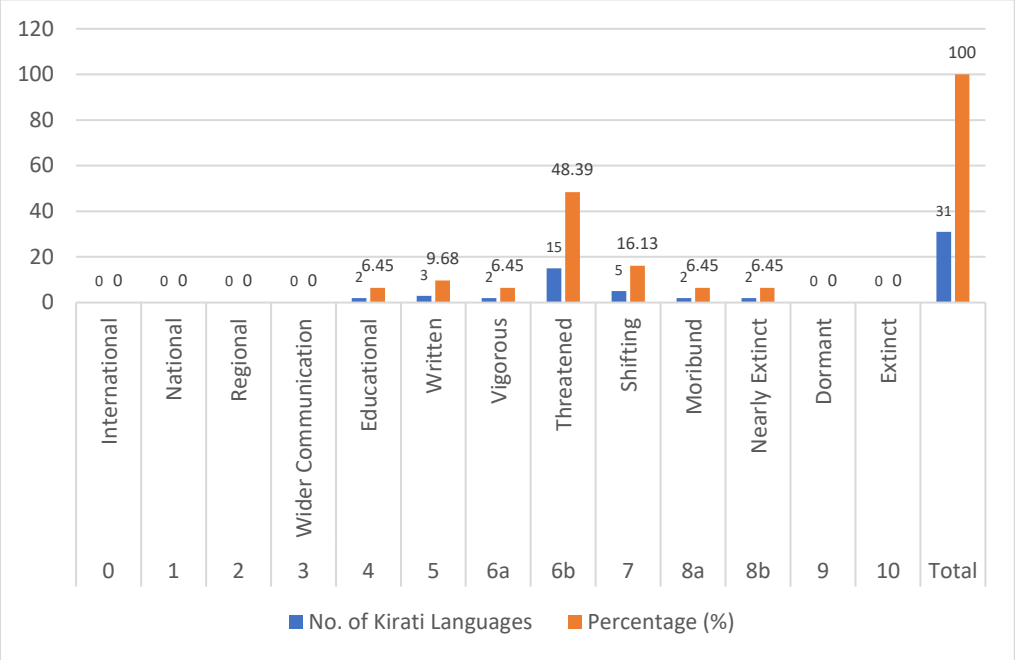
The Assessment of the Kirati Languages using EGIDS

EGIDS Level	Category	Kirati Languages
0	*International*	-
1	*National*	-
2	*Regional*	-
3	*Wider Communication*	-
4	*Educational*	Limbu/Yakthung
5	*Written*	Wambule, Thulung, Khaling
6a	*Vigorous*	Bahing/Bayung, Koyee
6b	*Threatened*	Athpahariya, Belhariya, Chamling, Chhintang, Dungmali, Bantawa, Jerung, Kulung, Yakthung/Limbu, Sunuwar, Lohorung, Sampang, Puma, Yakkha, Yamphu
7	*Shifting*	Hayu, Dumi, Chhulung, Nachhiring, Phangduwali
8a	*Moribund*	Tilung, Chukwa
8b	*Nearly Extinct*	Linkhim [Lungkhim], Sam
9	*Dormant*	-
10	*Extinct*	-

Source: Developed and adapted from the Eberhard et al. (Eds.) (2026)

Figure 2

The Kirati languages in the EGIDS scale



As can be observed in Table 2, the Kirati languages still lack representation of the major categories, national and regional or wider communication, as indicated in EGIDS. However, the Language Commission has recommended Maithili and Yakthung/Limbu as the provincial languages for the full-fledged level, and a few other Kirati languages above 1 percent in the Koshi province have been recommended for partial use in the province. But the language bill in the province has not yet been endorsed in the Province Assembly and yielded to the act.

The findings unpack that the Kirati languages range from EGIDS 4 to EGIDS 8b (nearly extinct). This clearly shows that the Kirati languages have not yet had the opportunity to enter governance, including higher education, mass media, and public administration.

Comparatively, among the Kirati languages, Limbu/Yakthung is at an advanced stage, as it has been taught at the +2 levels of education. Beyond the border of Nepal in Sikkim, India, this language has access to higher education up to the master's and PhD levels. Equally, materials related to literacy and literature, as well as documentation like dictionaries and grammars, are produced in the language. So, the institutional support and the development of the language are more advanced in comparison to the other Kirati languages.

The Kirati languages Wambule, Thulung, and Khaling are included in EGIDS 5 (Developing); that means they are entering the written form and literacy practices. These languages are believed to be in use beyond the home; they may be extended to the mass

media or the schools. Likewise, these languages have maintained sustained intergenerational transmission.

There are only two languages, Bahing/Bayung and Koyee, which stand for EGIDS 6a (Vigorous). This indicates that these languages have been continuing language transmission to their children. Everyday communication is still intact in the languages; however, there is a language shift to a wider communication language, Nepali, via bilingualism to multilingualism.

The Kirati languages, including Athpahariya, Belhare, Chamling, Chintang, Dungmali, Bantawa, Jerung, Kulung, Limbu, Sunuwar, Lohorung, Sampang, Puma, Yakkha, and Yamphu, are classified in the category EGIDS (Threatened). This is the largest number of Kirati languages categorized under this EGIDS. These languages are still used across generations, but there is a declining rate of intergenerational transmission. There is a threat to these languages, whose vitality is not only vulnerable but also losing domains day by day and shifting to Nepali, a wider communication language.

There are about 5 languages under the category of EGIDS 7 (Shifting), namely Hayu, Dumi, Chhulung, Nachhiring, and Phangduwali. These languages seem to have been interrupted in intergenerational transmission. The adults speak this language, while younger generations are inclining towards wider communication, the Nepali language. Unless there are any kinds of revitalization efforts undertaken, this language may disappear soon.

There is still a record of the Chukwa as moribund (nearly) extinct, but this language is no longer. There is no one identified as the speaker of this language. Only Tilung is still in use among a handful of elders[1]. The oldest generation hardly speaks, and the intergenerational transmission of this language has ceased. Lungkim, and Sam are both used interchangeably and also have a few speakers. Lunkghim is originally spoken in the Kerabari village, Ward No. 10 of the Suryadaya Municipality of Ilam District.

In the Ethnologue, Yakkha is listed as Lumba Yakkha, whereas there is Yakkha alone in the census report (NSO, 2021). Yamphu is listed with the other Southern Yamphu as the dialectal variation of the Yamphu language. Muga, belonging to the Rai Kirati subgroup, is not yet identified as a distinct language, as its similar name is in the Mugal of the Mugu district. There is no information about the Sam in the Ethnologue; however, it has been enumerated in the Census 2021.

[1] In the course of the Linguistic Survey of the Tilung language in 2014, the author visited the Tilung-speaking Chyasmitar village, Ward No. 3 of Halesi Tuwachung municipality, Khotang. During the field trip, the author found only 3-4 people who could hardly communicate with each other (Rai, 2014 b).

Intergenerational Language Transmission Based on SLS Reports

Except for a few languages, intergenerational language transmission among the Kirati languages is in crisis. Regmi (2016) indicates, "in the case of Athpahariya, that 'the vitality level of the Athpahariya language is not encouragingly high (p.43)" The Bantawa community, like many other Indigenous communities, is gradually shifting to Nepali, the language of wider communication (LWC) in Nepal (Rai et al., 2016). This trend is reflected in almost all Kirati languages (Rai, 2014a; Rai, 2015, Rai, 2017a; Rai & Tamang, 2017; Regmi, 2016; Rai & Thokar, 2014; Rai, 2024).

One of the reasons for the interruption of intergenerational language transmission in the Kirati communities is the practice of intermarriage, in which marriage across different linguistic groups is culturally accepted. This practice is "very common among Kirati communities, such as between Chamling and Puma speakers and between Chamling and Tilung speakers" (Rai, 2017, b p. 71).

Institutional Support and the Role of the Government

After the Language Commission was formed and recommended the provincial languages and brought them into the act, Koshi Province has remained indifferent over the last five years by not endorsing the act. Under pressure of the speech communities, local governments have been preparing mother tongue curricula, which have hardly been implemented because the local curriculum was simultaneously provisioned by the Curriculum Development Center (Local curriculum and implementation directives, CDC, 2076).

It seems to be very controversial that the Curriculum Development Centre has proposed both mother tongue education as a subject and the local curriculum in the same column with a slash, which means that either one can be taught. In most places, only the local curriculum is preferred and taught without mapping the local language. On the one hand, there is a lack of language policy, and on the other hand, neither the local nor the federal government has been positive towards mother tongue education for a long time. In a few places, through their own initiatives, mother tongue education as a subject is encouragingly being taught with the support of the local government; however, it has now been questioned because the *Rahat* relief quota is being postponed. There is no option to provide mother tongue education under the policy by the government, and the Education Bill at the federal level has not yet been endorsed.

Some local governments have proposed official languages, i.e., in Mangsebung, Laligurans municipality (Rai, 2025), and some other places, but they have not been functionally implemented due to the lack of their recognition by the government. The

Language Commission has recommended the languages that might be operated as official languages in local governments, but only with the approval of the federal government. Therefore, this practice is not only under consideration but is also problematic due to certain recommendations made by the Language Commission (Recommendation about the Official Languages Report, 2078 BS).

Conclusion

This study examined the language vitality levels of the Kirati languages using the EGIDS model. The Kirati languages range from EGIDS 4 to EGIDS 8b (nearly extinct). This indicates that the Kirati languages are still not included in public administration or higher education. There is limited access to the Kirati languages in the mass media. In comparison to the other Kirati languages, Limbu/Yakthung stands more advanced than the others. Limbu/Yakthung is taught in higher education up to the PhD level in Sikkim, India. Except for Limbu/Yakthung, the other Kirati languages, Wambule, Thulung, and Khaling, are classified under EGIDS 5 (Developing). This means that they are entering the written form and literacy practices. There are only two languages, Bahing/Bayung and Koyee, which are categorized under EGIDS 6a (Vigorous). This indicates that these languages have continued intergenerational language transmission to their children. The other languages, namely Athpahariya, Belhare, Chamling, Chintang, Dungmali, Bantawa, Jerung, Kulung, Limbu, Sunuwar, Lohorung, Sampang, Puma, Yakkha, and Yamphu, are classified under EGIDS 6b (Threatened).

This is the largest group of Kirati languages categorized under a single EGIDS level. There are five languages, namely Hayu, Dumi, Chhulung, Nachhiring, and Phangduwali, under EGIDS 7 (Shifting). These languages seem to have experienced interrupted intergenerational language transmission. Adults speak these languages, while the younger generations are inclined towards the wider communication language, Nepali. Tilung and Chukwa are classified as EGIDS 8a (Moribund), while Chukwa is no longer spoken.
The vitality of the Kirati languages needs to be enhanced by increasing the number of speakers through intergenerational language transmission. Equally, there should be expansion of the domains of language use. To achieve these goals, language planning, including corpus planning, status planning, and acquisition planning, should be undertaken. Generally speaking, this requires the implementation of the languages in schools, the media, and official domains, along with proper language documentation.

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Annexes

Table A1

Mother Tongues in the Kirati Languages (NSO 2021)

S.N.	Mother Tongue	Total	Male	Female
	All Mother tongues	29164578	14253551	14911027
1.	Yakthung/Limbu	350436	169889	180547
2.	*Rai	144512	68357	76155
3.	Bantawa	138003	67300	70703
4.	Chamling	89037	43512	45525
5.	Kulung	37912	18713	19199
6.	Sunuwar	32708	16182	16526
7.	Thulung	24,405	12,139	12,266
8.	Sampang	21,597	10,503	11,094
9.	Khaling	16,514	8,274	8,240
10.	Wambule	15,285	7,494	7,791
11.	Bahing/Bayung	14,449	7,099	7,350
12.	Yakkha	14,241	6,946	7,295
13.	Mewahang	7,428	3,730	3,698
14.	Puma	6,763	3,300	3,463
15.	Dumi	8,638	4,265	4,373
16.	Nachhiring	9,906	4,927	4,979
17.	Yamphu/Yamphe	10,744	5,354	5,390
18.	Athpahariya	5,580	2,651	2,929
19.	Dungmali	5,403	2,655	2,748
20.	Koyee	4,152	2,084	2,068
21.	Lohorung	3,884	1,876	2,008
22.	Jero/Jerung	2,817	1,380	1,437
23.	Chhintang	2,564	1,327	1,237
24.	Chhiling	2,011	992	1,019
25.	Tilung	1,969	1,017	952
26.	Hayu/Vayu	1,133	540	593
27.	Lungkhim	702	362	340
28.	Surel	174	89	85
29.	Phangduwali	247	142	105
30.	Belhare	177	84	93
31.	Sam	106	62	44

Source: National Statistics Office 2023

Table A2

The Status of the Language Development

S.N.	Language	Documentation					Literatures				Mass Media			
		Phonemic inventory	Glossary	Dictionary	Sketch Grammar	Descriptive Grammar	Literacy materials	curriculum-textbook	Literatures	Non-fiction	Magazine	FM-Radio	Television	Movies
1.	Yakthung/Limbu	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
2.	Bantawa	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	-	√	√	√	√
3.	Chamling	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	-
4.	Sunuwar	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	-	-
5.	Kulung	√	√	-	√	√	√	-	√	-	√	-	√	-
6.	Thulung	√	√	-	√	√	√	√	√	-	√	-	-	-
7.	Yakkha	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	-	-	-
8.	Sampang	√	√	√	-	-	√	-	√	-	-	-	-	-
9.	Khaling	√	√	√	√	-	√	√	√	√	-	-	-	-
10.	Wambule	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	-	-	-	-	√
11.	Bahing/Bayung	√	√	√	√	√	√	-	√	-	-	-	-	-
12.	Nachhiring	√	√	√	-	-	√	-	√	-	-	-	-	-
13.	Yamphu	√	√	-	-	√	√	-	√	-	-	-	-	-
14.	Dumi	√	√	√	√	√	√	-	√	-	-	-	-	-
15.	Puma	√	√	√	√	√	-	-	√	-	-	-	-	-
16.	Dungmali	√	√	√	√	-	-	-	√	-	-	-	-	-
17.	Athpahariya	√	√	√	√	√	-	-	√	-	-	-	-	-
18.	Mewahang	√	√	√	√	√	√	-	√	-	-	-	-	-
19.	Lohorung	√	√	√	√	-	-	-	√	-	-	-	-	-
20.	Chhintang	√	√	√	√	-	-	-	√	-	-	-	-	-
21.	Chhiling	√	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
22.	Jero/Jerung	√	√	-	-	√	-	-	√	-	-	-	-	-
23.	Hayu	√	√	-	-	√	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
24.	Tilung	√	√	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
25.	Koyee	√	√	√	√	√	-	-	√	-	√	-	-	-
26.	Belhare	√	√	√	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
27.	Phangduwali	√	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
28.	Surel	√	√	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
29.	Lungkhim	√	-	-	√	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
30.	Sam													

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Molung Educational Frontier is a scholarly journal that incorporates articles, book reviews, and research reports. This multidisciplinary journal accepts manuscripts from scholars worldwide that present original studies on themes and issues in the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, applied sciences, education, management, and law, all of which are connected to educational development and social change.

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3. The manuscript should have about 5000 words, which may vary depending on the nature of the topic. But book review articles can be about 2500 words. It should strictly follow the latest version of the APA Manual style sheet/format.
4. It should contain an abstract of 150 - 250 words, including 4-6 keywords, which contains the research topic (what the research is about), research question (what specific questions the researcher wanted to find the answers to), the objective (why this research was conducted and what the outcome of the research might be), methodological approach (how this research was conducted), and the major findings (what is the outcome of this research and how this research is novel).
5. It should be typed in 12-point Times New Roman font with 1 inch on the left margin, 1 inch on the right, 1 inch at the top, and 1 inch at the bottom.
6. The author should submit the complete manuscript in electronic form before the fixed date. Any submission after the deadline shall not be considered for publication in the current volume/number/issue.
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and has not been submitted for publication or published or considered for publication elsewhere.

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Molung Educational Frontier is a scholarly journal that incorporates articles, book reviews, and research reports. This multidisciplinary journal accepts manuscripts from scholars worldwide that present original studies on themes and issues in the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, applied sciences, education, management, and law, all of which are connected to educational development and social change.

Please provide critical comments and suggestions to the article contributor in the margins of the manuscript in track changes mode, as well as at the end of the manuscript you reviewed, following the guidelines below, and respond to each question in summary form at the end.

Title

1. Does the title cover the essence of the topic of research?
2. Does the topic reflect the relevant/genuine issue?

Abstract

1. Does the abstract provide a clear and concise picture of the entire research?
2. Do the keywords clearly reflect the main ideas of the study?

Introduction

1. Does the introduction reflect the concise literature review, research gap, research question(s), aim(s), objective(s), theoretical lens, methodology, findings, and implications of the study precisely?
2. Does it lay the foundation for the entire research?

Methodology

3. Is the methodological approach consistent with the research question(s) and/or hypothesis?
4. Has the researcher developed an appropriate research design – quantitative/ qualitative/ mixed method?

Results/Findings and Discussion/Interpretation

5. Are the results/findings of the study clearly formatted and logically presented?
6. Are they analyzed and interpreted critically?
7. Is the discussion supported by adequate data and a supply of authentic evidence?
8. Is the manuscript written with appropriate citation and referencing?

9. Are the tables, graphs, and charts appropriately presented?
10. Does the study confirm or contradict the existing knowledge and scholarship in light of the proposed theoretical/conceptual approach?

Conclusion and Implication(s)

11. Does the conclusion reflect the essence/thrust of the results/findings of the entire research?
12. Are the research findings fresh and novel? How do they contribute to knowledge and scholarship?

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