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# Welcome Note

## **Dr. Nadia Anwar**

Editor-in-Chief, The Literary Fulcrum

Acting Dean, Institute of Liberal Arts

Artificial Intelligence may control our professional lives but it can never surpass the aesthetics of human imagination. The power of the human mind transcends time and space; and technology, with all its exciting features, may never emulate a single expression sieved out from the reservoir of human emotions. The more I see the havoc done to creative arts and aesthetics by artificially produced content, the more inclined I am to affirm that technology can never replace the flow and finesse of human thought. With this premise, I welcome all our readers to the third issue of The Literary Fulcrum (TLF) that pays tribute to human thought and the hand that carefully documents that thought and encapsulates its essence on the page. Our team has gathered a bunch of roses whose beauty will mesmerise you, whose scent will infatuate you, and whose impression will stay with you in the days to come. Let me stop you no further and invite you along on this imaginative flight with a promise that you will find the endeavours of our novice and experienced writers an unforgettable treat.

# Preface

TLF's journey has been truly remarkable. I have seen it grow from a fledgling to a soaring bird, singing with 'full throated ease', as Keats once said about his beloved nightingale! I am proud to say that TLF 3 has gone a step beyond in giving voice to the restless and palpitating spirits of our young students and is metaphorically a nightingale in its own right! The current edition is a panoramic collection of different literary genres reflective of the students' creative and intellectual aspirations. This edition includes three new sections, 'Memoirs', 'Critical Thinking' and 'Guest Corner' which have been added for the dual purpose of broadening the magazine's domain and catering to the diverse needs of our enthusiastic authors within and beyond UMT. As always, I am grateful to my students who constantly make me proud by contributing generously to TLF, my colleagues who never shy away from giving us their precious poetic pieces, and the guest contributors who chose TLF as a forum of expression. I am also thankful to the entire team of TLF, for their unwavering support in making this edition a breathing reality. Last but not least, I am truly grateful to the Dean, ILA and Editor in Chief, Dr. Nadia Anwar, who has kept the flame burning and is forever giving us 'wings and spurs'.

Happy Reading!

**Sobia Ilyas**

Managing Editor

Head, Centre for Languages

Institute of Liberal Arts



# POETRY



## Mindfulness

By Khadeeja Ayoub

M.Phil, English Literature, Session: 2020-2022

I taught her how to ground herself—  
 in the present  
 "When the world starts to crumble  
 I want you to remember,  
 Your mind has inverted the reality"  
 Take a deep breath,  
 look around  
 and touch something nearby  
 When sensory overload compels you to take flight  
 I want you to resist  
 and amidst all the noise—  
 Find a sound that you like  
 Careless laughter of the youth perhaps  
 Or the sweet sound of the breeze  
 See? The world's going on just fine  
 And you can too  
 Leaving behind the past traumas and future-scares,  
 be mindful of the present wheres.  
 You see? I know the tactics to control the devil inside my skull  
 But perhaps I am a vessel of shallow capacity  
 My mediocre knowledge fears to disappoint the romantic in me  
 "How can love and trauma be reduced to a mere play of some chemicals?"  
 So am I half as present as I ask her to be?  
 Yes, I observe milieu  
 absorb energies  
 and frame beauty



But I also float through past, present and future in seconds  
and carry everywhere, all the spaces that I ever lived  
Ah! I guess I forgot to leave my Aleph in the attic.

### **Love's Way**

By Ali Ashraf

M.A, English, Session: 2019-2021

Have you ever seen  
a burning rose?  
Have you ever seen  
perfect flaws?  
Have you ever walked  
in the sky?  
Have you ever seen  
a fish fly?  
Have you ever kissed  
a heart in pain?  
Have you ever lost  
without a gain?  
Fall in love  
And you will see  
Angels burning  
And demons free.

## Consumerist Dream

By Ali Ashraf

M.A, English, Session: 2019-2021

We are a generation of broken dreams  
brought up and pampered  
by boomers, Gen X, and in between  
we were told lies, sold false hopes,  
and fake dreams.

Cinderella never met her prince  
beauty never tamed the beast.  
Love was just part of the equation  
we were being sold the consumerist dream.

O stranger, behind the screen  
Do you hear my silent screams?  
Do you remember our virtual love?  
when you said "I am yours  
and you are mine"  
and I too had a glimpse of heaven  
when I saw your eyes, the first time.

Yet we weaved the net  
of our virtual dreams  
trips to Ibiza, honeymoon in Bali  
holding hands beside skyscrapers  
screaming "I love you" from the Empire State Building.

Now I feel I had a fall  
My story is the story of Adam  
I fell from bed instead of heaven

and woke from the deep slumber.  
Now I grind my days to earn numbers  
afraid of falling behind due to wasted time  
the time I wasted on you, O stranger behind the screen  
I've been stuck in this virtual space  
this claustrophobic screen of my phone  
this virtual ghost town where you  
ghosted me and left me alone.  
The consumerist dream has come to a complete cycle.

## **Memories**

By Tuba Naeem

BS, English Literature, Session: 2019-2023

Time flies in the blink of an eye  
The imprints of memories cannot die  
The lane to the past is not yet discovered,  
But the memories open the past's forgetful shutters  
The warmth of memories in the cold of winters  
when the fears of the present make you shiver.  
The hands of memories touch you;  
And heal the wounds you are going through.

## Ode to Fire

By Ramisha Javaid

BS, English Literature, Session: 2020-2024

I saw a lady, dancing in beauty,  
In yellow, orange, green and red.  
Brightening the dark with her grace...  
Around whom we were having our bed.  
Cherishing the pleasure and warmth of her,  
Partners in love, head to head.

From ashes she rises, from wood she grows.  
Consistent movement without any pause.  
She takes the hatred but still, for thee...  
Burns the bad memories so thy life flows.  
She has the power to melt the ice,  
Turn into ashes - the raised nose, the lifted brows.

She's resistant at the peak of passion,  
She raises, and raises from the last flame.  
With wildness in nature, with eternity in being,  
She possesses perplexity in her name.  
How will thee make up for the loss?  
Alas! If her fluency ever got tamed.

## Time

By Alishba Amjad

M.Phil, English Literature, Session: 2022-2024

There was a time,  
When everything was fine,  
Parties were accompanied with dine  
Where are those happy days!  
Can they come back in line?

Playing under the trees of pine,  
Vacations and the collection of coins,  
Everyone seemed to be mine  
How innocent were those days!  
When we relied on zodiac signs

The lights of the streets were divine,  
When there was no fear of time,  
Especially at the age of nine  
How can we get those days back?  
Which were straight like a spine.

## Maladaptive Daydreaming

By Fatima-Tuz-Zuhra

BS, English Literature, Session: 2023-2027

Behind the white draperies,  
along the rosy path,  
and under the willow's shadow,  
settles my happy place.  
Decorated with felicitous dreams,  
and awe-striking thoughts.  
With old and wise birds  
that narrate tales  
of the lands they once visited,  
of kings and queens,  
of princes and princesses  
of peasants and townsmen  
of true love, and of burning wrath.  
And they narrate them  
with utmost eloquence, beauty and perfection.  
Sometimes, they slide in jokes about  
Woody the woodpecker in between their solemn anecdotes.  
One jolly fellow he was, they say.  
Why is my happy place, a bunch of birds  
Giving me long and boring lectures?  
Quite eccentric, you might think.

The birds think so too  
But they like my company nonetheless.

You see, I'm still a child  
that longs for the bedtime stories  
my grandma once told me.

But she can't remember any now  
for she's too old, or perhaps she thinks  
"I'm too old to rest my head on her lap  
and let her stroke my hair".

But I can recall the ones I've already been told  
of the woman in the golden wheat field,  
of the giant that kidnapped a princess,  
of love stories that defied the norms.

And I break these tales up and  
glue the parts together to create new ones,  
urging the birds to narrate them to me.

So, through the golden wheat field,  
by the giant's cave  
and in the old town,  
settles my happy place,

The Willow doesn't just give me shade,  
for when the birds are busy,  
sometimes,  
he takes on their story-telling job  
and narrates tales

of Goblins and Ogres that partied nearby,  
of Dwarves and Hobbits,  
that schemed for a dragon's treasure.  
of Pirates and Thieves that set voyage for the elixir of life,  
of lands where the dead toil tirelessly,  
of treasures hidden deep in the Earth's crust.  
The soil tells the Willow about them.  
So, through the Caribbean Sea,  
amid the enchanted waters,  
and on the Lost Island,  
settles my happy place.



## Prayer of a Newborn Child

### (A Response to Sylvia Plath's poem: Prayer Before Birth)

By Tuba Naeem

BS, English Literature, Session: 2019-2023

Now I fled in this world, help me, from the bite of a venomous snake  
The colour of my skin rolls me to bloodshed, trolls me to blunt lies  
Now I have born, heal me. Oh nature! Under the sunrise  
Let the snow dance, trees cheer with me, ocean ease my ache  
This brutal animal dressed me in red and hypnotised my innocence to fake  
Oh god, ignore me, from the sins in which I drowned, took fire from my eyes  
My loved ones betrayed me; children left me in a world full of cries  
The sky curses me, clouds stare at me, and volcanoes start to break  
Now I have spurted like a sun to scratch my fears, to defeat them  
Let us begin this journey hand in hand, forgetting this colour race  
From the depths of the ocean, flowing like waves, nothing can bind me, No!  
Disguised my charm like a desert. Oh! I succeed in making myself a gem  
Free from the fakeness of the world, my shadow will not trace  
Now I am born in this world, let this bird go above the sky, Go!

## Papercut

By Isha Aamir

BS, English Literature, Session: 2020-2024

The Ugly ravishes, unless cloaked  
Enchanting long enough to bear wailing whimper  
Upon a dark pavement,  
Beneath a treacherous moon,  
And broken windows lie layers of human  
Everywhere fine papercuts,  
Of every broken door remain  
The sinking hollow bodies,  
Cold and loud thumping footsteps,  
And metres of heavy rain,  
Engraving enraging  
The breath of the Eery  
Lifeless head  
On the floor of creaking wood  
And dancing cyanide within;  
Green veins of bloody cluster  
And discovered longing's fervent choir  
And disco  
Of doors shut and screams held  
In clots stuck in the throat

Lumps of unwanted sorrow  
Fine papercut!  
The unstoppable pen drooling;  
Over dead fantasies  
And lies of false hope  
Experienced half in pain;  
For mind forgets to stay alive  
Amidst chaos and infliction  
Striding in bad luck  
And murderous afternoons  
In depth of surveillance  
Of every action every step  
Dealt with twice thrice and multiple times  
Over and over and over again  
The nightmares of lost desires  
Once woke pass away  
Non-existent self disregards  
That which disturbs the very soul  
And gives more power to more lying hypocrisy  
The very thought bewilders the soul  
But that of decision and love  
Is faded in fear most  
Of unwanted gut, the truth to be regarded  
Is ghastly admirable, the strength found under the layers

The strength that upholds complexities  
Of human contradictions  
Of somebody fooled,  
And somebody aware  
Crippled pieces of sparkless fear  
Becoming sane and insane all at once,  
Hiding the papercut  
Until a hundred more are found  
On every inch of unattached-attached skin  
But every step of the way darkness surrounds  
my loveable soul and its deserving bones  
In hopes of ravishing sunlight  
To mark my way.

## Porcelain

By Isha Aamir

BS, English Literature, Session: 2020-2024

In poetical summer dreams,

I choose thy heart

With a million streams of butternut trees

And dancing amidst poison ivy

I choose thy heart

In the rich winds of innocence

And in the hands covered in raspberry jam

My porcelain self and I,

Rest in melodies of the flute

And ceramic poetry

In little gardens of woes

And again, I choose thy heart

With dull scars and ill-fated apples

An epidermis to decay

Eyes of the Wind, Air, Water, Earth

Touch mine and thine own heart

Where once star-crosses in union

Today thou art epiphanic

My porcelain self and I,  
Fragile and soulless  
Wait by the well beside thine own gate  
Whereupon I wish on no shooting star  
But an old coin buried  
When I had chosen thy heart.

### **Eyes, Embers, and Echoes**

By Lamiya Siddiqe

BS, Business Information Systems, Session: 2022-2026

In eyes that shield no emotion,  
Withholding no heart-shattering conversation,  
They endeavour to ignite a spark within me,  
Yet I extinguish it with relentless tears.  
The lingering ashes of my memory  
Obscure my once unclouded path,  
A haunting reminder of days gone by.



# ESSAYS



## **Stop This Atrocity**

By Mahmuda Adil

M.Phil, English Literature, Session: 2018-2021

The whole world around us is evolving and is constantly changing for the better, but our education system is still stuck in the same old methods. On the pretext of education, we have created tight compartments and criteria into which the immensely beautiful and intelligent human brain of a child has to cut itself into short bits and pieces in order to be accepted by the 'society'. The worst part is that all these educational institutes, whether they are highly expensive or extremely low cost, other than very few exceptions, are simply hoarding money from parents. The parents, ultimately, have to educate their children themselves.

The insufficient use of modern activity based learning and the ability to cover up reality by an artificially created environment, where it seems actual learning is taking place, is the hallmark of today's educational system. It is very sad to admit that among the 58% of the population which is being educated in Pakistan, approximately 2% might actually be able to use their full potential to become something in life. The rest are just trained to become workers. Our education system was designed by the Britishers to create workers out of this nation so that people from this side of the world can come to their countries and serve them while their own people are being prepared to become leaders of the world. When are we going to open our eyes to this unjustifiable fact? When will our true educators stop wasting their precious minds on this 'donkey-making' system and start amending it.

The increasing pressures must be checked. The vicious cycle of tensions being transferred from the heads of Institutes to the teachers, from the teachers to the students as well as the tensions from parents to their children, sandwiches our children. All these frustrations and negative feelings boil down to disaster. Hundreds of students are bullied every day at various schools. Minor issues are messed up by teenagers and converted into big fights because this is all they learn from their environment. At homes,



especially in joint family systems, family members develop small grudges which become brawls later on. Our children are absorbing everything from their surroundings. The dedicated teachers also come from the same background. They try their level best to keep their personal lives separate from their jobs. We must salute them for their bravery and devotion with which they leave their families to serve our children. These teachers are doing as they are told to do. If the administration of the school is only focusing on advertising its school, then the teachers' feelings are trampled on many times. I have witnessed the helplessness of teachers when they have to leave their job of teaching a class just to take a few selected students to a competition which will be highlighted on the social media and would help the school in increasing its fame.

The skills that we need in our lives have never been taught at schools. If an environment with fewer boundaries is created, the results would be much brighter. The age limits of students in a class must be relaxed. The human mind is not built in measured boxes. The syllabus must not be specific and must not be considered a fixed feature which cannot be surpassed. The understanding that teachers deal with human beings is slowly vanishing, especially from public schools. Marks and examinations must also be made more flexible. There is no need to pressurise the students into learning specific topics. The child must be given a variety of topics to prepare, from which they could move from most interesting to least interesting at their own pace. While the lesson is being conducted, teachers must encourage teamwork and cooperation with less focus on competition. A healthy sense of competition has its benefits but not when it overpowers. If we make 'gaining marks' the aim of our students' lives, I don't think we will be able to achieve the real goal of education.

In my opinion, we must focus on the following few important things that are essential for leading a successful life:

1. A child must be taught how to control one's temper and emotions.
2. There should be separate cupboards, corners or personal areas where children could learn how to keep their belongings organised during a busy day creating a sense of responsibility in the children.

3. Children should be able to have a time-out whenever they want, so that they could learn how to cope with tensions or any kind of pressures developing in their mind.
4. While dealing with others, the importance of honesty and trust must actually be dealt with practically instead of only making the children read, write and learn captions like: 'We must always speak the truth.'

The administration, in most of the well-known schools, give a lot of importance to activity-based learning. This activity-based learning is only possible if a teacher is given around 15-20 children with ample time and appropriate material. In the organisational policies, it is often mentioned that stationery and other material will be provided to the teachers, but most of the time it is not the case. In a 40-minute period with fixed lesson plans for the whole month and a huge number of topics to be delivered, along with a huge amount of notebook checking, there is simply no time for the teacher to be able to have an appropriate activity-based lesson. All the training sessions and workshops are wasted because of the unrealistic deadlines that have to be met by the teachers.

I am writing this essay in the hope that some educators might agree with me and might take some steps towards changing our education system. We need to make it less expensive, more easily available for the majority of the population and make it more relatable to real life situations.

## The Agony

By Rubab Fatima

BS, English Literature, Session: 2020-2024

Do men have some kind of obsession with female bodies? Yes, such is my understanding. Why does every other woman have to go through the dilemma of being gazed at, every day? Only because she is a woman, I presume? Is she not a soul? Does she have a voice or others prefer to speak for them? Though she becomes ignorant towards this gaze, with time, but not in all cases. Sometimes it feels like lightning is piercing through the clouds, and somebody has looked deep into your soul. The discomfort and agony it brings along are merely felt by a woman. Yes, I am talking about the intimidating feeling experienced by women.

It was an Eid lunch with my friends in Gulberg. The rest of the members went home, and Izna and I decided to have tea at McDonald's. It was a beautiful day coming to an end, with a cup of tea. The moment I sat there, three men immediately turned their faces towards me. But I tried to ignore them because it was not happening for the first time, obviously. We were chatting and laughing, having conversations on multiple subjects. It was okay until they started giving me inappropriate smiles and gestures. Those continuous gawky eyes touched my flesh. I told Izna that these men are making me uncomfortable. She said, "It's okay, we're about to leave in a while".

We had our tea, clicked some pictures, and waited for the Uber outside the premises of McDonald's. I did not realise that those men were behind me and they were observing my actions. I sat in the rickshaw along with Izna, and there she asked me, "*Wo teeno larkey iss black gari me hain?*" (Are those three men in that black car?). My heart palpitated. I said, "What, I'd have to get down in the middle of the road, if they did something". She assured me that nothing will happen. I've never been so scared travelling alone in Ubers; the driver was a middle-aged man, and multiple spooky ideas started appearing in my mind. I could not contemplate how to protect myself. It's Pakistan; the men could easily hit the driver and take me along. Then what?

The car was following us and meanwhile delusional thoughts were taking my breath away. Then Izna said, "*Bs yhin rok dai*". The car also stopped ahead of us, and she pointed towards the car and gave me a trepidatious smile. The vehicle moved, I called Izna to take the first Rikshaw coming. She had already taken one, and after asking about the car, she informed me that it was behind me. Another fit of palpitation. We moved and I felt that the following car had lost us. A sigh of relief. But what about the agony and discomfort it had caused me? The feeling of being unwantedly, wanted. To whom can I complain? No one, because it happens with everyone. If I tell this to my parents, they will be fretful, because I have to travel alone during my university days.

It is not just me falling prey to these intrinsic pleasures, which Sigmund Freud calls "id". There are many other women, who become food for their malicious souls, an object for their temporal joys. I always contemplated how society can blame a girl wearing Western attire and becoming a sight for such men. Sometimes, I agree with this. But, I soon contradict myself when I see a child being molested by an elderly man; a young girl child of 2-3 years cannot be held responsible for wearing Western outfits. This stereotypical ideology broke, when I felt harassed even though I wear a Hijab. As Helen Cixous mentions in her essay "The Laugh of Medusa", it's not women who lack, it's them (men). Therefore, men around the world should decipher what is wrong.

I also agree that not all men are to be held delinquents of this crime. Some men have great respect and reverence for women, which is reflected by their gestures. I once was travelling with a friend from university, and we got stuck in bad traffic, due to some political rallies. The Uber driver made sure that we reached home safely; he drove for 2 hours, navigating through different roads to our homes. He didn't charge us more than the fare mentioned, but my parents gave him extra because he made me reach home, safe and sound. Another example is of a Rickshaw driver, approximately the age of my uncle, who drove me home. Suddenly he stopped near a fruit hawker to buy some strawberries. He took them out in his hands and asked me if I wanted to have some. This kind gesture has remained in my heart.

Frank Herbert in *Chapterhouse: Dune*, says, "Seek freedom and become captive of your desires. Seek discipline and find your liberty". An ideology that every other

human being should apply to become a better person. A person acquiring freedom and liberty often forgets the roots and learning of their households. Being a liberated man or woman doesn't mean that you cross your ethical and moral constructs to fulfil your inclinations and desires. Liberty and freedom of expression ought to have integrity and discipline. The men intimidate women, anticipate their wild desires and pleasures, and fail to think of themselves as respected fathers, brothers, and sons. They can't intimidate a woman, by exhibiting a luxurious phone or a car. Instead, it causes agony.

While on a shopping spree, to a local market, the discomfort of a bad touch frightens me. I always cringe while passing by a man. I am reminded of my cousin's wedding. I was standing on the stage looking at the *rasams* (customs) happening. Someone grabbed my lower back. I immediately turned back, there was no one. It felt as if I had haphephobia, an anxious disorder and fear of being touched. I wanted to forget that moment and hated myself. How can I not protect myself? Who was it, I had no clue. Men who harass and intimidate women have no clue what mental distress it gives them. That single touch can become a dark everlasting memory.

Despite the fear of being touched, a single flirtatious sight can be haunting for a woman. She knows which man is looking at her, and with what intention. Sometimes, you question yourself. Was I looking back at those men, or did their confidence elevated because I looked back? But we all know, this does not happen all the time. I consciously restrict myself, to not look at them. So that I cannot be blamed. It happens because people point at your character rather than questioning their (men's) actions. Therefore, I am unable to find ways to overcome this dilemma. How far can a woman restrain herself?

No feminine movement can bring a change unless every man contemplates and rectifies his actions. Men should seek guidance from their own gender, from those (men) who are inclined to be consciously respectful towards women. A little change in oneself can make things better. So, I request men not to let the unconscious overpower their conscious self. You can be a positive force in a woman's world.



# MEMOIRS



## Whispers in the Wind

By Momina Arif

BS, English Literature, Session: 2020-2024

“No no no, God please don’t let this happen! Not now, not yet,” my mind screamed repeatedly as I sat there on the bed beside my nano’s breathless body, clawing my nails into my skin in disbelief and distress. My mother and my *mamu* along with my brothers and I had all gathered in the room while the doctor searched for a heartbeat with his stethoscope.

“I’m sorry. She’s no more.”

The words pierced through us like lightning through clouds. My mom held my nano’s hand and buried her face in her chest, shut her eyes and let out a moan. My *mamu* standing all alone near the table stared at his lifeless mother and let his tears flow silently, his expressions stern. It seemed as if he was looking at something beyond her, to a dismal land faraway. Sometimes I pity men for not being able to express their sorrowful emotions openly. My mother’s sobs intensified while I sat there numb, trying to absorb what had just befallen us. After a while, my mom pulled her face up and her eyes met mine. Looking at my terrified face, she tried to get hold of herself. She opened up her arms, called me to her and pulled me in. I finally let out a tear.

Relatives and neighbours were informed of my *nano*’s demise and they began arriving one after the other. My father was living in Pakpattan at the time due to his job. I called him and told him to reach Lahore immediately. By evening, the house was filled with people and every corner echoed with wails.

*Nano* was bathed, wrapped in a clean white cloth and laden with perfume by my mom and a few other women. She was placed in the centre of the room in a casket. Everyone sat surrounding the body and recited the Quran-e-Pak. Tents were put up in the veranda and my *mamu* had food delivered to the house. I found it painfully weird to serve the guests food instead of praying for my nano’s departed soul but I knew I had to do as I was told. Although the ten-year-old in me was too naive to process all the

emotions I was seeing and going through, I did not expect my mother to comfort me. Rather, I wanted her to find strength and comfort in me. She had lost her mother. I knew she was in unimaginable pain.

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My *nano* was a strict parent, especially to my mother since she was the eldest daughter of the family but she was also the child my nano was the closest to. My mother was in eighth grade when my *nano* laid most of the responsibilities of the house on her shoulders. Luckily, my mother treated me the exact opposite. She wanted to give me all the comfort she could not enjoy as a child.

*Nano* was a fair-skinned woman with naturally blemished cheeks. Her eyes, the shape of an almond, were perfectly placed on her round face. She had wavy black hair with some streaks of grey, always tied in a braid which fell just a little above her knees. With a rather sharp tongue but kind at heart, she was the perfect kashmiri woman. *Nano* was a disciplined woman who held her principles closer than anything else.

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*Nano's* advancing age made her develop obesity which made it hard for her to walk. As a child, I often used to closely walk behind her, mimicking her walk. Rather than getting angry, she would laugh with me and slap my cheek playfully. *Nano's* temper kept me at bay but I liked to have my moments of mischief with her.

The difficulty she had walking did not stand between her and her household chores. She did all the work herself including cooking, cleaning and washing clothes. Despite being heavy weight, she was an extremely active woman. She had not an ounce of laziness in her. My cousins and I would often get scolded by her for playing and running around the house, but we laughed it off. Interestingly, so did she and quite lovingly. *Nano* always took care of all those around her.

Ever since my *nana jaan* passed away, I laid down next to *nano* to listen to bedtime stories and get head scrubs from her. Every night she told the same story but started laughing hysterically in the middle because apparently, the Punjabi dialogues between the parrots were too funny. I failed to see it but her laugh always made me



laugh. After she finished laughing, she would ask me to sleep and close her eyes to doze off too. I never came to know how the story ended.

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One fine day, she was making her way back to her bed from the bathroom when she suddenly realised she could not take another step. Her legs felt lifeless. She shouted for help and I ran to her. She asked me to call my *mamu* or else she would fall. I could not understand her and spread out my hand for her to grab it. She held the door tightly, gaining support from it to stand and refused to hold my hand. She yelled at me one last time to call my *mamu* before completely falling down a few seconds later. My mom and my *mamu* ran to the rescue. I brought a chair for her as they struggled to lift her up. I stood there helplessly not knowing how to be of any help. I felt stupid for not doing the right thing when I was asked to. Perhaps if I had called my *mamu* earlier, *nano* would not have fallen down. I tried lifting her up but I was only nine. After a great deal of difficulty, she was elevated enough to be seated on the chair. That was the last day she walked on her own.

*Nano* underwent multiple medical procedures due to her increasingly ill health. Once she suffered a heart attack while undergoing medical treatment. She was put on a ventilator. Her heart kept beating but she remained unconscious for days. Doctors told us that she was practically not alive but she gained consciousness. The doctors called it a miraculous recovery.

I went to the hospital once to meet her. She had tubes inserted down her throat so she could not speak. She conversed with us by writing down words on paper. I was worriedly looking at her through the glass door when she gestured for me to come in. I did not know how to act around her. She seemed a completely different person while intubated. She looked so weak. She could not scold me. It hurt me to see her like that.

Her illness affected her mental health as well. Seeing her health gradually deteriorate was hard, especially for mama. She became bed-ridden and mama used to look after her. *Nano* hated it. A woman of her energy was limited to bed; she just wanted to stand up for once but her legs failed to comply.

As I grew up, her sickness became a norm for us. I sometimes grew annoyed by her. I was watching a TV show once and she wanted to talk to me. I grew flustered that she was talking in between the show and decided to ignore her.

She hurtfully said:

“Looks like Momina does not want to talk to me.”

I looked at her irritated not because she was wrong, but because she was impolite enough to say that aloud. She looked away sadly and did not look at me again. I shifted my eyes back to the TV show. After the show was over, I felt bad and wanted to tell her that but she had fallen asleep. I never mentioned it again to her but I knew she was displeased with me.

Before I could get a chance to say sorry, she passed away leaving me regretful. I just needed a little more time and courage to go up to her and tell her I was ashamed of my behaviour, but she was always cruel like that. She did not wait for me and left silently in her sleep. If I had a clue that time was running out, I would have gone to her. Why did you do that *nano*? The wind still whispers to me my forgotten regrets. I wish *nano* would forgive me so I could silence the wind.

There is often a voice in me which tells me, “You were only ten then.” I like to think it is *nano* telling me that she has forgiven me.

## My Fairy God-Mother

By Eman Aslam Khan

BS, English Literature, Session: 2020-2024

What is the best thing about living on the first floor? One might wonder but for me it was the tree that touched the walls of my house. I was able to enjoy the guavas it bore, little me would steal without any shame or sense of guilt. I don't recall letting them grow to their full size. I wasn't patient enough. I was taught not to waste food; hence, whatever was plucked from the tree would become that day's feast even if it was bitter. That guava tree was in my neighbour's house, where a fragile old aunty lived along with her married son. She adored me and whenever her students used to get done with their studies, they would go to the back lawn, to get some fresh guavas and if I ever protested to join them, aunty would say:

*"Eman ap idr hi raho, unko krnay do mehnat."*

I didn't like being left behind but, being the smallest of them all, I used to earn the sliced guavas in a bowl that I believe my fairy godmother cut for me and that was the supremacy of being a child.

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*Sar pe khajoor ka darkht bnaya huva hai?*

*Ye moo pe pakora laga huva hai?*

(pointing out at my nose)

She used to ask me these questions with the brightest smile on her face and I used to look at her and never reply. She was my first best friend and I am pretty sure she knew me before I was born. Just like a child recognizes their mother, it was no different for me when it came to Ashi *phupho*. She used to wear a hijab along with the brightest smile across her face and I vividly remember her cheek dimple which made her look more beautiful. I looked up to her literally and metaphorically. She was married to Ali uncle who was the son of "aunty". At least that is what my understanding was about that "perfect little family."

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I was a child and only when my cousin paid a visit to his grandmother on vacation from Rawalpindi, I felt I was a girl and inferior to him. I preferred being at *phupho's* place in such times because I was celebrated there. Eid held more significance for me than my own birthday and there was some connection of *meethi* eid and shopkeepers having gun toys for that specific time in their shops. I loved playing with guns, the only issue was my strength which was never enough to load a gun to fire. I recall running to Ashi *phupho* to load it every-time. She was sitting in her drawing room on a sofa which was right next to the door; where all of her guests were gathered to celebrate Eid, yet she didn't refuse my request for once. She just told me after loading it for five to eight times that her arm was hurting but I don't remember if I was considerate enough to stop there. She was a kind hearted woman.

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I wasn't the brightest student and I was never good with spellings either. Those who truly wish you well would push you to gain knowledge. Ashi *phupho* was no different. She quizzed me randomly one day and asked me the spelling of "shoes." I was embarrassed for not knowing it and left her house immediately. Some days later, I guess it was just another day when I was forced to go to school. I peeked into a class passing by the corridor and to my surprise Ashi *phupho* was there. I went to my class laughing with happiness as she saw me too and smiled. I told my friends that my *phupho* was there, she would be teaching us and how good a person she was. I got promoted in the first grade and she started teaching my class "*Shoshal studies*." I was told by my friends that she could not be my "real" *phupho* if she wasn't the sister of my father. Such binary was an alien concept for me and it stayed that way because I was simply not willing to accept it. She was my *phupho* and nothing could change that. I became her student even then I was unable to call her teacher/ma'am.

Once she was taking my class's written spelling quiz on white board and I was well prepared for it. One after another students stood up and wrote the words they were told. I was so excited for my turn but just before my turn when I almost stood up, the bell

rang. I was willing to stay back as I was confident, I knew all the spellings but it didn't make any difference. Another time she was having an oral quiz and I stayed close to her to know the questions she was asking other students so when my turn came, I would have my moments of stardom by giving the answers fluently. Unfortunately, on my turn she changed her questions. I felt violated. How could she just do that? Well, she was my teacher and she held the power and my "masterplan" failed in the most obnoxious way possible.

On the front gate, I saw my mother and Ashi *phupho* chatting and as I joined them, the first thing I heard was "she is usually standing in my class" and the reply was "I am glad you have communicated this on time." At that moment, I realised why my sister always stopped me from telling my mother what her Arabic teacher had to say about her progress. My teacher was my neighbour and my older sister's teacher was my mother's class-fellow once. Nothing could have gone worse at that point.

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"He called to let her know that he has put the paper aside after writing *Talak* thrice." I overheard someone discussing Ashi *phupho* and Ali uncle's conversation. "When asked, why did he do it? he replied, I don't know how it happened." I might have wondered at that time what it meant but I failed to pay much heed to it. Maybe, in my mind I was thinking it was something that didn't concern me. So, I should not worry about it either. It was much later when I realised that I stopped seeing *phupho* around. She stopped coming to school or to see me. She left... that's a thing? People leave too? I was okay with all the complaints she had from her student at this point. I would have tried improving myself too. I never wished her to leave. That divorce took my friend, my fairy godmother away from me. Tragedies happen to innocent children as well? Tragedy happened to my fairy godmother?

*Phupho* left and Ali uncle left too, his mother gifted her house to one of her nephews. Aunty had no biological children, it was much later revealed to me. Maybe there was "no perfect little family" either. It was just them living seemingly normal lives.

## Destiny, Faith and Rebirth

By Rubab Fatima

BS, English Literature, Session: 2020-2024

The winter blues had eventually left their streaks of dismay and sorrow when the doctor gave no other option than LIVER TRANSPLANT. What even was that? A strange medical word that had dropped into my ears. An 18-year girl could hardly imagine the huge process it takes. The only phrase I could hear from my mother was: "*Kahan se ayegyn itny paisy, we've no saving, and the donor, kaise hoga sb*".

But the doctors gave us no other choice; we had to start looking for the best doctors and hospitals in Pakistan because a period of only THREE MONTHS was in our hands. The most important aspect was money, as it is a life redeemer, you know money runs Pakistan. The critical part more than that was to find a donor, the person who could donate a part of his liver to my father. We kids didn't match the required blood group and had to search for someone within the family because no outsider could give this life-saving favour to us.

Listening to this news, your ultimate support and strength, the person who doesn't say anything but fulfils your desires, his presence is what you desire and look for. This unsaid relation is what you've with your father, I call Baba. Multiple distressing thoughts started popping up in my head. You all can relate to the feeling of losing your beloved father; this is what I was going through. I couldn't express this to my family, it was the time to be strong.

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At the time, we lived in Karachi, and the carelessly administered medications of doctors had caused severe destruction in his body. It was accelerating the disease and the liver began to decay. We were running through an intense financial crisis; baba lost his job due to his illness, and his family called us to Lahore. Coming to Lahore was the most mindful decision; it helped us as a family to heal. It revealed people's true

intentions. There were ones who stood by us, and there were those who created further difficulties with their actions and words.

The donor came like a blessing to us. I clearly remember, being at a family gathering at my Khalas place and the son of my mother's cousin, himself, expressed his desire to donate. We were extremely grateful and relieved, but the concern about money still remained.

Though it was still some time until spring, things had started rejuvenating, sprouting leaves and buds indicated the ray of happiness in our lives. Yet again, at a family wedding, the questions from the relatives left tears in mama's eyes. Her three cousins, living in the UK, put forward their monetary donations. Each of them gave twenty lac rupees. A huge relief. But the expense was more than eighty lac rupees. My mind questioned, "*Ab woh kahan se aygen*". Still, it seemed that God had already decided to give him a new life, for us, for our family. Then we started searching for a hospital and we were recommended to visit Shifa international hospital in Islamabad. The hospital was good enough to rely upon. The next stage was to search for a furnished home because the liver transplant has its requirements, and none of my relatives lived there. So my cousins on their own finalised a residence for a period of three months.

We did not have anything in our pockets but my baba's friend generously funded us. Where was the money coming from, I had no idea. He was in textiles since he started his career, the whole of the textile industry, at least I can say pitched in. So, it wasn't a transplant but a miracle, which took place in this chaotic world.

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The process started in the 2018 and then in the Summer of 2019, things were finalised, the residence, the money, the hospital, and the donor. My parents had left for Islamabad, leaving me with *khala*. We were supposed to leave the next day early in the morning with my cousin by road. The surgery was to be after two days. When we reached there, the house was full of people. All the close relatives were there to stand by us. Baba was admitted to the hospital for checkups a day before the transplant. Sitting on a chair, among my family, the fear of losing him pierced my heart. And that

was the time I opened up my vulnerable side in front of the world. I cried. Wept. Felt dismayed. My *Taya* said, "*Mujhe nahi pata tha aap bhi rotii ho*"

How can I not? My biggest fear is losing my family. The whole night we prayed and made *duas* and left 3 at night. Crying the whole way to the hospital, my cousin's husband told me that life and death are in the Almighty's hands. It relied on his willpower and how strong he would respond.

I reached the room, he was prepared and unconscious. Everybody there said, "*Mil lo*". And there a girl busted out with emotions hugging her father. And then he said "*Apny tou meri himmt hi tordl*". This cannot be put into words, ineffable.

It was a long surgery, 8 hours. In the middle of it, the doctor called my mother. A beat dropped. My *Taya* went along. There they showed them the rotten liver, as evidence. Mama narrates that *Taya* went immediately to *Sajda*, as the doctor told them everything was alright.

The surgery was successful, the doctor left the operation theatre, then came to the donor lying on a bed with multiple machines attached to him. It was painful seeing him. The pain had increased when Baba came out in the same condition. Then it was painful, now it seems to be a scene from a drama. He was kept in ICU for two days, under strict observation, as liver transplant patients have chances of coma if they're diabetic and have hypertension. When I visited him, he waved at me from the glass room.

He was kept in the hospital for a few days. Then the day came, he had to come home. The doctor advised us to have perfect hygiene, less social connection, and caution in food. We cleaned up his room with detergent and felt excited and charged about the words of caution.

We came back to Lahore and many took care of us. It took him 3 long months to return to Lahore. We had waited for that day, to see him home, healthy. Unfortunately, it was my college that day but it was the happiest day after a long time. He came back wearing a white *shalwar kameez*. His hair had grown silver and he had lost a lot of weight, yet the hope was sparkling in his eyes. He had defeated the disease, with his strong willpower and faith in the Almighty. He had to return. Baba was home with us.





# CRITICAL THINKING

## Tracing *Foucault's* Power Dynamics in Charles Yu's *Interior Chinatown*

By Saba Naveed

M.Phil, English Literature, Session: 2023-2025

### Abstract

This article aims to explore the power dynamics in *Interior Chinatown* by Charles Yu with a specific emphasis on Michel Foucault's theoretical framework. This novel seeks to identify the aspects of alienation and disconnectivity of the Generic Man in American Culture and the discourse on the implications of power. Yu presents Asian American experiences by discussing the themes of assimilations and distorted identities. Relying on Foucault's power relations and restraint contraption, this article will elucidate how the concept of power, discourse and panopticon operates at social, cultural and institutional levels. This analysis will shed light on how these power relations dominate and dictate the lives of the characters in the novel and how this contributed to the perpetuation and construction of racial conventionalized mentality and hierarchies of society.

**Keywords:** power dynamics, racial mentality, generic man, disconnectivity, discourse, alienation

### Introduction:

This article embraces different elements of postmodernism and explores various themes of misleading identities, the human race and power dynamics in the light of Michel Foucault's theoretical framework on power dynamics. This section provides an extensive explanation of Foucault's concept of power, including disciplinary power, power relations and the panopticon. It evaluates Foucault's ideas on the construction and canon of knowledge, the functioning of power through discourses, and the consequences of surveillance and personalised control. This paper scrutinises the racial stereotypes, pressures, and the hierarchical constructions that shape the lives of the

characters. The analysis highlights how this power operates within a social structure such as Hollywood, media, and immigration centres, affecting the agency and identities of Asian Americans.

Foucault's theory stressed how power is employed in society and how it shapes individual perspicacity. He observes that power is not simply a bureaucratic force exercised by a presiding authority but is broadcasted throughout practices and social institutions. The concept of power is mirrored in *Interior Chinatown* through its criticism of racial stereotypes and the ways the characters preserve power imbalances.

### **Power Dynamics:**

*Interior Chinatown* by Charles Yu traverses power dynamics and the experiences of Asian Americans in modern society. The book presents a sarcastic yet impressive narrative that fishes into themes of assimilation, identity, and the struggle for organisation within a racialized society. The story limelights Willis Wu, a Chinese American actor who yearns to escape from the stereotypical roles assigned to him in Hollywood. Set in the backdrop of "Chinatown," a fictionalised category of Chinatown in the capital American city, the novel utilised the television industry as a metaphor for broader society.

The main aspects of power inspected in the book are the prevalence, penetration and restricting nature of racial stereotypes. Willis Wu the protagonist, like many other Asian American actors, is cast as a Generic Asian man or as a Grumpy or Silly Eastern/Oriental Male. This typical representation fortifies the notion that Asian Americans are eternal foreigners or eternal outsiders, thus reducing their opportunities for more significant and complex roles. Through Willis' expedition, this book spotlights the power dynamics ingrained in the industry of entertainment, where actors of Asian ancestry are often marginalised and victimised by racially discriminatory stereotypes.

Moreover, *Interior Chinatown* inquires into the dynamics of power within communities and families. This novel elaborates on the divide between Willis' parents,

who have accepted their limited roles and assimilated themselves into American society, and Willis' longings for a perfect life. It sheds light on the embodied racism and self-perception of an individual created within marginalised societies and communities, as individuals combat their place in society.

This novel also demonstrates power dynamics between different ethnic and racial groups. In the fabricated Chinatown, there is a clear sign of authority and hierarchy exhibited by white men dominating the positions of power and influence, while Asian Americans are reduced to supporting roles or demeaned positions. This brutal portrayal reflects broader societal power disproportion and the difficulties faced by Asian Americans in steering and challenging these structures. Overall, *Interior Chinatown* discusses power dynamics through its observation of racial stereotypes, larger societal structures and family dynamics that paint the experiences of Asian Americans. By engaging a satirical lens, Charles Yu explicates these issues and invites readers to critically reflect on the ambiguities of power and identity in modern society.

### **Discourse and Power:**

This section interrogates the role of discourse in this novel and how this contributes to the drilling of power. It examines the rambling practices that affect the character's social positioning and self-perception, foregrounding how narratives and language reinforce power imbalances. Discourse mentions how communication and language shape and mirror social reality. It plays a remarkable role in *Interior Chinatown* as the characters struggle with the governing discourses that border them. In the novel, the discourse encompassing Chinatown sustains stereotypes and fortifies the marginalisation of its occupants. Power dynamics are complicatedly connected to discourse. Dominant narratives are often controlled by those who hold power, certain groups or individuals shaping the society's rules.

In "*Interior Chinatown*," power has been investigated through the lens of racist stereotypes and the racial roles that Asian Americans are often limited to in popular

culture. The protagonist, Willis Wu, is a "Generic Asian Man" who aspires to escape from the imprisonment of his role as an extra character in a popular TV show. He envisions becoming a "Kung Fu Guy" and moving upward on the ladder of success. Willis struggles against the constraints imposed on him by society and the film industry. Through this novel, Yu highlights the way power structures are validated and propagated. The characters in *Interior Chinatown* are caught in a cyclic motion of minimal roles and stereotypes that disempowers their agency and restricts their chances for self-expression. Power dynamics in the novel are reflected in the real-life experiences of many rejected and marginalised communities, where individuals have to negotiate oppressive systems and stereotypes to recover their agency and status. Yu's novel educates us with a critical evaluation of how this discourse and power bisect to shape the lives of marginalised communities. By highlighting the struggles faced by Asian Americans and giving different connotations to stereotypes, *Interior Chinatown* invites readers to critically evaluate the dominant narratives that govern inequality and marginalisation in society.

### **Panopticon:**

The concept of Panopticon had been coined by the philosopher "Jeremy Bentham" in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is a conjectural prison design that engages a central watchtower surrounded by cells, authorising a single observer to monitor all the prisoners without their knowledge that they are being watched all the time. This prison design creates a sense of continuous surveillance and authoritative control. Even if the observer is not present there, the feeling of being observed will remain. The Panopticon is presented as a symbol for the wider concept of surveillance in society, and spotlights the power dynamics and disciplinary mechanisms that develop from constant observation.

In this panoptic system, the knowledge that one is under surveillance at any time leads to self-activation and accordance with societal norms. Surveillance, both digital and physical, has become increasingly prevailing in the modern world. Technological

development has made it easier to store, analyse and collect extensive amounts of data on individuals, directing to concerns about privacy, power imbalance and freedom. In the presence of surveillance, the Panopticon is repeatedly invoked to talk about the dynamics between those who observe and those who have been observed. The continual possibility of being watched can impact behaviour and create a structure of social control. This notion of surveillance highlights questions about individual self-determination, power structures, and the influence on personal freedom.

Sketching on Foucault's concept of the panopticon, the section explores the prevalent surveillance and personalised dominance experienced by the characters in *Interior Chinatown*. It inspects how the character's behaviour is shaped by the continuous presence of surveillance and the fear of being scrutinised, donating to their accordance with societal norms and expectations. Examples of present-day surveillance systems that pull out the contrast with the Panopticon include closed-circuit television CCTV networks, government inspection programs, monitoring of social media, and tech companies for data collection. These systems are used for numerous purposes, such as criminal investigation, national security, crime prevention or targeted advertisement, but they also raise some ethical concerns related to consent, privacy and the possibility for abuse. The Panopticon and surveillance concepts are frequently discussed in relation to power, as scrutiny is often waged by those in authoritative positions to maintain and obtain control and utilise influence. The imbalance of power between the observer and the one who is observed can lead to inequality and possible abuses if not properly regulated. In conclusion, the Panopticon targets the dynamics of power, self-regulation and control that arise from constant observation. As monitoring technologies continue to advance, it is mandatory to arrest people in critical discussions about their intimidating impact on individual freedom, privacy and the balance of power in societies.

### **Resistance and Agency:**

This section examines the hazard of resistance and agency within the frame of power structures depicted in the novel. It explores instances of individual and

cooperative resistance by the characters, pointing out their attempts to challenge and destabilise dominant power associations. Willis Wu personifies themes of resistance and agency in the face of the limitations imposed upon by society and stereotypes. Willis is a "Generic Man," playing insignificant, stereotypical roles as an extra on a popular TV show set in Chinatown. Resistance is noticeable in Willis's ambitions and dreams. Despite being restricted to limited roles, he refuses to accept the state of affairs and dreams of becoming a "Kung Fu Guy," a more authorised and significant character. Willis's service is displayed through his attempts to declare his individuality and question the domination of the narrative surrounding Asian Americans. There was no contentment for him while simply conforming to the expectations set for him. He actively seeks opportunities to prove himself and shape his own identity. He gives many auditions for acting, attempting to redesign his role and push against the hindrances and limitations imposed on him by the film industry. As the story moves forwards, Willis's resistance and agency become more prominent. He starts questioning the ethnic stereotypes continued by the entertainment industry and squares up the systemic biases that maintain these stereotypes. He challenges the power structures through his actions that imprison him and seeks to create space for his genuine voice. Willis's expedition highlights the intricacies of resistance and agency within a system that continues stereotypes and marginalisation. It discusses the hardships faced in navigating a brutal environment while trying to maintain sight of individuality and agency. *Interior Chinatown* provides a critique of the hurdles, limitations and stereotypes suffered by Asian Americans in Western society, and through Willis Wu's character the writer represents the internal and external battles they must confront. By concretizing resistance and agency, Willis becomes a sign of resilience, empowerment, and self-sufficiency in the face of oppressive structures.

**Conclusion:**

By registering to Foucault's theoretical structure this analysis illustrates how power and discourse traverse to shape the lives of marginalised people and communities. The discourse of domination surrounding Chinatown in the novel

preserves stereotypes and imposes marginalisation on its inhabitants. Those in authoritative positions control the discourse and limit the business or influence of individuals like Willis. However, Willis's character typifies resistance and agency in the face of these hindrances and limitations. He dreams of breaking free from stereotypical roles, actively challenges prescriptions, and seeks opportunities to imbed his individuality. His voyage in this big ocean highlights the complexities of steering an oppressive environment while attempting for self-reliance and the declaration of one's voice. Through Willis's story and application of Michel Foucault's theory of power, this research invites readers to critically evaluate and examine the dominant narratives and power structures that extend imbalance state and marginalisation. It indicates the importance of resistance in oppressive systems and advocates agency as a means to challenge and amend societal norms.

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## **The Study of the Rebuttal of Grand Narratives and Norms in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things***

By Bisma Amjad

M.Phil, English Literature, Session: 2023-2025

Arundhati Roy, a prominent Indian novelist, and social activist, is a notable postmodern novelist and an award-winning author of the novel *The God of Small Things* (1997) followed by *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017). She is well known for her significant societal approaches towards gender identities, power, capitalism, nationalism, urbanisation, social hierarchy, resilience, subversion of conventional norms, and hope. She raises a reformative voice against discrimination for the rights of lower castes, transgender, outcasts, and other marginalised individuals.

The widely acclaimed semi-autobiographical debut novel *The God of Small Things* represents the forbidden love and laws set by society and social discrimination related to the Syrian Christian family in Ayemenem. Both fictional novels of Roy embrace the postmodern techniques of disjointed narrative, intersexuality, irony, parody, pastiche, among others. She has also penned non-fictional books that mainly focus on various aspects of society. She wrote *The God of Small Things* in a form of fragmented narrative. In an interview conducted in October 1997, she says "It was all just coming out of me like smoke I suppose and I kept putting it down". The novel represents different chronological times through the recollection of Rahel's memories. Roy has criticised social, moral, religious, and political values that were once considered great but now have lost their credibility. The narrator also conveys that the world is not really controlled by Marxism, Christianity, or Coca-Cola but by the "God of Loss"; it is the loss and falling away, rather than grand narratives that promise us our humanity (Airaudi 19). Ammu and her children exhibit the function of "Subversive liminars" to protect themselves from caste, religion, and gender (Froula 39). The epigraph "[n]ever again

will a single story be told as though it's the only one" of the novel is itself open to multiple interpretations. It highlights Lyotard's suspicion towards metanarratives (Jani 54). Roy has portrayed Ammu's liminality in her "Unmixable mix" (Roy 304) which highlights the doubts about absolutism. This article is a qualitative study of *The God of Small Things* and uses Jean Lyotard's concept of "Incredulity towards metanarratives" (25). It aims to look at the postmodern society represented in the novel and destabilise the idea of absolute values.

Postmodernism is the age of rejection of absolute narrative and acceptance of plurality and discontinuity of history. It refutes the concept of certainty and stable ideologies. Jean Francois Lyotard defines postmodernism as "incredulity towards metanarratives" in his book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (25). Metanarratives are grand narratives that totalize and legitimise knowledge. He says the narrative function loses its heroes, dangers, voyages, and goals (25). In the postmodern, postindustrial, and technologically advanced age, "the grand narrative has lost its credibility" (Lyotard 64). He describes two kinds of knowledge, "Scientific" and "Narrative". Both types of discourse do not provide a totality of knowledge. Narrative knowledge is self-legitimizing, defined as "what has the right to be said and done in the culture in question. They are legitimised by the simple fact that they do what they do" (Lyotard 50). He says that this incredulity towards metanarratives results from scientific progress when "societies enter what is known as postindustrial age and cultures enter what is known as postmodern age" (30). Knowledge has become an "informational commodity" indispensable for the worldwide competition for power. Lyotard explains that the techno-science and capitalist economy strengthen the rule that there is "no reality unless testified by a consensus between partners over a certain knowledge" (104). He says that consensus is the "agreement between men" that can be obtained through dialogue to legitimise the power system. The "consensus as a component of the system" can lead to dictatorship (87). That is the reason it is dissension that must be emphasised or the consensus that should be achieved on a local basis (93). He emphasised that local or small narratives replace grand narratives. The local narratives

work to attain emancipation or liberation. He says that there is no absolute truth as it is unattainable. He argues that the totalizing knowledge or truth has failed to legitimise scientific or narrative knowledge because the idea of universality legitimises the prevailing norms that are made deliberately (57). The postmodern condition is related to the positivity of delegitimation. It has no relevance with judging what is true or just" (Lyotard 26).

The title of the novel is itself open to a plurality of interpretations as Binayak Roy has mentioned in "The Title of 'The God of Small Things': A Subversive Salvo" (56-57). According to A. N. Dwivedi, "'small things' in the title of the novel suggest the fulfilment of sexual hunger, (and) the satiety of physical desires" (9). However, "The God of Small Things is the God of mere human beings. It is not the God of Certainties, but the God of Loss" and it is the god of "instincts and human Kindness" (Airaudi 14-16). On the other hand, Jon Mee has suggested that a "Small God" is related to individuals and a "Big God" is related to nation (335). Moreover, "'the God of Big things' is the god of the powerful characters such as Pappachi, Baby Kochamma, Mammachi, Chacko, Comrade Pillai, and Inspector Thomas Mathew and 'The God of Small Things' is the god of Ammu, Velutha, Rahel, Estha, Sophie Mol" (Prasad 161). Roy has paradoxically represented the concept of two gods which is symbolic of the contradictory concept of metanarratives and small narratives. This article presents the violation of social codes, laws of love, and religious narratives by the characters who are supported by a small god, the god of emotions, love, physical desires, kindness, and insignificant things.

The first striking reflection of rebuttal of overwhelming powers and renegotiating of the normative laws of kinship and marriage are conspicuous in Ammu's struggles to self-consolidate her identity: "Kinship is ..... a set of practices in postcolonial Kerala that are, as Roy suggests, controlled, performed, ritualised, and monopolised by those in power" (Saldívar 361). Ammu falls victim to oppression in Ayemenem House which contains the marginal individuals in it. It is a patriarchal space of those supported by big gods. Moreover, it is the embodiment of magnified oppressions of an outside world that holds the domination of males on their women (Upstone 73). Roy, purposely, avoids

presenting the ideal structure of contained spaces or the family to unfold the disturbed identities and disorder of the ordered systems. Even smaller spaces within the house attempt to overturn and defy the patriarchal system instead of idealising it (Upstone 74). Trapped in the house, Ammu finds no other way but to accept Babu's proposal as it would, supposedly, ameliorate her condition because Pappachi has already restricted her from education which he thinks is a useless expense for him. Unfortunately, alcoholic and abusive Babu, a typical example of the patriarchal system, beats her for trivial things. Swamped by his lustful nature, he forces her to make an intimate relationship with his boss. Subverting the abusively patriarchal norms, Ammu with her twins decides to divorce Babu. Returning to Ayemenem, she meets the untouchable Velutha who is a carpenter and worker at Pickles factory, another contained space that highlights the racism and social hierarchies of the upper class. They choose each other and celebrate the moments of togetherness against the societal privileges of "Love Laws" which state whom to be loved and how much (Roy 84). Ammu, overwhelmed by the human nature to be loved, fulfils her desires with the lower caste Velutha. She along with Baby Kochamma rebels against the traditional grand narratives of social structure, sexual norms, and the institution of marriage (Yadav 45). Ammu holds the postmodern narrative that the purity of women is not related to their sexual encounters or illegitimate relationships. She shows that she has authority over her body. Ammu urges to slap the females who visit her home to show sympathy and "commiserate with her about her divorce" (Roy 20). However, she feels dejected by the patriarchal norms in Kerala and attempts to destabilise the deserted, alienated, disastrous, and disrespectful life that divorced women experience in Kerala's politically triggered society in the 1960s as depicted in the novel.

The History House, the alternative to the Ayemenem domestic house where the desires are subdued, serves as a successful resistance where the lovers attempt to reclaim their identities irrespective of the impacts of caste and religion in this space (Upstone 76). Roy criticises the grand norms and ideologies of powerful institutions that have set hierarchies to legitimise their truths. Ammu revolts against the oppressive and

repressive structures of grand values and embraces the love of Velutha, marginalised as paravan (untouchable) by the colonality of dominant powerful social codes. Froula has claimed that Ammu's sexual encounter with Velutha "threatens to marginalise the mainstream" (41). After the revelation of forbidden sexual liaison, Velutha is brutally murdered at the police station on false charges. Baby Kochamma, a manipulative sadist who managed to brainwash Rahel to save her false belief caste reputation, informs local police that Velutha had kidnapped and raped Ammu. Velutha, the supporter of Marxism, is ironically tortured to death by police "with the approval of the local Marxist party hegemony" (Saldívar 360). Interestingly, Velutha is killed not only out of forbidden love but of social hierarchies as well (Upstone 76) because he intrudes into the house, a restricted space where his father Vellya Paapen would never go since it was of an Ipe Syrian Christian family with anglophiles' heritage. Consequently, the subversive Ayemenem house reveals the hollowness of religious and social codes set by privileges to legitimise the biased truths. Roy has emphasised the aesthetics of minute, local, and self-legitimising narrative knowledge through the defiance of Ammu and Velutha towards the theoretical and historical knowledge of the past. In accordance, Foucault, for instance, noted in "The Subject and Power" that the point is "not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are" (212). The refusal of imposed identities is parallel to the suspicion of cultural implications. Velutha is himself the antithesis of the state and history (Jani 55).

Dominantly before the 1980's Kerala, women are identified in relation to men as portrayed in the novel because social conditions have denied giving them a place in society and history. Women's identities in Kerala have been restricted to just "family women" which highlights the denial of Indian women's autonomy by cultural and religious influences (Subrahmanian 1-3). According to "Manu-smṛti" (Laws of Manu), they are protected by father, husband, and son in childhood, youth, and old age, respectively (IX: 3). For example, Ammu and Baby Kochamma are introduced as the daughter and sister of Pappachi, respectively. But this notion is rejected by the marginalised characters in the novel such as Ammu and Rahel. This narrative is also

rejected by the twins Estha and Rahel who prefer to write “unknown” in their surname instead of writing their father’s name as they are distraught by strict norms and unhomely relationship with their father (Roy 75). Moreover, Ammu and Rahel’s divorces shape them into extravagantly rebellious, defiant, and independent women against the established narratives of women’s submissiveness and politeness. Rahel also shows defiance of the societal normative rules which parallel the divorce of upper-class Christian women to death and self-destruction. Comrade Pillai, the leader of the Communist Party, shocks to pronounce the word “die-voiced” when Rahel tells him that she is divorced (62). Ammu and Rahel resist the bourgeoisie narrative that divorced and widowed women are not dignified as compared to married women.

The complexity of the disjointed narratives of the plot as a postmodern style of writing shown through the eyes of Rahel also validates the theme of incredulity towards grand values and codes. In addition, the incestuous relationship between Estha and Rahel is also unconventional and law-breaking non-compliance to gods of dominance. Although it is not depicted directly, the novel ends when adult twins hold each other after making love. The incoherence between societal love laws and the twin’s autonomous desires has a background story as reflected in “that night was not happiness, but hideous grief” (311). To overcome the grief of standing apart for twenty-five years since December 1969, Rahel leaves her job at the gas station in America and returns to Ayemenem “To (meet) Estha in the rain” (Roy 10). Rahel suffers from self-imposed diaspora, bad marriage in Boston, and labour exploitation in New York (Saldívar 361). Nevertheless, Ammu is not given a burial by the Christian community that has collaborated with other strict religious and socio-cultural norms to make Rahel depressed. The failure of socio-economic powers and South Asian narratives in Kerala has turned Estha mute. Consequently, the twins find shelter against the oppressive dead norms, false traditions, and political dilemmas in their reunion and feel the touch of their loved ones on their bodies. Moreover, the twins also defy social hierarchies when they enter Velutha’s house where they were forbidden to enter.

*The God of Small Things* recenters the world to small things and emphasises the struggle of marginalised Velutha, Ammu, Estha, and Rahel. It criticises the established grand narratives related to “Love Laws” (Roy 16), Christianity, Marxism, Patriarchy, and political institutions. Ammu and Velutha break the love laws to fulfil their desires. Estha and Rahel try to find solace in incest, unconventional love. Roy portrays the freedom of following her desires and the emancipation of holding different narratives through its oppressed characters. The little narratives have overturned the marginality and taken non-traditional turns to portray reality. It has challenged the concept of God and takes into account insignificant things to validate the delegitimation of metanarratives.

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## **Performativity in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*: A Postmodern Feminist Perspective**

By Minhal Sarfraz

M.Phil, English Literature, Session: 2023-2025

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, a Booker winner, takes place in Kerala in the 1960s and follows Ammu's family through both ordinary and tragic events. It is one of the most influential novels that inventively portrays Indian society's family realism and harsh facts that were the most significant obstacles to peaceful progress of Indian society. It declares war on societal issues that have resulted in a great deal of injustice against the oppressed classes. She announces the same war against society's tyrannical class as Roy continues to fight the government and social authorities for the poor and the depressed (Islam 75). The novel looks at how seemingly insignificant things influence people's actions and lives.

Feminism and postmodernism are combined in the study. Change has marked the beginning of postmodernism and will continue to do so. All facets of our lives are influenced by a change, which shows itself at work and in relaxation. Life in postmodernism is regularly alluded to as "new times" because of its significant effect on all parts of our lives (Antsy). The idea of postmodern feminism asserts that naturalised notions of the human subject and essentialist conceptions of women are unnecessary and troubling components of feminist political theory and practice. Judith Butler may be the person who has made this claim more convincingly than anyone else by utilising the idea of Performativity (Digester). The researcher aims to look into the novel, *The Good of Small Things*, through the lens of Gender Performativity. The idea of gender performativity is given by Judith Butler in her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990). Gender Performativity deconstructs the concept of gender and sex. It is about how neither gender nor sex is regular, but

they are just performing acts rather than natural. They are being performed by the people and approved by the general public. Gender performativity is the stylized repetition of actions or role-playing of preexisting gender-dominant conventions. According to Butler, the cultural context in which gender is practised determines its meaning. Therefore, it opposes fixities and universalities (Mambrol), just like postmodernism rejects the notion of fixed truth.

Applying performativity to the text will be beneficial as it will help to explore the construction of characters as per the preserved standards and roles associated with their gender in the context of Kerala, India. The study will show how characters intersect with racial, class, ethnic, especially sexual, and regional modes of discursively constituted identities. It will highlight that gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in various historical contexts. This means that the term does not cover all pre-gendered persons. As a result, it becomes impossible to distinguish between men and women from its frequent production and maintenance at the intersections of culture and politics (Butler 16). It will additionally make sense that how the characters in *The God of Small Things* participate in performative gender acts and through their roles they "do" or "undo" gender. In addition, it raises the question of how they, through their desires, identities, and actions, defy gender norms. The purpose of this study is to investigate the facts that support the connection between the desires of the novel's characters and the post-modern feminist perspective.

The late 20th century saw the emergence of postmodern feminist thought. Postmodernism and feminism are combined in this broad and intricate field. It deconstructs power structures and hierarchies and challenges established gender norms. Postmodern women activists hold multiple points of view. The explanations of sex and sexuality that rely solely on biological factors to define women's social existence have been frequently criticised by feminist theory. The distinction between sex and gender, according to feminist theorists, challenges causal explanations that assume that women's experiences are predetermined by their biological sex.

Phenomenological hypotheses, which centre on the live insights of the body, additionally try to isolate the physiological parts of the epitome from the social implications ascribed to it (Kenny). Simone de Beauvoir observes in *The Second Sex* that gender, rather than being a natural phenomenon, is the result of historical circumstances (Beauvoir). The material and natural aspects of the body are acknowledged by Beauvoir, but the process by which cultural meanings are assigned to the body is emphasised more than its physicality (Kenny).

In *The God of Small Things*, the idea that men protect and justify women's existence is questioned and challenged. The novel depicts characters who oppose these assigned gender roles and assumptions, looking for their organisation and opportunity beyond the bounds of cultural standards. The concept that Lord Man will safeguard the master Lady and will be accountable for legitimising her reality: alongside the monetary risk, she escapes the otherworldly gamble of an opportunity that should imagine its objectives without assistance (Beauvoir 30); it reflects Mammachi's choices and actions as a reflection of her acceptance of and support for gendered power dynamics in society. She holds the belief that her existence and worth are dependent on their presence and approval, and as a result, she looks to the men in her life for protection and validation. She defers to Pappachi and Chacko's authority and seeks their approval in their relationship. Whereas, on the other hand, Ammu goes against her gender role and questions and challenges the traditional gender roles and assumptions set upon her, trying to state her opportunities and wants. She chooses to define her own goals and discover her sense of freedom rather than relying solely on men for protection and validation. Here lies the concept of Butler's Performativity that if the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time, rather than a seemingly seamless identity, then gender transformation is possible (Butler). Likewise, gender roles can be challenged or exchanged. The roles that have been assigned to a woman can be subverted. Estha and Rahel's relationship is not only a test of the standards of independence, public historicism, and worldwide private enterprise, but also a study of the manners by

which gender roles, sexual standards, and the objectives of conceptive heterosexuality generally structure and control opportunities for the person at personal, public, and global levels. It pays attention to how the "Love Laws" are a fundamental regulatory structure that restricts human possibilities in the world (Dora).

Postmodernity is against the fixed notions that are engraved into the minds as reality. It deconstructs the nature of reality. The concept that feminism is all about women and against men is also a misconception. In *Feminism is for Everyone, Passionate Politics*, Hooks discovers that the real issue with feminism is "sexism," not "anti-male." She asserts that feminism is "the movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (Hooks 47). This makes it clear that every human being is born with the acceptance of sexist ideas and behaviours. She argues that "women can be as sexist as men" (Hooks). It is clear that female characters in the novel, like Baby Kochamma and Mammachi, subvert other female characters, perpetuating patriarchal norms and contributing to the oppression of women around them like Ammu. Throughout the novel, Baby Kochamma performs sexist ideologies and holds deeply ingrained patriarchal beliefs. She frequently builds up gender roles and practises biased conduct towards other female characters. Her activities and proclamations mirror a feeling of predominance and privilege given her gender and social status. It is vital to note that Baby Kochamma's performativity is not just her very own; It is likewise a reaction to and an impression of the bigger man-centric framework wherein she exists. Her adherence to gender norms and her imposition of those norms on others serve to maintain and exacerbate the system's inherent power imbalances.

Ammu and Rahel are, in the end, Roy's hope for modern India, who are willing to abandon outdated notions. Just that "once again they broke the Love Laws. That lay down who should be loved. And how. And how much" (Roy 33). They cannot be dampened by tradition, family, history, the state, or even death (Tewari). Postmodern feminist ideas of subjectivity highlight a thought of "oneself" that is fluid, problematic, and created in association with others and regular practices. These social designs

and cycles that shape subjectivity are arranged inside desultory fields where language, power relations, and talks exist, cross, and build contending approaches to giving significance to and building subjectivity. The theory of Performativity furnishes a rich commitment to the perplexing relations that empower the development of subjectivity. It can be utilised to dissect the manner by which subjectivity is negotiated in social connections (Jackson). The researcher concludes that Butler's theory of Performativity is a hopeful theory of subjectivity that allows for individual agency and differences.

The novel has been explored in different contexts by previous researchers, i.e.; Post-colonialism, Marxism, Gender and Feminism, Narrative techniques, Cultural hybridity, and forbidden relationships. It has been explored in a postmodern context, like its non-Linear narrative structure, language subversion, fragmented narration, or power dynamics, but applying a feminist approach to Gender Performativity will not only enrich the novel but also the theory itself. It will give new insights to both areas of studies.

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## “Kafkaesque in the Writings of Franz Kafka”

By Syed Hussein Ali Shah

M.Phil, English Literature, Session: 2023-2025

Franz Kafka, a German Bohemian novelist and short-story writer, was one of the most respected figures of 20th-century literature. He was a prolific writer, who spent most of his time in writing but burnt almost 90 percent of his work. Kafka published a few short stories in his lifetime including “The Judgement” and “The Metamorphosis”. Apart from this, we only have scattered fragments of letters and diaries, dictums or maxims, and manuscripts of unpublished novels. Kafka wrote in his will to his friend and executor Max Brod to burn all his work but Brod condoned his will and published his remaining work. With his untiring efforts, *The Trial* was published in 1925 followed by *The Castle* and *Amerika*.

Kafka belongs to the 20th century but his works are still relevant today because they give us a peep into the postmodern world: how people are trapped in different situations and conditions. “The Judgment” is still relevant because it has a universal theme: the breach between the relationship of father and son and their inability to comprehend each other’s ideas and nature are still relevant to our times. Gregor Samsa’s love and sense of responsibility toward his family are evident, but when he fails to live up to their expectations, he is not treated well by his family. His desire to continue his job and his imploration to the manager create a pitiable situation. Some of us at least are going through such situations in life.

Postmodern research gives us a sense of the complexities and intricacies of social realities which leads us to different interpretations which are often perplexing to human comprehension where every individual has his/her own reality. As a term Kafkaesque is used to describe ideas and situations pertinent to Kafka’s work, especially in *The Trial* and “Metamorphosis”. It includes the instances in which bureaucracies entrap the life of the people and control the power dynamics, which are

the most prominent features of the postmodern era. In a surreal, nightmarish milieu that evokes feelings of senselessness, vagueness, and helplessness, characters in a Kafkaesque world often lack a vivid direction to escape situations. Kafkaesque elements are abundant in existentialist works developing complicated, incomprehensible, and grotesque situations. Kafka's writing style focuses on the psychological perspectives of the characters. This term is apt in delineating the concept of inexplicable situations through which the characters like Gregor Samsa, Joseph K. and Georg go through. They try to deal with the difficulties but they find themselves at a loss which is the hallmark of the postmodern age.

Kafka's writings must not be read as being cynical but as sceptical. That is the very true essence of postmodernism. As a critic, we must acknowledge the problem with his writings. Apart from a few stories, Kafka's work cannot be said to be his own; e.g., novels *The Trial*, *Amerika*, and *The Castle* are the joint works of Kafka and Max Brod. The discussion in this paper will be based on the plot, characterization, symbolism, and postmodern elements found in Kafka's works. The researcher examines the novella *The Metamorphosis*, the story "The Judgement", and the novel *The Trial* through the lens of Kafkaesque. The study will focus on how his writings vividly depict postmodernism.

The analysis is based on a postmodern reading of Kafka's writing through the lens of Kafkaesque. In terms of essence and style, his writings give us an idea of the postmodern world. Although Kafka was born in the era of modernism, his writings truly depict the idea of postmodern literature filled with disillusionment which is the most overwhelming feature of the postmodern era and this very feature is prominent in his stories and how characters' ideas are shattered about their families. Fragmentation, another notable postmodern element is explored through the main characters and in settings.

Moreover, other postmodern features which are noteworthy in his writings include isolation, existentialism, absurdism in the life of characters, solitude, and alienation. He



also highlights the element of death; like the main characters dying at the end of the stories, which disrupt relations and communication failure. Kafka's work is essentially based on these postmodern features, people detached themselves from others and this becomes the reason for social distance, lack of decision-making power, inability to play a constructive role and to comprehend the complicated situations and dilemmas of life in a post-modern world. I will explain these postmodern elements and give a new perspective on Kafka's works as a postmodernist. I will also highlight that though Kafka belongs to the modern era; his writings give us the idea of postmodernism in its true sense. Besides, it will be seen how the modern and postmodern world and its ways affect the minds of people and what their reactions are after finding themselves in cumbersome situations.

In "The Judgment" and *The Metamorphosis*, both the central characters are in strange situations. It is not in their power to control these situations; therefore, they surrender. Georg commits suicide and Gregor Samsa dies at the end of the story. Both characters have a sense of guilt which is very common in modern society. The characters want to prove and make themselves beneficial for their families but they cannot. In these stories, the feature of control is ever-present in the form of fathers or social pressures. As per Freud's theory, both characters believe their fathers are god-like figures. George commits suicide because of the pressure put on him by his father. In *The Metamorphosis*, Gregor's father tries to drive the insect, Gregor, back into his room. He observes that "the noise is his rear sound no longer likes the voice of a single father" (*The Metamorphosis* part 3), acknowledging that postmodern characters prefer to live an isolated life. They know that there is no one to understand them and even help them out of a difficult situation. Moreover, family members start to leave them. This further elaborates the idea that even family members need each other only for needs. If a certain member of the family is no longer able to do his duty or live up to others' expectations, he will not be a member of that family.

The concept of misfit is also present in both stories, which is a prominent feature of the postmodern era. Gregor Samsa and Georg are misfits in these situations. They

do not want to do what they are doing. Gregor does not like his job. He does not understand how to make the situation better for himself and his father. Efforts for reconciliation can also be found in both stories. Both major characters Georg and Gregor make different attempts to perform better even in the worst situation. Gregor assures the manager of the company that he will be soon in the office. Although he knows his transformation and his inability to work yet he wants to play a better role according to the demands of the company. Similarly, Georg's father is not on good terms with him and he knows about this, hence he suggested his father exchange the room with him. He decides that he will take care of his father along with his wife.

The novel *The Trial* also depicts a Kafkaesque situation. The beginning of the novel gives us a nightmarish aura. We are puzzled just like Joseph K; when we come to know that he is under arrest without being aware of the reason. The complicated and bizarre situation starts from the beginning and remains till the end of the novel. Joseph K. does not know what situation he is in and how to get rid of that. The bureaucratic rigmarole makes his situation worse. His ongoing trial is so disturbing for him that he cannot concentrate on his work at the bank or pay attention to his clients.

On the first day of his trial, he is not informed of what exact place he has to reach. The labyrinth structure building which makes it difficult to find the courtroom is very similar to his situation. This reminds us of the idea of the navigation of labyrinthine bureaucracies. Such a similar situation was faced by people in Covid-19 days. Moreover, the death of Joseph K. gives us the idea of horror, absurdism, irrationalism, and hopelessness. The lack of communication becomes evident in the novel through Joseph K.'s reluctance to reveal his situation to others and his reticent behaviour. Joseph K's situation also shows the element of uncertainty. He is no longer in a position to know why he is involved in this situation, what kind of charge is put on him, and how he can get through this situation. The importance of paperwork is more than the importance of the life of a man. The people who come to court are the official representatives of the concerned department. The theme of helplessness, another element of postmodernism, is also present in the novel. Joseph K. takes help from the

painter who has connections with court officials and the lawyer but his efforts are proven fruitless. Later, the incident at the cathedral has a great importance in the novel where Joseph K. had a conversation with a priest. He discusses his situation perhaps to find some spiritual relief because he knows that there is no escape.

In conclusion, it is stated that these Kafkaesque narratives truly depict the true picture of what Kafka personified, because the stories of characters depict bizarre, nightmarish, and hopeless situations. There is no way for them to get rid of these situations. Moreover, these give the idea of postmodernism because Kafka's work surpassed his time. His writings depict the postmodern spirit for which he is praised by postmodern writers and critics. His writings are postmodern because the element of fragmentation, alienation, deterioration, man's struggle with reality, and isolation are abundantly found in his works. Franz Kafka gives us a true spirit of postmodernism. He is widely read and the world's renowned writer of our time. This research paper gives new direction to researchers and readers: it shows through many instances how the works of Kafka belong to postmodern literature and how these are still relevant to modern society of the present age. Kafka is a great writer who shows the complications of human life vividly and accurately.

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## Intertextuality in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

By Fatima Fareed

M.Phil, English Literature, Session: 2023-2025

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is a mesmerising novel that weaves a poignant narrative set in the lush landscape of Kerala, India. Published in 1997, this debut novel brought international acclaim to Roy, who skillfully intertwines themes of love, caste, social hierarchy, and the weight of societal norms (Hariharasudan). One of the striking aspects of the novel is its adept use of intertextuality, which enriches the narrative and offers deeper layers of meaning. Furthermore, *The God of Small Things* resonates strongly with postmodern theory, as it challenges traditional storytelling conventions, embraces nonlinear narratives, and explores the fragmented nature of reality. Therefore, this article explores the application of postmodern theory, explicitly focusing on intertextuality in *The God of Small Things*. By analysing the intertextual references present in the novel through the lens of postmodern theory, the article unravels the intricate layers of meaning. It sheds light on the novel's engagement with postmodernist themes.

This research aims to investigate the use of intertextuality in the novel that involves referencing, borrowing, or alluding to other texts within a work of literature (Hariharasudan) through postmodern theory. Roy masterfully incorporates intertextuality in *The God of Small Things*, enriching the reader's experience and enhancing the narrative's complexity. Through this, the researcher evaluates that intertextuality in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* functions as a powerful tool that aligns with postmodern theory, enabling a deeper analysis of the novel's themes and narrative structure.

One aspect of postmodern theory that the researcher observes in the novel is narrative fragmentation. Roy employs a nonlinear structure, jumping back and forth in

time and weaving together multiple perspectives. This fragmentation reflects the subjective nature of memory and perception, emphasising that reality is not fixed or absolute. Intertextuality plays a significant role in this fragmentation by incorporating references to various texts and narratives (Jarle). For instance, the researcher inspects that the novel contains passages from well-known works of literature, such as William Shakespeare's "The Tempest." These intertextual references disrupt the linear flow of the narrative, blurring the boundaries between the novel's fictional world and the broader literary canon. This blurring of boundaries aligns with postmodern notions of the fluidity and interconnectedness of narratives and the rejection of a singular, authoritative truth.

Intertextuality in the novel also deconstructs established power structures and challenges societal norms. Roy uses intertextual references strategically to critique the dominant ideologies and power hierarchies in Indian society. For example, the character of Velutha, who defies the rigid caste system, embodies resistance against social oppression (Jarle). Through intertextuality, Roy expands the scope of the narrative beyond the immediate story, drawing upon historical, political, and cultural references. This interplay of different texts adds layers of meaning and subverts the authority of dominant discourses, aligning with postmodern theories of deconstruction and challenging fixed identities and oppressive structures. *The God of Small Things* extensively uses intertextuality, a central postmodernist idea (Jarle).

By analysing the intertextual elements present in the novel, this research sheds light on the novel's engagement with postmodernist discourse. Postmodernism is a literary and cultural movement that emerged as a reaction to the dominant modernist ideas and conventions (Jarle). It is characterised by a rejection of grand narratives, a scepticism towards universal truths, and an emphasis on fragmentation, subjectivity, and the blurring of boundaries. The intertextual references serve multiple purposes in the novel as they contribute to deconstructing traditional literary forms and genres by disrupting narrative conventions and expectations (Jarle). They also challenge the notion of a single, stable reality by highlighting the diversity of perspectives and the

subjective nature of truth. It opens up new possibilities for interpretation and invites readers to question the boundaries of literary creation.

In *The God of Small Things*, the novel opens with the sentence, "May in Ayemenem is a hot, brooding month that the gods carelessly throw into the mix of seasons" (Roy 2). This sentence contains an intertextual reference to T.S. Eliot's poem "The Waste Land." In Eliot's poem, April is famously described as "the cruellest month" (Kochupurackal). Arundhati Roy's allusion to this line establishes a connection between the novel and Eliot's work, invoking the themes and atmosphere of "The Waste Land" within the narrative. By referencing "The Waste Land," Roy parallels the disjointed and desolate universe portrayed in Eliot's poem and the chaotic lives of the characters in *The God of Small Things*. Both works explore a sense of despair, fragmentation, and societal decay. The use of intertextuality in this instance allows Roy to set the story's tone and evoke a feeling of sorrow right from the beginning.

The reference to Eliot's "The Waste Land" also serves to situate *The God of Small Things* within a broader literary tradition (Kochupurackal). Eliot's poem is considered one of the seminal works of modernist literature, and by alluding to it, Roy signals her engagement with the literary canon and positions her novel within the lineage of modernist and postmodernist discourse. Furthermore, this intertextual reference demonstrates the novel's exploration of postmodernist themes and techniques. Postmodernism often involves the appropriation and recontextualization of existing texts, challenging the boundaries between originality and intertextuality. Roy's use of intertextuality in referencing Eliot's work reflects her engagement with postmodernist ideas of intertextual play and the subversion of traditional literary forms.

The research also explores that Arundhati Roy makes a subtle intertextual reference to John Donne's poem "The Good Morrow" through the characters Estha and Rahel, twins, with an unbreakable bond. By drawing on Donne's poem, Roy explores themes of love, identity, and the search for completeness. In Donne's "The Good Morrow," the speaker reflects on the transformative power of love and the awakening of

the soul. The poem expresses that love can bring a sense of wholeness and unity, erasing individual boundaries and creating a profound connection (Sharma). Roy uses this intertextual reference to parallel the profound love shared by Estha and Rahel with Donne's exploration of the soul's need for oneness.

By referencing Donne's poem, Roy pays homage to the literary history and traditions that have shaped her work (Sharma). This intertextual connection deepens the novel's thematic resonance and adds layers of meaning to the portrayal of Estha and Rahel's relationship. Roy delves into the complexities of love, identity, and the longing for completeness through their bond. The intertextual reference to Donne's poem also highlights the interplay between different texts and how literature is connected across time and space. Roy's incorporation of intertextuality demonstrates her engagement with postmodernist ideas of intertextual play and the blending of different cultural, historical, and literary contexts.

Analysing intertextuality in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* through the lens of postmodern theory reveals the novel's engagement with various literary and cultural texts to challenge fixed meanings and explore the complexities of power, identity, and history. Despite the extensive analysis of *The God of Small Things*, there is a research gap about how the intertextuality in the novel reflects the social, cultural, and political context of the 1960s Kerala, India, and how it engages with broader issues of power, identity, and colonialism. Although previous studies have examined how intertextuality is used in the narrative fabric of the novel, there is still a need to thoroughly examine how these postmodernist techniques are connected to the specific historical and sociopolitical context of the story. By addressing this research gap, the current research can provide new insights into the novel's socio-cultural implications and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how postmodernism operates within the context of postcolonial literature.

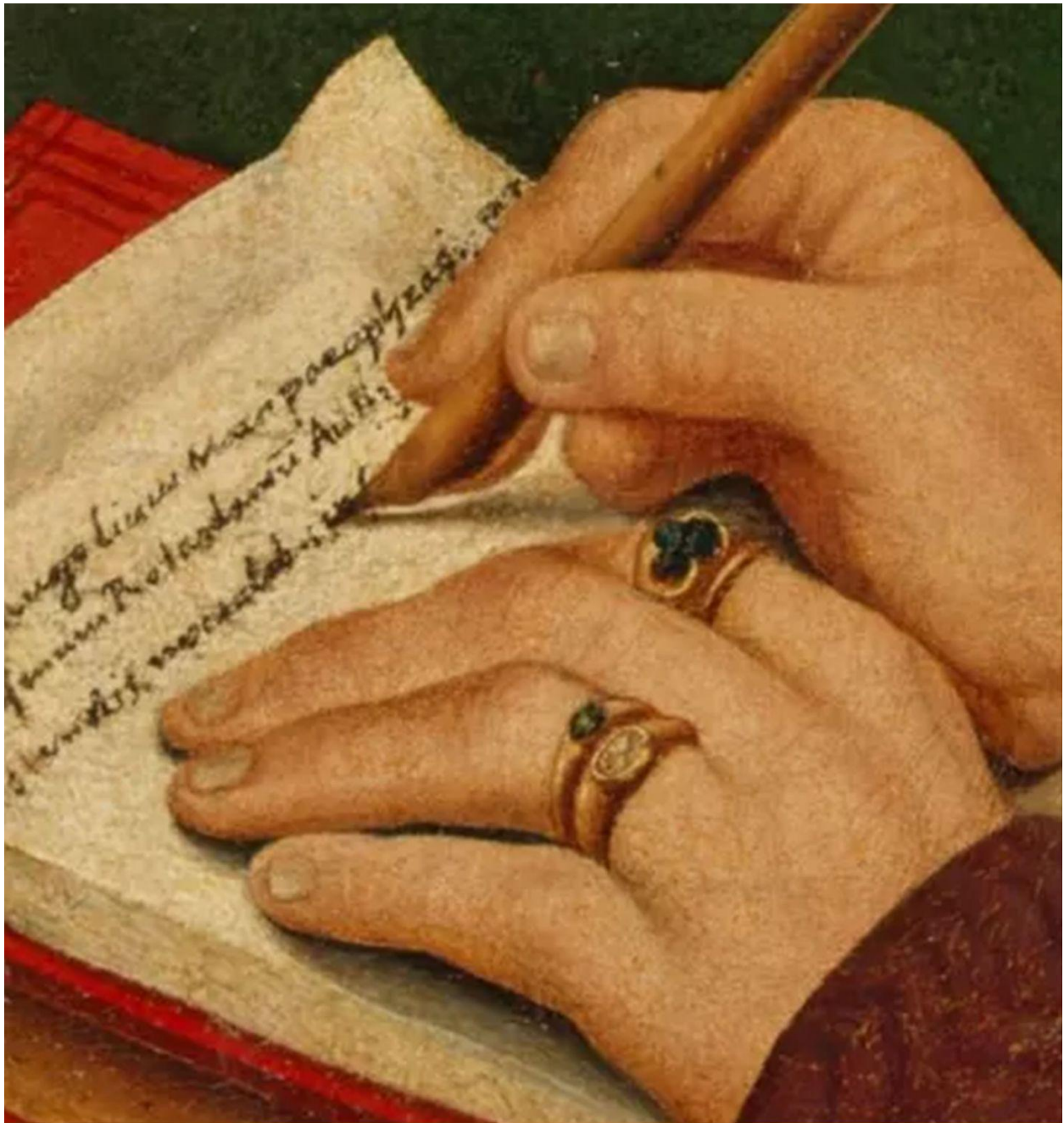
In conclusion, intertextuality in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is a powerful tool for exploring the novel through the lens of postmodern theory. By applying



this theory, the researcher contributes to exploring the concept of the intertextual approach in the novel, which aligns with postmodern ideas of fragmented narratives, metafiction, and the deconstruction of dominant discourses. Ultimately, it encourages readers to thoughtfully engage with the complex nature of truth, reality, and the creation of significance in the novel. Therefore, this research enhances the comprehension of the intricate themes of the novel and its role in the postmodern literary condition. This research also offers a fresh perspective for future scholars and provides novel insights into the text.

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# SHORT STORIES

## **I am Sorry**

By Roman Khalid

BS, Graphic Design, Session: 2022-2026

I woke up at my usual time of 9:00 AM. My mother had gone to work and my little brother had just left for school. It's a typical day with no one around. I washed my face and put healing cream on my face scars, neck scratches and arm cuts. Mother left breakfast on the table. She made a sandwich today, which looked delicious. I checked the door to ensure everything was locked, then grabbed my food and took it to my room.

Three years ago, I used to attend high school as well but after a particular incident, I stopped going. Simply, because it was impossible to stay at that place. The amount of humiliation and bullying that I had to endure was way too much. My parents have brown skin and straight black hair; however, I have brown curly hair and pale skin. Quite different from any of the family members. I always looked like an outcast. My classmates knew this and accused me of being adopted. Their accusations were usually verbal but sometimes they do get physical as well. Like when they fully trashed my backpack when I was out getting lunch from the cafeteria. They even put someone else's stuff in my bag and told everyone I stole it.

***(I was never able to clear my name from that)***

They threw water on the teacher when she was writing on a whiteboard and said, I did it and so many other things.

***(I did none of them but why did I have to endure punishments?)***

In school, I was not learning English, Physics or Maths. Rather, I was learning how cruel the world is. How much it can cause pain if you try to raise your voice for some injustice...for some peace. Like I once did and fate represented itself in the form of permanent scars on my face and neck...

***(The incident goes like this)***

I was sitting on my chair. When Sera tried to snatch my lunch, I thought if I tried to stand up for myself or maybe if I asked for help, the teachers would hear my voice or someone would save me.

***(No one came for help. Instead, they took pictures and videos to torture me in the future)***

Sera always bullied me. She took my stuff and never gave it back. Took my notes, books and even the stationery I got as a birthday present.

So, she was no stranger when it came to bullying me. She was also no stranger to hitting me... Yes, I said, hitting me. She is the reason why I have cuts on my forearm. We had home economics class and she brought a new paper cutter. Sera said to her friends "I want to test this cutter". I was stepping out of class for some silence. She ran toward me. Took my arm and said

"let's see how sharp this is".

Without any hesitation. She cut my arm. Before I got a chance to catch my breath, there were three cuts on my arm. When she saw her cutter had gone red. Her eyes widened and her legs got shaky. She stood there for few a seconds before running back into the class while shouting,

"CREEPY GIRL!, UGLY CREEPY GIRL!"

***(IT HURT LIKE HELL !!! I WAS IN SO MUCH PAIN THAT I COULDN'T SPEAK WHEN THE SCHOOL NURSE ASKED WHAT HAPPENED...)***

I had to take school leave for two days. When I told my mother about this incident, she simply let out a sigh. Then she said, "You could have fought back, said something to stop her, or resisted at least."

"Why did you let it happen?"

...

I shut my mouth to her response.

***(After that, I often wore makeup on my arms. whenever my little brother was around)***

So, when Sera took my lunch, I shouted for help. I know it's weird. Raising my voice after what she had done previously. I was expecting teachers' from next room to hear me. They didn't but Sera stopped, turned around as if she heard someone coming in her direction. She was standing like a statue. Even though no one was there. She said nothing and left me alone while glaring at me.

It was surprising, not just for me but for the whole class as well. I was quite happy to know that I stood up for myself...

That happiness was short-lived. When I left school after classes, she followed me and approached me. I was startled at first. It was Sera with her friends. They were acting friendly and giving out a happy aura.

***(Hope made me blind)***

***(What they did still gives me shivers in my bones)***

Her friends lured me into thinking all they were going to do was have a friendly chat. They started by giving me praise for standing up for myself and making me feel better not just for my actions but as a person as well by saying things like "You are a very kind person, who doesn't disturb anyone", "everyone likes you in their heart", "we shouldn't have been bullying you in the first place", and all sorts of heartwarming stuff.

***(I wish I wasn't naive)***

When we were finally out of sight of everyone. Her friends blocked my path and started opening their backpacks. One pulled out a long scarf, another pulled out a wrench and one of them pulled out a wire cutter.

Sera's friends put that scarf on my mouth immediately after pulling it out. I gave off a squeak but it wasn't loud... enough...

Sera grabbed the wrench and smashed it onto my arms. They removed the mouth cloth when I finished screaming.

She said: "This is what you get for talking back to me; you know that you don't have the right to speak. Worthless Adopted".

*I wasn't sure what was hurting more, my hand or her words...*

She then pulled my tongue out and used the wire cutter to chip the middle part...

***(I screamed a lot... But then they put the same scarf in my mouth as before. They didn't stop there. They started beating me while I lay on the ground in pain)***

After that, I stopped attending school and my mother didn't question me once...

...

I now mostly stay in my room, avoiding my little brother and mother. I only go out to the park at 5 pm. It's the only time when I can see the sunset alone or I go out for a walk in the morning. I walk around on the silent streets while listening to the chirping of birds.

***(I always have a small bag with me, which contains pepper spray, basic makeup kit and other stuff that I think might be useful)***

Like my usual routine, I was at the park in the evening, when I saw a kid getting cornered by another kid. He then started shouting for help.

***(It reminded me of myself when no one came to help)***

I tried to ignore him but he shouted for help twice and then stopped, while tears fell from his eyes. Maybe he had accepted his faith. I didn't want to be involved but when I saw his crying face, I couldn't just stay still. I stood behind the bully. When he saw my shadow fall on the kid 's face, he turned around and looked at me, then ran away. I am not sure what caused him to run in such a hurry. Was it the presence of someone older than him or was he terrified of my scars...?

When that bully ran away. I took a closer look at the kid. He was trembling with fear, his eyes were closed, he was hiccupping. I felt like I was looking at a mirror, however it was showing a younger version of me.

I said, "He's gone. You are safe now"

***(I wish someone would have said those words to me... I wish someone would have been there to save me)***

That boy opened his eyes and took a deep breath. His hands were still trembling. I took this opportunity to ask "what is your name and where do you live?" He was scared to talk so instead I asked him "Do your parents know where you are or anyone else?" He stayed quiet for a while then replied "n-o-no-... no they don't, I was on my way home when he pushed me. So, I tried to run away from him".

***(He is much braver than me; he at least tried to run to save himself rather than just give up)***

I studied his expression for a few seconds. Then I gave him a head pat while saying "you did the right thing. I am proud of you".

***(Hope it will make him feel safe)***

His eyes lit up a bit after hearing this. He asked: "what's your name miss?" To which I replied: "You should introduce yourself before asking someone else, who they are. My name is Hana, Sakura Hana, it means 'Flower of hope'".

“What is your name?”.

He replied: “Sora. It means sky”.

My eyes fell on his red knee.

***(He might have tripped while running away from the bully)***

I opened my bag and took out a bandage. I applied that bandage after sanitising his wound. Sora then sat on a swing, I took a swing next to him.

He then started telling me how it all happened. Why was he getting chased alongside other stuff...? Sora was getting bullied because he had a better mechanical pencil than others. When he refused to give the bully his pencil. They forcefully took it from him but after class Sora grabbed that pencil and ran away.

***(My first thought. He is strong... and stupid. What if I wasn't here in the park or what if there were more than one kid chasing him)***

After listening to his story, I said to him, “That bully, will never mess with you again. If he ever tries to hurt you ever again, you can come to me. I will save you”.

***(Sora smiled at me when I said this. I wonder why I felt happy inside. Was it the feeling of helping someone in hard times or that child's smile was just too adorable)?***

We talked for a while and he said: “I will be moving to a different city next month and a different school too. I hope nothing bad happens at the next school”.

***(I felt a stab of anxiety and tightness in my chest)***

I said to Sora: “Everything's going to be fine. You are brave and know what is right. You know how to stand up for yourself. Believe me when I say this. Most people can't do it”.



A few minutes later, I dropped him off at his house, which was just next to the road to the park. I wonder why he didn't go to his house for shelter.

After this incident, Sora often came to the park and told me about his day. Whenever I spoke to him, I felt like I was healing or that the part that I lost a long time ago was coming back.

***(Happiness)***

After talking to Sora for a few days. I realised how little I have seen my little brother and what little effort I have made to get close to him... it's been years since we last sat down and chatted with each other.

***(maybe I should try speaking to him again)***

It was Sunday morning and my little brother Haru (meaning spring) was painting with watercolours. Mother was out getting groceries. I had no idea how to start a conversation with him... it had been way too long. What if I tried to talk and he got scared or went to his room yelling he hated me?

***(I don't think I am ready to hear those words from him)***

I kept looking for words or any topic to talk about... But nothing... I couldn't think of anything. I noticed his glass of water was spilled and that water was touching his feet and that water was running close near the electric socket.

***(My heart skipped a beat)***

I ran as fast as I could to move Haru away from the water. I used paper towels to clean the spilled water. He was as shocked as I was. He seemed frozen, analysing what just happened. His sister whom he had not seen in 3 years, just grabbed him and was now cleaning the spilled water from the floor and table.

After taking his time he said "Thank you...".

To which I replied “Your welcome”.

***(Finally, he said something)***

I took this moment to catch a glimpse of his drawing. He was drawing a burning house while dragons were flying in the sky. For some reason the grass was way too tall and the sky was bright blue with beautiful clouds.

I said: “That’s a very good drawing. Is it for your art class?”

He replied, in what seemed like a whisper, almost as if he was holding back something “It’s for a contest”. While cleaning the table I realised, I did not have any makeup on my hands and neck.

***(I was stunned... speechless)***

I was about to apply makeup on my hands after I had thought of a topic to talk about but now he had seen them. I wonder what’s going through his mind right then. After cleaning the table, I stood up, making my way upstairs.

He asked, “Are those scars the reason you haven’t talked to us?”

***(I was not sure how to answer this, what should I say? Should I tell him the truth or lie about these scars?)***

When I replied, my voice cracked: “ye-s... one of the reasons”.

We both did not say anything for a minute. There was tension, anxiety, sadness and along with those emotions was happiness. We finally talked to each other.

***(I should tell him)***

Haru had stopped drawing and now his eyes were fixated on my arms. His face was tense and his jaw was tightened. I told him about everything that happened to me at the

school. I told him why I never came out of the room. Why, I have a cut on my tongue and a bruise on my neck as well. I told him why I was wearing makeup.

***(He said nothing when I was telling him all that. He only nodded from time to time)***

When I finished telling him everything. He stood up and went to his room. When I saw him do this, my eyes got wet and I said to myself:

***(It was expected, I was ready for this from the start but why does it make me so sad...)***

How is he supposed to accept this fact... which was more of a selfish decision to leave everyone. I was wiping my eyes when Haru came back with an envelope. He handed me that envelope and said: "You should open it, you might wanna see what's inside". I did not have the slightest clue what was in that envelope. So, I took a look inside, and it contained pictures. I took them out one by one.

First picture was a picture of me holding him when he was a baby.

***(I might cry just by looking at this picture)***

Then I took out the second picture, it was a picture of me feeding him food, when he had a fever in grade 2. I took out another picture, it was a picture of him winning a drawing contest in his 4th grade which I forced him to enter. Then I took out the last picture, it was a picture of our whole family. Mother, me and him were celebrating his birthday.

***(I had just realised that he is in 10th grade... It's been that long already)***

The envelope was empty, so I started putting the pictures back.

He said: "Can we all be close like we used to be... please?"

***(My eyes started to form tears. I was about to cry)***

I embraced him, giving him a sense of assurance.

He started to cry as soon as I hugged him. It didn't take long for me to weep as well. When both of us were finished with our tears session, Haru remembered he had to submit his content drawing by tomorrow.

When he started working on his drawing again, I went to the kitchen and started making pudding for us. We ate together and I sat on the couch while he completed his drawing. I asked him questions about his school life and drawing contests. We were having so much fun that I forgot to check the time. It was around 5pm and mother was about to come home. As I was about to stand up to leave, I heard the sound of the door opening. She entered the house. She saw me sitting next to Haru but she said nothing and quietly went to her room. When she was all freshened up, she came back to the living room.

***(I could hear my heartbeat racing. As sweat was falling from my face along with my makeup)***

I asked: "Do you want to eat pudding?"

She said nothing while staring at me for a while. As I was about to regret asking her this question, she questioned while looking at Haru's drawing "did you make it?"

I replied to her with "Yeah, I made it an hour ago"

She nodded without even looking at me.

***(That's a relief but I did wish she would look at me)***

I went to the kitchen and came back with pudding on a plate she liked to use for herself. She ate silently. When she finished, she looked at me and nodded, giving a signal to take the dishes.

***(There is silence but I felt much more relaxed than before)***

All of us were sitting in the TV-lounge. Haru was drawing. Mother was working on her laptop. I was sitting on the front sofa with Haru.

Mother asked “When did you get a bruise on your neck?”

There was hesitance in her voice.

I replied: “Around three years ago. A day before, I locked myself in a room”.

She questioned again: “Do they still hurt? What about your tongue?” Hesitance in her every breath...

I tried to assure her: “They don't, I applied medicine on them daily. So, they stopped hurting pretty early and as for my tongue, it tickles more than anything”.

I took a breather and said: “thank you... thank you for the medicines”.

***(When I said this, I felt a heavy weight lifted off my chest)***

She sighed, which looked like a sigh of relief.

She then said: “Did you guys eat anything besides pudding?”

I and Haru both replied to her with a shaking head. After that we both looked at each other and smiled.

***(Ahhh, I missed talking to Haru... and Mother)***

“Would you like to eat outside today?”

We both agreed and started preparing before going out. Haru gathered all his art supplies and placed them in his drawers. I went to my room. I started applying makeup to hide scars and to get dressed as well. Mother went to her room to get ready. After an hour we all gathered in the same place.

***(I could see the surprise on both Haru and mother's faces, because none of my scars were visible)***

Mother said: "Is that how you kept your scars hidden from me?"

I knew it's a serious question but I couldn't help but take pride in my skills.

I replied to her with a smirk: "yah. I practised applying makeup in my room and I also wore makeup whenever I went out of the house".

***(After that she looked at my dress)***

I was wearing an off-white shirt with black pants. I found them cute. Mother was wearing black coat with off-white check marks, white shirt underneath and black pants of the same off-white check marks design as the coat. Haru was wearing a simple dark blue shirt with grey pants. We all got to the restaurant and ate food, then we watched a movie, we went to an amusement park, and arrived back home at around 10:00 pm.

***(IT WAS SOOO MUCH FUN!!!)***

I had so much fun. It had been so long since I watched a movie and ate outside. When we came back, I wasn't planning to say anything but then I said to them: "I am sorry, sorry for locking myself in the room and ignoring both of you and thank you for accepting me, even after that time". I gave my mother a hug and said: "Thank you for everything mother". None of us moved until Haru cleared his throat.

Next day, I woke up sleepy and my mother called me to eat breakfast with her.

***(I was startled when I heard that)***

I got out of bed as quickly as I could. I washed my face and went downstairs. We all ate egg sandwiches. Then mother left along with Haru. I went to my room and took my medicine. I watched dramas and learned makeup. It's noon now, so I ate lunch. I then

made fried rice. In the evening, I did my makeup and went out to the park to see Sora. I haven't seen him in days.

***(I have lot to hear from him and tell him few things as well)***

At 5:30 pm, he arrived with a friend.

***(I was a little surprised and pleased to know he has a friend now)***

Her name is Emi (meaning beautiful smile). She indeed has an adorable smile. When we talked, it didn't take me long to know why Sora is friends with Emi. Emi is a kind-hearted person. She also tried to help him when he got bullied for the first time. She lives near him. Sora thanked me for helping him and giving him confidence. If it wasn't for our interaction, he would have never talked to Emi.

***(When I heard these words, at that moment, I made my mind of what I wanted to do with my life)***

I said to myself, I am going to become a makeup artist and give other people a voice and confidence and help them reach their goals.

We all went home. It's 9 p.m and I was eating dinner with my mother and Haru.

I said to them: "I want to pursue a career in makeup. I am going to study makeup and eventually open up my shop as well."

Mother looked at me for a while and then said, "Is this the path you choose for your future? Are you sure?"

I replied to her with a firm voice, "Yes, mother, this is my final decision."

"Okay. Since this is your choice, why don't we look for a makeup school near our house and a practice model? I can volunteer for that."

I smiled and said, "I will do my best, Mother."

## Epilogue

It has been five years since I gave my life to become the best makeup artist and it's been twenty-three years since my father's death. I miss him a lot. I wish he was here with us to see his daughter succeed. I now own a proper salon called "Facial Glow" with four employees. It's working out wonderfully for me. I have gotten a chance to learn and do more stuff than I ever thought I would ever be able to do. Building relationships with customers, doing makeup for weddings and attending award shows. I even got a job once to be on a makeup team for a movie as well. My mother visits my salon from time to time as well. I have come to know why I love doing makeup so much. First, I used to do it to hide myself, but now I do it to give myself confidence and strength and I want to give that same strength to other people as well. No one should be able to hide oneself. Instead, they should express themselves without fear.

My life is going smoothly now. Most of the time, I am in the salon. If I am not, I am thinking of ways to advance my makeup skills or looking for a place to branch out.

***(It's nice when you don't have to worry about society or have any complicated family issues.)***

I am hoping to open another shop at the end of this month.

As for further plans, I have none. I am pretty happy with what I have now. Haru is studying to be an "environment designer". He loves showing me his new drawings. As for Sora, he moved to a different city after completing his fifth grade. Emi and I have become close friends. She loves showing up to my shop and chatting. I also teach her some makeup stuff from time to time. She might find it useful in the future.

I hope to grow as a person in the future. Hope is all I had at my lowest and at my peak. I won't mess up this time.

Hopefully...



**Author's Note:**

If you are getting bullied (like Hana), kindly seek help from someone you trust such as your parents, school advisers, friends or any person you think is close to you.

They can help you and do their best to resolve it. Don't ever endorse such bullying.

Stay safe, everyone.



# CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE UMT FAMILY

## **If Winter Comes, Can Spring be Far Behind?**

**[Note: I am indebted to P.B. Shelley for the 'title' of this piece]**

By Dr. Nadia Anwar

Associate Professor, Acting Dean, Institute of Liberal Arts

Leafed out

I stand bare to the creeping cold;  
Wind slashing my wrinkled skin  
And I wriggling to my very bones.  
This winter, may perhaps, be my last,  
The thought pinched like salt  
I, who survived for centuries  
A shady haven, a sanctuary,  
to weary travellers and tots;  
A retreat, a consort,  
To lovers with their sneaky hearts  
A host to many wanderers  
A friend to fruit gatherers  
Would I sigh my last?  
My glory, a thing of the past?  
And days passed by...  
A flood of memories,  
Awashed by melting snow  
Gasped for last breath  
And midnight wind whistled  
The break of dawn  
In my clogged aeons.  
My deadly winter sores  
Ached to life  
Jolting my dithering soul.

My bloodless mien shivered  
And a fracture appeared  
A tiny life peeped out  
Giggled to sprout  
The Spring had come  
NEW LIFE had begun!

### **The Truth**

By Dr. Bushra Siddiqui

Assistant Professor, Department of English and Literary Studies, ILA

The footsteps on the trodden path  
Reevoke me from the silence that's as deep as eternity  
I come out of the world of fantasies  
To focus on the stern realities  
That impart the truth  
The truth that is smogged under sweet and shallow words  
It invokes the Real from within and mirrors others

## An Ode to Rohi (Cholistaan)

By Rida Sarfraz

Assistant Professor, Department of Linguistics and Communications, ILA

Her eyes were never

Blue hazel or green

Simple dark brown

Yet

Desert drinks from her gaze

Her complexion was never

Fair ivory or rosy

Simply wheatish

Yet

Sun beams reflect

From her forehead

Her language was never

English Urdu or Punjabi

Simply "Saraiki"

Yet

Honey dipped dialect she had

Her taste in music was

No pop rock or blues

Yet

The sweetest melodies

Of some *parwana mastana*

Folklore rooted

At Rohi

Her veil was

Never

Black white or blue  
Yet  
That *churro* scarf she had  
Was seeping red and yellow  
Her teeth when she smiled  
Were never like pearls  
Yet  
Shiny pebbles  
Being flossed with neemtree twig  
Her dreams were never  
Made of  
Glass marble or sandal  
Yet  
She saw them  
With eyes  
Made of  
Water clay pots  
Of mesmerising ecstasy  
Her gaze was cold  
In the  
Melodious desert where she lived and longed for;  
Hiraeth!  
As she belonged to Rohi  
The desert of solace....

## **A Mentor's Legacy**

By Zafrah Khalid

Lecturer, Centre for Languages, ILA

In the hallowed halls of wisdom's sanctuary

There stands a mentor, a luminary

Guiding with a wisdom profound and free

Shaping futures as far as eyes can see.

Lessons not just from books and lectures

But life's grand tapestry, its endless spectacles

In academic quests and spiritual conjectures

This mentor nurtures with unwavering principles.

Through *Rahimia's* path, a spiritual guide

Awakening soul, where deep truths reside

Leading us to the right track, far and wide

In the realm of knowledge, side by side.

Career paths carved with insights bright

A beacon in the darkest academic night

In this journey, showing the way's light

This mentor's wisdom, a celestial flight.

Reviving indigenous culture, decolonizing thought

Championing change, where it was sought

In the roots of systems, battles fought

This mentor's legacy, a revolution wrought.

May this mentor, in wisdom, forever shine

Spreading truths like stars in the night's design

Shaping young minds with a love so fine

In the annals of knowledge, a guiding sign.

For in this mentor's insightful talks we find

A compass for life, an unwavering mind

May his struggles for change for humankind

Endure in perpetuity, his influence defined.



## **Ache of a Daughter**

By Safia Iqbal

Research Associate, ORIC, UMT

There are scattered,  
Unaddressed letters  
Hanging wall to wall.  
I write, write and write  
To the one who left home.....

Where to post?  
Show me, Show me  
The way to heaven  
House; lingering with memories  
Smile and pain – pain and pang

There are unattended  
Souls that roam omnipresent  
As shadow of sorrow  
An echo of soul  
Pain itself hungering for an echo

There are eyes  
Swollen – Awaited  
With a feelingless smile  
When the day started without you  
Still, the brightness finds me in tears

There are losses  
Feel like aching

My keepsake – My keepsake  
Your unseen presence  
This pain has its own soul

### **Ice Cold Life**

By Adeela Madad

Lecturer, Centre for Languages, ILA

As if my life was really mine  
As if my love was really there  
As if my heart could always dare  
And pain was such that I could bear  
Almost good but always bad  
Was that all I ever had  
Not one last look, not one good bye  
I hear the echoes of my past  
Wrong choices made have come to last  
From eyes of mine pour endless rain  
Each breath of mine is pure disdain  
Poor soul of mine, all wrapped in mist  
Was this my reason to exist?

## Litany

By Sadia Riaz

Assistant Professor, Centre for Languages, ILA

'Could this waiting be a shield against angst?' She thought to herself while staring through the window at the sight of pastel leaves billowed by rushing wind and dandelion seeds hovering in the air under the sunrays. A rusted railway track was lying vast before her sight. She heard the grumble of steel rolling on rusted track under the dark long tunnels forwarding the passengers to their fore-longed destination. The gloomy ambiance of eerie calm was interrupted by the cacophony of the train signal. The train scurried quickly, blowing dust and causing her clothes to flail and hair to flap. A record was playing a track on an embanked dhaba where passengers mostly stayed to grab a cup of tea before boarding on the train.

Sajaan Preet Lagayee ke

Dur Des Mat Jaa

Baso hamari Nagari

Hum Mange Duaa

She felt a numbing melancholy at the sound of the track and tucked her hair at the back of her ears as if she was bringing order to an otherwise disordered life. Will this train ever bring home those who left to sail to faraway lands and break the endless circle of painful wait? She questioned herself counterposing spatial disjunction. She knew this train had taken him away on a journey along with all the happiness, shades and peace leaving only memories, agony and pain.

O Kadi aa Mil sanwal yaar ve

Mere loon loon cheekh pukar ve

Slowly the wind and the track's sound faded away and she heard the silence again. The train's lights flickered away and the smoke from the engine created a smoke screen blocking her view and numbing her senses. She chose to pretend to overlook the stark truth of the enveloping emptiness and meaninglessness of her fabricated world by awaiting succour because she knew her melodic litany of a *maseeha* was just anaesthesia to her mind.

## **Born in a Closet**

By Adeela Madad

Lecturer, Centre for Languages, ILA

I was born in a small, dark and murky closet where I was not allowed to cry or laugh and this is the only place I have ever known. I have never seen the outside of this airless, hoary and stuffy closet where I could hardly breathe. Darkness in this closet was so thick that I didn't even get to see the person who was responsible for bringing me into this closet. I remember the sensation of a hand on my mouth, clogging down my voice back into my throat when once I tried to produce a sound. So much force was used to thrust my voice back into my throat that I felt comatose for a while. So I knew perfectly well that I am prohibited from making any kind of noise. This was the only incident that I can recollect from my childhood.

After that, I learnt that there is no room for any sound in this closet. So I didn't dare move or make any noise again. This closet forbids any sound or light because their presence will further reduce the area of this closet and suffocate me to death. I am stuck in this closet in which I cannot move a single fibre of my body and now I have almost forgotten how to move or speak. Sometimes, I feel that this closet was shaped after putting me in it and with the passage of time it is getting smaller.

I never saw any light until a day when the timeworn and familiar hand that had fed me and choked me when I tried to speak, left me alone in that dark horrid closet and went out through the door of the closet. I remember the figure standing in the light but I didn't get to see the face of that figure because it was the first and the only time that I was exposed to light and the light was too intense for me to open my miffed eyes. I remember that that figure stood there for a moment perfectly still for a few seconds before it disappeared forever. Then the door was closed and sealed from the outside. After that, the closet further contracted and the door vanished magically. That figure never returned to me again. Neither did the door appear again nor do I expect it to.

Perhaps, I will not see the light again but it's fine with me because it does not hold anything for me. Perhaps I will never be allowed to speak but I know how to think.

That day I lost the only contact I have other than the walls of this closet. I have never heard or talked to that figure which was living with me but I felt a tingle when it left me. I don't know who or what that was. Do I have any relation with it or not but I know that it was with me and now it's not with me and this is enough to sting my heart. Once again, I felt the pain that I had felt a long time ago when I was almost suffocated to death or it might be worse than that. I am comparing this unnamed feeling to that soreness because it was the only feeling that I ever had. I didn't weep because the well of my tears was sealed permanently long before but I felt my heart was trying to break my ribs and it was ready to fall in the rotten floor of the closet that was slowly dissolving me into nothingness.

I was locked inside this closet like a demon that can be controlled only by locking and keeping in an isolated place but unlike the growth of demons I am liquefying. I can feel this thick and frosting darkness penetrating into my bones and melting me down like I am born for this sole purpose. Soon I am going to go extinct from the face of the earth which I haven't yet seen. Thinking about that moment of complete annihilation is the only refuge I have in this closet.



# GUEST CORNER

## Who Am I?

By Muhammad Haroon Jakhrani  
M.Phil, English Literature, ISP, Multan, Pakistan

Who am I?

Often wonder, a mere mortal, or something grand?

A drop in the ocean, or a burning star,

A fleeting thought, or a story so far?

Am I the sum of my memories,

Or a reflection of my dreams and fantasies?

Am I the one, to whom I see in the mirror,

Or am I someone else, a stranger, a bearer?

For who am I, if not a question,

A mystery that's worth exploration?

A journey of discovery, that I have to take,

A story of life, that's mine to make.

Am I the laughter, or the tears that I shed,

The hopes and fears that swirl in my head?

Am I the past, or the promise of tomorrow,

Or the journey that's filled with joy and sorrow?

For who am I, if not a work of art,

A masterpiece of life, that's set apart?

A kaleidoscope of colours,

A symphony of flavours.



Am I the choices, that I make each day,  
Or the paths that I choose to play?  
Am I the sum of my flaws and strengths,  
Or a blend of moments that life presents?

For who am I, if not a journey,  
A story that's worth every memory?  
A quest to discover, who I really am,  
In a world that's a mystery, that's just as grand.

And though the answer, may never be clear,  
I'll keep exploring, in hope and fear,  
For in the journey, I'll find my way,  
And I'll build a life, that I'm proud to say.

So let me ask once more, who am I?  
A question that's worth, the endless try,  
For in the end, it's not about the answer,  
But the journey that leads to the grandeur.

## Abominable

By Asjl Khan

Brand & Communications Analyst at Addo AI

Stride along with heavy feet  
Days are short but nights are bleak  
Had nothing to hide or to seek  
Maybe the love will remain this unique

Hate the feeling of hopeless tomorrow  
But the world spins to add to the sorrow  
Still injured by the Cupid's arrow  
Hate the feeling, no time to borrow

Hid the love behind infatuation  
Bludged by insatiable inclination  
Too much for the spiritual emancipation  
As the efforts had no emotional remuneration

It takes a lot to be vulnerable  
Because a burning heart is inconsolable  
As nothing in this world is ever durable  
Expectations and reciprocation remain abominable

### About “The Literary Fulcrum”

The Literary Fulcrum (TLF) is the Annual Literary Magazine of the Department of English and Literary Studies (DELS) which caters to the following genres of literary and creative writings:

- Poetry
- Short Stories
- Non-Fiction Prose
- Comic Fiction
- Drama/Plays
- Travelogs
- Memoirs
- Critical Thinking

### Submission Guidelines

Authors are required to send submissions by following the given guidelines:

1. Manuscripts should be in proper English with a special focus on grammar and vocabulary.

The same applies to other literary genres such as plays and comic fiction.

2. Essays, Travelogs (1st person/ 3rd Person), Non-Fiction Prose, and Argumentative Writings should contain a logical sequence of writing e.g. Introduction, Middle, and Conclusion.
3. The authors are encouraged to make abundant use of literary devices, especially in fictional pieces, to enhance their work.
4. All submissions (apart from poems) must be of a reasonable length. The preferred word limit of prose works is 1000-1500.
5. The authors must clearly mention their affiliation: name, designation (in case of faculty or staff), batch, and program of study on the manuscript.
6. **IMPORTANT: Authors are requested to send no more than 2 manuscripts for review for each issue.**
7. **IMPORTANT: Authors are also requested to give a brief overall synopsis/summary of what the manuscript is about. The authors can identify major themes, ideas, motifs, symbolism, and/or other literary devices.**

**AUTHORS MUST SEND THEIR SUBMISSION  
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**OR SCAN:**



### Review Process

The reviewing process will be completed within a few weeks after which the authors will receive detailed feedback on their work along with the editors' decision. It is advised that the manuscript be thoroughly proofread before submission to avoid any inconvenience.

# PATRON'S MESSAGE

The Literary Fulcrum is a means of expression and catharsis for both the established and emerging literary enthusiasts. This issue offers an array of thought-provoking and insightful entries in the form of poetry, prose and critical analysis. I believe that the magazine is a celebration of creativity, inclusivity and literary expression of the deepest human emotions.

**Prof. Dr. Asif Raza**

Rector University of Management  
and Technology, Lahore

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