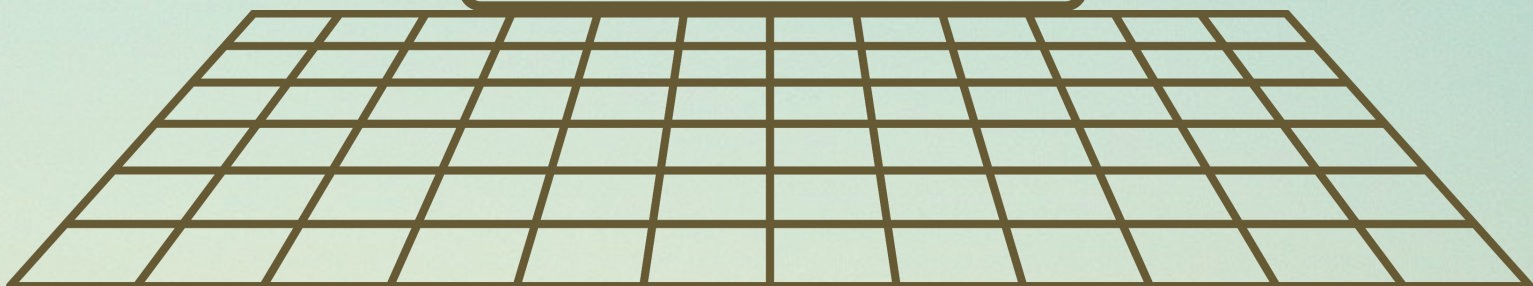
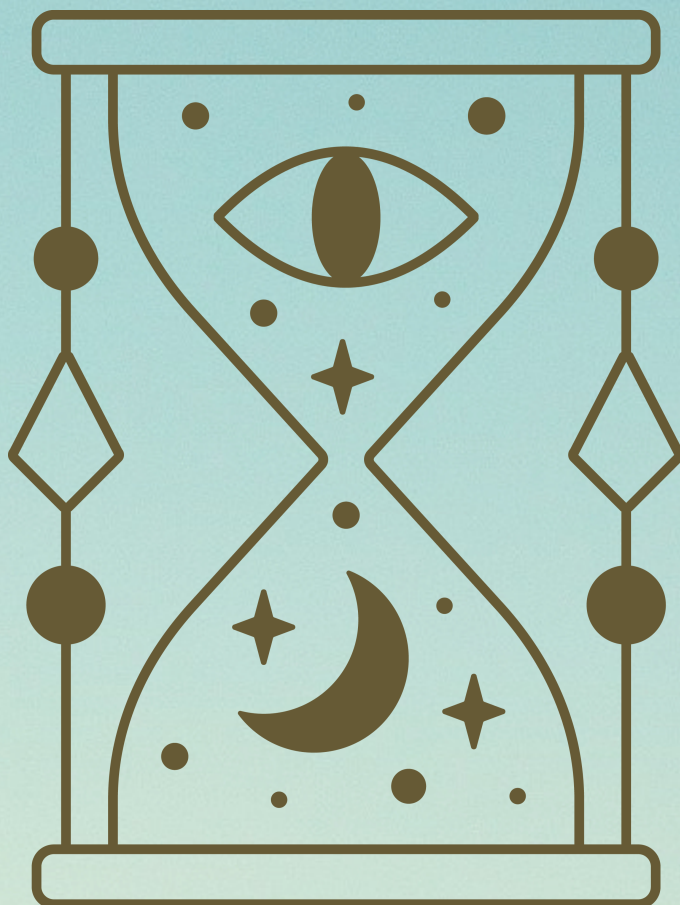


**N O E S I S 2 0 2 1**



**DEPARTMENT OF**

**PHILOSOPHY, LSR**



*To the year that revealed us to ourselves.*

## **FOREWORD**

*It gives me immense pleasure to introduce the latest publication of the student academic journal of the Department of Philosophy at Lady Shri Ram College for Women: Noesis Vol. VII.*

*This year, we have witnessed the maximum number of submissions. Thus, it is with immense pride that I have reviewed the longest ever edition of Noesis. Papers that have been featured deliberate on a multitude of topics, covering various fields as well as intersections of philosophy. This diversity includes themes such as religion, spirituality, and gender. It's a collection of critical thought processes that aim to analyze topics of great worth with such effortlessness. I hope this edition initiates subsequent discussions and serves as a good point of reference for study of these topics.*

*A lot of people refrain from reading philosophical articles with the thought that the subject would be too complex. I think that's where the value of a journal such as Noesis comes in. With every publication, students get a chance to explore these intricacies on their own, and try to posit themselves in the footsteps of great philosophers or academic thinkers. Through this medium, we encourage the critical thought process that is an indispensable skill for all human endeavours.*

*I would especially like to thank my colleagues in the Department for their support and the Principal, Dr. Suman Sharma, for always guiding us. I applaud the commendable efforts of all students who have contributed to this edition, and because of whom we are able to present this collection of thought-provoking papers for yet another year.*

*Sincerely,*

*Dr. Lipi Saxena*

*Assistant Professor*

*Lady Shri Ram College for Women*

*Delhi University*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>FOREWORD</b> .....	2
<b>GENDER BINARISM: BODIES FRAMED AS MUCH BY CULTURE AS NATURALLY</b> .....	5
<i>Adhishri Aruman</i> .....	5
<b>FOOD FOR (SOCIAL) THOUGHT</b> .....	14
<i>Priyanshi Bhardwaj</i> .....	14
<b>BEYOND THE DIFFERENCES: QUESTIONING PARALLELS AND CONTRASTS</b> .....	23
<i>Bhavika Bhatia</i> .....	23
<b>SIKH HISTORY AND FEMINISM: TRAJECTORY DURING THE TIMES OF SIKH GURUS AND PRESENT STATUS OF FEMINISM IN SIKHISM</b> .....	32
<i>Grace Gill</i> .....	32
<b>A CRITICAL SURVEY OF BINARY OPPOSITION THROUGH THE LENS OF GENDER</b> .....	46
<i>Nanda H.</i> .....	46
<b>OF POSTS AND PERSPECTIVES: THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL POTENTIAL OF THE #METOO MOVEMENT</b> .....	56
<i>Ishita Jain</i> .....	56
<b>PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE: BHARTRHARI AND BEYOND</b> .....	66
<i>Madhura Kar</i> .....	66
<b>PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS OF FILIAL OBLIGATION</b> .....	75
<i>Sirjan Kaur</i> .....	75
<b>A PHILOSOPHICAL, HISTORICAL AND MODERN-DAY PERSPECTIVE ON FEMALE BODY</b> .....	96

<i>Saloni Kumar</i> .....	96
<b>SICK-FLICKS AND CHILL: REPRESENTATION OF ILLNESS IN FILMS</b> .....	107
<i>Shefali Mehra</i> .....	107
<b>SOME QUESTIONS ON THE DOCTRINE OF KARMA</b> .....	117
<i>Kalyani Nandagopal</i> .....	117
<b>THE FUNCTIONING OF BUDDHISM: A CULTURAL AND SOCIAL ELABORATION</b> .....	126
<i>Vaishnavi Nimma</i> .....	126
<b>PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS OF A GENOCIDE</b> .....	135
<i>Ananya Nivsarkar</i> .....	135
<b>THE ANNIHILATION OF BEING - AN ANALYSIS OF DEATH AND AFTERLIFE</b> .....	145
<i>Pooja Sharma</i> .....	145
<b>KABIR'S SYNCRETISM IS MORE RELEVANT IN THE 21ST CENTURY THAN EVER</b> .....	155
<i>Rishika Singh</i> .....	155
<b>PLAGIARISM AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF IDEAS</b> .....	164
<i>Aadrika Sominder</i> .....	164
<b>THE SHAKESPEAREAN PRINCE</b> .....	172
<i>Snigdha Agarwal Srinivas</i> .....	172
<i>Ritisha Gupta</i> .....	172
<b>FOUCAULT'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY: RETHINKING POWER RELATIONS IN THE PANDEMIC SITUATION</b> .....	195
<i>Nandini Vats</i> .....	195
<b>IS PHILOSOPHY OBSOLETE AS A DISCIPLINE?</b> .....	206
<i>Yusra Zainuddin</i> .....	206
<b>EDITORIAL BOARD</b> .....	215

## **GENDER BINARISM: BODIES FRAMED AS MUCH BY CULTURE AS NATURALLY**

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*Lady Shri Ram College for Women*

### ***ABSTRACT***

*Gender has always been a major point of contention in all arenas of human control, since centuries. It is also one of the most important themes of feminist and queer literature, and has been widely deliberated to understand gender oppression, subordination of women, different cultural constructs of masculinity and femininity, and exclusion of those who do not meet the expectations of gender.*

*This paper discusses an important aspect of gender: gender binarism, a view that there are only two genders and everyone has to be one of them. It begins with defining the terms sex, gender, gender identity and sexual orientation, creating the understanding of a constructed binary sex, binary body and its binary gender roles. It goes on to debunk certain scientific facts about the sexed bodies, which were not there just to be discovered, but have been framed as per the context and norms of the society. The paper ends by establishing that not only gender, but the sexed construction of human bodies is also as much a work of culture, and thus readdressing the limited nature of gender binaries.*

## Introduction

Gender binarism is a notion that “gender comes only in two distinct identities, masculine man and feminine woman, who are of the male and female sex respectively, excluding the non-binary, non-conforming people and subjugating them”<sup>1</sup>. A large part of the present reality depends on this binary comprehension of sex and gender, identifying different sets of characteristics for both, and disciplining those who do not match these expected characteristics into ‘appropriate’ behavior. Dress codes in school, marriage norms, sexual division of labor and even the nomenclature of an infant, all these are the prominent examples of trying to maintain the gender binary. The gender binary is a particularly pervasive and an all-around acknowledged idea in our society that we tend to put everything into one category or the other. Yet, while the gender binary is certainly secure within society and our social norms, there is actually a long history of gender not being viewed in such a binary manner. Indeed, many indigenous cultures around the globe held more fluid and dynamic understandings of gender prior to experiencing western theories of gender.

## A Brief Historical Overview

“When two adult men hold hands in public in the US, they are deemed gay, not so in India. To understand queerness, cultural filters are necessary. What’s also needed is the awareness that these filters can sometimes choke voices.” (Shikhandi, Devdutt Pattanaik)

Anne Fausto-Sterling points out that “In Europe, it was only by the seventeenth century that hermaphrodites were forced to choose one established gender and stay with it, the punishment being death for failing to do so” (2002). A Nigerian scholar, Oyeronke Oyewumi, makes the suggestion that 'gender' as a category did not matter or was not prominent in pre-colonial Yoruba and many other African cultures, where seniority is the defining axis of hierarchy, not gender. Ifi Amadiume, the linguistic system of the Igbo, had few gender distinctions, and terms for roles such as 'head of household' were not gendered, while the 'master' or 'husband' role did not necessarily intend a male classification. Amadiume terms this 'gender flexibility'.

Devdutt Pattanaik in his book ‘Shikhandi’ points out how the discomfort with sexual conduct, especially homosexuality can be traced to the “valorisation of celibacy and the rise of monastic orders in all cultures”. He suggests that “It is very common to deny the existence of fluidity in

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<sup>1</sup> Moleiro, Carla and Pinto, Nuno (2015). Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity: Review of concepts, controversies and their relation to psychopathology classification systems.

our ancient stories and scriptures, or simply locate them in the realm of the supernatural”. There are many examples of queer stories and gender fluidity in our cultures. There is a story of a man was transformed by the underworld gods into the rabbit deity (supporter and protector of homosexuality), after being executed for desiring another man. Another tender story is of Emperor Ai who cut the sleeve of his clothing instead of upsetting the sleep of his loved one, a man, originating the phrase ‘passion of the cut sleeve’ that refers same-sex love. There are examples of Greek poems of love between two women, written by Sappho, on the island of Lesbos, which gave rise to the word ‘lesbian’. In devotional literature, Gods turn into females on various occasions (Shiva’s Ardhanarishwar form, Vishnu’s Mohini form). This is unique to India.

“The celebration of queer ideas in Hindu stories, symbols and rituals is in stark contrast to the ignorance and rigidity that we see in Indian society. Some blame the British for making Indians defensive about being so ‘feminine’ and for criminalising amongst many others, queer communities like the Hijras, and everyone else who indulges in ‘sodomy’ (a biblical word for sexual deviation that was practised in the ancient city of Sodom).” The hijras, considered India’s third gender, ignored, rejected, and reduced to entertainment, have a peculiar clap to ensure that the world notices them.

A.K. Ramanujan suggests that the Bhakti saints crossed and recessed the lines of binary gender (a movement that originated in Tamil Nadu, India in 16<sup>th</sup> century CE). They feel liberated by becoming indifferent to this gender difference. Historical work on cross-dressing (male actors playing female roles) in theatre and dance in late-nineteenth/early twentieth-century India, at a moment when the practice was starting to become de legitimate by the arrival of modernity, demonstrates that arguments about gender verisimilitude—that cross-dressing men didn’t look feminine enough—were brought up to end the practice of cross-dressing. Bindu Menon points out in this context that “Having a woman’s body was not sufficient to perform women on stage. Femininity was a highly coded practice, and these codes were developed by Velukkutty (one of the legendary impersonators of Malayalam theatre) and similar female impersonators.”

Hinduism, in its various texts has, again and again talked about self versus body dualism. For them, self is something which does not have a gender, and this sexed, gendered body is it’s cage, which self(atman) has to leave. Therefore this gender and sex is just as for this one life, while the atman that travels through various adobes is eternal and does not have a materialistic appearance or features.



A similar account of Launda Naach can be seen today, one of the oldest traditions in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. A seasonal migration from October to March takes place every year when several gay men and transgender women come to these states to work as 'Launda Dancers'.

### **Difference Between Sex and Gender, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation**

Making a distinction between sex and gender is an important move against the gender binaries. At first, the term 'sex' used to allude to the biological distinction between men and women, while 'gender' was the cultural inscription or social engraving of this difference. Feminist anthropologists, such as Margret Mead, have shown that the definitions of masculinity and femininity differs across cultures, thus arguing that there is no necessary fundamental relation between the biological men and women and the masculine and feminine qualities. The child-rearing practices establish certain differences between sexes. In addition, social orders value the 'manly' attributes higher than the 'feminine' ones. A man who shows his grief by crying is shamed and asked to 'man up', however, a woman being brave is 'complimented' by considering her an exception to other women (thus asserting that bravery is a masculine, and not feminine characteristic).

The 'body' even is not only natural, but has a cultural influence in its formation (this will be discussed in detail later). Sex, therefore is not an immutable ground on which 'gender' is constructed, but sex itself is an evolving and constantly changing subject.

Gender identity means one's idea of being either a male or female, or a non-conforming individual (coined in mid 1960s): "a person's self-conception of their gender (regardless of their biological sex)."<sup>2</sup> However, gender identity is not a very whole concept yet, as defining how an individual is supposed to identify themselves is never going to be adequate. Every individual is different and has a unique set of characteristics and qualities, and these categories, in which they are expected to fit, shouldn't be a parameter to judge one's identity.

Sexual orientation alludes to the sex of one's romantic or sexual partner. Nowadays the term 'gay' and 'lesbian' are used for people who are attracted to the individuals of same sex, and the term 'bisexual' to describe people who are attracted to the individuals of the male and female sexes. "Even though these categories are widely used, sexual orientation does not always appear in such definable categories (pansexual, asexual, demisexual, etc.), and instead,

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<sup>2</sup> Moleiro, Carla and Pinto, Nuno (2015). Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity: Review of concepts, controversies and their relation to psychopathology classification systems

occurs on a continuum and people perceived or described as LGB may identify in various ways.”

### **Gender and Bodies**

A feminist philosopher who changed the wave of the movement, whose name inevitably arises in any gender context, Judith Butler, whose first book *Gender Trouble* is seen as a landmark in queer and feminist literature. Butler takes Simone de Beauvoir’s dictum that “one is not born, but becomes a woman”, and argues that this means that all of us are taught to be men and women, which therefore, gives us no reason to attach ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ qualities only to bodies marked male and female respectively. She thus brings in the idea of a “radical discontinuity” between the bodies and genders. Butler’s “heterosexual matrix” refers to a framework produced by cultural practices, deliberations and the context of the society, through which, it seems as a fact that human bodies are supposed to have one of the two fixed sexual identities, getting attracted only to the opposite sex. However, removing this matrix shows that human sexualities and desires are fluid and cannot be fixed into categories.

Thus, their startling argument is that 'gender' is not the social derivation of meaning on a pre-set 'sex'. Instead, gender produces the sex, by a series of performances, which go on continuously till the moment one person ceases to exist. They put it as the bodies being ‘forcibly marginalized over time’ by reiterative, repeated practices of gender performances.

Butler puts forth the point that we are always trying to perform and be a part of one of the genders, we are never confident of fitting in a binary category. It's a continuous lifelong process. Therefore, we are always putting up with the gender expectations in a world where no one wants to understand the complexities of these bodies and their identities.

This ‘heterosexual matrix’ renders multiplicity of bodies invisible. Several bodies become imperceptible or illegitimate due to the functioning of hegemonic legal codes and cultural norms, the idea becoming common sense and getting internalized even by those oppressed by it.

Since the dominant understanding of the human . body is explicitly binary, those who do not conform to this description, are thought to be diseased. For instance, hermaphrodites, homosexuals, eunuchs, transgender, people who have characteristics that do not match their assigned gender (non-masculine, non-feminine), respectively. All these have to be made

normal enough to fit our society through medical and surgical intervention, or they must be declared abnormal or invalid.

Our very language, held in the grasp of this faulty system of gender binary, falters when trying to incorporate such bodies. However, gender pronouns, specifically they, are being used to incorporate every different individual.

### **Debunking of scientific ‘facts’**

"We need the power of modern critical theories of how meanings and bodies get made, not in order to deny meanings and bodies, but in order to build meanings and bodies that have a chance for life." (Haraway 1989a:580)

Nelly Oudshoorn, in her book *Beyond the Natural Body*, presents an outline of how scientific concepts of the body such as the hormonal body look like the real facts only because of the exercises of scientists. She takes up the history of bodies and their formation, initially into ‘one-sex model’, focusing on the similarities between the two bodies, and the emergence of hormones, and the focus shifting on distinguishing the bodies, establishing how scientific facts are not fundamentally given, but aggregately built.

Feminist biologists like her have rejected the idea of biological determinism, an idea that validates different types of subjection as natural and unpreventable, because it depends on evidently natural and, along these lines, unchangeable factors. Oudshoorn argues that “there does not exist an unmediated natural truth of the body.” The social constructivists approach opened up a totally new and different line of research uncovering the various manners in which the biomedical sciences as digressive advancements remake and mirror our comprehension of the body. Scientists are making reality rather than discovering it. Biomedical discourses not only are framed by technological advancements, but are also representation of changes in society.

Bodily processes have been described in forms of metaphors reflecting the state of society. Nelly Oudshoorn clearly states, “The use of metaphors is not just a game of words, they entail specific meanings and values that may contribute to a positive or negative attitude towards the body. The representation of menstruation in terms of failed production, for instance, seems to facilitate a rather negative view of it.”

As Oudshoorn has presented, the hormonal body, indeed, takes into account, the chance of dismissing the gender binary. That implies, if bodies have both male and female sex hormones,

then maleness and femaleness can be in both bodies too. However, biomedical sciences prefer to treat the presence of androgen in female bodies and oestrogen in male bodies as abnormal. Further, the female body is made to appear as a body completely in control of hormones (the same does not apply to the male body). In this process, a clear network can be seen between the medical profession and the pharmaceutical business. All sorts of 'diseases' in women, such as depression, irregular menstrual cycle-are prescribed hormonal therapy (Oudshoorn 1994). This also covers the male bodies, which react to a smaller number of female hormones present in their bodies.

“Nearly a third of the male population can have 'breasts', and if it is not due to rare endocrinological causes, the condition is perfectly normal.” It does not have any negative impact, but still, it is pathologized and made into a disease (gynaecomastia), and when other serious illnesses have been ruled out, the advice given is to undertake surgery and make the body look conforming to the gender binary norms.

The conversion of fierce, uncontrollable fertility into soft motherhood is a feature of many religions of the world. The point is that the 'disability' of any natural bodily function can and must be understood as a product of its inescapable social dimensions.

### **Intersex**

“Intersex people are born with both ovarian and testicular tissue or with ambiguous sex organs.”<sup>3</sup> Intersex people, hermaphrodites, as they used to be called, were not a problem for society until the advent of modernity and the formation of strict gender binary. In the West, from the twentieth century, it became common for doctors to make surgical interventions for the assignment of one or the other sex to intersex infants.

A classic example of an intersex person is that of ‘Shikhandi’ from Hindu epic ‘Mahabharata’, who went through a very specific change genitally, and can be called an intersexed hermaphrodite.

A study<sup>4</sup> conducted of intersex babies and sex assignment in the US showed that “medical decisions to assign one sex or the other were made on the basis of cultural expectations and not on the basis of the biological features present.” There is a wider international debate on whether such children should be left to discover their own identities or the surgical interventions should

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<sup>3</sup> Menon, Nivedita (2012). *Seeing Like a Feminist*. Penguin Books.

<sup>4</sup> Kessler (1990)

continue. Another possibility wherein they could live normal happy lives as intersex people, even being able to reproduce. So, the only reason to assign a sex to them through surgical interventions is cultural and not biological.

Therefore, the fixed binary categories are not decided by nature, but by culture.

### **Conclusion**

Gender, sex, identity, orientation, and bodies, are the intricacies of complex human natures. Trying to define them narrowly by creating binary categories not only excludes a wide range of bodies and identities, it also traumatizes those who do not meet the expectations of the gender binary. For free human expression and for acknowledging the uniqueness and diversity, removal of the gender binary and heteronormativity is an absolute necessity.

Human bodies are not just formed by nature, but are a culmination of various cultural aspects. The context in which a society is set up reflects our attitude towards a body. Inclusion of non-binary, non-conforming bodies should be normalized for creating a better world.

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## FOOD FOR (SOCIAL) THOUGHT

**Priyanshi Bhardwaj**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*In this paper, the author looks at food impacting various facets of social structures and life. The themes that will be touched upon include historical significance of food and how it aided in the creation of social structures, food and its relation to the feminine principle, Food in relation to the establishment of class structures along with the issue of cultural appropriation and the State's role in how food finds its place in politics.*

**Keywords:** *society, binary coding, critical theory, appropriation, class structures.*

## Introduction

*“The recipe for making the perfect batch of brownies is as follows:*

*Step 1: Get all your ingredients in place, a stick of butter, a bag of flour, a bag of sugar, a couple of eggs, cocoa powder, a little bit of coffee, vegetable oil, apple cider, baking powder, baking soda.*

*Step 2: Don’t let the ingredients know or the kitchen know that you are confident enough to make the brownies.”*

This might feel like an anecdote that a cookbook will start with so that the author can establish the fact that the author and the reader are not so different. This, of course, could not be farther from the truth. The author has managed to write a cookbook and the reader has not. This obvious fact has already created an unequal relationship between the two.

A politician yelling at the top of his voice that he is exactly like the population that will vote for him ends up doing something similar. They have written the cookbook with the perfect recipes for crowd-pleasing, for vote banking, and of course the dessert where they will lower their heads and ask for water after their victory.

Food, in this way, mirrors not just social structures and political icons, but human beings as a whole. *You are what you eat* is not just a motivational poster to frame in your dining hall for you to eat healthier, instead, these five words carry within themselves a whole set of identity politics. If you eat a certain form of meat, you are an enemy of the state; if you refuse to eat at the temple, you are encouraging the wrath of God themselves.

In this paper we will be looking at food from three lenses:

1. Food and History
2. Food and Feminist Critical theory
3. Food and Social theory
4. The stomach and the State

## Food and History



The eating and drinking habits of people are influenced by cultural, social, geographical, and by large historical factors. The places that people are born in and the status that they are born with influence the way they consume. In a much more philosophical sense, the history of food as an academic discipline can be seen as a unifier of different approaches. The old distinction between mind and body, intellect and substance, seems to vanish in the face of the need to understand human behavior concerning food. What people eat engages both body and mind, sensation and thought<sup>5</sup>.

Even as we read history, the initial movement of human beings from one place to another depended on the availability of meat, vegetation, etc. As agriculture came into the picture, we started seeing an evocation of permanence, creation of societies, the establishment of trade, of barter systems, even the usage of money, as it is used now. All of this can be seen boiling down to food, and the human condition that demands survival.

It is necessary to mention here that food should be seen as parallel to the beginning of history and social movements and not the culmination of it.

Roland Barthes had compared the narration of a story to the sequence of a meal. He asserts that food is language itself. The food we read about when it is being described in fiction and non-fiction work can be seen echoing in the menus we read at restaurants. Both these being attempts at converting a sensory experience of preparation and consumption, into the intellectual activity of reading. There are numerous examples of food and food imagery in literature, poetry, theatre, and media in general.

In popular culture as well, food finds its representation in cooking as a calming activity, stories of travelers from Europe discovering spices for the first time, a workaholic chef, among others. These representations that often go unnoticed, happen to be a culmination of the historically significant place that food has time and again found itself in. From the Feminist movement to various social movements, the agricultural revolutions to the State's interference with a citizen's dining room. All of these have had sub-movements where what one eats and drinks became not just about survival, rather it represented the entire social situation of the person.

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<sup>5</sup> Wertz, S.K.. (2017). Food and philosophy: Selected essays.

## Food, Fiction, and Feminist Critical Theory

Raising the issue of food in the context of the Feminist movement becomes important since food has so often been associated with women and the 'feminine principle' itself. It starts with the usual narrative of 'women belong in the kitchen, and extends to the dining room with prime significance given to the table manners of a lady. Margaret Visser in *The Rituals of Dinner*<sup>6</sup> states, 'Behind every rule of table etiquette lurks the determination of each person present to be a diner, not a dish. It is one of the chief roles of etiquette to keep the lid on the violence which the meal being eaten presupposes.'

Nora Ephron's novel *Heartburn* tells the story of the disintegrating marriage of the narrator, a cookbook writer. Among the fifteen recipes that feature in the novel, the last one is of Key Lime Pie, which the narrator throws at her husband in the novel's ending. The inculcation of recipes in the novel is what can be called 'culinary fiction' or 'recipe fiction'<sup>7</sup>. This mixture of cookbooks and novels might come across as an odd one but there is much to be understood here.

Margaret Visser, in *Much Depends on Dinner*, describes the 'Hippocratic complex' of the Greeks; this complex divides the world into "a series of diametrically opposing principles: up and down, light and dark, male and female, hot and cold, dry and wet, and so on." This sort of binary coding, which seems non-threatening, tends to privilege the masculine over the feminine. This in turn tends to favor one form of writing to another.

Cooking has historically been inseparable from the feminine. It is the work and habit, a sharing of personal histories for women. In South Asian households, to visit another's home as a guest is a privilege granted only to men, women have to enter the kitchen and be of help. There is a guilt that is shared and carried from one house to another because the binary coding has let the

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<sup>6</sup> Visser, Margaret. *The Rituals of Dinner: The Origins, Evolution, Eccentricities, and Meaning of Table Manners*, 1992

<sup>7</sup> Judyth Rigler, writing for the New York Times News Service, has. Further reproduction is prohibited without permission. 55 coined the term "culinary fiction" and describes the novel with recipes as "the newest publishing blockbuster."

feminine bear the brunt of secondary providing<sup>8</sup> and preparing whereas the masculine has to deal with consumption.

The relationship between gender and food is a complex one. Norms of domesticized femininity find their footing in food behaviors. The onus of ensuring a full diet for the children falls on women as an extension of her as the first nutrient provider to the infant.

Food that has been historically established as important for survival for our species started playing a strategic role in the organization of the family. It also adds to our understanding and normalization of social roles in general. Food started acting as an extension of the gendered role of caring. The primary provider became the masculine and the secondary provider became the feminine, the former became a public role and the latter a private role.

### **Food and Social Theory**

Food and critical theory have had a long-standing historical relationship. Socially, the raw materials we use, the way we cook, the way we serve, the way we eat, essentially the entire sequence of a meal speaks volumes of our place in the class structure. The existence of courses in meals is not a structure that exists in most households, mainly because not every household can afford a structure.

Knowing this, certain communities and societies adapted by making the most of whatever they could afford. However, the utter isolation of any community is extremely difficult, if not an entirely impossible task. The ability of the upper class to invade and appropriate the culture and food habits of the lower class leads to more than just hurt sentiments. As a matter of fact, at times, this leaves the lower class financially vulnerable as well.

Let's take an example here, a favorite in the U.S., ribs were garage meat. Made from the parts where there was hardly any meat on the bone, they were undesired by the upper class and became a staple in the diet of the middle and lower classes. Eventually, when the upper class realized that the raw materials did not matter as much as the way of preparing it did, their newly found desire for ribs drove up the price for this junk meat.

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<sup>8</sup> Secondary providing: The author considers the historical definition of providing, which is a much more public activity that men engage in, secondary providing is the 'duty of a woman to provide the daily needs of food, water, etc.

There is a sense of created desire that the upper class keeps perpetuating. The moment one desire is fulfilled, there is a restlessness in place for another, and since more often than not the means to look for and fulfill the new desires is readily available, a social appropriation ensues.

What initially comes across as ignorance of the rich and the cleverness of advertising starts to expose a larger social structure that is responsible for the historical appropriation of stories, narratives, and recipes. It is this hierarchical social structure that perpetuates the binary coding that continues to privilege one narrative over another.

### **The Stomach and the State**

It is no secret that the State has a huge role to play in providing the citizens with the food that they will consume. The complex world of export, import is one that the State navigates. However, at times, the intervention of the State exists beyond just the indirectness. Some nations have a heterogeneous mixture of varying communities living together. Ideally, this mixture should co-exist with harmony, but that is rarely the case.

The concept of violence<sup>9</sup> is a complex and highly contested one. Human beings, as a species, have been tainted with a history of violence, mainly through the endless wars that we have fought. This violence emerges from a place of conflicting ideologies, personal ambitions, and greed, hate-mongering, among others. Within all of these, violence comes from a place of insecurity, a sense of dread of what reality is and what it could have been.

The insecurity that we often see emerging in waves echoes a remanence of prominence in an oppressive structure. Members of a community that had been, in the past, socially and financially important or powerful, tend to live in a what-if scenario, where they had managed to keep that power. These members then live in their imagination, creating private scenarios that they wish would play out in the reality as well.

This does not seem any different than a child's play. However, a child is not expected to act any differently. For adult members in a society, the expectations are quite different. The State cannot play house with them, and if it does, it speaks more of the State's incompetence than it does of the superiority of any particular community.

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<sup>9</sup> If it is a concept at all. (Mark Vorobej, *The Concept of violence*, Routledge, 2016.)

Moving forward, with the above mentioned in mind, we come to our major discussion about the State and food. The main theme that we will be discussing is not the food items that citizens are allowed to eat, but instead food items that are restricted. In an ideal scenario, if certain food items do not fit with multiple communities' ideologies or faith, two scenarios should arise, either the state bans all food items that fall under this category, no matter which community is offended, or the State does not ban any of these food items to not align itself with anyone community's ideology.

However, in both of these cases, we presuppose a secular State. In both of these cases, we see the state taking full control of what we eat, or no control of it. There are scenarios when certain items might be moderated or restricted because of environmental reasons, but our presupposition does not include an environmentally aware State.

India has seen the Colonial State impose restrictions on the collection and sale of salt, a basic requirement in the process of cooking regardless of which community you belonged to. Here we saw the State not align itself with any community, but rather it used its power to further its ambitions and greed. This can be seen as an example of the State functioning not as a State but as a community. A State that instead of working towards the harmonized living of a heterogeneous nation, starts creating an ideology of its own, and then works towards imposing this ideology.

The State functioning as a community leads to a structure where this one State converting into a community, by default has greater power over the others. The former can now work on the whims and fancies of its ideology that tends to be extremely vague. The benefit that this vague ideology shows is its flexible nature. This functioning leads to the weaponization of aspects of a citizen's life that were never perceived as violent. What raw materials they buy, the way they cook, the courses they serve, all of it is policed heavily. Ironically this policing does not always come from the State, it starts to come from fellow citizens, because the State has begun the creation of the narrative that food is not the beginning of human history, but instead the end of it.

As we have established through the previous sections, food has a close relationship with the human condition, not just historically or philosophically, but also in the debates surrounding class, gender, binary coding, cultural appropriation, etc. In all these debates, there is an onus that falls on the State at large. Because as centralized as it sounds, a good State has the ability

and power to enable a structured discourse in these debates, instead of the usual blame roulette that people find themselves in.

### **Food for (Social) Thought**

The process of baking the perfect batch of brownies requires the omission of the confidence that one might have in their abilities. You might have followed the same recipe every day of your life. It might have been a recipe that has gone through generations of personal histories. Yet, the non-existence of the final product makes your confidence dwindle.

In every history lesson there hides a cautionary tale of the inevitability of history repeating itself. Mainly, because history has repeated itself multiple times, each time some people were confident that they knew where this repetition was going. Their confidence turned things awry multiple times.

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## **BEYOND THE DIFFERENCES: QUESTIONING PARALLELS AND CONTRASTS**

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### ***ABSTRACT***

*Much has been said and talked about the stigmas of anxiety, trauma, stress, and the various segments concerning mental health. But, have we tried to pinpoint precisely where the peripheral parts of our thinking head to? Do we try to find the 'Will'?*

*This paper tries to stark a parallel between the two watershed decades, the 1920s and 2020s by taking Virginia Woolf's work Mrs. Dalloway and the Covid-19 pandemic as the apparatus of viewing existentialism and determinism under the introspecting lens. It also attempts to demystify the behaviors of the two characters who were trying to cope up in their ways with the ever-changing surroundings. Post bringing the major characters into light, the paper concludes with the need to search for the 'Will' in the current scenarios by considering both the subjective and objective viewpoints.*



## Introduction

Virginia Woolf in her essay, 'Modern Fiction'(1919)<sup>10</sup> writes, "Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives myriad impressions- trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel...Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end." Woolf discarded the notion of realistic fiction used by Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy and rather argued for a representation of the life of the mind, in all its vagaries, idiosyncrasies, in its complexity and its fullness.<sup>11</sup> Her work, Mrs. Dalloway, is a remarkable piece of writing of the modernist era that portrayed the inner turbulence, chaos of the characters. Woolf inspires modern writers to dig out the inner psyche of the characters; the real interest lies in "the dark places of psychology". She experimented with the technique of stream-of-consciousness which describes the fragmented nature of consciousness. It is important to note here that the fragmented nature of consciousness is an apt symptom of a traumatic victim. Jonathan Shay says, "Severe trauma explodes the cohesion of consciousness". With her characters Mrs. Dalloway and Septimus, Woolf focuses on the victims of the war that suffer psychological trauma and lead a hellish life full of agony, threat, and chaos. Traumatic events as Judith Herman states, "destroy the victim's fundamental assumptions about the safety of the world; the positive value of self, and the meaningful order of creation".<sup>12</sup>This is a justification valid not only for the modern times of war but eerily applies to the present scenarios of the 2020 pandemic.

The novel Mrs. Dalloway shows how the consciousness of self-shifts from one discursive position to another, from one mental image to another, and demonstrates, much in a "deconstructive" fashion, how language operates in a ceaseless play of differences that cannot be pinned down to an authoritative unit of meaning or a transcendental signified. This is very much the inner working of a mind which irrespective of any situation, time or era should not be ignored.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Woolf, Virginia. 'Modern Fiction'. First published as 'Modern Novels' in the TLS (10 April 1919)

<sup>11</sup> Kaur, Harinder. (2020). Septimus And His Double: Psychological: Chaos In Mrs. Dalloway Of Virginia Woolf. *PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt / Egyptology*, 17(12), 279-289.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.,282

<sup>13</sup> Bose, Brinda. 'Introduction' to Mrs Dalloway. Worldview Critical Edition, 2012. xix

### **A parallel between- ‘The 1920s’ and the ‘2020s’**

There is never an era for traumatic aftermath. If the situation arises, the functioning of the mind, body, and soul works on the individual's mechanism.

Woolf through Mrs. Dalloway<sup>14</sup> portray her exceptional writing skills by not only hailing as a classic novel of modernist trauma literature but also as Cathy Caruth states characterizing and presenting trauma as a “wound of the mind” that defies comprehension.

The addressal of traumatic aftermath, wounded mind, inner turbulence, psychological neurosis was of prime importance not only for the war period but for the present times as well. And how in the current scenario we perceive ‘identity crises’, ‘finding a peaceful space’, and terms that depict Post Traumatic Stress Disorder not an abnormality but a symptom of a traumatic experience.

The line between Septimus, Clarissa from the 1920s in post-war London, and people living through a pandemic of 2020 is equal to a blur. The only difference lies in the change of eras and the methodology of addressing the issues.

Septimus Smith represented a character as Toril Moi suggested in her essay, 'Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf?', "whose mind succumbs to 'imaginary' chaos. The young war veteran closely provided a scope to explore the phenomenon of psychosis/neurosis that plagued him through those war years and continued afterward.

Doesn't it sound too similar to the recent headlines where it stated that the COVID-19 pandemic is ravaging all areas of human life creating distress, and exacerbating mental health issues? Well, the uncanny situation being people never considered PTSD as anxiety for the future. We have always attributed traumatic stress reactions to past and life-threatening issues. But keeping aside these differences there is a similarity so uncanny which cannot be ignored. It will lead us to question what stress/crisis really is?

On the outside, the characters seem to embody gender stereotypes yet the definition of their roles is not obvious when comparing the conscious and the unconscious part of the text. This draws a stark parallel of the lives during the pandemic where the outer appearance could not

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<sup>14</sup> Bloom, H. (1988). *Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers.

reflect the representation of the self. This could be clearer to understand through the approach of Ontological security. It is the idea of 'security of being rather than physical security.'<sup>15</sup>

Ontological Insecurity emerges when there is a disruption to routines, which invokes instability and a break with what is knowable, consistent, and comprehensible to self.

A part of this ontological security could be observed in the fictional characters of Septimus and Clarissa after the war and in the people living through the deadly Pandemic - jobless, some homeless, and all clueless.

### **Did we evolve or just the surroundings?**

Evolution is evident yet so complex. It is an elongated process but when looked at so closely, sometimes could feel as if nothing's changed really. Finally, it always comes around the viewpoints, perspectives.

There can be two viewpoints- either subjective or objective.

Looking from a factual, objective, exterior perspective it seems a long distance from considering the stigma of psychological crisis as an abnormality to considering it a genuine illness. On the other side, from a subjective, inner viewpoint, one might feel the looming taboo around the concept of mental help and illness. The constant appraisal of 'moving on' in a difficult situation and providing 'Life goes on' as the habitual mantra to any crisis. We stop making an effort to reach out and prioritize over communal normalcy of a situation. We prefer the majority ratio over the minor/insignificant percentage.

The significant predicament here is the natural tendency of viewing things objectively because it seems as if it is the only right way to see how things are for real. It might also be the reason for our nurturing to be based on the idea that emotions, inner meaning does not really guide us towards the authentic meaning. The mind will always rule the heart. Choose a rational mind over the erratic, irrational heart. For this exact purpose, Woolf choosing a 'deconstructive approach' to writing through her conscious exploitation of the sportive, sensual nature of language as Toril Moi states, "rejects the metaphysical essentialism underlying patriarchal ideology, which hails God, the Father or the phallus as its transcendental signified".<sup>16</sup> She

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<sup>15</sup> Agius, C. (2017). Drawing the discourses of ontological security: Immigration and identity in the Danish and Swedish cartoon crises. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 52(1), 109-125.

<sup>16</sup> Moi, T. (1985). *Sexual/textual politics: Feminist literary theory*.

refuses the language to be pinned down to underlying essential meaning. She brought a revolution by talking about the inner turbulence where the world differentiated objectively about the sane and insane.

However, did we evolve enough to support our surroundings with an inner perspective? A space that prioritizes over accepting the chaos, then asking to normalize it. A step towards acknowledging mental illness was already achieved. Did we take a step further too, in reality, in order to create a surrounding to discuss those crises?

The answer to this dilemma seems vague, an endless discussion of our evolutions and progress in the field of neurosis, psychology, and psychiatry.

Nonetheless, Septimus's suicide in the 1920s to 1000 suicides in the 2020s seem like a triumph. Why is that? Is it the constant, pacing evolution or rather the stark stillness in our surroundings? Did we actually precede our situations?

### **A simultaneous separation and relation**

It is considered that continuity and order provide certainty for the self, and certainty is achieved through the performance of routines. There seems to be a simultaneous separation and relation attached to it.

From having an objective viewpoint when order is disturbed, we lose a part of the self and one when could not uphold the 'human nature' of moving on simply separates oneself from the objective reality.<sup>17</sup>

However, when viewed as a subjective perspective, the performance of routines creates a level of relation to reality. One remains cognizant to survival, to making an effort towards living, be it because of the routines.

There could not be a single division between what is perceived as sanity and insanity<sup>18</sup>. For Septimus, instead of following a routine and conforming to 'human nature' appears pressurized

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<sup>17</sup> <https://medium.com/philosophy-studios/five-parade-examples-for-the-conflict-between-subjective-and-objective-9afc84b11210>

<sup>18</sup> (2012). Retrieved 11 April 2021, from <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:518707/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

and a failed attempt towards living. For him, survival is a failure if he loses himself. Whereas, Clarissa who abides by routines, felt 'death was defiance'. She self-prescribed in order to live.

The coronavirus pandemic has poured many repercussions onto the existence of humanity, but owing to the lessened stigma of mental sickness one doesn't simply question 'why' rather a lot are compliant to offer a patient ear to the victims. Having said that, one must not eschew that de-stigmatization fails to fill the void of 'identity crises' that has transferred many selves into a world that is numb, chaotic, and has a thick shell that merely permits one to 'live in the moment'.

This is justified by the licensed professional counselor Theresa Summer's interaction with people who earlier used to question their identity, but recently, she's seeing a new trend. "In previous times the idea may have been, 'you make your bed for the first half of your life and then you lie in it for the second half,'" she says.

"It is more common for a client to come in now and say, 'I just don't think this is who I am anymore.' They want a different bed — metaphorically and, sometimes, literally."

Therefore, the fight doesn't end here. The relation and the separation still exist as we are fighting for a space to give room for inner turbulence to be a natural part of life rather than something fabricated.

### **What remains is the will**

The question remains then is, how to live then? Like every other victim of philosophical dilemma, the big philosophical questions start haunting us -questioning our actions, our ideas, our choices, our selves.

Is there any personal will? what is the perfect way of living? If death is not defiance, then is suicide the answer? If suicide is not the means of survival, then losing the ontological security of self is and living every day is? Is there freedom to act?

Philosophy may not be the ultimate guide but the will to be, the will to choose, the will to let our past affect our present, the will to let our present affect our future, everything might lie in the power of WILL.

It is evident that one could question the philosophy of *Determinism*, a belief in the philosophy that all events are determined by causes that have previously existed. But then, it will be your will to perceive this objectively or subjectively.

Objectively everything is a chain of events and a result of cause and effect. Subjectively, it could be completely your will to perform in a particular way to a particular situation.

Yes, it's absolutely true that there are no true, complete, simple answers. And maybe if this is perceived differently it's the vagueness and incomprehensibility that gives room to our will. It's the vagueness that makes no clear demarcation between sanity and insanity.

Septimus's death, Clarissa's survival; People committing suicide or you're baking instead of finding work is a will, is a decision you choose for yourself. There are no correct or incorrect choices here. Septimus's death in a way could be recognized as a sacrifice for others to value the impermanence of life. People finding a means to survive Covid whether it be shouting on the terrace or doing DIY art is all about deciding to survive, to resonate with a self you're comfortable with amidst the crisis of finding purpose.

## **Conclusion**

Conclusively, there could not be a definitive end to the looming question of existential crises. One if is governed by the philosophy of Determinism and take it as a means of losing personal freedom could then nevermore really come out of the bubble of identity crisis. The answer to this is not a one-page document, but ultimately an opinion to make space for everyone. People are suffering, surviving every day and acknowledging their struggles is the first step anyone could take.

As a matter of fact, when comparing, Septimus, a veteran of World War I, a sufferer of PTSD; with the ever-found identity crises, it is evident to notice that our surroundings have evolved, but we on an individual level are simply moving ahead with a mental suitcase that has reduced our efficiencies, efforts, and will to be present in the ongoing moment.

It would be a better method if one finds their means of ontological security and identity that comforts their mind, body, and soul. The self is loose as water and cannot form a particular shape, or stops whenever it wants. It's ever-evolving and changing. Find your intersubjective meanings, which are threaded into the fabric of narratives of self.

Find your will to make your narrative.

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## **SIKH HISTORY AND FEMINISM: TRAJECTORY DURING THE TIMES OF SIKH GURUS AND PRESENT STATUS OF FEMINISM IN SIKHISM**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The overall purpose of the study is to critically understand how some people, who follow the Sikh Rehat Maryada (The Code of Conduct for a Sikh); gradually failed to spread Guru Nanak's message of gender equality. Practices that are barred by eleventh formless Guru, Guru Granth Sahib Ji, gripped this community. This paper tries to ascertain the meaning of the verses written by the Sikh Gurus on women, their status and existence in every possible way. Ms. Prabhjot Kaur, author, "Women Liberation, through the prism of Sikh Faith" regarded Guru Nanak's movement for women as a social movement, not a gender-based movement. Which means an end to the dual victimisation of women, gender-based and caste-based. The concluding statement reveals that what came along Sikh History was rich but because of certain reasons like, misinterpretation of Adi Guru Granth Sahib, (the central religious scripture of Sikhism, regarded by Sikhs as the final, sovereign and eternal God following the lineage of the ten human Gurus of the religion), the community people fell for malicious writings like Bachitar Natak (which was not compiled by Guru Gobind Singh Ji). Not adhering to the original meanings, led to the intrusion of the Brahmanical patriarchal system which was deeply established by the 15th century (when Sikhism came into being) into the religion to some extent. The impact of oppression of bigoted Muslim rulers coupled with the equally oppressive and dehumanizing impact of the caste system on the Sikh movement had a pertinent role to play for gender biases to continue. "The reaction of Indian society towards the open involvement of women in the Sikh movement was inappropriate because of certain norms and 'social expectations' associated with women."(Singh B.) These norms were generalized enough for all women to adhere to it and were influential because they were made to seem universal. "Religious explanations of masculinity and femininity are historical in nature, though they claim to be transcendent and universal. They evolved over a period of time and contain several layers of meaning" writes V Geetha. Such an evolution was brought by Sikhism.*

**Keywords:**

*Sikh Rehat Mariyada: The Sikh Rehat Mariyada addresses key issues such as the definition of a Sikh, his/her personal and communal obligations.*

*Bachitar Natak: This is malicious writing which is associated with Sikhism. It was not compiled by Guru Gobind Singh Ji.*

*Granthi: Custodians of gurdwaras who also act as caretakers of the Guru Granth Sahib, the sacred scripture of the Sikhs.*

**Introduction:**

**ਆਪੇ ਪੁਰਖੁ ਆਪੇ ਹੀ ਨਾਰੀ**

*aapay purakh aapay hee naree.*

*Explanation: "God is both a man and a woman" (Kaur)*

*AGGS, M 1, p. 1020.*

The year 1469 marks the birth of the first Sikh Guru and the founder of Sikhism, Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji. By the time of Guru Nanak's birth, the status of women was deplorable in the society which we get to know from the times of Babur, (the first Mughal ruler). Whenever wars have taken place amongst the countries, women have always suffered. Women were being sold openly in the markets. Brahmanical Patriarchy had strong clutches across the society wherein women were not only oppressed, but it was a system where the belief of letting your oppressor oppress you with consent prevailed. Women were habitual in believing the words of the oppressor. Women had to face discrimination, first, on the basis of caste. Women from marginalised sections of the society were targeted brutally. Second, from the very fact that they were women. It was dual victimisation. Even today, a "Dalit Woman" was raped corroborates the fact. The most frequent argument had been that women are of low-grade because of natural biological differences. Manu notes, "Knowing women's disposition, which the Lord of creatures laid on them at creation (i.e. their reproductive power, their sexuality, their essential nature), every man should most strenuously exert himself to guard them." A Jataka tale states that women as a sex are unable to distinguish truth from falsehood and lies from truth. Another Jataka tale holds that women are wrathful, slanderous ingrates, sowers of strife and dissension. (Geetha) Such generalised norms for women were established since centuries and were made to seem universal. (Geetha) Confirmation to these norms was well established 'social expectation' for women. Guru Nanak's verses came as a counter to all of these practices.

Women scholars like Upinder Jit Kaur praise Guru Nanak for his respect for women: "*Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith, raised his voice for justice to women and provided the scriptural basis for equality which was not to be found in the scriptures of other India-born religions and texts across the world.... In an age when the inferiority of women was taken for granted and female infanticide and the customs of purdah and sati were commonly practised, the Guru spoke out against them with a voice of reason and sanity.*"

Sikhism started as a reformist movement not to preach the religion but to fight for the cause to achieve social justice, to eradicate the concept of forced religious conversions, from the society, to make people aware about what is just for them so that people are refrained from falling to superstitious false beliefs and Good always triumphs over Evil. With the founding of Sikhism as a religion, there came an ideological change/ reform to teach society the way and meaning of life. However, the actual ideology preached by the Gurus and found in the supreme lord, Sri Guru Granth Sahib failed to reach out to the Sikhs and the other castes because of various reasons discussed in the paper. The other ten Sikh Gurus who carried forward the legacy of Guru Nanak can be called ten Nanak. The description of the valour of *Mata Tripta*, *Mai Bhago*, *Mata Kheevi*, *Bibi Sharan Kaur*, *Mata Gujri Ji*, *Maa Ajit Kaur*, *Bibi Bhani Ji* and so on shows how those Sikh women stepped onto the battleground and fought the wars thus, not limiting their role to reproduction. Things went off track gradually during medieval history, when practices like Sati, Purdah system, dowry system came into being. People started using other scriptures like *Dasam Granth* and *Bachitar Natak* which preached statements against women and that led some authors to find literal meanings from these malicious writings and commented on women as being poisoned which is completely an ignorant statement and is highly criticised. For instance, Jakobsh associated women with *maya* (materialism) in her writings on women and Sikhism. However, in Guru Granth Sahib, the ‘pleasure in woman’ carries the meaning, ‘adultery of a man.’

### **Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji And Asa Di War:**

*Asa Di Var* is a collection of 24 pauris or stanzas written by Shri Guru Nanak Dev Ji (*Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, Ang 462 to Ang 475). The whole Var was compiled by the 5th Guru, Guru Arjan Dev Ji in 1604 AD. This stanza is included in the UN Official Video on Gender Equality.

ਮਃ ੧ ॥ ਸਃ ੧ ॥ Mēhlā 1. First Mehl:

ਭੰਡਿ ਜੰਮੀਐ ਭੰਡਿ ਨਿੰਮੀਐ ਭੰਡਿ ਮੰਗਣੁ ਵੀਆਹੁ ॥

ਭੰਡਿ ਜਮੀਐ ਭੰਡਿ ਨਿਮੀਐ ਭੰਡਿ ਮੰਗਣੁ ਵੀਆਹੁ ॥

Bḥand jammī<sup>ai</sup>ai bḥand nimmī<sup>ai</sup>ai bḥand mangan vī<sup>ai</sup>āhu.

*“From woman, man is born; within woman, man is conceived; to woman, he is engaged and married.”<sup>19</sup>*

ਭੰਡਹੁ ਹੋਵੈ ਦੋਸਤੀ ਭੰਡਹੁ ਚਲੈ ਰਾਹੁ ॥

ਮੰਡਹੁ ਹੋਵੈ ਦੋਸਤੀ ਮੰਡਹੁ ਚਲੈ ਰਾਹੁ ॥

Bḥandahu have dostī bḥandahu chalai rāhu.

*“A woman becomes his friend and spreads positivity everywhere; First, a woman becomes a mother and loves her children, and makes them good human beings and then, as a wife she walks hand in hand with her husband in all his struggles. It is she who nurtures and sustains the human race.”*

ਭੰਡੁ ਮੁਆ ਭੰਡੁ ਭਾਲੀਐ ਭੰਡਿ ਹੋਵੈ ਬੰਧਾਨੁ ॥

ਮੰਡੁ ਸੁਆ ਮੰਡੁ ਮਾਲੀਐ ਮੰਡਿ ਹੋਵੈ ਬੰਧਾਨੁ ॥

Bḥand muā bḥand bhālīai bḥand hovey bandhān.

*“When his woman dies, he seeks another woman; why he seeks another woman? Because he longs for the support; to woman, he is bound. It is through women, relations are created.”*

ਸੋ ਕਿਉ ਮੰਦਾ ਆਖੀਐ ਜਿਤੁ ਜੰਮਹਿ ਰਾਜਾਨ ॥

ਸੋ ਕਿਉ ਮੰਦਾ ਆਖੀਐ ਜਿਤੁ ਜਮਹਿ ਰਾਜਾਨ ॥

So ki<sup>o</sup> mandā ākhīai jit jamèh rājān.

*“How could she, from whom kings are born, be considered inferior? This means the woman is granted the status above all the kings and successful men.”*

ਭੰਡਹੁ ਹੀ ਭੰਡੁ ਉਪਜੈ ਭੰਡੈ ਬਾਝੁ ਨ ਕੋਇ ॥

ਮੰਡਹੁ ਹੀ ਮੰਡੁ ਉਪਜੈ ਮੰਡੈ ਬਾਝੁ ਨ ਕੋਇ ॥

Bḥandahu hī bḥand ūpjai bḥandai bājh na ko<sup>e</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> “Status of Sikh Women in Religion.” Golden Temple Heaven On Earth, Gurbani, Guru Teachings, Sewa, goldentempleheavenonearth.wordpress.com/2015/07/18/so-kyon-manda-akhiye-jit-jamein-rajan.

*“From a woman, a woman is born; without a woman, there would be no one at all.”*

ਨਾਨਕ ਭੰਡੈ ਬਾਹਰਾ ਏਕੋ ਸਚਾ ਸੋਇ ॥

ਨਾਨਕ ਮੰਡੈ ਬਾਹਰਾ ਏਕੋ ਸਚਾ ਸੋਝ ॥

Nānak bḥandai bāhrā eko sachā so<sup>ᵃ</sup>e.

*“O Nanak, only the True Lord is without a woman.”* (B. Singh)

“It is mentioned in the Guru Granth Sahib that the true lord is formless, not time-bound, eternal and omnipresent. True lord is the creator of the world, and being the creator of the world, the Lord gave the role of creator to women. This means, after the lord, women are the precious creatures.”

Some can question, doesn't it limit women under the ambit of reproduction and birth gives only. This has an answer as well when the pathetic state of affairs for women before Nanak's time is taken into kind perusal.

ਰੰਨਾਂ ਹੋਈਆ ਬੋਧੀਆ ਪੁਰਸ ਹੋਏ ਸਈਨਾਦ ॥

ਸੀਲੁ ਸੰਜਮੁ ਸੁਚ ਭੰਨੀ ਖਾਜੁ ਅਹਾਜੁ ॥

ਸਰਮੁ ਗਇਆ ਘਰ ਆਪਣੈ ਪਤਿ ਨਾਲਿ ॥

ਨਾਨਕ ਸੱਚਾ ਏਕੁ ਹੈ ਅਉਰੁ ਨ ਸਚਾ ਭਾਲਿ ॥

*“Women have lost their vitality and become submissive and men have become brutal. Politeness, soberness (self-control) and sincerity have banished and dishonest living has become the way of life. The sense of shame and honour has disappeared from society. Nanak, only the One is True, do not look for another one.”*

AGGS, Mahalla 1, p 1243. (Singh)

"The denigration of the female body "expressed in many cultural and religious taboos surrounding menstruation and child-Birth" is absent in the Sikh worldview. Guru Nanak openly chides those who attribute pollution to women because of menstruation. (N. G. Singh). The Sikh holy book fully celebrates the female body and affirms the centrality of menstrual blood in the creative process: "*Ma ki raktu pita bidu dhara*" [From mother's blood and father's semen is created the human form] (GG 1022). Here priority is given to *ma ki raktu* (mother's blood).

This is also the case in another passage: "*Raktu bindu kari nimia*" [From blood and semen is one created] (GG 706). *Raktu* (mother's blood) is mentioned first, and then *bindu* (semen).

Modern feminists such as Penelope Washburn and Judy Grahn and psychologists such as Judith Bardwick have explored the degrading of menstruation in Western culture to the point where it is considered a private, shameful process equated with being ill or weak. The concern of these spokeswomen is that disdain for this natural feminine phenomenon in our society has led to the lowered status of women: "The status and social control women have had has fallen with the fall of menstruation." (Washburn) Far from being disdained, menstrual bleeding is acknowledged in Sikh thought as an essential, natural process. Life itself begins with it. In fact, Guru Nanak reprimands those who stigmatize as polluting a garment stained with menstrual blood (GG 140). (Press)

Targeting women on the basis of their religion was one of the wicked practices during the 15th-16<sup>th</sup> century. Guru Nanak openly fought against forced religious conversions and stated "***Ek noor te sab jag upajya, koun bhalley koun mandey***" (Ang 1349, Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji)

Meaning: From the One Light, the entire universe welled up. So, who is good, and who is bad?

For ages, women were suffering from dual oppression, one from their caste and another, because of their gender, Sikhism came as a dual relief for women from the oppression of both. This verse negates the practice of caste and gender- based discrimination.

#### **Other sikh gurus and role of valorous Sikh women in Sikh history:**

*"O red-robed woman, discard your red dress, and then, you shall come to love your Husband Lord. (Thind) By wearing her red dress, no one has found her Husband Lord; the self-willed manmukh is burnt to death. Meeting the true guru, she discards her red dress and eradicates egotism from within. Her mind and body are imbued with the deep red colour of his love. She becomes her soul-bride forever with the word of the Shabad (Guru's word) in her mind, she makes the fear of God and the Love of the God her ornaments and decorations."* – Explained Anga 787 Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji.

This explained verse breaks the taboo of ornaments, fashion and all the materialist things associated with women. It discarded the dress up style associated with women by society. When there is Shabad (Guru's words) in her mind, she fights for the just cause in the society,

because this is what *Nitnem* in Sikhism means.<sup>20</sup> Those are the ornaments for women, leading a just, truthful life. Mary Daly, the radical feminist philosopher says, “The process of exorcism, of peeling off the layers of mind bindings and cosmetics, is movement past the patriarchally imposed sense of reality and identity.” (Daly)

### **Mata Khivi Ji (Spouse, Second Sikh Guru, Guru Angad Dev Ji) :**

She is mentioned by name in the Guru Granth Sahib “Balwand says that Khivi, the Guru’s wife, is a noblewoman, who gives soothing, leafy shade to all. (B. Singh) She distributes the bounty of the Guru’s Langar; the kheer - the rice pudding and ghee, is like sweet ambrosia. The Langar- the kitchen of the Guru’s Shabad has been opened, and its supplies never run short.” (page 967). So *mata* Khivi made people of every caste sit equally, in one single line, and on a floor where no discrimination based on caste could be made. And this pious ritual of Langar continues.

### **Third Sikh Guru, Guru Amardas Ji And His Verse on Freedom Of Women:**

Guru Amar Das carried out a vigorous campaign against the practice of Sati. G.B. Scott acclaims the Guru as “the first reformer who condemned the prevailing Hindu practise of Sati.”

<sup>21</sup> The Guru advocated the following:

*“Satis are not those who are burnt with husbands, O Nanak, true Satis are whom pangs of separation can finish. Those are considered Satis who live contentedly, embellish themselves with good conduct; And cherish the Lord ever and call on Him.”* (N. G. Singh)

*(Var Suhi ki- Slok Mohalla 3, p-787)*

The Guru lifted the status of women as equal to men and also preached in the favour of widow marriage. (Singh)

### **Sikh women warriors:**

*“Shaheeda de Sirtaj”* Guru Arjan Dev,<sup>5<sup>th</sup></sup> Sikh Guru was tortured to death by Jahangir. The Guru was made to sit on a burning hot plate, hot sand poured on his face. The Guru initiated this spirit of never to give up for the just cause even when death waits for one. The Guru was given birth by **Mata Bhani Ji** who was the one who selected her groom herself, Guru Ram

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<sup>20</sup> Nit (every day) + Nem (I swear), one will not indulge in bad deeds in society and respect and acknowledge the importance of each human present on the planet irrespective of one’s caste, creed, gender, race, colour.

<sup>21</sup> “Pathway to God, Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji.” Search Gurbani, <https://www.searchgurbani.com/sgdv/isg>, [www.searchgurbani.com](http://www.searchgurbani.com).



Das. (Kaur, 2018) She was very active in the affairs of the community during her father and her husband's Guruship. **Mata Nanki Ji** gave birth to Guru Teg Bahadur Ji, 9<sup>th</sup> Sikh guru, martyred at Chandni Chowk, New Delhi. Those Sikh mothers, wives and sisters who sent their sons, husband and brothers to join the Khalsa forces when it meant sure death to become a Khalsa, their sacrifice and their thinking beyond something which was barred for them, like going to the battlefield; can never be negated. (Newspaper) Who can ever forget **Mata Gujri Ji**, spouse Guru Teg Bahadur Ji and mother of Guru Gobind Singh Ji, 10<sup>th</sup> Sikh Guru? She left the world when her grandsons were bricked alive by Subedar Wazir Khan at Sirhind. **Mai Bhago/ Mata Bhag Kaur**, first Sikh Woman to take up arms to fight oppressors who led Sikh Soldiers against the Mughals in 1705. She was a skilled warrior and revered as a Saint in Sikhism. She was known for rallying 40 Sikhs who abandoned Guru Gobind Singh at the siege of Anandpur Sahib and bringing them back to fight (Rozana). **Bibi Bhag Bhari** (late 1400s-early 1500s) was appointed to the Manji of Kashmir by Guru Amar Das Sahib. **Mata Sahib Kaur** (1681-1747) famously added sugar to the Amrit during Guru Gobind Singh's creation of the Khalsa. **Mata Sundri (Jito)**--wife of Guru Gobind Singh, guided the Sikh community through a very difficult period of external repression and internal divisions after her husband's death -- about forty years (1708-1747 C.E.), longer than any of the nine Gurus after Guru Nanak. Women headed some of the twenty-two manjis (dioceses) set up by Guru Amar Das. (K. Singh) It is not easy to see their children getting martyred in front of a mother's eyes. The power of Gurbani in Sri Guru Granth Sahib always taught and kept these women in *Chardikala* (in high spirits) and to fight against the oppressor.

### ਗੁਰਮੁਖ ਸੁਖ ਫਲਿ ਨਿਹਚਉ ਨਾਰੀ ॥

“Through infinite wisdom, virtuous women assuredly bring happiness” – *Vaar 5, Pauri 16; Bhai Gurdas* (Kaur)

Sikh Professor Puran Singh writes, “The woman and child of man are free, no slaves. The laws of man are wrong and they offend the law of God if they establish any right of man over a woman or of woman over man or man over man... I declare woman is free; she is the architect of love on this earth, and she must be free. By slavery, man has degraded her. How ridiculous for her to adorn her hair and face and form and figure for the mere animal pleasure of man!” (P. P. Singh)

*Gurbani in Guru Granth Sahib is Gender-neutral and gives value to women, then why so the people of the present community discriminate against women? Why are some of the rituals in Sikhism gender biased like the one practised during Funerals?*

### **Background to medieval times:**

Given the minority position of Sikhs amidst the Hindu and Muslim milieu that surrounded them, it was important to present Sikhism as offering Punjab's womenfolk more than the larger traditions that surrounded them. (B. Singh) Bhai Vir Singh's Novel, Sundri offers evidence in this regard. The 'golden age' of Sikh women during the Guru period is iterated and reiterated.

### **Gurdwara Reform Movement:**

Gurdwara Reform Movement, in the course of its five year (1920-25) struggle, the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee and the Akali Dal were not only able to oust the Mahants, rather obtained control over all the important Sikh shrines through peaceful agitation and passive sufferings, but also to strengthen the forces of nationalism in Punjab by ejecting the Mahants, the government-appointed managers and other vested interests in the Sikh communities. (D.R.Kumar) The concept of Mahants is very crucial to understand as to why the actual verses of Gurbani failed to reach the common masses and the religion got adulterated with rituals that were barred by Guru Sahibs. As per Khushwant Singh's Sikh History (1469-1988), during the times of Mughals, people dreaded to become the *Granthi* of the Gurdwara. Therefore, the Mahants who were established as the *Granthi* of the Gurdwaras did not follow the *Khalsa rahet mariyada*. They were characterised by all those traits which were against Sikhism. Whenever there seemed a threat to the religion, they separated themselves and pretended to be Non-Sikhs to save their lives.

The background of **The Nankana Sahib Holocaust** tells that it was being managed by an *udasi mahant, Narain das*, who lived in the Gurdwara with a mistress and was known to have invited prostitutes to dance in the sacred premises.

**Association of these holocausts with Sikhism and Feminism:** Because the Mahants were the *Granthis* during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the real essence, the real meaning of Guru's Bani (hymns) did not reach common people. Distorted meanings of Gurbani were disseminated, which is why the position of women was gripped by the overpowering spread of Patriarchy across society. The propagation and dissemination of true meanings of Gurbani could not be expected from those who used to make prostitutes dance in front of everyone in Gurdwaras. How Sikh Gurus

stood for women empowerment and against practices like objectifying women, was never conveyed and the milieu which gripped the society was accepted by the community as well, to some extent. The blame cannot solely rest on the society and the functioning during the time of mahants. The time which followed up hitherto depicts the sad affairs of women when it comes to Sikhism and Feminism because of each individual's role in the trajectory. Denial of Women on having the right to become *granthis*, *ragis* (professional musicians of kirtan), and *panj piaras* (the five beloveds who administer the initiation rite) by the male counterparts are conspicuous. It is frequently seen that all these religious services are performed by men. There is a contrasting incident too when all the *panj piaras* were women (Tribune) But these are a handful of incidents, the majority does not grant women their natural rights, be it in religious shrines, or personal lives contrary to the rich Sikh History.

### **Conclusion:**

Certain Hindu scriptural texts claim that at the very dawn of creation, women emerged as sinful- creatures, fire, snakes and poison all rolled into one. The original Manu, the author of Dharmashastra, argues that at the moment of creation itself, women were allotted the habits of lying, sitting around, with an indiscriminate love for ornaments, and qualities such as anger, meanness, treachery and bad conduct. (V. Geetha) The *process of naturalization* was very evident wherein, a particular historical and sociological identity is displaced onto the female sex as such, and made to appear natural to it. In times like those, Guru Nanak's verses and practice for providing dignity to women apart from castes and other created differences, giving importance to the simplicity and fighting for a good cause, prepared women not to fall prey to the already established customs and "social expectations" assigned to women. This was a massive social change which was followed by all the other ten Sikh Gurus. In a way, the role of women as frontline *sewadars* remain limited, but not negligible because of the very fact that patriarchy was well established by that time and Sikhism came into being in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. However, the ideological change which is envisaged in Sri Guru Granth Sahib by the Sikh Gurus and other *Bhakats and Bhats* could not be sustained in the entire community because of community people practising discrimination in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Second, due to various adulterations into the religion like one of the Mahant System where original meaning from Guru Granth Sahib did not reach to the masses, esp. to women themselves. The former reason dominates. The majority of the community people had forgotten the essence of religion. They read Gurbani but fail to understand it and practice it. The overhaul of the Sikh Culture by the adoption of the Western system by its very own people by more than the required amount failed

today's generation to learn Gurmukhi and created the rush for English. If the generation of this community does not know how to read Gurmukhi, their mother tongue, in which *Guru Granth Sahib* is written, how will they ensure the implementation of the verses of women empowerment when they do not know what was conveyed? How can the text shape the people if the common masses cannot approach it? Canons and texts are usually regarded as the kingdom of males. For Mary Daly, texts belong to the realm of reified word, of condensed spirit; they are seen in contrast with textiles: "In patriarchal tradition, sewing and spinning are for girls; books are for boys." The Guru Granth, or the Sikh canon, is not anti-woman. It was written by men, but its many poets identify themselves with women and articulate their longing for the Divine in a woman's voice. Male authors and poets in the Guru Granth do not confront women but seek to merge themselves with feminine feelings and thoughts. The distinction between male and female is overcome, thus establishing the significance of being human. The Guru Granth is polyphonic; it is full of multivalent and complex feminine symbols and imagery. The text presents the ontological ground of all existence as *mata*, the Mother; the divine spark within all creatures as *joti*, the feminine light; the soul longing to unite with the transcendent. Like mirrors, the images reveal our true selves, giving us wisdom and hope. They enable us to discern the divine spark within, to legitimate our bodies, and to fully validate ourselves. We begin to act and perform in accordance with our empowering literature as literary symbols are translated into social, political, and economic realities. When all the closures that divide us from our text are torn away, word and action, the ideal and the real, mythos and ethos, being and becoming, moral sensitivity and social praxis can be linked together. (Singh)

However, as the years passed the people of the community fell to the prevailing practices which were barred. Gender-based domestic violence, the practice of dowry by the majority of the community people are some of the deplorable acts which are still prevalent. Refeminization of Rituals is the need of the hour. David Kertzer said that ritual can be even stronger than transformation, for it can be used as a revolutionary strategy: "Rituals help revolutionary political stances and organizations through providing legitimacy, creating solidarity, and leading people to understand their political universe in certain ways." The Sikh faith opened up a wide horizon for all women, irrespective of their caste, class, or marital status; married and single, wives and widows, all were equally validated. Women were no longer segregated, they did not have to observe purdah or stay home, but could now freely participate in *sangat* wherever it met. In fact, the Gurus regarded women as physically, psychologically and spiritually more refined, adopting a female voice and tone to express their love for the Divine.

In both praxis and poetry, the Sikh Gurus created a window of opportunity for women, an opening through which women could achieve liberty, equality, and sorority. (Singh) But there are many obstacles along the way: the Guru Granth is physically enclosed by men; its meaning is not properly disclosed; it is linguistically closed off, it is closed up in rites of passage; and it is closed to women by their social conditioning. Even some female symbols in the Guru Granth are turning into male symbols.

Bhagat Kabir Ji's verse in Guru Granth Sahib says, "***Kabira Jaha Gian teh Dharam hai Jaha Jhooth teh Paap, Jaha Lobh teh Kaal hai Jaha Khima teh Aap***"

Explanation:

Kabir, where there is Spiritual Wisdom, there is Righteousness.

Where there is Falsehood, there is Sin.

Where there is Greed, there is Death.

Where there is Forgiveness, there is GOD.

These pious words if understood and followed can eradicate all the sins ranging from gender discrimination to caste discrimination from the society, but they have not been; except quite a few people who follow the verse. But this is not a substantial number. The turban has an emblematic significance for Sikhs. We still find people saying, "*kudi baabal di pagg nu daag laundi hai*" or "A girl, can be the blot on father's turban, not a boy." which is a derogatory statement. It wasn't in Sikhism. People make a particular community because they are the ones who keep the history of the community alive, they are the ones who propagate and disseminate the values enshrined in the religion. Now the onus is on people to recognise women as the free citizens of this society. If this doesn't happen, it is a sin which is being committed by the people and is against the ideology of Sikhism.

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## A CRITICAL SURVEY OF BINARY OPPOSITION THROUGH THE LENS OF GENDER

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### **ABSTRACT**

*From the Montagues and the Capulets from Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet and the Galactic Empire and the Rebel Alliance from George Lukas's Star Wars Series in the fictional world to binaries in the real world formed through gender, race, religion, caste, culture, sexuality and other factors, binary opposition has always been a concept that has been ingrained into our understanding of the world. Binary opposition can be understood as the tendency to perceive an object of human understanding with respect to what it is not, thus creating a polarity between two objects of human understanding. Ferdinand de Saussure incorporated binary opposition in his structuralist theory of logocentrism in linguistics, but it was Claude Lévi Strauss who theorized binary opposition in the world of anthropology, culture and media.*

*I believe that the negative effects of binary opposition outweigh the positive effects of the same in the development of humankind, especially when used to reinforce hierarchies, as has been done for centuries. A chief drawback of binary oppositions is that it has been, both in historical and present times, used as a tool of oppression, such as oppression on the basis of gender, sexuality, caste, class, race, political views, religion etc. This paper aims to delineate the beginnings of references to binary opposition, explore the views of various scholars on binaries and explore its drawbacks through the lens of gender and sexuality, thus outlining a broad feminist and queer criticism of the widely-accepted and adopted structuralist tool of oppression.*

*“We the precocious, we the repressed of culture, our lovely mouths gagged with pollen, our wind knocked out of us, we the labyrinths, the ladders, the trampled spaces, the beevies- we are black and we are beautiful... What happiness for us who are omitted, brushed aside at the scene of inheritances; we inspire ourselves and we expire without running out of breath, we are everywhere!”*

-Hélène Cixous, The Laugh of the Medusa.

## **Introduction**

If there are certain concepts to which human beings subscribe without ever realizing that they have accepted these concepts without a shred of contemplation, one of these concepts has to be that of binary opposition. Polarity as an idea has been used since the very beginning of human progress. Homer’s and Hesiod’s uses of polar expressions in Ancient Greece is as satisfying an example of binary opposition in the ancient world as is the Yin and Yang in Chinese cosmology. Over the centuries, humankind has incorporated binary oppositions both in fictional works or ideas as well as in real life, the latter, in my opinion, being a cause of great concern. This paper aims to explore the meaning of binary opposition and gain insight into the world of historically oppressed communities in the society, particularly in the context of gender and sexuality, to understand the drawbacks of binary systems that exist today.

### **Definition, Usage and Examples of Binary Oppositions**

Binary opposition can be understood as the tendency to view concepts in terms of opposing binaries or polarities. The concept of binary opposition seems to have risen from Structuralism, which Terence Hawkes describes to be “a way of thinking about the world which is predominantly concerned with the perception and description of structures.” Ferdinand de Saussure, who is widely considered to be the founder of semiotics, brought the concept of binary opposition into mainstream discourse and stated that “the opposition between the two classes gives a better understanding of the nature of each class.” He demonstrated that upon viewing a Doric column, for instance, one carries out a mental comparison of it with other styles of columns, such as Ionian or Corinthian, thus creating an associative relation between contrasting ideas. What this implies is that we tend to understand certain concepts on the basis of what it is not- for example, the concept of cowardice can be only understood with relation to the concept of bravery. Saussure’s theory went on to influence Lévi-Strauss, Derrida, Barthes, Althusser, Cixous and many others.



French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss was a structuralist who was heavily influenced by Saussure and made significant contributions to the subject of binary opposition and its relevance in anthropology. According to his studies, the dual organization of societies is often extended to the bipartition of the universe, comparing it to “characteristic oppositions” such as Day and Night, Sun and Moon, Earth and Water etc. Lévi- Strauss states, regarding the study of myths, that “... it becomes possible to organize all the known variants of a myth as a series forming a kind of permutation group, the two variants placed at the far-ends being in a symmetrical, though inverted, relationship to each other.”

There are various examples of binary oppositions scattered throughout the remains of every civilization that exists or has previously existed. Basic concepts have been understood in the form of dichotomies, some of the oldest concepts being the duality of the mind and body, masculinity and femininity, day and night, light and darkness, good and evil and many more. The concept of the duality of mind and body has been discussed and supported by many philosophers, particularly rationalists, such as Plato (who demonstrated his Theory of Forms through the allegory of the cave) and Descartes (who proved the existence of God as well as that of the mind and the body through his famous ‘method’). Masculinity and femininity has been represented by the Puruśa (mind) and Prakriti (nature/extension) in the famous depiction of Shiva and Parvati as the ‘Ardhanārīśwara’ in Hinduism. Good and Evil is a famous trope that has been used in stories from ancient civilizations all the way to the present day, when superhero comics, action movies, fantasy books and video games tend to pitch the ‘hero(es) against the villain(s)’.

### **Critique of Binary Opposition**

Post-structuralist theorists such as Derrida, however, commented on the limitations of this Saussurean theory on dual grounds: firstly, recognizing that Saussure’s theory defended logocentrism (which privileged primarily speech, and secondarily writing, as the measure of true progress), Derrida commented in his *Of Grammatology* that comparing cultures on the basis of their writing would invariably lead to ethnocentrism (we have the infamous words of Macaulay as proof for this) and secondly, he wrote in his *Margins of Philosophy* that “An opposition of metaphysical concepts (speech/writing, presence/absence, etc.) is never the face-to-face of two terms, but a hierarchy and an order of subordination”. As many philosophers, including Hélène Cixous, have noted, polarity itself implies a certain hierarchy- there is always the domination of one subset over the other; the light dominates the dark, reason dominates

passion and Yin dominates Yang and each subset denotes gender in almost all cultures, which provokes Cixous to ask women to take up the platforms of speech that are phallogocentric or, as she puts it, “which has been governed by the phallus.” As Simone de Beauvoir states in her *The Second Sex* so eloquently, “...alterity is the fundamental category of human thought. No group ever defines itself as One without immediately setting up the Other opposite itself.” Dominick LaCapra further critiques binary oppositions in the context of scapegoating, where the alterity is purged for all things “other”, thus providing instant “purification” for the overdog.

### **Binary Opposition as a Tool of Oppression**

Having gained a basic understanding of the nature and instances of binary oppositions and the various theorists who have addressed and criticized the concept, we can move on to a deeper analysis of the shortcomings of binary systems from the lens of communities that have been historically oppressed (and are, unsurprisingly, still facing oppression), namely on the basis of gender and sexuality. It must be kept in mind, however, that almost all other forms of hierarchies of oppression- caste, class, race, religion- have been facilitated through binary opposition. Before beginning this analysis, I find it necessary to reiterate that the main shortcoming of binary opposition is the hierarchy that it creates by implying the domination of one subset over the other. Polarity in its natural sense, such as in the case of North and South, isn't problematic, but essential for the understanding of the external world; it is the unequal value that society places on these polarities that makes binary opposition problematic.

There are unending examples of how the idea of “Us vs. Them” leads to large-scale oppression. For example, in the context of race and religion, the Apartheid and the Holocaust come to mind; in fact, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and racism are still widely prevalent across the world. We even have a word used to indicate our fear of any community that is foreign to us- Xenophobia- which obviously works with our tendency to create binary oppositions. Viewed from the context of postcolonialism, we can notice the ludicrousness of the “White Man's Burden”, which was in reality nothing but a facade to dominate and oppress. The caste system has undoubtedly been another tool of oppression which generously sprinkled the seeds of intricate binaries into different layers of the system itself. In a world that is turning capitalistic more and more every single day, money is also turning into a tool of oppression and regulation. Having briefly touched upon the disastrous effects which binary opposition can produce on society as

a whole, we can now explore the binary system through the lens of gender and sexuality in particular.

### **Platonic and Cartesian Parallels of the Mind with Man and the Body with Woman**

Beauvoir elaborates the unique struggle of women amidst oppressed communities- women are neither minorities nor has there been a particular event which contributed to the oppression of women. Women, throughout history, were dispersed among men, unorganized and in solidarity with whatever other community they were a part of. Therefore, the aristocratic woman first identified herself as an aristocrat and then as a woman and, similarly, a black woman first identified herself as black. Therefore, women became “the Other at the heart of a whole whose two components are necessary to each other.” What led to the development of misogyny- the fundamental belief that men are superior to women? This is where it is important to bring into the picture the mind/body dualism and a really good place to begin this discussion would be with Plato. In Book VII of Republic, Plato describes in detail the popular Allegory of the Cave, which, if you haven’t heard or read about, I highly recommend that you read. What this Allegory helps support is his Theory of Forms- that the body acts deceptively, making us absorbed in a world of material things, and that the knowledge of reality can only be pursued by the soul. This “reality”, for Plato, is the world of Ideas or Forms- a world which is a perfect model to all imperfect, particular things that exist in our material world. This explicitly presents Plato’s attitude towards the mind/body dichotomy that, for him, the realm of the mind is superior to the realm of the body.

In this context, let us analyze Plato’s views on love, beauty and women. In the Symposium, Plato states that true beauty cannot “take the form of a face, or of hands, or of anything that is of the flesh.” Since only the soul can view the forms, only the soul can know true beauty. The same text contains Plato’s well-known discussion of love, the crux of which, once again, is the superiority of the soul over the body. While one can initially understand beauty on the basis of the body and find bodies beautiful, eventually, one senses a beauty that is beyond what lies in the body and that lies in the soul. According to Plato, the capability of bodies is limited to the creation of other bodies (this is an obvious reference to the woman’s capability to bear a child), but the unity of souls in love, i.e., spiritual love, conceives virtues that are spiritual in nature. Thus, for Plato, spiritual love between two men is superior to the apparently material love between a man and a woman.

Plato, while trying to explain that the what is like (because one can't observe the soul directly, but can only try to explain what it resembles), was therefore, also finding ways to imply that the soul is more important than the body, and to do that, he wanted to point out the consequences of ignoring the voice of the soul and indulging in what the body wanted. He thus began associating the ruling of the soul by the body with women. Plato thus said in his Republic that: "When any sorrow of our own happens to us, then you may observe that... we would fain be quiet and patient; this is the manly part, and the other which delighted us in the recitation in now deemed to be the part of a woman." All of this might be surprising to people who have held the belief that Plato considered women and men to be equal in all respects except physically- and that is true, because he does say so while proposing the ideal state in Republic. It is a deep analysis of Plato's double message that brings Elizabeth V. Spelman to address in her paper titled "Woman as Body: Ancient and Contemporary Views" the concept of Somatophobia, which is the fear or undesirability of the body. Somatophobia, albeit addressed very rarely today, has indirectly impacted the way in which we understand women and materialism- the superiority of the soul over the body eventually transformed into a religious fear of all bodily desires and pleasures, and idea that can be directly witnessed in almost all religions even to this day. And, since women were associated with the body, one had to rule their women if one wanted to rule their body.

Descartes carried a version of this belief forward in his Meditations and Discourse on Method, where he excluded the role of corporeality (or the body) in scientific inquiry by initially doubting his senses. In retrospect, the divide between the rationalist and empiricist schools is, in itself, an organization of philosophy on the basis of binaries using the mind/body dualism as a reference. In this context, many have written about the dangers of watertight division between the rationalists and the empiricists. For instance, Peter Markie made a valid point when he stated in his "Rationalism vs. Empiricism" in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy that "the rationalist/empiricist distinction is not exhaustive of the possible sources of knowledge". This criticism of the rationalist/empiricist debate brings to light a criticism of any and all binary systems- the assumption of two opposite classes also assumes that there are more classes neither in between nor outside the two classes. This criticism is very important to the discourse around gender and sexuality, as we shall observe later in the paper. Thus, the feminist and post-structuralist critique of Cartesian thought suggested that the mind/body dualism is, in itself, gendered, and the association of the mind with masculinity and the body with femininity

influences the belief systems of almost all cultures around the world, especially through colonization.

### **Consequences of the Gender Binary on Both Gender and Sexuality**

Beauvoir's proposal that the body ought to be both the situation and instrumentality of women's freedom and that transcendence must be pursued above immanence was criticized by Butler where they brought up the undeniable fact that the mind/body dualism had always been phallogocentric, for mind was associated with masculinity and the body with femininity, thus making Beauvoir the unknowing perpetrator of the very system she opposed. What can be concluded for certain from these discussions is the fact that it is the binary opposition of nature and man or the mind and body that led to the binary opposition between man and woman, which further led to the oppression of women. The disruption of this dichotomy is what will ultimately cease the commodification of women due to their gender.

However, the discussion doesn't end here. The binary opposition between genders also erases gender identities that are beyond the binary. Understanding this in association with Markie's argument would come in handy here. Today, more and more people are coming out as non-binary, but aren't legally addressed in accordance to their gender. Butler themselves have critiqued the gender binary, and so have many theorists across the decades but the gender binary has been enforced so strictly upon the masses that they view anything beyond the binary as simply unnatural. The issue is even more concerning when we view it from the intersection of gender with sexuality. Compulsory heterosexuality is what helped solidify the gender binary. According to Butler, "the metaphysical unity of the three [sex, gender and desire] is assumed to be truly known and expressed in a differentiating desire for an oppositional gender- that is, in a form of oppositional heterosexuality." Therefore, the gender binary itself has been established with the unopposed view that humans are heterosexual. Somehow, through the years, homosexuality became polarized against heterosexuality; this, again, reinforced the gender binary. This binary opposition in sexuality also oppressed homosexuals around the world for millennia.

Furthermore, it erases any sexuality that is beyond the binaries of homosexuality and heterosexuality, which has led to biphobia as well as non-cisphobia. The dichotomization of gender to 'man' and 'woman' and of sexuality to 'heterosexual' and 'homosexual' not only creates a hegemonic structure within communities on the basis of their gender and sexuality but also restricts and reduces the identity of people to the binary options that they are presented

with. And heteronormativity imposes with it the idea that all people are romantic, sexual and limited to having a single romantic or sexual partner (monogamy), none of which are true considering the fact that there is are thriving aromantic, asexual and polyamorous communities in the LGBTQIAP+ community. Heteronormativity also manages to equate romantic orientation with sexual orientation, which is also growing to be accepted as separate. Both gender and sexuality are fluid and intricate, and assigning people with one of the two genders or, in the case of sexuality, assuming everyone to be heterosexual is as ridiculous as throwing a dart blindfolded and expecting it to hit the bullseye.

### **Conclusion**

Let us now revisit Hélène Cixous' direct quote from her *The Laugh of the Medusa* mentioned at the beginning of this paper. She talks about the internalization of racism and sexism. Just as the African community was taught to be afraid of their own colour by the colonizers, women were also taught to hate themselves and each other- “they have made women an anti-narcissism!” So, Cixous asked women to reclaim their spaces that were made inferior by the phallogocentrism of man. It is this very process of reclamation that people of the oppressed communities and those outside the binary must do. It is only by breaking the chains of dichotomy that we can overthrow the structures of power that are constructed around our gender and sexual identities.

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## OF POSTS AND PERSPECTIVES: THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL POTENTIAL OF THE #METOO MOVEMENT

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper seeks to understand the scope of feminist social epistemology and the contentions within it, in the context of the #MeToo movement. The first section establishes the movement as a theoretical enterprise with epistemological implications. The second section identifies opposition to epistemic injustices as the central achievement of the #MeToo movement which reclaimed epistemic agency for its participants, inviting them in the realm of discussions on epistemology. The third section looks at the nature of the knower as proposed by the movement, once the epistemic credibility of its participants was validated. The fourth section builds upon the movement's conception of the knower to elaborate upon its conception of the nature of knowledge and the epistemological practices needed to achieve it.*

## **Introduction**

For a seemingly benign phrase, #MeToo has given way to an unprecedented public reckoning in recent history. Against sexual violation in its different forms, the #MeToo movement entailed mass mobilization and the forging of feminist solidarity across national boundaries. The movement, rooted primarily in women's experiences with sexual harassment and abuse, sought to reshape public opinion on these issues as a way of bringing about larger institutional changes. Its ripples were felt across social media, courtrooms and workplaces as the (mostly male) perpetrators were publicly disgraced. While the novel methods of the movement invited criticisms ranging from their undesirability to inadequacy, the movement's resolute focus on experience as a resource for knowledge holds lasting lessons for those engaged in its theoretical pursuit.

### **#MeToo as an Epistemological Project**

The #MeToo movement owed its origin to American activist Tarana Burke who coined the phrase in 2006 as part of a campaign to empower sexual abuse survivors. It came into prominence in 2017 as stories of sexual misconduct by Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein came to the fore. Allegations, including those of rape, were levied by over eighty women, dating back decades. It led actor Alyssa Milano, to tweet- "If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote 'Me too' as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem". Her tweet triggered the popular movement and #MeToo went viral. It was tweeted 1.7 million times within ten days and 85 countries had more than a thousand tweets containing the hashtag. The hashtag, across different social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, accompanied women's testimonies which named the perpetrator in some cases and didn't in others. High-profile cases included allegations against the US President Donald Trump and then US Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh. In India, allegations were made against actor Nana Patekar, artist Jatin Das, then Minister of State for External Affairs M J Akbar among others. Besides public shaming, allegations in some instances led to legal action or punitive measures in the professional space against the perpetrator.

The movement, as its evolution indicates, privileged experience as a tool for understanding social reality- violent sexual culture in particular; thus entering the field of social epistemology. Social epistemology argues that social relations affect knowledge practices, including what is known and how. Repudiating the belief in an atomised, detached, objective knower, it focusses

on the perspectival nature of knowledge creation. This is believed to be an outcome of the differential codes of conduct, virtues, habits etc prescribed to individuals under social systems, especially those hierarchical in nature, which finds expression through knowers' experiences. Feminist social epistemology focusses on gender as social category which influences knowledge practices. It aims to uncover the gendered attitudes, interests and values underlying dominant knowledge and advance a normative account of knowledge. The idea of 'situated knowledge(s)', as proposed by Donna Haraway, is a cornerstone in this project as it makes the case for all knowledge being necessarily an outcome of embodied objectivity; being situated in a specific, partial position that stems from, but is not limited to one's ascriptive identity.

Proponents of feminist epistemology, though united in their support for a social account of epistemology, employ contending assumptions and so differ in the nature of the reconstructive new epistemological projects they propose. Sandra Harding's tripartite classification of feminist epistemologies, though not all-encompassing, serves to highlight key differences. She identifies feminist empiricism as a project to uncover androcentric biases in science and evolve a feminist 'successor science'. Feminist standpoint theory gives central focus to the epistemically-privileged 'standpoint' of women to create alternative social and political arrangements. And feminist postmodernism attempts to forge solidarity across specific, particular embodied perspectives denying claims to universality. Subsequent sections of this paper explore the tensions between these epistemologies through different facets of the #MeToo movement and its attempt at producing knowledge on the issue of sexual harassment.

The history of the concept of sexual harassment itself is a testament to the gendered nature of knowledge creation; the questions that are asked and the answers that are deemed acceptable. The idea of sexual harassment was properly articulated in USA in the mid 1970s when Carnita Wood, a former employee at Cornell University, claimed unemployment benefit, stating unwanted touch from her supervisor as the reason for her resignation. The University's refusal led Wood to form a feminist collective named 'Working Women United' which coined the term, drawing from the experiences of women in the workforce. Public discourse gradually accepted the harassment lexicon as women claimed its prevalence and their previous inability to properly articulate their experiences. Legal and political theory subsequently added to its conceptualisation. In India, similarly, feminist outrage over the gang rape of Bhanwari Devi, a Dalit Rajasthani woman, led the Supreme Court to formulate the Vishakha Guidelines— a redressal-based mechanism for sexual harassment at the workplace. Formulated in 1997, these guidelines lent validity to the concern over sexual harassment. The issue has, thus, been named

and formulated through women's lived realities and situated understanding of oppression in patriarchal societies.

#MeToo, employing a similar epistemic pattern, has built upon these preliminary understandings of sexual harassment. The movement, by amplifying the common experience of millions of women (and some men), legitimised the situated nature of the feminist critique of contemporary sexual culture. The quintessential #MeToo post, given the the fear of distrust or backlash, was often a result of critical reflection upon experience, and gave visibility to the survivor within it. It can, then, be understood as an embodied, local knowledge. Cumulatively, these knowledges broadened the popular perception of sexual harassment from that of an anomaly to a systematic and pervasive phenomenon. They also highlighted the enablers of such a system found in contemporary legal, workplace and social cultures. The movement brought survivors' experiences from the realm of private 'whisper-networks' to the public sphere, thereby increasing their acceptance as a knowledge claim. The nomenclature of the hashtag itself highlights a transaction of validity and solidarity shared among survivors, which respectively reflect the epistemological and activist potential of the movement they were engaged in.

### **Opposition to Epistemic Injustices**

Central to #MeToo's epistemological assertions is the drive to shed light on the epistemic injustices faced by women. Miranda Fricker, elaborating upon the injustices faced in one's capacity as a knower, identifies two forms of epistemic injustices. Testimonial injustice, she argues, refers to a credibility deficit suffered by a speaker due to an identity prejudice held by the hearer. Survivors of sexual harassment have often refrained from sharing their testimonies due to the fear not being believed and/or being slut-shamed and devalued. Franco Palazzi argues that American public memory is still influenced by the famous Anita Hill v/s Clarence Thomas case of 1991 in which Hill accused Thomas of sexual harassment and was widely discredited, her testimony bearing limited stand in the court. Legal scholar Catharine MacKinnon claims that cases of campus sexual abuse usually take three-four women testifying against the same man to be deemed credible, thereby reducing the epistemic authority of a woman to that of one fourth of a person. In such a culture of disbelief, the mass informal disclosures of #MeToo and popular support for the same have attempted to assert the epistemic authority of women. They have also underlined the unjust epistemic patterns of valuing the denial of male abusers over the claims of female survivors, both in and outside courtrooms.

The identification of epistemic injustice as the problem and attempts to overcome it were reflected in the parallel hashtags that gained traction with the movement like #BelieveHer, #BelieveSurvivors, #WhyIDidntReport etc.

Fricker's second form of epistemic injustice is hermeneutical injustice. It occurs when gap exists in collective interpretative resources preventing a group from adequately understanding their own experiences. It harms the knower who may be led to disbelieve herself and invites inadequate responses from hearers, who too lack the ability to understand the experience. The creation of the notion of sexual harassment and its broadening through #MeToo, as discussed above, are cases in point. Katharine Jenkins' distinction between manifest and operative nature of concepts, or the legal-nominal and widely accepted concepts respectively, explains the movement's achievements in popularising the latter. The movement has also made the case for the persistence of hermeneutical injustice, particularly in the legal theory of sexual harassment which continues to lack interpretative resources for issues of standards of evidence, preventive and punitive measures for sexual harassment.

The highlighting of epistemic injustices faced by women and reaffirmation of their epistemic agency, although significant, did not lead to a proportional increase in holding perpetrators to accountability through legal or other punitive mechanisms. It can still be understood as the central epistemological achievement of the #MeToo movement on the basis of which other epistemological patterns can be observed. Cassie Herbert's analysis of the metric for measuring the success of the movement can be employed here. She argues that the speech acts of #MeToo need to be understood as reports and not allegations, especially since the paradigmatic #MeToo post did not name the perpetrator. Allegations have material accountability as their end, while a report is a truth claim that privileges first-hand knowledge. Understanding the movement as a series of reports gives credit to the epistemic agent and the propositional content in their truth claim which is a resource for deliberations on feminist epistemology. Concerns over unsubstantiated or anonymous allegations, though valid, deal with the operational, activist dimensions of the movement and need not undermine its epistemological implications which stem from the nature of its speech act.

### **Knowers and #MeToo**

Through the identification of epistemic injustices faced by women and opposition to it, the #MeToo movement has implications for understanding both the nature of the knower and knowledge itself. By collectively reclaiming epistemic authority, the survivors situated

themselves in relation with each other as knowers engaged in a collective search for answers to the issue of sexual violation. The #MeToo movement has, thus, demonstrated a strong interdependence between feminist activism and epistemology. Political mobilisation led women to interrogate their individual experiences in the context of their specific social location, thus qualifying Harraway's description of a self-reflexive, partial, perspectival knowledge. The history of development of the concept of feminist social epistemology reaffirms this interdependence between politics and epistemology. The field grew in the 1980s and 1990s with the simultaneous growth of feminist politics and mobilisation in the West. Women claiming to be knowers of non-androcentric knowledge, thus, grew in relation with each other.

The interactive and relational nature of knowers is key in the feminist epistemological project. Since individuals occupy different social locations, they need to rely on those situated differently to attain certain forms of knowledge. The interaction of different situated perspectives becomes a way of testing the epistemic reliability of specific knowledges. The building of social and political ties between locations aids such epistemic relations, as was seen in the case of the #MeToo movement. Survivors across class, race, caste, gender and nationality based boundaries participated in the sharing of knowledge about sexual violation, uncovering both similarities and differences in their oppressions. In the image of Harvey Weinstein and other popular perpetrators, women as diverse as Hollywood celebrities and ordinary professionals found a united platform to deliberate on their knowledges. Heidi Grasswick's idea of knowers as 'individuals-in-communities' places the individual knower in interrelations with multiple communities, while participating in the process of knowledge creation. The way power relations were negotiated in the interactions of knowers indicates both the successes and failures of the #MeToo movement. The movement received some criticism from racial, sexual, and gender based minorities for not understanding the distinct nature of their oppression, which itself serves to underscore the need to form political and epistemic interactive alliances in any theoretical enterprise.

The creation of political and epistemic solidarity to enable the 'individual-in-communities' knower requires democratic practices. Social concepts of objectivity involving social processes of critical scrutiny can aid such an endeavour. The creation of democratic epistemic communities enables the sharing of perspectives from hierarchically situated locations in a manner which lends them equal epistemic authority. Helen Longino argues for the need for diverse representation in such communities to make visible underlying assumptions and values

that similarly situated knowers may not be aware of. Social media, which became the primary platform for the #MeToo movement, democratised to some extent the epistemic relations between survivors by enabling mass participation. It brought reports of harassment to the attention of all, not just those involved in feminist circles, therefore inviting reactions and participation from diverse groups of followers. In negotiating these diverse networks, both #MeToo and its criticisms emphasise the need for democratic inclusivity in political and epistemic relations to enable cross-locational scrutiny.

### **Knowledge and #MeToo**

By reclaiming epistemic authority, the participants of the #MeToo movement have also sketched out a conception of knowledge that has implications for Harding's tripartite classification of feminist epistemologies. The knowledge creation acts of #MeToo do not neatly subscribe to either of feminist empiricism, standpoint theory or postmodernism, and seek to derive elements from each. Harraway's conception of situated knowledges, as previously discussed, can be used to explain the mass informal disclosures of sexual violation as embodied, particular knowledges having a historical contingency in the context of a mass mobilisation. It doesn't completely discount the role of empiricism in feminist inquiry. Objectivity is sought through webs of partial situated perspectives. These were seen in the form of the democratic political and epistemic relations between knowers that #MeToo attempted to promote. This conception values transcending one's own location and reflecting in alliance with differently located individuals, thereby creating a scope for inclusivity and scrutiny on intersectional lines. This was achieved, in limited measure, by the #MeToo movement.

The situated knowledges conception rejects the idea of a singular feminist standpoint which claims to represent the voice of the epistemically privileged, but politically subjugated. It does not exempt the subjugated perspective from critical reflection and does not accept it to be 'innocent' of local values and interests. The epistemic privilege argument can lead to essentialist understandings which prioritise identity (like those of racial, religious, sexual minorities) over self-reflexive critical positioning. #MeToo through its dramatic revelation of similarities in the experiences of women occupying different positions in power relations—that is, from affluent famous actresses to working class individuals—highlights the need to build epistemic connections across locations and not prioritise any one. However, the movement, by stressing the need to incorporate women's perspectives in expanding the legal and theoretical conceptualisation of sexual violation, did extend legitimacy to the idea that

some experiences can be better suited to acquiring certain kinds of knowledge. Without privileging a singular location, the #MeToo movement, then, can be understood to yield an epistemic conception which values experience and perspective as resources for building webbed alliances across social locations.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has sought to establish the #MeToo movement as both an activist and theoretical enterprise, whose latter dimension led it to generate its own conception of feminist social epistemology. Identification of epistemic injustice as a feminist concern and opposition to it has been identified as the movement's central achievement. The quest for epistemic justice led survivors to employ their experiences in understanding of sexual violation as a systemic, pervasive phenomenon. The collective and mobilisation-based origin of these knowledge claims indicates the nature of the knower as an interactive, relational entity. The movement reflected an 'individual-in-communities' model of knower creates knowledge in epistemic alliances with those located differently. The implication of such a knower is for knowledge itself to be understood as an exercise in transcending individual locations in an attempt to be objective and inclusive. This can be achieved through webbed epistemic alliances across social locations which are sensitive to the differential significance of locational experiences in different contexts without discounting any experience as irrelevant. While the #MeToo movement did not completely succeed in operationalizing these epistemic practices, its successes and failures underscored their desirability for feminist theory and praxis and the need to further deliberate upon the same.



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## PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE: BHARTRHARI AND BEYOND

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Language is woven into our daily existences to such a degree that it is impossible to speculate about the latter, or speculate about anything at all, without the former. In light of the complex yet eminent position language occupies in ontology and epistemology, this paper expands on various speculations regarding the myriad aspects of language and engages with a few of them through the lens of Bhartrhari's views on language and linguistics. The paper's discussions are limited to the intersections of philosophy and language and stray away from discussing particular languages and the relations between scriptural/verbal authority and language.*

*The paper commences with a brief note on Sphota theory and its connection to artha or meaning by drawing on Patnaik's work on the same. It discusses the question of where the artha lies- in the buddhi/mind or in the signifier itself. The paper then takes a look at the intricate relationship that exists between name-ability and know-ability. Can all we know be expressed in words and can we know everything we name? The paper argues that while we know everything we name, there are instances of acquiring knowledge that is more experiential than language-bound. In relation to the associations between knowledge and language, the paper touches upon the one between thought and language. Which one precedes the other? Or is that question an oversimplification of how thought and language function and evolve hand in hand? Ultimately, the paper touches upon the limitations of language and human thought. It discusses the issues that one encounters while attempting to move from the universal concept of language to the particular. It does so by discussing the issue of translation in relation to the occurrence of words that resist the same. Overall, the paper discusses, perhaps ironically, how complex the process of defining various facets of language can be and yet, how we continue to define it all the same.*

Philosophy as a discipline has witnessed countless evolutions throughout time: from the Nyaya to Navya-Nyaya philosophy, the Ionian to the Aristotelian philosophy, the naturalists to the empiricists, etc. According to Tandra Patnaik, what sets apart the twentieth-century philosophical practices from the ones that ha occurred before, was the “linguistic turn” of the 1930s. This new era was marked by linguistic analysis and the philosophy of language which comprises of deconstructing classical philosophical questions and analyzing them through a linguistic lens ,and dealing with problems such as meaning, reference, truth etc. respectively (Patnaik 2007, 3).

To define the scope of this paper, let us try to define what the concept of a language is. When one thinks of language, they are usually referring to the kind of language that can be read, written and spoken. But there are other forms of language as well. There are languages such as the Braille and sign language that heavily use tactile and visual perception respectively. There is also the concept of body language that refers to movements of the body as response to certain emotions. Mathematics itself can be considered to be a language as it uses symbols (numbers and others) to represent certain concepts. The over-arching commonality in the aforementioned examples is the communicative property. Hence, language can be defined as a common instrument used to denote ideas and concepts for communication between beings who understand the workings of the instrument, i.e. those who comprehend the language. One could thus say that the primary function of a language is to communicate.

Language is inherently connected to epistemology, as the latter occurs through the instrument of the former; i.e. knowledge is comprehended through language. However, in Indian philosophy, different schools of thought hold differing points of view regarding the same. Sabda, meaning word, is not always considered to be a valid form of Pramana, meaning means of knowledge. Schools of thought such as the Nyaya, Mimansa, Vedanta and Samkhya accept the validity of sabda-pramana, whereas, schools such as the Carvaka do not (Patnaik 2007, 5). This paper will attempt to look at the philosophy of language and raise certain speculative questions regarding sabda-pramana. An important point to note is that Patnaik draws a clear line between linguistics and the philosophy of language. Linguistics is meant to deal with the syntactical and semantical nuances of a language, which would suggest that the analysis would change in accordance with the language being analyzed due to the difference in linguistic laws and structures. The philosophy of language, on the other hand, deals with the notion of a language itself and thus, is valid for any and every language (Patnaik 2007, 3). This difference

holds special importance for this paper as one of the goals of the same is to raise questions that pertain to the universality of language and not to the particularity of languages.

In light of the distinction that was just made, it is also important to point out the distinction that Patnaik makes between sabda-pramana and verbal authority. According to Patnaik, the former cannot be the same as the latter as this renders all the philosophical attempts to comprehend the many dimensions of a language useless (Patnaik 2007, 10). Drawing attention once again to the intent of this paper, the examination of the associations between scriptural authority and language falls beyond the scope of the same. This paper is more geared towards an attempt to understand the association between philosophy and language.

Let us begin by looking at the relationship between a word and the meaning. To do that, one must understand what both of those concepts are. One cannot utter gibberish or make sounds and expect to be understood as those do not qualify as words. Language is primarily meant for communication. Thus, only a certain arrangement of letters that produce a certain phonetic sound can count as a valid word in a particular language. Even if one is uttering words, if they do not follow certain rules of arrangement, effective communication can never take place; i.e. it defeats the purpose of a language itself. Thus, only certain sounds arranged in a certain manner that abide by the semantical and the syntactical laws of the language can carry a certain meaning. The *Sphota* theory explains the same. Sphota signifies the “unit of linguistic potency” (Patnaik 2007, 49). It is thus broken down into the audible component and the component that bears meaning. According to Bhartrhari, the theory of Sphota also implies the presence of both a speaker and a listener, as the speaker uses the language to communicate with a listener, and thus, both of them have an active role to play (Patnaik 2007, 48). Thus, one could say that a word itself has a physical manifestation, that of an audible sound, and an abstract one, that of the meaning.

But what does that mean in terms of the ontology of the meaning? Does the meaning exist in the substratum of the word, or is the word purely an instrument used to comprehend the meaning? According to Bhartrhari, the sabda exists in buddhi, or our minds, and the word conveys the meaning (Patnaik 2007, 50). But does the artha, or the meaning, exist in our minds as well, or does it exist in the word itself? Even though there are rules that a word has to abide by to be considered as valid, a word at the end of the day, is a random arrangement of letters that carries a meaning i.e. there is nothing in the word “pen” itself to suggest the meaning that the language gives it. It could easily have been called chair if the word “chair” carried the

meaning that the word “pen” does. One can, however, problematize this reasoning as well. Even though the physical form, along with its phonetics, of the word changes in the aforementioned example, it is after all the word, whether pen, chair, or something else, that carries the meaning. Another way to approach this question is to examine whether the meaning, like the word, exists in our buddhi. One could argue that the meaning, or at this point, an idea or a concept exists in our minds. But do we not associate a concept with a word when we think of it? Thus, this issue can be traced back to the notions of name-ability and knowability.

According to the Nyaya, whatever is nameable has to be knowable (King 1999, 108). But does the vice-versa have to be true as well? Different schools of thought vary in their views when it comes to pramana, but perception is one of the most widely accepted ones. One can argue that there is knowledge to be gained by perception that does not necessarily have to be nameable, like learning to not touch a hot object after having touched it once. Hence, one could argue that all that is knowable does not necessarily have to be nameable. But, at that point are we not referring to only concepts or ideas. The moment one mentions artha or meaning, the question that seems to follow is meaning of what? Thus, one could say that regardless of whether sabda is the substratum of artha, they are ontologically intertwined.

Patnaik states, referring to Bhartrhari’s explanation of the roles of a speaker, “Before translating his thought into audible form both the elements, i.e. the form of words and meaning are present in the potential form in his buddhi (the inner faculty or consciousness). (Patnaik 2007, 68).” This quote makes room for a plethora of questions to be raised. Does this imply that we think in a different language and speak in a different one? And is this the very reason why one occasionally faces difficulty in penning down one’s thoughts? Is the language of thought, unlike every other language that one can read, write and speak? One must also remember that there is a difference between speech and language. When one speaks, speech occurs. Albeit, speech occurs through language and thus, in some ways, the two are inseparable, but the difference remains. As a matter of fact, according to Bhartrhari, speech, even though extremely essential, is only the tip of the iceberg that is the language (Patnaik 2007, 96).

The speculation over the relationship between thought and language can be reduced to three questions. Is language a vehicle for sharing thoughts, thus implying thought precedes language? Do we only think in languages, thus implying that language precedes thought? Does the relationship between thought and language have to be unidirectional, or can it work both ways?

As indicated by Bhartrhari, and Indian tradition as well, the process of communication takes place through the five following stages: what is in the speaker's thoughts, what the speaker intends to say, what the utterance actually means, what the listener understands from the utterance, what is in the listener's thoughts after hearing the same (Patnaik 2007, 114). Ideally, all of the five aforementioned steps must align with each other and what is in the speaker's thoughts must ultimately, be evoked in the listener's thoughts after listening to the utterance. Thus, the communicative purpose of language is fulfilled. One can argue, drawing from the system of communication, that thought precedes language because of the difference between the first two stages. Had there been no gap to jump between thoughts and language, the first two steps could have been combined with ease into one unified step that would include thinking of what to say.

Drawing from the process of ideal communication, if one is able to successfully convert their thoughts into words and say it, the speaker's side of the job is done. But there still remains other hindrances in the path of communication. For example, can one say all that one knows, i.e. what is the relationship between say-ability and know-ability? In Bhartrhari's philosophy of language, he includes the analysis of thought and cognition as well (Patnaik 2007, 174). Patnaik points out that according to Bhartrhari, "...thought, in any form, be it cognition or awareness, needs conceptualization. And conceptualization, in turn, needs word-loadedness. ... As long as we are thinking and talking about the phenomenal world or the experiences of our life there is no epistemic gap between the thought, language, and referent. (Patnaik 2007, 175)" One can condense the aforementioned into: all that is say-able is knowable and all that knowable is say-able.

Going back to the definition of language that this paper attempted to establish at the very beginning, communication is the primary purpose of the same. Thus, the conversion of thoughts to language becomes key in communication. This ultimately should not be an issue as we have established already that one has the ability to say all that they know. But does this utterance and language as a whole represent reality or does language only exist in a separate linguistic world and is thus, only a reflection of it? Does language even map reality? According to Bhartrhari, language maps neither linguistic reality nor the reality associated with the phenomenal world (Patnaik 2007, 184). This stems from his belief that human beings use language in their day to day lives for communicative purposes and the components of the language used, like the words and the sentences, only convey certain dimensions of the whole and thus, language can only represent a fraction of the whole reality. Hence, according to him,

whatever is say-able is knowable, but all things are not say-able. One can infer, from the aforementioned, that he acknowledges the fact that there are aspects of reality that lie beyond the boundaries of language, as they are not say-able, and thus, are not knowable either. Hence, while language is a reflection of reality, it does not express reality in its entirety.

At the same time, can one imagine a world without language? If one traces the trajectory of a day that a human being experiences on a daily basis, the use of language comes up time and time again. Even if one completely separates thought from language, thus taking away the linguistic from the thought, the moment another human being comes into the picture, communication is rendered impossible. This is just the micro picture. A micro picture of the same would be a world full of human beings with the most brilliant innovations, ideas and narratives in their head but with no means to get it across to a fellow human being. Entire disciplines that have fascinated the minds of human beings since time would never exist. Thus, language has to be linked at a foundational level with reality.

The paper, so far, has discussed the many nuances and boundaries of language and how we as human beings interact with it and interact with each other through it. But, when one discusses the many ways our existence would not be possible without languages and everything that a language is able to achieve, there is room to ask about what languages are unable to do. Are there any limitations of languages, if so, are those the limitations of the human mind imposed on the former?

Since the philosophy of language is concerned with the universal notion of a language itself, problems that occur with its particular counterpart might be difficult to philosophize about within the realm of the same. Even though this paper talks about the universal concept of language, in real world interactions, language manifests itself through its particularities; i.e. through different languages. Is there then a possibility of a gap between the understanding of one language and another? For example, authors often talk about how the experience of reading a book in a certain language is a novel one as a translation, albeit created to reach more people, would be a different book entirely. Hence, even though the translation is created so that the original thought process and content can be presented in a different language, thus making it more accessible, there remains a risk of not being able to accurately portray what the original work did. One even hears of badly done translations where the essence of the work has not been preserved at all, thus defeating the purpose of translation itself. This also leaves room for misinforming a reader who is only proficient in the language that the work has been translated



in, as they have no choice but to believe in the translation. Even in Patnaik's work, she states that there is no one-word translation for *Sphota* in English and is thus obligated to translate it through a string of words instead. Thus, it becomes clear that not all words are directly translatable from one language to another and this problem only becomes apparent when one moves from the universal notion of language to the particular notion of languages.

Another possible limitation lies in the extent of possible usage. When one begins to learn a new language, especially if one has studied it as opposed to just picking it up from their surroundings, it is most often by stringing together words and their meanings and forming sentences. So, one comprehends the sentence by understanding its components, i.e. the words. But once one is able to gain full understanding of the language itself, one understands the sentence as a whole. When someone says, "This is a pen", they do not comprehend the meaning of each word separately and then put it together. It is true that this is only possible since one already knows what the words mean, but even then, one has an understanding of the aforementioned sentence in its entirety and not in its components. This goes to show that language is a tricky instrument. A word can also not be defined beyond a certain point. Once again, if one takes the word *pen* and starts to define it, one will initially get "something to write with". Upon continuing by defining every word in the definition further, there will eventually arrive at a point beyond which it is impossible to further define a word without using the word itself in the definition.

There is also the notion of the indescribable. By calling something indescribable, is one not describing it already? And how could something be indescribable; i.e. how can there be no words to attribute to a certain something. We have already established that everything knowable is say-able as well, then why does this issue come up? Perhaps this is more of an epistemological question as experiencing something might not be the same as knowing it. Thus, one can experience something indescribable and not know what it is and hence, not be able to describe it. King states that, according to Bhartrhari, "Even those things that might be described as indescribable are describable precisely in so far as we can refer to them as indescribable (King 1999, 47)."

Other than issues with definability and translations, there is also the issue of language specific ideas. Even though Bhartrhari's philosophy of language had more to do with the universal language than any particularity, his philosophy, in a way, is bound to Sanskrit as that was probably one of the only languages that he worked with. Bhartrhari's view of language being

indivisible and unitary stems from there being no real concept of a full stop in Sanskrit, which leads to the possibility of there being infinitely long sentences that are indivisible (King 1999, 48). According to King, in Bhartrhari's linguistic context, there was no difference between linguistic analysis and study of the Vedas, as Sanskrit was considered to be the perfect natural language whose grammatical structures even the universe conformed to (King 1999, 47). Does that mean Bhartrhari's philosophy is only applicable to Sanskrit? But surely there is more to it than just that as he refers to language as something that occurs at a very foundational level and even within babies, thus shedding a light on the universal notion of language and not just Sanskrit.

Thus, the analysis of the many nuances of language and linguistic practices takes one through a maze of mind-bending peculiarities. A puzzling point of ponderance makes itself felt here; would this paper not have existed at all had it not been written and had it all been in someone's buddhi only, i.e. does this paper, along with the thoughts expressed in it, only exist because it was penned down for others to know of and verify its existence or it would it be just as real if it were only in someone's mind? Once again, one finds language being heavily intertwined with both epistemology and ontology.

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## PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS OF FILIAL OBLIGATION

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The United Nations has classified India as an ageing country, which currently has 8.6% of its total population in the age group of and above 60 years. Further, this number is expected to triple by 2050, thereby constituting more than 20% of the total population. However, it is imperative to understand that not all parent-child relationships are good and not all children respect their parents equally, for reasons that vary widely. Another fact to be glanced at is the increase in the number of residents of old age homes in the span of a year (2017-2018) from 18,057 to 26,728, this presents a grave situation. These facts give rise to an important moral debate of whether or not children have a duty towards their parents, or more importantly, whether or not children 'owe' something to their parents. The relationship between parents and children goes beyond all the other relationships one would encounter in the world. Parents are the first connection of a child in this world and more often than not, it is usually through the parent's lens that a child views the world for quite a few years of their lives.*

*This paper is an attempt to highlight these arguments and to deliberate on the different religious and moral arguments that have been made on this issue. Different religions, philosophers and ethicists have given different views on this issue. There exists different moral arguments for it. This issue becomes all the more important because it is not something limited to the realm of applied ethics and morality, but it goes beyond since there exist different legal provisions in different countries regarding the duties of adult children to their elderly parents. Through this paper, I hope to bring all of these views and arguments to light and leave the reader with certain answers to these ethical issues.*

## **Introduction**

The relation between a parent and child is a unique bond that nurtures the holistic growth and development of a child. The parent child relationship is quantitatively different from almost all other relationships. It is one that develops and grows over time, influenced by the characteristics of both parent and child.

Parents are not merely the birth givers of a child, but the guide and lens of how the child views the world during his/her initial years of growing. One would find a child picking up a lot of his/her parents' usual habits and adopting those in their lives as well. A majority of parents endure a lot and might even make a lot of sacrifices in the upbringing of their child and for his/her well-being. There are a few different theories that highlight the different ways of upbringing practised by parents around the world.

A few of these include the social control (Giordano, 2010 ) and attachment theory in developmental psychology (Dornbusch, Erickson, Laird, & Wong, 2001 ; Steinberg, 2001 ), which state that parents inhibit their child's (specifically the adolescent's) behaviour by one of two ways

(a) expressing care, which leads to adolescents' sense of attachment, and feeling that they matter to parents (Elliott, 2009 )

(b) constraining involvement in particular activities.

Young children rely on their parent(s) to provide them with basic needs and parents provide for their children in order to sustain them and build towards future generations. In accordance with evolutionary psychology, the human motivation to love, protect, and provide for their children has evolved from the principles of natural selection (Floyd & Morman, 2014). These studies are proof of the bond that parents develop with their children, most often through the theories of natural selection as well. Another study that specifies the amount of effort that parents put in the upbringing of a child is Afifi, Granger, Denes, Joseph, & Aldeis, 2011. This states that most parents invest in their children through providing resources such as time, affection, finances, education, and health care. This investment and subsequent interdependence fuels an important interpersonal bond between parents and children, socializes them into adulthood, and molds their communication skills.

Now that it has been established that across different theories of parent child relationship and different studies that there are certain basic tenets that almost all parent child relations involve, we now move on to discussing and analysing the concept of “parental sacrifice”.

### **Parental Sacrifice**

In consideration of the parent-child relation, Parental Sacrifice is an important aspect. Usually, all worldly relationships, barring the parent-child relationship, are based on equal status of individuals in contrastingly, the parent-child relationship usually involves an unequal status; and this is stated on the basis of the fact that for a considerable amount of time, parents make greater efforts and even sacrifice their lives’ comforts, desires and passions, in order to fulfill those of their children's.

According to a 2018 survey conducted by HSBC, worldwide- with a sample population of 10,000 parents and 1,500 students, the results for India showed that 49% of the Indian parents either work extra hours or take up a second job in order to afford university expenses. Furthermore, as compared to the global 53%- around 60% of the surveyed Indian parents claimed that this caused them to reduce spending on leisure activities like eating out or watching a movie in the theatre.

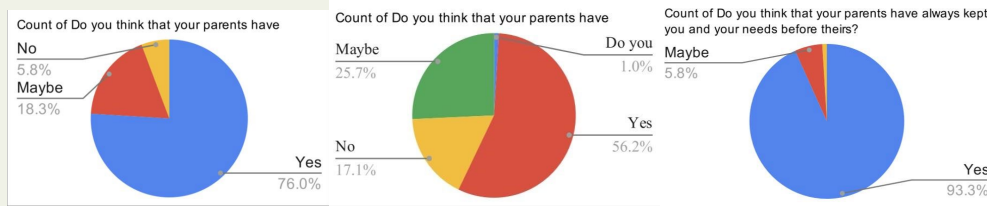
Apart from that, just under 64% of Indian parents are in debt because of educational obligations as compared to the global 1/3rd. Indian parents spend an average of \$5560 to put their child to university.

A study with a sample size of 100 children (18 to 22) from middle class backgrounds was conducted on parental sacrifice. Responses were collected from the following questions to understand what these children thought of their parent’s sacrifices for them. The following questions were asked to understand and yield responses concerning the topic:

Do you think that your parents have reduced spending on their needs to ensure a comfortable life for you? (79% respondents answered in affirmed, 5.8% in negative, 18.3% went with maybe)

Do you think that your parents gave up on their hobbies/passions in order to help fulfill yours? (57.2% affirmed, 17.1% negated, 25.7% chose maybe)

Do you think that your parents have always kept you and your needs before theirs? (93.3% affirmed, 1% negated, 5.8% chose maybe)



The posed questions were asked as an indication of the child's understanding of parental sacrifice and whether or not they consider their parents to have actually made sacrifices for their upbringing or to provide them with a comfortable life.

### Filial Obligations

Filial obligation is a term used to express and refer to the specific and special duties of children towards their parents. This role is not only limited to contact with parents and sharing living arrangements with them but also providing them with emotional support, physical care and financial care. (Wakui & Cheng, 2016, Pg 6) The concept of Filial Obligation is highlighted in different ways in different religions and most of them make it necessary for children to observe their parents and adopt a dutiful attitude towards them.

Further, in contemporary times too the deliberation over the topic has continued. This deliberation has led to several different theories for the same. A few of them will be analysed in the further sections

### Hinduism

Another excerpt from the Manusmriti highlights the importance of the sacrifices of parents in a child's life and states how no child can ever repay what his/her parents have done for him/her.

Parents, as laid down by various Hindu scriptures are to be considered as equivalent to Devas and their service is a holy and a pious act- as understood by the following Sloka:

मातृदेवो भव । पितृदेवो भव ।'

The slok states that one's mother and father are like Bhagwan/God. This sloka appropriately captures the whole essence of the religion towards the idea of what attitude should children have towards their parents.

## Islam

Islam, also has a concept of children obeying, respecting and holding a duty towards their parents. The religious scripture of Islam, the Holy Quran has, on different occasions, given a set of commandments, guidelines to be followed by a Muslim towards his/her parents.

The concept of duty towards parents is taken to be so sacred in Islam, that many of the Hadiths even go on to adorne a higher value to filial dutifulness, so much so that it is valued more than the practice of Jihad. This is understood from the instance narrated by Abdullah Ibn Amir, who states that once a man went to the Prophet and expressed a desire to take part in Jihad. To this the Prophet is sad to have asked him if his parents are alive. The man answered in the affirmative. Following this, the Prophet told him to exert his life in the service of his parents, that will be true jihad for him.

Further, disobedience towards parents is opposed to the ideal Muslim's life and is considered to a major sin in the religion. The Prophet, as stated in one of the Hadiths is also said to have said that "Paradise lies under the feet of the mother."

## Sikhism

Sikhism differs from other religions in the sense that it doesn't pass rigid commandments. Although it does allude to the duties of children towards their parents, these are to be looked in the context of an ideal individual. It passes moral ideas for a child to respect his/her parents.

*"Kaahe putt chagrat hau sang baap, jin ke badat jane badhaare tum ho, tin sio charagt paap."*

*"O son, why do you argue with your father? (It is a sin to argue with the one who fathered you and raised you.)"*

There is a strong emphasis to serve one's parents diligently while they are alive because after they are no more, none of the service during that time is of any use. This can be understood from the following verse-

*"jeevat pitar na maanai ko-oo moo-ay<sup>N</sup> siraaDh karaaheell' ( Ang/page 332, Guru Granth Sahib)*

He does not honor his ancestors while they are alive, but he holds feasts in their honor after they have died.



## Christianity

The Christian belief as highlighted in the Ephesians 6:1-3 lays down a duty and command for the children in regard to their parents.

*“Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.”*

It is further stated that the duty of the children towards their parents are found in the nature, and by the virtue of this, they ought to serve their parents. In the case of a Christainity, this duty is captured in the word *Obedience*, which further has four elements to it. The are:

Further, since it has been established that parents definitely have more knowledge than children and therefore, children ought to respect and obey their parents. The idea of an ideal child is persistence in Christianity as well. An ideal Christian child would walk and serve his/her parents as guided by these commandments and therefore, would ensure a good Christian family.

## Judaism

This can be seen in the Old Testament, Judaism’s most important text, which states God as commanding the children to ‘*Honour Thy Mother and Thy Father*’. The Old Testament comprises two different terms to refer to Filial Obligation, which also indicate a difference in the ideas associated with it. The Hebrew word associated with *kabed* (כָּבֵד) which in English corresponds to ‘Honour’. However, the word for Filial Obligation in the related text Leviticus in the commandment “Every one of you is to revere his father and mother, and you are to keep the Sabbath,” is that of *tirau*, which corresponds to the English word ‘fear’ or ‘revere’. This presents not only distinct but contrasting notions of Filial Obligation. One has a positive connotation attached to it, the other attaches a negative and fright so as to get children to care for their parents.

Here, Fear alludes to the feelings of honour and respect whereas Honour primarily deals with the obligation of children to provide material care and support to their parents.

The Fifth of the Ten Commandments states the duty of the children to honour their parents because it is on their account that they have a range of things in their life from their existence to the comforts:

“It further, also states how the child has received the bones, the veins, the nails, the brain, and the white of the eye come from the father. The mother gives him skin, flesh, blood, hair, and

the pupil of the eye. Rest the inhibitions of senses, man has received from God. Therefore, children become obligated to honour and serve their parents.

### **Filial Obligation and Its Theories by Various Philosophers**

Views on filial obligation, however, do not end with religious commandments. The difference between the contemporary theories of filial obligations and those laid down by different religions lie in their approach towards the subject matter. But, there also exists a commonality in terms of the fact that they both present their views from a moral point of view, or adopt the course of morality in approaching the matter at hand.

**Confucius**, is a well known Chinese Philosopher and thinker, and his (*filial piety*) model primarily states the moral duties that children have towards their parents. This concept has been considered as the root of morality in the Confucian tradition.

The concept of Filial Piety stresses majorly on the concept of adult children serving, taking care and being responsible towards their aged parents. The Confucian model of *Xiao*, states filial piety to be a “cardinal virtue of a moral person” (*jun zi*). It makes a child an ideal citizen of the state too, thus associating and providing the moral virtue of *Xiao* a larger context.

This idea of Filial Piety is further reflected in the ideas of Mencius, who was a propagator of Confucianism. Mencius, is said to have states-

*“a son and a younger brother should be taught their obligation of taking good care of their aged parents. The people with grey hair should not be seen carrying burdens on the street”*

*(Mencius 1A:7)*

Interestingly, the Confucian family model has since time immemorial been a great effect on the Chinese law as well. In the case of the model of Filial Piety too, its reflections can be found in the Chinese laws for Marriages.

This model gives a further addition to this model, with the introduction of the concept of justice called *yi*. This concept is further understood as Righteousness. This ideal lays down the idea of making oneself more appropriate to one’s surroundings so that one is able to interact in a better manner with their environment, that includes familial relations, social and natural relations. Thus, as is reflected in the Confucian model of Filial Piety, it is more stringent in the fact that it goes beyond the Biblical command of ‘Honour thy mother and thy father’ and is a set of strong, to be followed strictly rules and principles that prompt hierarchy, obedience and

obligation. The model of Confucius has formed the basis for the modern day Chinese family systems as well.

This has embarked a different tradition in the Chinese system altogether, where the love that children have towards shouldnt be limited to a mere feeling but should also comprise and be expressed through the material care that children provide their parents with. Further, another important value under the model of Filial Piety is to mourn one's parents 'properly', if not lavishly. The concept of Filial Piety/Xiao as proposed by Confucius, a Chinese thinker and Philosopher, runs deep in the Chinese culture and is even reflected in their modern day family laws. (Teon, 2016)

### **Plato's views on Filial Obligation**

The source of Plato's views on the issues pertaining to filial obligations can be found in a lot of his published work. According to him,

*“religion demands the due discharge of this earliest and heaviest debt, which is the most sacred of our all other obligations.”*

Plato, like Confucian theory of Filial Piety, has stated that children owe their entire existence and everything that they own to their parents, since it is them who brought them into existence. Plato further states that it is imperative for children to recognise the debt that they owe to their parents, as reflected in his writings:

*“It bids a man count all he has and owns at the service of those who gave him birth and breeding, to minister to their needs to his utmost ability, first with his substance, then with his body, and then with his mind, in repayment of loan of care and painful labor ade so long ago on the security of his youth, and now to be made good to his elders in their age and sore necessity.” (Plato's Laws)*

He further states that heaven and Gods even bless those children who honour and serve their parents. He goes on to even ordain a Godly status to parents by stating that parents are the embodiment of God on the Earth. This idea is reflected in his writing:

In contrast to the Confucian theory, Plato proposed that the idea of a good law is necessary against those who show their parents an “*all lawful honour*”, this is understood from:

*“If any person in such state be less mindful of his parents than he ought, not showing himself ore careful to consider and comply with all their wishes, more than those of his sons and other posterity whatsoever, and his own also, he that lies under such neglect may report it, in person or by deputy, to the three senior curators and three of the women who have charge of wedlock.”*

This law indicates that the obligation of duty towards one’s parents overpowers all the other familial relations that one has, even those of one’s own relations. Going further, this law also prescribes a public component that provides for a legal redressal to get the children to fulfill his/her obligations.

Plato also discusses in the *Euthyphro* dialogue that children should never betray their parents, even for the state. As seen in this dialogue, Socrates is absolutely shocked at knowing that Euthyphro will prosecute his own father for murder. Socrates says that *“I fancy it is not correct for any ordinary person to do that, but only for a man already far advanced in point of wisdom.”*

Another point by Plato states that even if parents are hurtful or unworthy, a good person, acting as an obedient child does not complain or expose their parents to others. As is clear, Plato’s stance on Filial Obligation is based on a very hard pressing.

### **Aristotle**

Aristotle, states that children owe to their parents- honour, sustenance and a certain degree of obedience. As reflected in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle has stated that children should honour their parents because the parents are responsible for providing the children with a lot of important things and children should therefore, reflect towards their parents with love.

It should be noted that Aristotle stresses on the concept of friendship as serving a relation between the parents and the children. This Aristotle refers to a mutually responsible relationship of children rendering to those who brought them into the world and parents rendering what they should render to their children. Aristotle asserts that parents are *owed* honour, service and care. He even states that if parents had their best interests and still, somewhat failed, children still owe them ‘something’. This is because of Aristotle’s stress on the component of gratitude in the friendship between parents and children and this is further necessary, for leading an Eudomionious life.

Aristotle's model of Filial Obligation therefore, is based on the idea of the parent-child relationship being grounded in friendship and gratitude being an ideal that children must possess towards their parents.

### **Kant's Duty of Beneficence**

Kant's theory of Duty of Beneficence in the *Doctrine of Virtue*, under the section "On the duty of love to each other". However, it is important to note here that by 'Love', Kant over here does not refer to an affective relationship. This is because Kant believes that there cannot be a certain way or obligation in any person to feel in a certain way or to feel a certain emotion.

Specifically dealing with the moral issue of Filial Obligation, the Duty of Beneficence, as stated by Kant, is a duty of love, not one that arises from attachment and as an affective relationship, but one that arises from responding to the needs and wants of others (in this case, the parents) and promoting their ends.

Kant further describes the concept of 'Practical Love' called *Benevolence*. However, interesting to note is that this idea of practical love proposed by Kant eventually leads to Beneficence, which is an act of charity, kindness; this mostly involves the concept of doing good to others, coming from a position of moral obligation.

Relevant to the concept of Filial Obligation, Kant states that in the case of aged parents, the duty of beneficence of grown children in that case would be to understand the ends of the parents and further to help achieve and promote those ends. (Miller, 2003, pg 178-181)

Further, Kant in his Duty of Beneficence highlights two notions of, *human vulnerability* and *rationality*. This concept by Kant begins from a position of recognising the needs of others. So, the care for parents, according to Kant, would then emerge in response to their needs rather than feeling that the adult child 'owes' to their parents or that there exists a bond of mutual friendship, love etc between the parents and the child.

Kant further goes on to state that providing good care might lead to parents demanding more of it, just like providing bad care brings about shame. Therefore, an adult child in the case of providing care to the aged parents with their needs is to essentially strike a balance, which neither brings about humbling nor humiliation. Another aspect is the idea that grown children are not only to simply respond to the needs of the parents, but also to take into consideration the ends and happiness that the aging parents have developed for themselves. Thus, ensuring

the autonomy of aging parents to decide for themselves rather than having their children meet ends for them according to their own wishes.

This is a striking point which makes Kant's theory of Duty of Beneficence different from the other view and theories proposed either by religions or different philosophers. Aging parents are to be served, according to Kant, as per their own wishes, even though the children have to do it with the affective relation in mind; parents are to serve not according to what the child deems fit rather what the parents wish for.

Kant's Duty of Beneficence consists of an important realization that there do exist certain limitations on the care that grown children can provide to their aged parents. These limitations come in the realisation that not all needs constitute a genuine *need* that need to be responded to. And the other realises in the form that one has certain duties to promote one's own ends as well. Therefore, while Kant proposes for grown children to care for their elderly parents, but along with that he does propose that there do exist certain restrictions on the extent of this care and in that case, children might have to arrange for alternatives to this care, because it becomes impossible for children to meet all the demands/needs of the parents; along with the consideration that children have a duty to meet their ends as well. (Miller, 2003, Pg 192-193)

### **Theories of Filial Obligation and Moral Arguments Surrounding it**

As dealt with in the sections of views of different religions and philosophers on Filial obligation, it will be safe to say that almost all religions and even philosophers, despite certain differences agree on the point of Filial Obligations being a moral responsibility of the children. However, the degrees of it being a moral obligation may vary. Even then, the issue is not turned into a less debatable one. With the rise in the number of old age care homes, the increasing abandonment of aged parents by grown children, lack of emotional and physical support along with no access to basic necessities provided by the children, seems to have increased.

A majority of people today are guided by what is known as Common Morality (Gert, 2004), which is a set of everyday principles that we use in judgements about what one ought to do. Therefore, in any debate concerning a moral issue, it is necessary to take these general and common notions of morality that are popularised among the majority along with the recognised moral principles. While moral theorists have largely argued that there is no debt, per se, which children owe to their parents (Daniels, 1982; English, 1992), common morality perceives filial obligations as moral requirements (Zhan, 2005; Forssén, Carlstedt, & Mortberg, 2005; AARP International, 2008).

### **Argument of Reciprocity**

The central argument that arises in favour of Filial Obligation is the argument of Reciprocity, which mainly states that for a considerable years in a person's life, it is one's parents who are responsible for all their basic needs, for their nurturing to education to other ordeals in upbringing. Due to this reason, children *owe* something to their parents. children ,therefore, are morally expected to return and most importantly, reciprocate all that their parents have done for them. This theory or more of a moral argument can be understood as one arising from the notion of Common Morality. It “functions as a basic premise in our moral practices” and “expresses a legitimate expectation within a particular moral practice”, in a simpler understanding, it mostly goes without saying. (Van den Hoven 2006, p.44).’

However, counter arguments from several scholars and philosophers, begin by raising the question of what it is that children need to do to reciprocate or in return of what their parents have done. If the argument of reciprocity states the necessity of children reciprocating to the favours of their parents, it should also give out details stating what children should do to return these favours. Simon Keller, while differentiating between the terms ‘owing’ and ‘gratitude’, finds both the terms inadequate to describe the nature of the parent-child relation. Jane English, too states that the idea of associating a moral element of ‘reciprocating’ puts a negative connotation to the relation. Instead, the *voluntary* element in parental sacrifice should be stressed.

Wiccalir, very importantly points out that as for debts, they have to be discharged, which is not the case with Filial Obligation. English claims that the relationship between parents and children isn't one in which favours are to be exchanged. She asserts that the past parental sacrifices are not important, it is the current relationship between the parent and the adult child that is of actual significance.It , therefore, stresses upon children a duty to return and give their parents what they owe to them. All this at the virtue of the fact that parents have provided for the children, their sustenance was provided for by the parents and therefore, children should *necessarily* also provide for them too, in their aging period.

### **The Friendship Model of Filial Obligation**

The Friendship model of Filial obligation, contrary to the Reciprocity model, does not emphasise on children returning the favours that their parents have done for them or paying any sort of debt to their service. This model, on the other hand, is based on the present relationship of the parent and child, rather than recalling any sort of the past parental sacrifices

or even the past relationship. It only states that the past *voluntary* sacrifices that parents make for their children only harness the feeling of friendship between them. So, the adult children care for their parents solely on the grounds of the current relationship, which according to this model, is *ideally* based on friendship.

However, in English's understanding of this theory, she associates the metaphor of parents' favours being as if one mows your garden without being told to do so. Therefore, children do not have any obligation or some sort of a duty to actually return those. English does acknowledge that past sacrifices of the parents may contribute in harnessing the friendship but she asserts a greater emphasis on the current relationship between the adult child and aging parents. It should emanate from love and concern for each other's welfare.

Dixon, however states that the parent-child relation may function as an exception to this since even if friendship ceases to be in parent-child relation, children still hold a duty towards their parents. The presence of the feeling of Friendship may not always be necessary to their relationship. He states that the Friendship model, contrary to other models, puts filial duties in the context of loving and voluntary relationships. He adds that in consideration of adult children who have never formed a loving relationship with their parents and refuse to take care of them at all, they can be criticised solely on the basis of moral considerations too, which are compatible with the Friendship model as well.

The friendship model, however, classifies the Parent-child relation in the realm of friendships, which is a loose classification since friendships between two or more individuals are voluntary in nature, but the voluntary nature of friendship cannot describe the relationship between a parent and a child. Dixon, to the defence of this theory states that the relation between parent-child is a different kind of friendship.s

### **Special Goods Theory**

This theory in contrast to the reciprocity and the gratitude theory of Filial Obligation focuses on the needs of the parents along with the benefits to the child. Additionally and more importantly, it states that the parent-child relation is one that makes possible certain *special goods*. Simon Keller describes special goods in the following way:

*“Those goods that contribute to individual welfare; meaning that they are goods that benefit an individual, or contribute to her well-being, or her best interests.”*



Another important feature of the Special goods that Keller goes on to describe is that these are goods that the parent can receive from no one/almost no one and consequently the child too can not receive them from anyone. Generic goods, on the other hand, are those that can arise from any source. This theory further states that when children are younger, they need certain special goods so as to live comfortably and flourish. Similarly, when parents are aging, they too require these special goods, which then is the responsibility of the grown children to provide. It states that if the aged parents requires a special good, and has provided the child with the special goods in the past, then this theory requires for the child to provide the parent with the required special goods. This theory then differs from other theories of Filial Obligation in the sense that it clearly demarcates the kind of duties that children possess towards the parents.

Another aspect differentiating the theory from the reciprocity theory specifically, is the fact that this theory does not operate on the concept of proportionality, that is to say that the child's obligations are in no way related to the past sacrifices or the provisions of the special goods by the parents. Keller, a defender of this theory states this view as-

*“There is no connection between the size of that (parental) sacrifice and the nature of the goods to which your relationship with your parents can potentially give rise. What matters is a parent-child relationship within which the special goods can be manifested, not the exact story from where the relationship originates.”*

However, this theory does not go without its criticisms. One of them is that this does highlight the reciprocal relationship that the parent and child share insofar that both the parent and child benefit from the relationship. This consideration of the theory is problematic since it does not value the past efforts that have been put in the relationship and only focuses on how the parent and child can reciprocate in the present. But, in the case of aged parents who are extremely ill, suffering from major diseases and therefore, might not be able to contribute anything to the relation, in such a case the adult child as per the Special Goods is left in a dilemma whether or not to continue contributing the special goods to their parents, since they don't receive any benefit/reciprocation in return.

### **Gratitude Theory of Filial Obligation**

This theory arises from the natural thought that we have an obligation of gratitude towards our parents. This, like the reciprocity theory is a response from having achieved benefits from the

other person. Fred Berger, who has developed an account of this theory states that how the gratitude is to be achieved by adult children-

*“The sort of continual sacrifice and caring involved in a decent upbringing is not reciprocated to parents by a warm handshake at the legal age of independence. While the emotion of gratitude to one’s parents can clearly be overdone, it is clear enough that an adequate showing of gratitude cannot be made to them with mere verbal expressions.*

According to this theory, Gratitude is an emotion that arises as a result of an act/benefit performed by the benefactor for the beneficiary. So, considering the parent-child relationship, the children have been in the position of Beneficiary for so many years of their life and their parents have been the benefactors who are constantly providing them with different benefits and resources. This implied, children are therefore, required to adopt a feeling of Gratitude towards their parents.

Furthermore, the Gratitude Theory states that since Gratitude towards parents is owed in response to Benevolence, so grown children are obligated to owe gratitude even for those goods that the parents are morally obligated to provide, like food, basic necessities. Adult children are obligated to respect their parents and care for them because they are the objects of their parent’s benevolence. Here, the degree of the parental sacrifices and the concessions provided by the parents will make a mark in the extent of gratitude that children have for their parents. However, this theory is significantly different from other theories in the sense that Gratitude by children is to be expressed only in response to Benevolence. So, Berger here sites an example where parents, who are keen on maintaining the social status of their family, secure benefits for their children with this motivation in their mind.

This theory, like a few others, fails to delimit what kind or amount of Gratitude do children owe to their parents in response to the benefits arising from Benevolence. This could vary from a simple ‘thank you’ to the provision of a costly treatment. It however, hints at it a little, by stating that something as meagre as a ‘thank you’ will definitely reduce the self-respect of the other party (that is, the parents) and therefore harm the moral relationship. Even Berger notes the problem and difficulty in terms of arriving at what obligations of Gratitude should be. He states:

*“It is a debt which differs in important ways from others and there seem to be no acts which it is our duty to perform in order to discharge the debt, even though a range of acts may be sufficient.”*

The Gratitude Theory of Filial Obligation, stresses on the gratitude that arises from the tenants of a moral relationship, that is grounded in self respect as well as respect for both the parties involved, in this case, the parents and the child. It, however, draws a clear line that the idea of children owing gratitude only arises when parents provide benefits with a benevolent feeling. This significantly differs it from other theories which state that whether or not, parents provide the benefits with a selfless thought, children ought to respect and care for their parents.

### **Legal Aspect**

The concept of Filial Obligation pertains to the area of Applied Ethics essentially because it is an issue that one is bound to encounter in one's everyday life. Since parent-child relationships form a major part of the majority of people, there do exist not only moral views regarding it but even legal provisions in certain places. In this section, I will look at certain provisions made by law in different countries regarding Filial Obligations.

Filial Support Laws “*a statutory duty for adult children to financially support their parents who are unable to provide for themselves.*” These laws help in formal recognition of the duties and responsibilities of adult children towards their parents and the extent to which the filial obligation extends or should be necessarily practiced by adult children.

### **India**

In India, the law pertaining to the area of Filial Obligation and the care and welfare of aged parents is the *Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act (2007)*. An amendment was introduced to the bill in the year 2019, which has been approved by both the houses of the Parliament. The Amendment steps to bring adoptive children, step-children, children-in-law under the purview of the definition of Children. It further dates for the Maintenance Tribunals to direct children to pay a maximum maintenance amount of Rs.10,000 to their parents. It however, has removed an upper limit on the maintenance amount and Failure to implement this, may lead to imprisonment.

### **USA**

In the United States of America, out of the 50 states, 30 states have legislation pertaining to the duties of adult children towards their parents. This number is significantly low from the previous high of 45 states having legislations for Filial Responsibility. The reason for some states repealing the filial security laws was because other legislations from the State like Social Security, Medicaid suffice the need for the Filial Security laws. However, the Supreme Court

of Pennsylvania while giving the ruling for a [case](#), came to the conclusion that since the state did not have a duty to consider the other sources that the aged parent may have for their basic necessities (primarily medical aid), it was the duty of the adult child to render the required responsibilities.

### ***Ukraine***

The Ukrainian Law provides for a general obligation for adult children to provide for their parents. The Article 172 of the Family Code of Ukraine provides for the “Duty of Child and Daughters and Sons who have reached the Majority to be concerned about Parents.” Further, Section 1 of the same article considers Filial Duty to be both a moral and financial obligation, where it states that “A child and son and daughter who have reached majority shall be obliged to be concerned about parents, display concern for them, and render assistance to them.” Asserting the component of adult children providing the parents with financial assistance, the Section 3 of Article 172 states: “If a daughter or son who has reached majority is not concerned about his parents unable to work and infirm, means to cover expenses connected with rendering such concern may be recovered from them by decision of the court.”

The law further asserts the financial obligation that adult children have towards their aged parents and goes on to give a detailed account of the financial duties of the adult children. This can be seen in the Articles 202-206 of the Ukrainian Family Law. Here, the law allows the court to fix an amount for alimony in the terms of fixed amount of money or share of expenses, taking into consideration the position of the parties.

The Ukrainian Law therefore, consists of a system of legislations to legally enforce filial responsibility. The law decrees for the adult children to care for their parents, however, the Ukrainian law also takes into account the reasonable restrictions to this care like the child’s earnings and capacity to spend.

### ***China***

The Chinese Filial Obligation laws are heavily influenced by the Confucian model of Filial Piety. One of the most stringent filial obligations around the world, China enacted the “Protection of the Rights and Interests of Elderly People” in the year 2013. The law comprises nine clauses that essentially lays down the duties, responsibilities and obligations of children so as to ‘fulfil the spiritual needs of the parents’. The clauses of the law comprise of elements that children should visit home often so as to meet their parents and also, occasionally send

them greetings. Moreover, the law also states that workplaces should practice flexibility in terms of giving the employees enough time for making parental visits. A Chinese court also rules that a young couple had to visit their 77-year-old mother at least twice a month to tend to her 'spiritual needs'. This ruling came after the mother sued her daughter and son-in-law for neglect and not taking enough care of her. The court along with monthly visits also asked the couple to pay compensation for the same.

The reason for so much deliberation on this concept, on children owning their parents is because undoubtedly, parent-child relation holds a significant role in an individual's life. Regions and Philosophers across the world have deliberated on it and have put forward their views as I have tried to present above as well. While it may seem that majority religions and further, even a lot of Philosophers go on to place a duty on children to serve their parents and take care of them. The Moral theories and debate also deliberate on the element of children 'owe' to their parents.

However, a simplistic understanding of this moral issue won't do justice because understanding it on a simple level, we would ignore the fact that there are so many parents who fail at parenting, nurturing and looking after their children. There are so many parents who have knowingly made their child's life harder, who have abused their child or have made the child's only resort- their homes, a hell hole for them. This certainly calls for a lot of retrospection into the ideas of most religions, the theory of Filial Piety by Confucius who make it necessary for children to serve their parents. Here, we can allude to philosophers like Jane English who contests the element of obligation in this relation.

However, Jane English too forms the other side of the extreme by completely disregarding the past sacrifices that parents have made for their children. This won't be the most wise thing to do because one can not completely disregard the past in not only parent-child relation, but in any relationship. Giving primacy to the present is important but the present stands on the bricks of the past.

This issue like any other moral issue requires us to arrive at a middle ground, which can help strike a balance between the two ends.

## **Conclusion**

The ethical issue of Filial Obligation is essentially an issue pertaining to the field of Applied Ethics because it is relevant to the everyday lives of people. The first relation for all individuals

in this world is that of parent-child relation, therefore, the deliberation on this concept becomes all the more important. With the rise in the aging population across the world and more specifically, in India, it again becomes a pertinent question whether or not the adult children owe or are obligated to serve or take care of their aging parents.

In this paper, I tried to explore this concept as stated by different religions, what is the take of different religious paths on the duties of children towards their parents. I have also tried to talk about the concept of Parental sacrifice and in my research found out that there is hardly any parent (from the sample population) who hasn't made certain sacrifices and life adjustments to ensure a more comfortable life for their child(ren). This then puts a bigger obligation on the children. However, the moral debate regarding this issue is not that simple. There exists various moral theories on Filial Obligation, as I have stated above, which put forward different arguments.

However, to arrive at a conclusion- I propose that there can hardly be a universal moral standard regarding the issue of Filial Obligation. Like most other moral issues, we too have to be open to certain considerations and certain exceptions while considering this ethical issue. Parent-child relationships are most definitely one of the most important relationships in an individual's life and therefore, need to be deliberated upon with a lot of care. However, as stated before as well, not all parent-child relationships universally are characterised by love, care and respect and therefore, there most definitely have to be certain exceptions. As inferred from the study conducted during this research, the majority of the respondents answered in affirmative when posed questions related to parental sacrifice. It can thus be learnt that there does exist an acknowledgement by grown-up children for the sacrifices that parents make so as to provide them with a better life. Therefore, it can be concluded that Filial Obligation depends on the kind of relationship that the parent and child have shared during the upbringing of the child.

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## **A PHILOSOPHICAL, HISTORICAL AND MODERN-DAY PERSPECTIVE ON FEMALE BODY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Much has been said and written about the body in general and the female body in particular. From treating the female body as inferior versions of males to setting unrealistic body standards for the female body, people haven't come a long way when it comes to viewing it in a neutral, non-sexualized way. The female body has been treated like an object to be toyed with, and to be fit in a particular form. In this paper, I have tried to study the female body from a philosophical, a historical and a modern-day perspective. It was imperative for me to also figure out what the current trend wants the female body to look like, to get an accurate picture of how society wants to treat the female body in this day and age. Since social media is such an integral part of our lives these days, the ideal female body is dictated through the usage of such platforms. I have also tried to state some of the negative effects that such norms have on women, though it is hard to accurately describe the struggle that women have felt over the years to be just treated as humans.*

## **Mind-Body Dualism and The Female Body**

Reductive physicalism is the view that the world is made only of physical stuff, including us. By this logic, everything about humans can be explained in terms of our bodies. Substance dualism, on the other hand, says that the world is made of both physical and mental stuff. Substance dualists say that minds are a separate, nonphysical substance that can't be reduced to or explained in terms of, physical stuff, like brains. Human beings have both physical properties like weight, height, etc. as well as mental faculties like consciousness. Physical properties are mostly public, that is, they can be viewed by anyone and everyone. Mental properties, on the other hand, can't be. The mind-body problem constitutes the ontological questions like the nature of our physical and mental states and if one property is a subclass of another and the causal questions, like, which state influences the other state. Descartes believed that mind and body are two different kinds of substances because they have different properties. The body occupies the space, but the mind doesn't. The mind thinks and has ideas and, unlike the body, doesn't have shape or size. Mind is non-physical. This dichotomy between mind and body has often been related to the opposition between males and females. "Women are somehow more biological, more corporeal, and more natural than men" (Grosz 14).<sup>22</sup> It was Beauvoir who put the relation between body and the self in the center stage. "To be present in the world implies strictly that there exists a body which is at once a material thing in the world and a point of view towards the world." (Beauvoir 39)<sup>23</sup>. The body constitutes the self, especially for phenomenologists like Freud.

## **Female Body and The Norm**

Beauvoir, in her 'The Second Sex' goes on to review the data of biology in the first chapter. She describes the socially accepted biological characteristics of females as being weaker than men, having less muscular strength, in addition to having a different reproductive role. She claims that these facts have no significance in themselves. This is because people compare the female and the male of the species from a human perspective and from this human perspective the physiological facts take on meaning dependent on the whole context. Society alone decides the norm for the "normal body" and is the sole arbiter. Beauvoir, thus, can be credited as one of the earliest philosophers to have talked about the distinction between sex and gender. She can also be called a phenomenologist as her book emphasizes the experiences of a lived body.

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<sup>22</sup> Elizabeth Grosz's "Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism"

<sup>23</sup> Beauvoir's "Second Sex".

This body, according to her, yields the sensory experience, is encountered by others and on which our sense of being hinges on. Beauvoir's "one is not born, but rather, becomes a woman" is extensively quoted, which makes her position on the female body clear. Aristotle, too, regarded women to be inferior to men. Among his many controversial claims is his claim regarding how only fair-skinned women climaxed and had a sexual discharge. He also believed that women's sexual discharge was similar to that of infertile or amputated males'. He believed that men and women differed radically in terms of the physical aspect and that female was an incomplete male or "as it were a deformity". The male body, then, was taken to be the norm and anyone having physical attributes that were different, even if they constituted half of the population, were treated as inferior and like "the other". Women's bodies have always been objectified; they lived their bodies in accordance with the other's gaze. When a male is taken as the norm of the human, specificity of female embodiment becomes invisible. The sexual differences are either not recognized or conceptualized in a "maternal-feminine", an idea so abstract that people started looking down upon it.

### **Gender Essentialism**

Biological essentialism is the belief that attributes related to human nature, which constitute an individual's personality or certain specific character traits like intelligence, creativity, etc. are natural and are not a product of the surroundings. Biological essentialism is a form of reductionism, wherein social factors are taken to be the effects of biological causes. Women's capabilities are defined by the biological factors. Gender essentialism establishes that females are inherently different from males. It can also refer to the fixed essence of women. The feminine ideas are universalized, thus, acting as an impediment to women wanting to express themselves in ways that defy these universalized characteristics. Possibilities of change and social reorganization are reduced. This view has helped root patriarchy because women are considered to be biologically weaker than men and thus in need of protection. Gender essentialism also puts women in one boxed category of homogeneity and strengthens the binary between men and women. This view has often been criticized by feminist thinkers who promote the "social construction of gender" wherein views regarding gender are seen to be the products of society and culture, which differ according to place and time.

### **Meaning of Bodily Imaginaries**

"For Merleau-Ponty, our body image or body schema is the awareness of the shape or form of our body" (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy).

There are certain body features that people focus on when they look at their bodies or the bodies of others. While going about the day, some features of body parts stand out more than others, while the others almost become invisible. Some may regard this as rather problematic while others may applaud it as a way of identifying themselves as corporeal beings.

“The touches of others, the interest others take in the different parts of our body, will be of enormous importance in the postural model of the body.” (Weiss)<sup>24</sup> Women have always tried to subscribe to the notion of beauty that was prevailing at that time.

### **“Aesthetical” Female Body Types Throughout History**

Though the notion of “the perfect female body” has changed, what hasn’t changed is the fact that women have always strived to achieve that standard, regardless of the consequences. Beauty standards change over time. Before social media came into the picture, beauty standards were dictated by one’s locality and ethnicity. People were isolated. A person could only look up to their mother or their town’s “famous beautiful girl”. However, the late 1800s and early 1900s saw the emergence of magazines. Women now had these to get influenced by. Over time, portraits, magazines, and cinema began to dictate the ideal body type.

- **ITALIAN RENAISSANCE (1400s – 1700s)**

During the renaissance, women who were overweight and full figured were considered to be attractive. “Being thin was a symbol of being poor. It showcased that you couldn’t buy food.”<sup>25</sup> The paintings of that time depicted women who were plump, often crossing the boundaries of being called “fat”.

Prominent features – ample bosom, full hips, fair skin and rounded stomach

- **VICTORIAN ERA (1837 – 1901)**

Women in the Victorian Era aimed for extra tiny waists. They would wear corsets which made it extremely difficult for them to do simple tasks like sitting or walking. Some women even had various health issues ranging from broken ribs to difficulty in conceiving. Except for the tiny waists, they were still desirably plump.

Prominent features – full figured, plump, cinched waists

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<sup>24</sup> Gail Weiss on ‘Body Images’

<sup>25</sup> “Beauty Standards” – Science of People

- **ROARING 1920s**

Women of the 20s were known for their “flapper dresses”. They cut their hair short, bound their breasts to create flatter chests. Some even wrapped a cloth around their breasts to create a more androgynous appearance. Women also hid their curves. These boyish features were considered to be the ultimate body type of 20s.

Prominent features – flat chest, downplayed waist, short bob hairstyle, boyish figure

- **GOLDEN ERA OF HOLLYWOOD (1930s – 1950s)**

Women in this time period were greatly influenced by Hollywood movie stars. Unlike the women of 20s they wanted to show off their curves. Marilyn Monroe was the latest obsession of that time. Women also started working out so that they could show off their “lean legs” and “fit arms”.

Prominent features – hourglass figure, slim waists, and sizeable breasts

- **MODEL MOVEMENT OF THE 1960s**

Women during this time period were obsessed with being dangerously thin. They wanted to look like models that became famous during that time. The swinging 1960s transpired women to be as skinny as possible. They no longer wanted to show off their curves. It was during this time when dieting fads and eating disorders gained momentum.

Prominent features – willowy, long and slim legs, adolescent physique

- **SUPERMODEL ERA (1980-1990)**

During this time, women strived for a toned look, often wearing tight spandex. They worked out obsessively but weren’t keen on gaining too much muscle. The 1990s saw the gaining popularity of Kate Moss. Women often resorted to drug use and starvation to achieve a “skinny, sexy body”.

Prominent features – toned arms, tall, athletic with translucent skin

- **POSTMODERN BEAUTY (2000s – today)**

Women now have started embracing their curves again. During the past year, people have seen curvier women in the magazines, newspapers and TV screens. Women like Kim Kardashian

and Jennifer Lopez represent the “ideal body type” of this age. However, body issues are still very prevalent thanks to unattainable beauty standards. Many women take the help of plastic surgeries to get that “desired look”.

Prominent features – flat stomach, large breasts and butt and thigh gap<sup>26</sup>

### **Modern Day Bodily Imaginaries**

Search for workouts on YouTube and one is bound to be hounded by “leg slimming workouts”, “how to get a tiny waist” and “how to lift up your glutes to match Kim Kardashian’s”. It is rather interesting to note how not too long before, everyone wanted to be skinny like Victoria Secret’s models and now with the ever-rising popularity of the Kardashians’, everyone wants tiny waists, big butts, big breasts and fuller lips. All this begs the question – is there a fixed ideal body size that transcends time? This “ideal” size is often dictated by various art forms such as paintings, movies, video songs, portraits, to name a few. Whether it is Kylie Jenner, showcasing her portrait on Instagram or Aristotle calling women “the deformed males” these beauty standards, often unrealistic, impact young girls making them resort to dieting fads or over – exercising. The impacts of such dictation of unusual body standards can be severe and deteriorate the quality of life of a female.

### **Decoding the Current Ideal Female Body**

Social media these days tells the women what their bodies are supposed to look like. The people that are most followed, say on, Instagram, influence others subconsciously. Unsurprisingly enough there are some common features of the most followed females on Instagram.

Cassey Ho who runs the channel ‘Blogilates’ on YouTube conducted a research, studying the common aspects of the top most 100 followed females on Instagram who are in the showbiz. The result was as follows: -

IDEAL HEIGHT	STOMACH TYPE	CHEST	FIGURE TYPE
5’7”	Flat	Not flat	Hourglass with round butt
80%	89%	89%	76%

<sup>26</sup> ‘Women’s Ideal Body Types Throughout History’ - BuzzFeed

*Table 1: Representing the body type of top Instagram Influencers*<sup>27</sup>

It's pretty ironical that people today think that the mediums that help them connect to the world, where they find solace, also dictates how they are supposed to look. Closer to home, one finds that actresses like Sonakshi Sinha and Sunny Leone are being praised for their curves, making people forget that female bodies come in all shapes and sizes. There is a pre – defined look that dominates the top. Not just social media, people are inundated by what they are supposed to look like by the models, actresses, singers, fashion influencers and even dolls.

“One 2006 study in the journal *Development Psychology*, found that 5 to 8-year-old girls exposed to Barbie had less confidence in their own bodies and expressed a strong desire to be thin than girls who didn't play with the doll.”<sup>28</sup>

Naturally there was a roar to make the dolls more inclusive and realistic, with many parents arguing that Barbie makers should ensure that the dolls come in various shapes and sizes. When people are constantly surrounded by art mediums telling them what they should look like, it's hard not to get lost in this rabbit hole of looking “perfect”.

### **The Plight of “Fitness” Gurus and Models**

People who want to be models or break into the “fitness” industry find it extremely hard to cope with changing beauty standards. The transition between supermodels to curvy women was too swift and rapid for people to really adapt. Every changing decade seems to bring a new “ideal” body size. How then is one supposed to keep pace? Do people change themselves according to the newest trend? “As a kid, I was very self – conscious of my fuller body. I was curvier than my peers even though I was really into exercising. One would think that with the rising popularity of the hourglass figure, this would be my time to shine. But honestly, figures like mine have been so distorted in the media that it is rather off-putting. The predatory glorification of women's bodies doesn't help matters either”, claimed Portia Syas who has been in the fitness industry for a decade. It's rather disturbing to know that even the fitness industry requires one to look in a certain way before it can accept the person.

### **The Plight of a Normal Person**

#### **(Societal Impacts)**

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<sup>27</sup> 'Instagram Beauty Standards' - Cassey Ho

<sup>28</sup> “Barbie Doll Controversies” - Reader's Digest

- **Spread of eating disorders** – With an average female feeling the need to look like a supermodel, it is no surprise that eating disorders are not very uncommon. Be it bulimia, bingeing and purging, or anorexia nervosa, all of the eating disorders peaked during 1970s and the 80s and it is not hard to guess why. With the increasing amount of dissatisfaction among people with regards to their bodies, people began depriving themselves of a basic necessity.

“Anorexia has the highest mortality rate. Cardiac complications (ranging from irregular heart rhythms to heart failure), heart, kidney and liver failure, fertility challenges, low blood sugar are just some of health risks associated with it.”<sup>29</sup>

People try to emulate their favorite TV stars or model at the cost of their lives. It does that more harm than good. In this race of achieving “body perfection” they end up harming themselves, sometimes irrevocably.

- **Mental Trauma** – Media propagates unattainable beauty standards because that is what keeps the industry going. People become increasingly dissatisfied with their bodies. This dissatisfaction often culminates into mental trauma. When children are fed with ideas such as that they are supposed to look a certain way, they grow up with low level of confidence and a high level of insecurities. They often grow up to be adults who are more susceptible to clinical depression causing disruption to their private and professional lives.

### Case Study

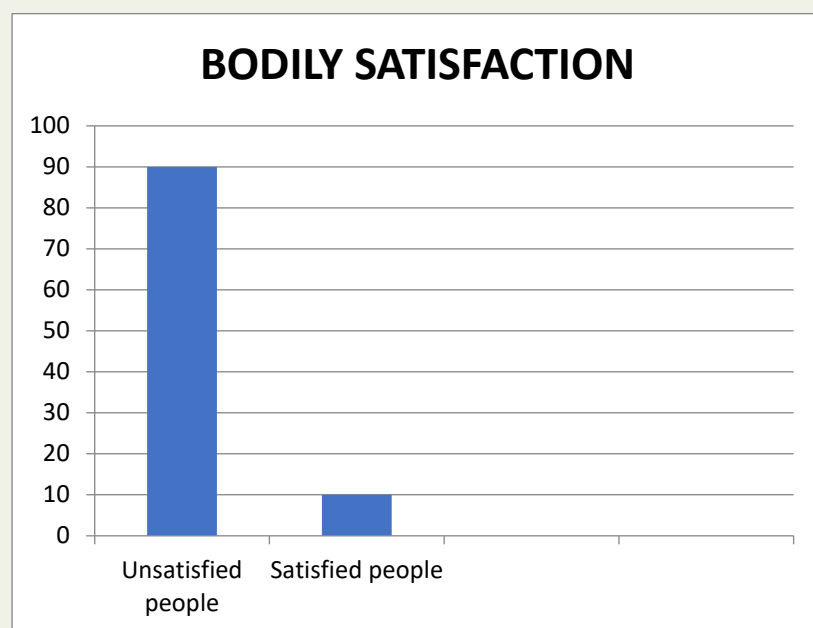
Upon surveying some 170 urban women, in the age group of 15-24, I found that 90% of women are unhappy with their current bodies and want to change something about them physically. The remaining 10% had to fight an uphill battle to accept themselves the way they are and love their bodies. The women who were unhappy often felt anxious about their size, weight or body type. Most of them had triggering thoughts that they admitted wasn't a very healthy practice. Bodily imaginaries and this obsession of overt critical analysis of female bodies has resulted in women feeling inferior.

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<sup>29</sup> “Anorexia” - [eatingrecoverycenter.com](http://eatingrecoverycenter.com)



Bar Graph showing percentage of people who are satisfied/unsatisfied with themselves



*Along y axis – Percentage of people who are happy/unhappy with their bodies*

*Along x axis – Categories of people, whether satisfied or unsatisfied*

- **Spread of Diet Culture** – From Keto to Atkins, to water only, to juice cleanse, every few months one comes across a new diet that claims to be a quick shot remedy to weight loss or gaining of muscle in certain places. These diets are not only unhealthy but also hinders one from getting enough macronutrients and micronutrients. The sentence “I am on a diet” makes one belong to a community of people who obsessively watch over their weight. “If a diet promises rapid results, it is probably also going to cause rapid damage. There have been several cases where diets have led its patrons to the emergency room. There are also cases of severe malnutrition or hyperproteinemia.”<sup>30</sup>
- **Change in Everyday Language** – Constant bombardment of TV stars and models also changes the way people communicate with each other. Certain adjectives like “hot”, “sexy” and “sizzling” are reserved for the body types that follow the latest norm of the “ideal” body. Posting a picture of one’s chubby teen self, garners adjectives like “cute” and “sweet”. This demarcation is very evident in people’s

<sup>30</sup> versionweekly.com on “The Dark Side of Dieting”

everyday lives. In an era of millennials seeking constant validation, everyone wants to be called “sexy”, pose a certain way that can get them ample number of likes and positive comments.

- **Social Withdrawal** – How a person views their body is referred to as “body image”. Failing to achieve the size standard defined by the media, renders one to deem “unworthy” of oneself. Consequently, people start to withdraw from the social settings because of the “shame” and “disgust” that they feel in the company of anyone. This makes them isolated which makes them more likely to take drastic measures to make them look a certain way.

## Conclusion

Women’s bodies have often been objectified. Men, by defining the characteristics of women, making them resort to their traditional roles of cooking, cleaning, nurturing, etc. and by defining the ideal body types since times immemorial have prevented women from entering the educational or political spheres.

The women of today have given the reins to the media and the men to tell them how they should look, what they should eat to look that way and how much they should exercise. A normal healthy weight can be seen as “overweight”, while someone on the thinner side may end up desiring that “perfect chest” all their lives. Body dysmorphic disorder (BDD) is defined as a “mental illness involving obsessive focus on a perceived flaw in appearance.”<sup>31</sup> These flaws are often unnoticeable to others and can range from a bit of love handle, extra thin thighs or even some back fat. It is classified as “common” with more than 1 million cases per year in India.<sup>32</sup> With those figures, it is quite evident that people all around the world are unhappy with themselves in one way or another. If women weren’t surrounded by bodies representing a definite type, they all would have been more accepting of themselves. If media portrayed the fact that female bodies come in all shapes and sizes, they would have been saved by a lot of mental stress. Even movements like “body positivity” need to be more inclusive and incorporate people who are on the “thinner” side. To an extent, the women of today, need to tune out the toxic messages being sent by the media and focus more on positive ones and really think about why they are being fed this notion of what a perfect female body is supposed to look like.

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<sup>31</sup> “Body dysmorphic disorder” – mayoclinic.com

<sup>32</sup> “Body dysmorphic disorder” - Wikipedia

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## **SICK-FLICKS AND CHILL: REPRESENTATION OF ILLNESS IN FILMS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Should there be restrictions on art that misrepresents? Films are an entertainment channel for the masses, and that makes them that much more vulnerable to scrutiny as well as responsibility. A genre of films, termed “sick-flicks,” is becoming extremely popular with the young adult audience. A subcategory of the “chick-flick,” these movies play on the emotions of consumers by making them grieve for the state of the protagonists. Director of one of the movies, Justin Baldoni, says that “this is a film and creative license is always necessary to tell a complete story in two hours.” But how much room do serious issues allow for this? Not only can these representations and “takes” of reality potentially affect mainstream perception, but also ultimately end-up harming the community represented too. While many enjoy this category and those whose diseases are depicted are glad to see their voices getting a platform, this paper suggests that the teams behind such movies need improvement in their entire process to reach a stage where they should take this step. Oft-repeated portrayals affect societal perception, sometimes in a subconscious manner. These considerations raise the key themes of emotional effects of creative tools, importance of accuracy in teen literature, inspiration porn and other literary tropes, intersections of representation and identity. The paper adopts a philo-psycho-social point of view.*

## Introduction

*“Your liberty to swing your fist ends just where my nose begins.”*

*- Unknown*

The “sick flick” genre of the films using “Inspiration Porn” as a literary tool, features stories around sick young women (predominantly white; played by able-bodied white women) who teach the male character something, as they die. A close relative of the manic pixie sick girl. Movies like *The Fault in Our Stars* and *A Walk to Remember* are examples.

The movie *Five Feet Apart* speaks of teenagers managing a disease called Cystic Fibrosis (CF), which carries with a high risk of infection and to prevent which persons must keep a distance at a COVID-friendly six-foot distance. One of them is also infected with a bacteria that’s particularly dangerous, and this makes their romance tougher. They end up intentionally breaching this rule. Director and star Justin Baldoni said that they took responsibility to ensure that the movie reflected true experiences and that his target audience was primarily those people that were managing the same illness (Dodson). The production maintained that assistance of medical professionals as well as patients was taken in understanding the disease completely, including its effects.

In 2017, another movie ‘*Everything, Everything*,’ examined the life of a teen who is always told to keep inside her house for safety as she lives with immunodeficiency. It was found she was not sick at all and it was a case of Munchausen by Proxy, defined by the Mayo Clinic as, “[A] Factitious disorder imposed on another... when someone makes another person sick, requiring medical attention.” This was an even trickier situation as in real life, people who have invisible chronic illnesses often struggle to get a proper diagnosis and are often labeled as hypochondriacs. The protagonist even goes on to say, about managing her condition, that “this isn’t a life worth living”. Annie Elaine is a YouTuber who is diagnosed with Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, believes the film erases the idea of living a happy life with chronic illness is possible, and puts forth the harmful “Faking Illness” narrative that many people with chronic illness (often the invisible ones) have to deal with.

## Limits on Creative Freedom

It is clear that our history, our culture, and our stories are not stored anywhere else better than in art. Regardless of his mainstream alignments, Coomaraswamy would say it becomes an artist’s obligation to deliver the idea that they find in their antar-hridaya-aakash, and this must

not need to cater to the audience at all. The contribution of art to social development is undeniable and thus has strong protectors of its ability to initiate discussions as well as provocations. Voices buried deep within layers of social construct can express their truth without the help of the powers, through this medium. It is thus also natural for these powers to want to restrict it in a way that tells one narrative -- the initialization of the free expression versus censorship debates.

Philosophical discussions about these occur in the backdrop of values that society finds important at the moment. For instance, Plato spoke of censorship in *The Republic*. For him, there is a sense in which all acting involves lying, for it may involve someone who is not Achilles posing as Achilles and speaking as though he were Achilles. In this way, art is seen to be dangerous for the society, and he wishes to banish these artists in extreme censorship in his ideal state.

Censorship can act as a limit to the so-called artistic freedom and creative license that artists sometimes use; while the latter serves to become justification of that art which directly not just offends but affects a community. It has been argued that if a work of art should be censored on (for example) moral grounds, it makes no sense to make an exception for aesthetic merit. Hence, a creative license would not allow representation of something in artform or as “good” art, that would be immoral in any other scenario.

Bernard Williams writes:

“The idea of making exceptions to a censorship law for works with artistic merit seems, ... If one believes that censorship on certain grounds is legitimate, then if a work of artistic merit does fall under the terms of the law, it is open to censorship: its merits, indeed, may make it more dangerous, on the grounds in question, than other works.” (20)

Is a fictional story a lie, as Plato believes? Only if one believes in the existence of other worlds, in idealism. An Idealist thus with his conception of another perfect world, will consider fictions as more than our imaginations.

One problem with this is in explaining how we can have emotional relations with fictional entities. Colin Radford, in 1975, wrote a paper which concluded that the “paradox of emotional response to fiction” was unsolvable. Burke’s description “delightful horror” asks how can audiences get pleasure from tragedies and horror stories when, if those same events were encountered in real life, they would surely be anything but pleasurable? This has indeed been

a contest for many thinkers. On the other hand, unless we find reflections of the fictitious in real life, on what basis can we like it?

Realism is “a literary form that has been associated with an insistence that art cannot turn away from the more sordid and harsh aspects of human existence” (Morris, 2003). A Realist will agree to “fictional characters,” about which we know there are some determinate truths.

Rothfield argues that medicine provided novelists with narrative strategies, epistemological assumptions and models of professional authority, and early medical realist novels in particular tended to portray illness as “either a fundamental ontological predicament or a punctual sign of innate moral inadequacy” (Rothfield).

Paula McDonald talks about another genre which is relevant to present discussion: clinical realism. It’s defined as “Fictional writing where health problems are systematically represented, not as a metaphor, not as a plot point, and not as the central topic of the writing, but as a part of a character's personal identity and day-to-day experience.” (McDonald)

### **Ethical Representation and Influence**

Virginia Woolf’s essay “On being ill” said: “Considering how common illness is... it becomes strange indeed that illness has not taken its place with love, battle and jealousy among the prime themes of literature”

Understanding aesthetic value definitely involves its cushioning within society and politics. This especially as illness and disability can profoundly affect an individual's life opportunities and personal identity.

With the heightened exposure that films get, the material and ideas they package get into societal consciousness. The depiction of an issue in the media plays a major role in forming public perception. Perceptions portrayed in the media directly reflect as well as influence how the represented communities are treated in society. Stereotypical depictions of any kind, even in fiction, has the potential of normalizing a perspective through repetition to the general audience, by means of mainstream media. These, as the consumers of literature know, correlate to "tropes".

“Ideas have power; images have power. And how we choose to represent other groups of people—that certainly has power,” professor Mary Lui, of Yale University, told *The Politic* (Lee). Representation, at its heart, is the striving for an authentic reflection from society’s

shared imagination. It can serve as a liberator for the marginalized from the stereotypes imposed by society.

The common media of the mainstream often depicts people with illnesses and disabilities through the lenses of either pity (if they don't survive) and heroism (if they pass on a lesson and then don't survive). "*Inspiration porn*" is, then by definition, the portrayal of said people as inspirational solely or in part on the basis of their disability (Wikipedia).

One cannot say for certain if it is instinctively wrong to make such depictions of people as potential role models. The problem then becomes objectification (as there is mostly little ground for identification between the audience and the representation), devaluation (people because of their impairment are represented as having a narrower scope), and mystification (it represents disability as a problem located in individual bodies and obscures causes of disability). The term 'porn' has come to signify "uncritical aesthetic appreciation" of something; for example, food porn. (Grue)

In a TED talk, late activist Stella Young, to whom the term above is attributed, said that "porn" terminology was used when a group of people are objectified for the benefit of another group of people - and so, here it was disabled people for the others. Young says:

"The purpose of these images is ... "Well, however bad my life is, it could be worse. I could be that person.""

This makes these types of movies, as discussed in the paper, as questionable in terms of ethics, immediately.

Ethics deals with making choices among acceptable alternatives, which depend on morality. Morality deliberates about how one should behave. Filmmaking is a matter of aesthetics. Ethics and aesthetics are both about making choices. Ethics as a field discusses certain choices in relation to others; aesthetics is about choices in relation to the art object itself. Each class of choices constrains the other. Aesthetic decisions can have ethical consequences; ethical decisions can have aesthetic consequences. (Priluck)

The movies, ultimately, also affect those living with the disease in question. The concept "quality of life" refers to the views of patients themselves about the effects of their illness and its treatment on their functional status. Recently, research on illness perceptions has made clear how patients' cognitions (beliefs, views) and emotions play a role in adapting (and mal-



adapting) to illness (Kaptein). Hence, these perceptions and influence on them through emotionally evocative movies, is extremely relevant.

If nothing else, then mere numbers do the talking. The star of the film *Five Feet Apart*, Cole Sprouse, also has around approximately thirty-nine million followers on Instagram itself. That's quite a bit of influence.

### **Parting Criticism for the Genre**

Identity is linked to self-esteem. And a disease itself becoming the major identity carries with it the risk of negatively impacting how people managing diseases see their own selves. This is precisely what will happen in making a movie where characters predominantly revolve around their issues. Therefore the kind of glamorous representation of illness shown in these young adult movies is dangerous and irresponsible.

In a blog post, CF activist Elsie Tellier called out *Five Feet Apart* for its “inherent ableism”. In popular and mainstream modes, specifically, people are usually not depicted “living” with the said chronic illness or chronic pain. With medical advancements and research, care standards have drastically changed. According to the CF Foundation, half of babies with CF born in 2017 are predicted to live to be 46 years or older (“What Pop Culture Gets Wrong”). People with chronic illnesses like CF are going to college, having careers, starting families, and planning for the future in many ways. The trope on the other hand essentially falls and lacks representation if there's no cure for your disease, you have no significant other, and you're not dying.

Blogger Gunnar, believes that the movie is a profit attempt to capitalize on a very narrow issue. He thus plays at naming the film with a more accurate and compelling title, such as “How to Kill a CFer in 10 Days” and “Six Feet Under”. The most famous films in this genre (sad movies centered around a disease-fighting teenager), like *The Fault in Our Stars*, have been centered around cancer. But CF is amongst the unfamiliar diseases that rarely get attention or platform in pop culture. Precisely this makes responsible depiction even more important, and the stakes of this particular one a lot higher.

Furthermore, healthcare teams have a moral duty to provide the safest care to patients they take up, as per medical ethics, especially with respect to doctor-patient relationships. The Hippocratic Oath requires a new physician to uphold specific ethical standards; including to treat the ill to the best of one's ability, to preserve a patient's privacy, and so on. Exposing

patients to deadly violations of a disease's guidelines, in the name of love, is thus a violation of the most fundamental principle of medical ethics.

## **Conclusion**

There have been various takes on this issue by those living with chronic illnesses, ranging from happiness from seeing someone being represented, no matter how accurately, to complete boycott of the genre.<sup>33</sup> A consensus amongst all, though, can be summarised as follows: (1) "My disease is not your literary tool," and (2) Love cannot heal, following proper treatment will.

Invisible illnesses for instance the Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome are recognised by some foreign medical bodies as a claimable disability; however, most states including India lag far behind on legislatures or guidelines. A misrepresentation, or a lack of clinical realism in artwork claiming to represent it, are extremely harmful prospects. Asking the classical question that features in several discussions on autonomy and ownership, "Whose life is this anyway?" offers a more collaborative approach. Who gets to tell the story of another life, with a rare disease? (Moffitt)

Representation is a dialectic, a two-way exchange between creatives and their audience. Questions that arise from the issue of representation include: What sort of sacrifices can media make to put the spotlight on the chosen community? And, finally, is all representation good representation? (Lee)

Journalist Michelle Slatalla wrote in 2009, "...today's tear-jerkers are a new example of an age-old fascination with other people's problems, the modern equivalent of going to the opera to see a tortured Tosca leap to her death from the Castel Sant' Angelo." (Slatalla) Questions for viewers to ask themselves include: What is it that we get out of these tales? Are we using them? Is it a form of catharsis?

Finally, it's true that consumers are free to choose if they want to consume a work of art or not. Artistic works don't carry just one interpretation; so it could be said they're just reporting and not promoting one meaning. This is a popular and irrefutable defense in the face of want for restrictions. However, it is just important to not give more platform or priority to any third voice, which is not given to the featured community itself.

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<sup>33</sup> Moral relativism is indeed a thing.

UNESCO points out that culture is much more than merely a commodity, and relates it with identity and meaning. However, at this point, when the world defines art as encompassing many more forms such as films and photographs, and at the same time becomes increasingly sure about monetizing it; an evolving meaning of art beyond representation of culture must be one of the many outcomes.

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## SOME QUESTIONS ON THE DOCTRINE OF KARMA

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Karma has been one of the most prominent philosophies in Indian philosophy for time immemorial. Many are familiar with it being a system of reward and punishment which one will endure in their next life based on their actions in this current life. It is hence closely tied to morality, especially that of one's actions, and possibly the individual themselves, by extension. While this might make Karma appear as a rather simple concept to grasp, it is further complicated when morality is closely considered. Indeed, it is only when notions such as 'good' and 'evil' are further analyzed that the doctrine of Karma begins to be more subjective, thereby ridding it of its concreteness. This paper seeks to question ideas of morality, especially how an action is judged on its 'goodness,' as well as what makes certain actions 'good' or 'bad.' Furthermore, the paper also takes into consideration the 'goodness' of an individual with respect to their actions, specifically questioning how the individual's moral factor is perceived by the doctrine of Karma with relation to the way they act. The aim of this paper is, thus, to not only complicate morality and the dichotomy of 'good' and 'bad,' but also to show the complexities in judging the morality of various actions and individuals, and overall, analyze a list of factors that might call into question the "just" nature of Karma. All of this will then lead to the presenting of a much larger question, that being: does Karma truly serve as an explanation to the question of theodicy?*

The doctrine of Karma works on the basis of punishing or rewarding individuals after reincarnation, based on their actions in their past life. It has been considered a 'rational' answer to the question of theodicy, as it explains why suffering exists in the world. The explanation given by karma regarding theodicy, ethics, and actions are rather simple only on a surface level. The law of karma, once examined closely and questioned, can lead one to raise a number of questions, especially regarding factors such as the notions of 'good' and 'evil,' the idea of moral and individual agency, as well as divine intervention. It is only once questions relating to these are asked, that the true complexity of karma, ethics, theodicy and human behaviour with respect to karma reveals itself.

### **Ethics and morality:**

Karma, as is known, functions on the basis that one's fate (be it rewarding or punishing) is a result of their actions, either in the past life, or the current one. It serves as an explanation for one's misfortunes, claiming that these are a result of their wrongdoings in a previous life. This, however, ceases to be as straightforward when the notions of 'good' and 'evil' are questioned – more specifically, what exactly determines the morality of a deed, and on what basis is this judgement made? It is also important to note that 'good' and 'evil,' here are dichotomized, when it should really be analyzed as existing on a spectrum. This will be further examined later on in the paper.

First, it must be noted that according to karma, morality exists as a binary, as all deeds are either good or bad, and this corresponds with the reward-punishment system. Therefore, all actions fall into the category of either 'good' or 'evil' and depending on this, a person's fate is decided. The first question therefore arises on the basis of this, for it must be known what exactly is meant by 'good' and 'evil'. Because karma affects people based on their supposed 'goodness', it is also assumed that all actions are either 'good' or 'evil' (if these can be identified in the first place), making the categories of 'good' and 'evil' seem absolute – meaning, the definitions of these terms are concrete, thereby leaving very little room for any grey areas. However, given the complexities of one's actions, where exactly does the morality of these actions lie?

For example, if a homeless man were to steal food to feed his starving family, which category would this deed fall into? Would this be a bad deed because he stole, or a good deed because he did it in order to feed his family? This then also begs the question of the objectivity of these actions - in other words, is stealing *objectively* bad, and is it always considered *wrong* in every

circumstance? Can all actions be labelled objectively 'good' or 'bad'? Since these questions pertain to the morality of the man's action, what can be further asked is whether or not the 'goodness' of a person is dependent on their actions alone, and if so, to what extent? Using the example above of the homeless man, if his action was to be deemed 'evil' would that necessarily make him a bad person? Likewise, if they were to be deemed 'good' because of the intention behind it, is he automatically considered an ethical person? This again goes back to the question of whether the morality of an action lies in the intent or outcome.

If a person's 'goodness' were to be determined solely by the intention behind their actions, the moral designation of this action could then be subject to change. If a person were to act based on their own moral compass, and their own personal judgement of 'good' in whatever circumstance they may be presented with, are they a 'good' person because of their attempt to do (what they consider) the 'right' or 'good' thing? In the example mentioned above, is the homeless man a 'good' person if he continues stealing, if done with the intention of providing for his family and having their best interest in mind?

If, on the other hand, the actions were the deciding factor of the morality of a person, would that imply that every action can only belong to one category? The goodness of a person's actions are arguably also partially based on the intent behind it (e.g. the homeless man's act of stealing food being at least partially 'good' since he is doing it to keep his family alive). Hence, if the action alone was the only deciding factor, that would then imply that all deeds are either only good or only bad, leaving little to no room for any grey areas. When taking the action alone into consideration, another important question to ask is what exactly makes an action good (keeping in mind that this does not take intent into account, and is looking specifically at the action alone). One single action could have multiple different outcomes of varying 'goodness'. So, in such a situation, what exactly would deem the action 'good' or 'bad'? Taking the aforementioned example, is the homeless man's deed 'bad' because of the impact it had on whomever he stole the food from, or 'good' because of the impact it had on his family? Therefore, just like the complexity that comes with assigning morality to one's intent, is it possible to do the same with one's actions?

Alternatively, could the morality of an action be judged solely on the basis of what it entails - i.e., how it is perceived on the exterior alone? In her article *Theodicy and the Doctrine of Karma*, Ursula Sharma looks at karma in a textual sense, as well as its real-world application. She provides an example of two brothers cutting down a peepal tree in order to clear land to



build themselves a house, and how their neighbours believe that this was a bad deed because of the fact that the peepal tree is very sacred in Hinduism (353). Here, the exterior nature of this judgement is seen in the fact that the act of cutting down a sacred tree is judged solely on what this act - once isolated from its intent - represents. Additionally, if, for example, Hinduism condemns the destruction of sacred entities (e.g., cows, peepal trees), would that mean that any destruction done to these entities, regardless of the intent or outcomes, would be objectively 'bad'? Had the men cut down the peepal tree to clear out land for an orphanage or a homeless shelter that would be of service to people, are they still doomed to be haunted by bad karma in the future?

Deciding the morality of one's actions based only on the action itself does make it more objective, therefore simplifying the law of karma, because if the religion explicitly mentions what actions will give a person good/bad karma, it allows a person to go about their life avoiding things that could come back to haunt them in their next life, as they have essentially been given a rule book of objective moral dos and don'ts. Therefore, a person would know exactly what they are getting into when they act a certain way, and sealing their own fate with full agency. The problem with this explanation, however, is that although it emboldens lines that are otherwise blurry (in terms of what is considered 'good' or 'bad', and why) is that it invites other ethical dilemmas. Going back to the previous example, do the men avoid clearing land to make institutions that will benefit people, simply because it would entail cutting down a sacred tree, an act that will lead to their suffering in the future? Similarly, another example mentioned in the article was a Brahmin having bad karma because he was living with a lower caste widow (353). If the Brahmin's actions are providing the widow comfort and solace, are these immediately erased simply because he is defying caste rules? Therefore, even if the goodness of actions was based on the actions alone and nothing else, it still raises multiple questions and dilemmas regarding ethics. Ethics and morality are hence difficult to systematize because of the various complexities, contradictions, and questions that it invites.

### **Agency, intent, and theodicy:**

The law of karma also works on the premise that individuals act by their own will and agency, and hence, they are aware of the karmic consequences of their actions. However, the notion of complete individual agency starts to get rather murky when we take into account a person's surroundings and beliefs. When looking at the idea of agency, it must be taken into consideration that one's actions are based on multiple outside factors for a large part, thereby

barring one from committing an act that is truly individual - in other words, the influence that external factors have on a person makes free will nothing more than a mere concept. Agency here, therefore, refers to action without the interference of an otherworldly entity, both directly and indirectly – direct interference being in the form of divinity, and indirect interference being in the form of the mere knowledge and fear of karma. For now, the latter will be examined, as well its role in the answer that karma provides to the question posed by theodicy.

Firstly, the beliefs and surroundings of an individual must be considered when looking at exactly how much agency (if any) an individual has in their actions, and invariably, the consequences they face in the future. As Ursula Sharma had observed about karma in practice, specifically in one particular village, "... it [karma] is either supplemented by other notions of causation, or it is implemented in such a way that the afflicted person is protected from a heavy sense of responsibility..." (Sharma 357). Here, we see that the acceptance of karma as a law is prevalent in this village, and the people in it do accept it as a cause of suffering. The article also features a number of instances where karma is cited as a reason for the misfortunes faced by people, along with how the villages interpreted the exact cause of said misfortune. Therefore, it is clear that the law of karma is taken rather seriously in this village. Because of this, it can be argued that a mere knowledge of and belief in karma can take away part of a person's agency over their own actions. A person's belief in and acceptance of karma could affect their actions due to a fear of being punished for their wrongdoings in the future. So, if one were to act based on a fear of a greater power, are they truly in complete control of their actions?

To further explain this with an example, if a God-fearing believer of karma was to spend their life donating to charities and volunteering at various shelters (for the homeless, animals etc.) simply due to a fear of punishment, or possibly even seeking a reward, can they be said to be acting on their own volition, especially if this is not something they would have done had they not felt burdened to act appropriately so as to avoid suffering in the future? When taking theodicy into account, can karma truly be considered 'just' and 'rational' if the consequences (be it reward or punishment) that people face are due to actions motivated by fear and/or greed? It can be argued that here, the person's belief in karma takes away the truthfulness of their actions – meaning, the essence of the person is lost to ulterior motives that arise from a knowledge of the role of supernatural forces. Some Hindu texts also allude to this very possibility, such as the Upanishads, which are said to deliberately keep the doctrine of karma somewhat secretive, "in part this obscurity is due to the gradual evolution of the doctrine from

the idea of efficacy of the sacrifice to the idea of efficacy of virtuous action in general...” (Kaufman 17). Therefore, since an individual’s fear of punishment or desire for a reward in the next life can cause them to be moral in the present, would they be fully deserving of their karma? This can again be connected back to previous questions regarding where exactly the ethics of one’s actions can be located, as well as whether or not the morality of a deed is absolute and unchangeable regardless of other factors such as intent and outcome. If karma does outline a certain set of rules that must be followed in order to avoid bad karma - and possibly even earn good karma - and an individual, knowing these rules, acts accordingly and gets rewarded in their next life as a result of this, the karma they receive cannot be one of rationality and justice, primarily because the actions would not be coming from an honest place.

Since theodicy aims to answer the age-old question of why the innocent suffer while the evil flourish (Kaufman 17), karma cannot, under the above-mentioned circumstances, be an appropriate enough answer to this question, because the question implies that the ones who suffer are not the ones who do no ‘bad’, but rather the ones that *are* not ‘bad’. As discussed earlier, one’s actions are not, and cannot be, the primary indicator of the innate ‘goodness’ of that person. If karma focuses solely on the actions of individuals, it invites the opportunity for wolves to dress up in sheep’s clothing, and get rewarded for it. However, as the Upanishads suggest based on their secrecy of the doctrine of karma, an individual’s karma can be seen as being based on the morality of the person, rather than their actions alone. But even this does not provide a straightforward explanation or answer, because as discussed earlier, there are multiple nuances that go into deciding whether a person is truly ‘good’ or not, which therefore complicates the doctrine of karma even further.

### **God and Dharma:**

Apart from the fear of karma taking moral agency away from an individual due to their desire to avoid suffering, divine intervention is also said to have a significant role in a person’s action. This, therefore, rids people of even the choices they make based on the world around them, as this idea implies that all of these are made for them, and their every move is instead controlled by an almighty. The Nyaya School’s belief in this, particularly, is what will be examined, and in addition to this, the supposed rationality of karma will also be questioned further.

As mentioned earlier, karma either punishes or rewards people based on their actions, which they have control over. Since the lack of one’s moral agency due to their fear of karma has already been discussed, the role of God must also be examined in determining just how much

agency an individual truly has. According to the Naiyayika's, "... it (the action of man) is influenced by Him (God)" (qtd. in Vattanky 394). This shows that man lacks any and all agency, because his actions are influenced by the divine. This then begs the question; how can karma be 'just' if the consequences faced by man are due to causes that are out of his hands? The role of God in the law of karma is questioned and answered by Vatsyayana – he asks, "... if the law of karma is inexorable, if it necessarily brings about the fruit, then what is the place of God," to which he is said to have replied that it is only when God "activates the dharmadharma of individual souls that each soul gets its due reward" (Vattanky 398-399). Here we see the exact influence that God plays in someone's actions and karma, as Vatsyayana's interpretation still shows the role that God plays in karma, while also showing that despite God's interference, man still has agency over himself and his actions, as the only thing mentioned in this quote is his dharma – here, agency is seen in the fact that God does not directly control man's actions, but only does so with his karma due to the activation of man's *dharmadharma*. Therefore, even in this sense, it can be argued that man still has control over his actions without the direct intervention of an otherworldly figure ('direct' intervention referring to God controlling man's every move).

Although Vatsyayana's interpretation does clarify just how much agency an individual has over their actions, what it also does is problematize the notions of morality according to karma. As discussed in the first section, there are multiple factors that decide the morality of a person (if this *can* be fully and completely determined, to begin with) and these factors themselves have a lot of nuances that make it hard to decide their exact moral position. So, when we add dharma to this problem, we are faced with a new set of questions. To start with, is every individual's dharma the same? The description of dharma mentioned in Ursula Sharma suggests it is in fact different for each person, as dharma is "[the] religious duty attached to their [an individual's] status or condition" (351). This would then mean that there truly cannot be a specific set of rights and wrongs to be followed by everyone under the laws of karma. Therefore, an action is deemed 'good' or 'evil' not simply based on the action itself, but because of a number of other factors that pertain to an individual's dharma. What this would also mean is that no one can really be sure of their karmic outcome, on account of the fact that no one is told what their dharma is. The dharma is simply activated by God, and it is only after this is done that the individual's actions become fruitful. This would then disprove the notion that people are aware of the consequences of their actions, because in reality, what is 'right' for one person may not be the same for another. This in turn can be argued to take away an individual's agency, not in

terms of actions, but in terms of their fate – if a person supposedly acts knowing the consequences of their actions, but they must also act based on a dharma that they are not aware of, they really have no agency over the outcome of their actions. Therefore, as mentioned earlier, karma, even according to the beliefs of various schools of thought within Hinduism, cannot be systematized, as it is too complex a subject.

**Conclusion:**

The topics (such as ethics and theodicy) that lie at the heart of the doctrine of karma make it far too complex to compile into a set of rules that must be followed in order to attain a reward and escape punishment. Karma, rather than being a sort of rule book, is instead a philosophy, and like all philosophies, it must be questioned and problematized to be fully understood – when such an intricate topic is limited to a mere handbook for one’s next life, many questions are left unanswered and many grey areas are left untouched. It is therefore virtually impossible to treat karma as a simple matter when the very nature of it demands complexity.

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## **THE FUNCTIONING OF BUDDHISM: A CULTURAL AND SOCIAL ELABORATION**

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### ***ABSTRACT***

*Religion cannot remain independent of the society it exists in, and neither can religious practices function without associating themselves with the larger community of followers and affect them accordingly. This dual aspect is recognised. The purpose of this paper is to examine religious functioning of Buddhism through two main aspects: The Legacy of the Sangha and the Cult of Amulets within the context of Thailand; a country where Buddhism has grown stably without foreign disturbances for a long period allowing it to retain and develop religious institutions and functions. The vast Buddhist practicing population and its nature which remains religious by nature provides a suitable ground for study.*

## Introduction

‘Sanuk’ a Thai word could find its closest interpretation as ‘fun’ within the English vocabulary. Yet ‘sanuk’ is so much more than ‘fun’, it is a representative of the attitude of life adopted by the Thai people- a conscious effort to induce joy in the most mundane of activities. Sanuk is a shadow of the Buddhist concept of Impermanence, a reminder of the transitory nature of the world and an attempt to live in the present. Thailand, a country known as the “The Land of Smiles” owes its popular stereotype of the ever smiling, happy Thai, partly to the adaptation of this attitude to life. Yet even within this widely dispersed and followed guideline we cannot but find traces of the essence of Buddhism. This instance is not adequate enough to explain the influence of Buddhism as a way of life in Thailand.

Thailand, a country where nearly 95% of the population is Buddhist, had been introduced to Buddhism as early as the 7th century. They had evaded colonization from the Europeans, unlike their neighbours and could allow the stable growth of Buddhism as a religion. For many Buddhism is a way of life rather than a religion and ultimately provides a sense of national identity and unity to many Thais.

This paper will attempt to explain two aspects of Buddhism in Thailand that are both deeply associated with the practice of Buddhism as a religion and are important within the social and cultural framework of Thailand as well. We will aim to study and understand the function of the Monastic Community in Thailand and the influence of amulets within the Thai society.

## The Monk as a Social Being

It is typically believed among scholars thorough with Buddhist ideology that the ideal life of a Buddhist monk is one of asceticism and renunciation. Thus the Buddhist religion is known as a “renouncer tradition”. It is a position separated from that of common man, where all things worldly are considered distractions on the path to *nirvana*.

These beliefs largely undermine the interconnectedness of the monastic community and the laity. Traces of this intertwining are found to be acknowledged among earliest literature. The term ‘*cāturdisha*’ translated to mean the ‘sangha of the four quarters’ can be understood to refer to the four communities- *The bhikkhu, the bhikkhunis, the upāsakas and the upāsikās*.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> The bhikkhu and the bhikkhunis refers to the community of the monks and the nuns respectively and is collectively known as the ubhayato- sangha- the two-fold community. The upāsakas and the upāsikās refer to the community of laymen and laywomen.



Reginald Ray further sums up the position of the laity in respect to the larger community practicing Buddhism:-

"On the other hand is the Buddhism of the laity, characterized by virtuous behaviour and generosity toward monastics as well as by participation in the cults of the stupa and of local deities. The laity practised a compromised Buddhism and, in so doing, acted as a kind of buffer between the authentic Buddhism of the monks and the non-Buddhist environment of larger India." (Prebish, 47)<sup>35</sup>

Another important dimension of this relationship between the laity and the Sangha<sup>36</sup> is one of power exchange also classified as reciprocal exchange, where the sangha passes on merit to the lay community in exchange for material donations. These merit making ceremonies can be as simple as providing food to monks in the morning while they beg for alms or presenting flowers and incense offerings to a Buddha statue. In return for their donations the generous lay person receives 'good merit' or puñña<sup>37</sup> and this affects the balance of karma on the cosmic scale.

A more elaborate example of gaining merit might be sponsoring major rituals like the Kathina ceremony.<sup>38</sup> Mahavagga from the Vinaya Pitaka states that for a three month period during the monsoon season, monks were required to take up a fixed residence and were subjected to a more intense course of study and meditation. This strict regime enhances the potency of the monk and the ceremony provides the lay community an opportunity to gain access to this increased power. The other main purpose of the ceremony is to provide material requirements like money to the sangha.

But we observe an uneven distribution of merit or blessings among the lay. The chief donor, usually an affluent patron, has the honour of presenting the first set of robes to the monks and is the first to be blessed by them. The patron's ability to donate is influenced by his financial capability, and the merit he is capable of acquiring is also thus affected. Thus the financial and

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<sup>35</sup> Prebish, Charles. "Varying the Vinaya: Creative Responses to Modernity." *Buddhism in the Modern World : Adaptations of an Ancient Tradition*.

<sup>36</sup> Sangha refers to the monastic community of monks and nuns in the Buddhist world.

<sup>37</sup> puñña (Pali) or punya (Sanskrit) refers to an attribute in Buddhism and Hinduism that develops better karma.

<sup>38</sup> The Kathina Ceremony refers to the presentation of robes at the sangha, at the end of the monsoon season. Kathina itself literally means frames; in olden times monks would stretch cloth over frames and collectively work on sewing them.

social status of the donator plays a factor in deciding his donating capability and thus the merit he receives. A similar parallel will be discussed in reference to distribution of amulets.

Thus, the dependence of the Sangha on the lay community is acknowledged through the recognition of the laity as benefactors and also as the locus for recruitment of new members

The Vinaya Pitaka, one of the most primary and sacred texts of Theravada Buddhism, authorised by Gautama Buddha himself, contains the established norms necessary for monastic institutions to observe. While the Vinaya certainly encompasses the essence of the Śīlā<sup>39</sup>, it is not exclusively ethical in nature. Its main concerns were the growth of the spiritual maturity of the monk and upholding the reputation of the Sangha in relation to the broader community where it exists.

### **Monks as a Pop Icon and Social Figure**

Justin McDaneil addresses wider trends in Thai Buddhism. He compares the followers of a particular monk to the likes of a fan following. Like a fan their loyalty can waver, they might be a fan of another monk as well without losing their prior devotion to the former. Others might visit shrines or collect images and amulets connected to their favourite monks. (McDaniel 11)<sup>40</sup>

One monk who I'd like to briefly address is Somdet To. Somdet To is one of the widest known monks in Thailand with a consistently large following. His pictures, amulets and catalogues of his life story are sold in markets.

While Buddhism is largely seen as a religion of meditation that promotes peace, Somdet To was lauded for his defensive magic and is considered a Thai monk rather than a Buddhist monk.

Somdet To's fierce passion for protecting national identity and the nation itself are reiterated through numerous stories. In aversion of one story it is said that he had dumped a cartload of amulets into Chao Phraya River and used magic chants to repel the French gunboats that approached Bangkok through the riverways.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Śīlā constitutes the ethical code of an individual and can be compared to a person's self discipline, a concept around which a monk or a nun is expected to structure their moral framework.

<sup>40</sup> Justin McDaniel. *The Lovelorn Ghost and the Magical Monk : Practicing Buddhism in Modern Thailand*. (Columbia University Press, 2011). 11

<sup>41</sup> In 1893, French boats approached the Chao Phraya River that flowed through Bangkok. They retreated without a fight before the Siamese army even had a chance to mobilize.

This is only one instance of Thai Buddhism associated with values of national identity, unity and protection. In the 20th century the Sangha became more involved in the society and played active roles for its betterment. They were encouraged to provide health and educational assistance in their capacity.

We see Thai monks becoming more familiar with the larger community. This depiction of the Thai monk is contrary to the ideal depiction of a non-attached and distant ascetic.

### **The Cult of Amulets**

The Buddha who was made absent by his parinibbāna<sup>42</sup> has his physical essence represented through relics, stupas and images in time and space parallel to the Dhamma (teaching of the Buddha) spread out similarly by the action of the Sangha. The presence of these reminders provides the comfort of Buddha's presence to devotees. It is said that when men provide homage to relics and images of Buddha goodness is caused to arise within them.

“A stupa should be erected at the crossroads for the Tathāgata. And whoever lays wreaths or puts sweet perfumes and colours there with a devout heart, will reap benefits and happiness for a long time.” (“Mahāparinibbāna Sutta: The Great Passing”)<sup>43</sup>

These reminders can be classified into four types. *Dhātucetiya* or *bodily relics*<sup>44</sup>, *Dhamma Cetiya* or *Dhamma*<sup>45</sup>, *Paribhogacetiya*<sup>46</sup> and *Uddecikacetiya*. *Uddecikacetiya* are indicative reminders i.e man-made substitutes, replicas, or copies of *paribhogacetiya*, like images or sculptures of events associated with Buddha, replicas of famous stupas etc.

Amulets the main concern of our discussion falls under the fourth category.

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<sup>42</sup> In Buddhism parinibbāna (pāli) or parinirvana (sanskrit) refers to nirvana after death, or release from Samsāra, rebirth and karma.

<sup>43</sup>“Mahāparinibbāna Sutta: The Great Passing.” [Http://www.Palicanon.Org](http://www.Palicanon.Org), [www.palicanon.org/en/sutta-pitaka/transcribed-suttas/majjhima-nikaya/131-mn-5-anangaa-sutta-without-blem](http://www.palicanon.org/en/sutta-pitaka/transcribed-suttas/majjhima-nikaya/131-mn-5-anangaa-sutta-without-blem).

<sup>44</sup> These consist of hair strands, nails, teeth , etc that have been claimed to belong to Buddha.

<sup>45</sup> These are the teachings of the Buddha, they exist as doctrines in the Pali canons.

<sup>46</sup> These are reminders by association, they include objects the Buddha is associated with or has had physical contact with. His almbowls or traces of his footprint are examples.

In Thai, amulets are called *khṛūēang rāng khāung khlang*<sup>47</sup> often abbreviated to *khṛūēang rāng*. They are objects of various types: Buddha images, emblems or clay tablets with imprints of animal or bird shapes among others, etc.

The average Thai person carries several amulets on their person. They are either strung around the neck or hidden at home and taken out occasionally to be admired. Some people only wear amulets on certain occasions and not everyday, but nearly everyone owns one.

A person may wear several amulets having originated from various places in the country. Someone who resides in Bangkok may hold possession of an amulet belonging to a forest monastery near the Northern Thailand borders or they might have amulets bought recently at a temple or one that had been made years ago. Amulets blessed by monks both dead and alive may be traded or revered amulets might be passed down through generations in a family. Thus contemporary Thai of diverse social and regional classes are connected by their possession of material items encompassing historical heritage and geographic spread within the country. They are representative of national identity and history like the many famous monks throughout the decades who fiercely protected it.

The relation that wearers associate with their amulets and the Buddhist doctrine may differ according to different social contexts. Through one explanation, we understand that votive tablets and images were made to remind oneself of Buddha and guide oneself accordingly with one's virtues. Gradually wearers began to believe amulets could provide them with bodily protection and ensure that a morally correct attitude could ensure good returns.

Additionally, the power of the amulet is partly determined by the status of the monk who participated in the sacralization ritual. The greater the yogic power and virtue of the monk the greater the power of the amulet.

Thus, we understand that the efficacy of the amulet is believed to be influenced by two main factors: -

- (1) The ethical behaviour and virtue of the amulet possessor
- (2) And the monk who conducts the rite of sacralization.

The latter will be mentioned in the following passages.

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<sup>47</sup> *Khāung khlang* refers to an object having sacred powers. *Khṛūēang rāng* means amulets.

### **Amulets in the cycle of power**

The final sacralization ritual of the amulet consists of two groups of monks. The first chant the paritta chants continuously and the second consists of meditating monks who are connected to a pile of amulets by a cord (sāi sin; thai) that is held in their hands. It is believed that by reciting gāthas<sup>48</sup> monks are able to concentrate power to the amulets.

Thus Thai monks who are believed to have yogic power because of their ascetic practices and meditation are asked to distribute this energy among the people in the form of amulets or other sacralized objects like Buddha statues. These objects are then storehouses of power and are dispersed among the laity.

The ascetic who has risen from the position of a common person to one capable of higher spiritual levels reaches a state of transcendence this process of purification is characterized by accession, while the function of redistributing amulets among the laity, to the lower levels of materiality is one of gratification and is characterised by descent.

Another cycle that is formed is one of commodification. Where the amulet, originally a gift given out of generosity and received with devotion, is instead commodified and sold as a product in the market with a commercial value. This act instigates a process in which numerous fake amulets and a wide range of catalogues, books and magazine articles to help differentiate them are produced. Additionally, monks presiding over the ceremony are reduced to the position of labour and are exploited.

While the number of amulets that are available for commercial trade increases in the marketplace, the capacity to own amulets increases according to a person's financial ability. Thus, mystic powers that are characteristic of amulets are commercialised as well, and amulets that are rarer and more powerful<sup>49</sup> are sold for a higher price. Thus, people in the higher levels of society are more able to own amulets that are rich in value and number.

This gives rise to an inequality in the distribution of mystic power within the society and acts as a marker of social status. The more historic, more famous and potent amulets are passed

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<sup>48</sup> Gāthas are verses recited (usually mentally) in rhythm to one's breath as a part of meditation or meditative study.

<sup>49</sup> The value of amulets are largely decided by the monks who preside over the sacralization ceremony. Thus an amulet that was presided under the care of an experienced, older monk would hold more value in terms of the virtue it contains as well as its economic price. Thus older amulets and amulets made by revered monks who are no longer alive are of higher value because of their rarity.

through the royal families, or those of noble and wealthy families for they are the sponsors of ascetic saints and monasteries. Despite the wide donation of amulets by saints, they eventually assume a materialistic value and become scarce due to accumulation.

### **Conclusion**

In the introduction to this paper, I've mentioned the idea of 'Sanuk' and in reference to it I addressed the role of Buddhism as a factor determining the practical life of a follower of the religion in Thailand. Yet a closer analysis reveals that Buddhism as a practice cannot remain unaffected by existing social classes or the idea of national identity.

We observe the role of social class and financial status in affecting the distribution of puñña (punya) and additionally how the distribution of puñña acts as a mark of social status. Both through the merit making rituals of the laity and the possession of amulets. Additionally, we've observed the changing roles of the religious institutions of the Sangha and the cult of amulets. Both of them exhibit and represent the essence of nationalism, whether it be through the protection of famous monks or the possession of amulets that span over space and time.

Our more general assessment is that religion has moved past its singular teleological aim (as in most Indian philosophies) and has both affected and been affected by the community it seeks its followers in.

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## PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS OF A GENOCIDE

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper aims to analyse the phenomenon of genocide from a philosophical point of view. It wasn't until recently that the topic of genocide started gaining attention from the scholars of philosophy, this paper is an attempt to highlight the key issues and present the most valid and important theories. The paper is divided into 4 sections, with the first three sections being the crux of it. The introduction explains the original meaning of the term genocide along with the key issues and debates about genocide under the philosophical literature. The second section talks mainly about the semantics of the word Genocide and the interpretation of the official UN definition. The third section is an attempt to establish the key and the most widely accepted theories regarding the evil of genocide.*



## **Introduction**

In the realms of almost all social sciences and their literature, genocide is considered as the most heinous crime of all. It is an unspeakable evil that has practically no moral justification. William Schabas has quoted in his works of genocide in international law that it is the crime of crimes and sits atop the pyramid in a hierarchy.

The term “Genocide” was coined by Ralph Lemkin, a Polish Jurist, in 1944. Two historic events pushed him to coin this term: The holocaust, and the Armenian and Ottoman Turks issue. He recognised the fact that the crimes committed in these two incidents are far from usual war crimes, are much more grave, and far more distinctive in nature, therefore, he moved to coin the term genocide.

As far as the root of the word is considered, it is made up of- *genos* - which is Greek for people/tribe/race, and - *cide* - which is Latin for murder/killing. So roughly (in Lemkin’s original idea) this translates into murder of people. Lemkin believed that at its core, genocide was beyond killing people physically, it was a crime against nationhood. It killed people by destroying their way of life and living. His thought process moved from the fact that its a crime against the world as it breaks and destroys nationalities and cultures and the world is ultimately made up of several distinct nationalities and cultures, an attack on them individually would destroy the world. He recognised 5 definite grounds on which the crime of genocide should be condemned:

1. It contravened, and also went beyond, with the norms of the then existing international law of war.
2. It breached the just-war theory as it involved illegitimate attack on civilian populations by military forces
3. It violated the basic human rights of individuals
4. It infringed on the right of people to exist and flourish as such
5. It attacked the integrity of the world by destroying vital national cultures it was made of.

The genocide literature wasn’t popular amongst philosophers until recently. A lot of philosophers believed that there isn’t much depth to recognise and work through when it comes to the concept of genocide but further reflections have revealed that there is indeed a lot that philosophy can contribute to the debate and discussion of this topic. Philosophical issues relating to semantics, core moral and political theories, ethics etc. run through the debate.

The subject matter of the “concept of genocide” has by far been the most debated issue in the whole discussion. The semantics of the UN definition and its relation to the original concept provided by Ralph Lemkin has made it the most contested issue amongst scholars. Moreover, what is it about genocide that makes it the most heinous crime of all, how is the evil of genocide different from a magnitude of other crimes that might be as heinous and immoral but it still has popular support in the literature of being at the top of the pyramid. It can be said that it is the exceptional harm and impact left on the victims of genocide that is unique, its the experience that is as scarring (or maybe more) as any physical experience. One has to prove that how is this harm unique to the experience of genocide, and what about that harm is different from an incidence of mass murder. This might lead us to the discussion on the importance of group membership and how strong the emphasis has to be on this concept to have the harm substantially differentiate from the one experienced in mass murder. Another popular debate has been on the question of morality in genocide and how can we defend the hypothesis that it is necessarily immoral. This debate will lead us to multiple issues requiring justification to make the argument that genocide is necessarily immoral, stand true. Arguments like existence and value of groups, ethics of collectivism, moral and legal responsibilities, intention and motive of the perpetrators, physical death and social death rise from that discussion.

All the aforementioned issues are majority of the broad concepts that the philosophical literature is dealing with in relation to the debate of genocide. Dwelling deeper into this will give rise to more such moral arguments, and philosophers are continuing to add their share to the comprehensive literature on genocide.

### **Meaning and Interpretation of the Official Definition**

After persistent lobbying at the UN, Lemkin was successful in making the organisation understand the gravity and need of the term. Although the UN upheld the validity of Lemkin’s concept, they struggled to define and present it in terms of international law. The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide was adopted in 1948, 4 years after the Lemkin originally coined the term, and it released a genocide act in which it subsumed the following definition that came to be accepted as official and internationally recognised:

Genocide means any of the following acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) killing members of the group;

- (b) causing serious bodily harm;
- (c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; and
- (e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

Before moving on to the interpretation and nuances of this concept, a thing to note here about the concept as a whole is that it failed to apply and affirm some key crimes as genocides because of the time during which this concept, as well as the convention, was released, mainly the alleged genocide of Armenians by the Ottoman Turks of 1915. Technically, it fulfils the requirements of the official definition but it wasn't accepted and critics present two highly debatable arguments.

The first argument they present is that the word and the concept of genocide didn't exist in 1915, it was coined in 1944 and Internationally recognised in 1948, therefore its not possible for a concept to apply to events that happened before it was introduced. In a general view, this argument is invalid apart from the exception of response-dependent concepts as described by Paul Boghossian in his paper. Genocide, as a concept, is in fact not response-dependent. The whole essence of the definition is driven by intention, the intention to harm the members of a particular ethnic group. No primary or secondary or ulterior requirement is recognised here that would require them to have prior knowledge about the concept of genocide before acting on their intention. Therefore, the argument stands invalid. The second unconvincing and unfair argument critics presented is that the UN Convention of Genocide, which affirmed and officially defined the term genocide, came into existence in 1948. And treaties do not function retroactively. Therefore, the convention, along with the concepts subsumed under it, didn't apply to what happened in 1915. The International Centre for Transitional Justice had ruled that legally the convention didn't apply to the events that happened in 1915 but they did affirm that the events of 1915 match the criteria of genocide given under the convention.

Now coming to the technicalities of the definition given by the convention. It defined a concept for us. In the semantics paper by Paul Boghossian titled "Concept of Genocide", he notes that there is always a purpose with which a legal or a moral term is introduced in a language. He identified and defined three constitutive purposes underlying the introduction of the term,

identifying these constitutive purposes, he says, is an essential part of philosophy as its integral for defining the conceptual role of the concept of genocide.

Firstly, it should define a distinctive phenomenon, something that doesn't come under any of the existing terms in the language. As noted above, Lemkin recognised a need for a term for the distinctive crimes he recognised being committed in the Jewish and Armenian cases, a crime that wasn't being recognised or whose gravity couldn't be covered under the existing terms.

Secondly, a phenomenon is supposed to be named that is in its own meaning, in its core, morally wrong. Whether it was moral or immoral shouldn't be up for questioning, the term and the meaning are not open ended. It should analytically follow from the meaning that if it is a genocide, it is immoral and unjustifiable.

Lastly, the term genocide is not only supposed to define a phenomenon that is distinctive but a phenomenon that is distinctively heinous. It is supposed to define something that is an extreme evil, the gravity of which is not subsumed by the existing terms.

The concept defined by the UN doesn't fulfil or satisfy these specific purposes.

Out of all the three purposes, most of the questions have been raised regarding the third purpose, does it define a phenomenon that is distinctively heinous?

That would bring up the question of whether it is really true that targeting a group is more immoral than targeting a large number of people. That would bring us to examine if there are group rights in addition to individual rights, so when the crime is committed against a group it is violating much more than just individual rights. This being said, even if we assume that this is true, another question would be brought up regarding the type of groups that come under the definition. Why is it that only racial, national, ethnic, or religious groups are recognised when it comes to this moral crime? Why are other groups like ideological, or political, or the ones centred around wealth not under this definition? A valid argument for this is that the groups recognised under the definition are the ones in which people are born and their association to the group is not a choice, they are indelible identifications. So it's commonly accepted that it's morally more wrong to target people regarding their identification that they have no control over rather than what they choose to become. But again, an argument can be raised that why doesn't it include groups like gender and religion then.

Moving to the phrases presented in the definition itself, the problem is raised with “in whole or in part”. The intention of the perpetrators should be to destroy a racial, ethnic, nationality, religious group either in part or in whole, as such.

This means the intention can be to destroy a part of a larger group, but it doesn’t signify how big the part should be. It can be a very small part and the definition doesn’t deal with such intricacies.

But we can’t remove the clause altogether too, because in none of the cases of recognised or even alleged genocides the attack was successful in harming the entirety of the group, so that might make us question that the intention was never to target the entirety of the group. Nazis spared a lot of Jews and the Turks chose to not kill a considerable number of Armenians as well. The concepts are very vague when it comes to determining killing people, it is clear with individuals but it gets messy as soon as a group comes in. Even though a lot of concepts are exempted from the problem of being vague, a concept such as genocide doesn’t have any room for such exceptions given the legal and moral importance that it holds.

Another problematic phrase in the definition is as such. According to Boghossian, as such in philosophy means “under that very description”. According to this, it can mean that when people move to form a specific intention (the essence of the whole definition) they form it under a specific description, and we can’t practically pinpoint or report on that description unless we are using that very same one, we can’t provide an extension of it or a related one, it has to be precisely that very definition.

Another interpretation of as such, probably the more official one as it comes from the UN, is that it aimed to indicate a motive. The motive of inflicting harm was that the people belonged to that very group, the whole intention to target that group came down from a motive to attack a particular group just because it is that particular group. Now the problem that comes here is, is this very motive a part of a larger motive, or is it the whole motive itself, but this can affect categorising different incidents as genocides and can lead to wrong categorisations.

The phrase can’t be removed completely from the definition either as it was put there to satisfy the second purpose (mentioned above) to show that the phenomenon is, by virtue, something immoral. They can remove the as such phrase and simply put the phrase indicating that it has to be without moral justification but that will bring in problems related to relativism, that who is to decide what is moral and what isn’t moral.

Even though we have recognised all these problems within the UN definition, a lot of people believe it is too late to change it now, and that there is not much scope to adjust the definition anyway.

### **The Evil in Genocide**

At the start of my paper, I mentioned that genocide is recognised to be the most heinous crime of all and if it was part of a hierarchy, it'll be at the top of the pyramid. Even though we are talking about how intense the evil is in this concept, a lot of philosophers say this phenomenon shouldn't surprise human beings. Mass killings and even genocides have existed since the time human beings started organising themselves and started differentiating on the basis of social groups. The difference between what happened in the past and the modern-day genocide, as pointed out by Stephen T Davis, is that now human hatred has begun to be allied to governmental bureaucracies, propaganda machines, transportation services, and technologies for mass killing. But what is it about genocide that makes it so evil, even unspeakable as mentioned by some of the philosophers?

We can say that genocide is morally wrong, that the roots of genocide which may come from something like murder are morally wrong too. But if we say this, we are faced with the question of moral relativism. Moral relativism, from a philosophical view, says that nothing is morally right or wrong per se. What might be morally wrong for me, might be morally right for someone else. The truth or falsity of evaluative moral claims is subjective or relative to the person or the group making them. So even if I say that genocide is morally wrong, I'm just referring to my own opinion, someone might come up to me and say that "I and my group believes that genocide is morally right", and they aren't wrong.

Coming to a more conceptual based reasoning, there are a few philosophers who collectively agree upon 2 facets that can, in the most basic way, sum up why genocide is considered distinctively evil.

The first facet talks about how genocide is mostly aimed towards those groups that are an integral part of national culture and important to individual identity. It aims not only at killing individuals but at destroying the whole group identity without which those individuals would and could not have been the individuals they were. Berel Lang compares the group to a person, "In effect, genocide in this sense represents the group as a "person"—arguably, as Aristotle proposes for the polis in the Politics, an entity prior to the individual person: life-giving—and understood in this way, reflecting the difference between death and life as well for the

individual". This facet of genocide involved completely destroying the means of existence and identity of the individual, along with the group as a whole.

The second facet talks about the intention with which the genocide is being committed. They are targeting the individual from those groups, not because of something they have done, will do, or are capable of doing, but simply on the basis of who they are, what is their identification. And even this identification, of whether they belong to the group that is being targeted for genocide, is not done by the victim but by the perpetrator. So, this means that the members of the groups are targeted during a genocide, not because of something they are responsible for but merely in terms of their belonging to that group. But the perpetrators still blame the targeted group and hold them responsible for being a danger to society or how harmful their decisions or choices are, even though the evidence for these claims is not usually strong and more often than not, lacking.

Both these facets together fulfil the understanding as to why, in the most basic way, genocide is distinctively evil. It kills not only the individual and the potential they possessed towards the world but also the means, the path, the way through which that potential could have been realised, it destroys their group identity, the collective identity to which a person is attached. But these two facets are not the only reason why genocide is evil. A lot of philosophers believe that another reason why genocide is so uncomfortably heinous is that, that evil goes beyond the usual and common understanding of evil. This evil subverts the common view that says that evil is intrinsically related to ignorance, lack of intention and absence of deliberation. This view says that when people commit evil it's not because they are conscious and aware of the evil that their doings have but because they think that what they are doing is right and is actually quite opposite to evil. This view believes that people aren't evil from their core, if they understood the gravity of what they were doing, if they genuinely, with full intention understood what they were doing, they would not choose to do it.

Another view about the reason why genocide is so distinctively evil is that social death is central to it as opposed to physical death, which is usually the case in incidents like mass murder. Social death is in almost all cases worse than physical death, because it is not just death of your body, under social death, you are humiliated and tortured mentally (maybe physically), you lose control over your own life and interests, you have to witness murders of your loved ones, there is a huge possibility of the victim being sexually assaulted, and even after your death your corpse is treated with utter disrespect, and in most of the cases, proper funeral

traditions are not followed or allowed to be followed. Claudia Card talks about how genocide and social death affects the social vitality of the victims. She talks about how its not just a death of a group and their collective identity, it is a death of culture and heritage, of intergenerational bonds, it also talks about natal alienation which would just prevent the moving on of traditions and culture of the group, leading to its gradual non-existence.

Some philosophers hold the view that those who are natively alienated are already born social dead. They have no cultural or familial connection, and no hopes for one apart from a link to their oppressor. Mostly, the immediate victims of genocide aren't born socially dead, which shows that sometimes social death is not just an intention or end to the genocide but a possible, gradual, consequence of it.

### **Conclusion**

Through this paper, I was able to analyse two aspects of genocide that fall under the philosophical literature, the semantics and the somewhat moral and ethical aspect. This doesn't even scratch the surface of the amount of literature philosophy has contributed to the studies of genocide. Presently philosophers have been successful in dwelling into issues regarding genocide that might not be seen at first blush, there is a lot of literature coming up even from a gendered perspective that makes the philosophical literature under genocide even more rich and voluminous. There is still a lot of scope for further exploration, especially in relation to the various modern theories introduced. Genocide is one of those topics that might seem to have quite obvious concepts and arguments but is actually one of the most contested and controversial topics to research about. But at the end of the day that is the beauty of something as complex as this concept, you won't appreciate the intricacy of it until you have explored the depths of it.

The UN definition shows that even after all these years we haven't arrived at a concrete legal concept that could capture the entire gravity of a genocide. The idea is still so fragile and contested that there is not much scope to even adjust the definitions. Similarly, following from this, we haven't been able to fully comprehend exactly what about genocide is so grave that it is seen as unspeakable, almost all the theories regarding it are contested and new theories have been coming up as well. This shows the ever evolving and dynamic nature of genocide as a concept, and the potential it has to keep growing as a comprehensive literature through inputs coming from a plethora of fields.



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## **THE ANNIHILATION OF BEING - AN ANALYSIS OF DEATH AND AFTERLIFE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Considerable contributions have been made to the study and nature of death. Without even thinking much about it, we immediately attribute a negative connotation to death. Death is hell/heaven, the absence of being, the end of all possibilities, and what we run away from, but at the same time run closer to it. The focus of this paper is to establish death as other than what it's conceived to be - the end.*

*Understanding our morality has been an area of focus for continental and analytic philosophy for a while. Moreover, making peace with the fact that this life is the only life that we shall ever live and focusing on what's beyond is an unnecessary task is also what this paper will talk about. The possibility of an afterlife and the need for some sort of 'forever' is what this paper shall focus on.*

## **Introduction**

Before getting into any questions that challenge our preconceived notions about death, let's understand what death really is. Is death just another life event for the human being, is it the inevitable change owing to which mourning follows natural? Is death a transition into another world and is this another world that we talk about in fact - real or something that we've conjured?

Concepts like religion and death are embedded in an individual since early on. It's only natural for people to wonder about the possibility of another world. However, why do we need to seek out a world that may or may not exist? Why do we need to know that there is a master plan in place for all of us? Is it because, as Stephen Hawking said - we need a fairy tale because we're afraid of the dark?

Some people would hold that God and everything associated with God, is nothing but a social construct. People make up social institutions like God, and religion to make themselves feel better.

Alternatively, what truly lies beyond, is a mystery that none of us may get to know, but through the course of this paper, I shall try to deduce our mortality from whatever research has been put down by earlier philosophers.

What is it about death that makes us so vulnerable, perhaps the fact that we're limited? The 'forever' cliches we so often hear in movies make us feel better about life and the fact that whatever we do isn't in vain. We reclaim ourselves by believing in the 'other side'. Moreover, people collectively believe that death is negative. Whilst many philosophers hold that death is something one should not be afraid of, the fear of losing your loved one is something that is barely talked about. In this paper, we'll explore the various accounts of different philosophers and references in pop culture that exhibit death as a not-so-grim life event.

Of the various accounts that I've researched for this paper, an argument proposed by Heidegger sums up what death actually is - Death makes life possible, we are, because there is death. What is after death, makes life all the more exciting and better.

So, the question I really aim to answer in this paper is

- (a) Is death scary because we don't know what lies ahead?
- (b) Is death a threshold we must cross to find answers that remain unknown?

(c) The possibility of an afterlife - does that make death a celebration?

In the ambit of this paper, I shall look at why death should not be a dejected event, compare death and afterlife in philosophy and popular culture. Furthermore, I'll answer the aforementioned questions.

### **What makes death so scary?**

Taking it back to the stories we heard about Yama, Lucifer, Azrael, or Thanatos - what made them an object of fear? The tale that a man with big horns and extreme strength would take you away from everything that you hold dear and close is what scared the life out of us, but it's not just limited to that. As humans, we pride ourselves over whatever little possessions we hold dear. So, the fear of losing something precious is obviously very harrowing.

Is death just FOMO (Fear of Missing out) and we don't want to miss out on anything? Thomas Nagel gave what came to be known as the deprivation theory or harm thesis that people do not want to die because they will miss out on things. People are essentially scared of not being a part of someone's life, so on and so forth. Nagel believed that if one's life is essentially good, there is a cause to mourn when this same life is cut short.

One can't help but invoke Aristotle's, "Man is by nature a social animal" Is this statement the very possible reason for us to fear death? The absence of a companion and friend is obviously very distressing but is it possible that man is just scared to be alone? They attribute great qualities and importance to a person and losing them makes them vulnerable and weak. Like a swarm of bees without its queen. So, can the fear of death be summed up by the fear of being alone?

The picture that Heidegger paints essentially tells us that if there were no possibility of death, life wouldn't be possible. To be put simply, one would not care about living if death were not an imminent possibility. To this extent, we can say that the fear of death is illogical and irrational.

However, let's look at the rationale that people generally apply when they think of death - hospitals, mourning, so on and so forth. Philosophers talk about death as an inevitable possibility, but shouldn't they talk about death as a beginning to a new possibility?

Heidegger addresses the same in 'Being and Time'. He says that even when Dasein is free from illusions and is ready for anything, even then the 'ahead-of-itself' remains hidden. He believes

it is in the basic constitution of the Dasein to have something outstanding. Moreover, as long as Dasein is an entity, it can never reach its 'wholeness'. This could loosely translate to that humans will never understand the fabric of their being until they meet their end.

Heidegger presents us an interesting picture when he says, "in every case, Dasein exists for the 'ahead-of-itself', and this means that in every case Dasein exists for the sake of itself." This 'ahead-of-itself' is intrinsically linked to Dasein and therefore there is something always outstanding in Dasein's case.

"With Death Dasein stands before itself in its own most potentiality-for-being." Heidegger asserts that death is more mine than anything else and that death is "the most intimate. Possibility of one's own existence" Glenn Gray says that death is "this most private. Possibility and the most intimate experience of all."

So, then the question presents itself again - What makes death an object of fear?

The most obvious conclusion that one can draw is - one's own death is not an issue, but losing someone else - quite a bummer.

The 'deceased' is more than just the word suggests, the word suggests that they are no longer factually 'there'. Heidegger analyses that whenever we use the words Being-with we essentially end up saying Being with someone other in the world. However, the deceased has left the world and abandoned it. Even then, in terms of that world [Aus ihr her] those who remain or are left behind, can still be with the 'deceased'.

The crux of the argument then becomes that someone's physical presence cannot limit the love and affection you have for them. Death shouldn't limit you, how can it when it is the only possibility of our being? From here, let's move on to understand the whole dilemma of the afterlife, does it exist, what do we know of it?

### **Death and afterlife in philosophy**

The need to know something concrete about the afterlife stems from the nervousness of not knowing our ultimate final exam. The need to answer these questions become all the more important when we realize that the stakes are eternal.

Materialists like Carvaka would completely refute the possibility of another realm where people can exist other than this one. For the whole premise of being a materialist is that you, equals your body. Epicurus believed the same, in addition to that he believed that fearing

nonexistence is not only stupid but also gets in the way of life. For Epicurus, fearing death was irrational because as soon as death arrives, you're gone! You and death are never present at the same time and if there's no you when death is present, then there is no time when death can be bad for you.

Even when Socrates was sentenced to death, he didn't fear, he believed that even though we cannot know that there is an afterlife, we can know that there remain only two possibilities:

- (a) That death is a dreamless sleep, or
- (b) Death is a passage to another life

Therefore, either way, death is nothing to fear. However, Socrates believed that in the afterlife, we wouldn't have our bodies and would exist as immaterialized beings.

Plato affirmed the existence of a pre-natal life of the soul and the continued life of the soul even after the body's death.

When I previously pointed out that the fear of death is necessarily the fear of missing out on life, I didn't talk about the kind of value one associates to 'life' itself. The value one associates with life also varies the value you attribute to death in general or the death of a particular person.

If one's life has been inherently good, then they would generally place a high value on the sanctity of life, the content or the person in said circumstance doesn't matter but what matters is that being alive is good in itself and losing it would be bad. However, if you attribute the value of life entirely to its quality, then you might end up distinguishing the good and bad experiences of it. If you value the quality of life, then you don't inherently care about life itself, but give value to the experiences that make life. Existentialism would thus play a critical role in how you perceive life and death. The fact that you attribute certain meaning and value to your life events is determined by various factors and would thus play a huge role in how you perceive death.

I think what we've understood so far is that death should not be feared. Let's talk a little about the death of others and how that makes us feel.

We have established that death isn't what we fear, what we fear is being alone and being left behind. Let's invoke Zhuangzi here, he says that fearing the inevitable is of no use.

We know that death is an imminent part of our life cycle, so why should we fear it? For example, you don't necessarily mourn any other prominent life events in a person's life - like a toddler becoming a baby and a baby becoming a teenager, so why should you mourn death? He thinks it's no more than another life event that shouldn't be mourned. He believes that death is simply a going away party for a grand journey and mourning can actually be selfish. According to Zhuangzi, when it is time for the people you love to move on, the last thing you should do, is hold them close.

### **Death and afterlife in popular culture**

It comes as no surprise that people want to watch and engage with movies with plots around death. Whether it is 'The Good Place' 'Forever' or 'Soul' or Monty Python, all of these movies/television series have one thing in common - death.

Plato believed that everything has essence- including us which means that part of being a good human is adhering to your essence. He shared the belief that our existences exist in us even before we are born. One may or may not know what their essence is and might be good or terrible at living up to their essence but the fact of the matter is that this essence is what gives our life - purpose. This 'purpose' suggests that you were born to be a certain thing, this theory 'essentialism' was all the rage until the late 19th century.

A similar idea is represented in Disney Pixar's 'Soul' wherein, every soul receives a personality in the 'Great Before'. The personality they receive is what gives their life meaning or better put, a 'purpose'. Joe Gardener gets in an accident and lands into the 'Great Before' instead of the 'Great Beyond'. He ends up mentoring 22, a soul who never found its purpose. Eventually, 22 ends up conspiring with Joe to make sure he gets his life on earth back. Through the course of the film, 22 ends up realising that its purpose isn't to become a great dancer, teacher or musician, its purpose is to love life. Heart Wrenching epiphanies that highlight what it's like to actually live is what makes this movie such a credible source for this paper. The need for an afterlife becomes all the more important because honestly, who wants this life to end?

Now, the Good Place has a lot to do with the ethical choices you make in life and how the same reflect in your afterlife, and even though the Good Place doesn't stick to the traditional heaven/hell concept, it still retains the essence of the concept. It personifies the Karma theory or the fact that the choices you make today shape your life (current and after)

The Good Place not only portrayed that people are capable of getting better when they are surrounded by love and support but also showed that there is an answer, that there is an end. The show portrays that even though you're riddled with problems and issues that are out of your control, you just might get a chance to change all of that in another metaphysical realm.

Now, in a slightly less popular series, 'Forever', we see an average heterosexual married couple dying and ending up in the afterlife that is more or less similar to the life that they led as humans. An average person would've been elated to find out that life after death is just the same as the kind you've been living only without mobile phones and with fewer people.

The protagonist however, realizes that she wants more and continues a journey far away from the one that she'd been continuing with her husband. What this shows essentially points out to us is that nothing can limit us, not even death. Fearing what comes after and not living your life the way you want to, is foolish.

So, let's sum up the argument that I've been trying to prove in this paper and answer the question that I aimed to answer.

(a) *Is death scary because we do not know what lies ahead?*

It goes without saying that oblivion is scary but has that ever stopped us from living?

Obviously, we want to live forever but fearing the inevitable wouldn't make living any easier.

The point that I've been trying to reiterate through the course of this paper is that death is certain, and fearing the inevitable or whatever follows the same is a foolish act. Let's think about it this way-we don't know what's going to happen to us a minute from now on, but does that scare us? Death could be a minute from now on or a decade from now on, so worrying about what lies post death is a futile action.

If you're afraid that you'll forever be cast to the wrath and fury of hell, you must understand that the heaven and hell we hear so much of is, at most, a social construction to make people morally conscious.

(b) *Is death a threshold we must cross to find answers that remain unknown?*

It comes as no surprise that people spend ages trying to deduct the truth of their morality from philosophy, biology and other sciences. Let's understand why is that, the paradigm that we currently exist in - tells us that we exist. Our existence is proved by the fact that we're thinking



beings, even if we don't have free will and are limited by determinism, we know we exist. What we don't know is, what lies ahead. So, what do we do?

We spend countless hours diving into volumes of work, nitpick the best and try to understand the meaning of our lives from the same. We put great thinkers on a pedestal because we think they have 'answers' that we don't.

Let's discuss this answer a little bit, what is it that we're chasing? What is it that we want an answer to? Do we want to understand the fabric of our being, do we want to understand the cause of our being? Do we want to understand the purpose of our existence? Do we think that death is the final test that we must cross in order to understand the same?

Why do we make out death and the afterlife to be such important concepts? we assume that we'll get answers to whatever remains unknown in another metaphysical realm. We believe that there will be an entity, God or not - who will tell us the reason for our being but who's to say that's for sure?

All of this could be a figment of our imagination or we could be a part of a Matrix, so why do we seek answers outside? Why do we dwell into books when we can be the answer ourselves? The reason for our being, the fabric of our essence, the answer to everything could be us but we'd still not know because we're too focused on what lies on the other side.

It's like what Heidegger said - you're still not thinking.

*(c) The possibility of an afterlife - does that make death a celebration?*

Let's talk a little about hope and the kind of value humans attribute to this emotion. When we don't have much to go on with, we latch onto hope. Looking at the possibility of an afterlife in light of hope makes a lot of sense. Losing someone whom you love and reuniting with them in another realm where your mortality doesn't limit you - is kind of the dream. So, the only right answer to this question is - us and the beliefs we choose to follow. No amount of philosophical discourse could help out, if we as individuals do not believe in them.

## **Conclusion**

Death is liberation, death is confinement, death is imminent, death is what life turns away from. Heidegger believed that death isn't brought to us, we know it from the beginning of our birth. Death is something that we project towards - gradually and inevitably. our presence makes death an impending possibility. Through the course of this paper, we have looked at various

accounts of how humans relate to death. We have looked at how mourning shouldn't be secondary to death, how death should not be something you fear but something you accept. How even when the ones you love, leave, you shouldn't hurt. We have looked at the possibility of parting as temporary. We have understood that the possibility of afterlife could offer us not only answers but also reunion with our loved ones.

The only question left to answer is the one that we always ask ourselves - what's going to happen to me? I think we can answer that now. We know what is going to happen to us, but worrying because of what might happen to us and letting that stop us from living the life that we're currently living is bizarre. The paradox then created is that death limits us but it also becomes the very reason that we want to live our life, the best way we know how.

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## **KABIR'S SYNCRETISM IS MORE RELEVANT IN THE 21ST CENTURY THAN EVER**

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### ***ABSTRACT***

*The paper looks into Kabir's syncretic philosophy to show its excessive importance in the contemporary 21st century where Hindu-Muslim riots, hate crimes, stone pelting, mob lynching, poverty, and widening rich-poor divide are increasing day by day. It starts with first establishing Kabir's 'estimated' life and upbringing that ultimately shaped his thought process. Even though he didn't write himself, many of his verses or dohas are used almost daily in every Indian household, showing its deep impact on society. Further, the paper presents Kabir's metaphysical underpinnings, through questioning the common narratives of the supreme being, Social Equality and Economic Equality. It does so with the help of various dohas as examples of his beliefs, which were usually against the common societal ones that were prevalent during his time. Finally, the paper ends with connecting the 15th century Kabir to the 21st century society, and some concluding comments.*

“कबीर कलि खोटी भाई, मुनियर मिली न कोय |

लालच लोभी मस्कारा, टिकू आदर होई ||”

This is the Kaliyug. A man who practices self-restraint is very rare here. People abound with greed, lies and false conduct, thrive here.

If one looks at the news headlines today, what would they see? Hindu-Muslim riots, hate crimes, stone pelting, mob lynching, Crimes against Dalits, increasing poverty, inequality on the rise, widening rich-poor divide, and the list may go on and on. It isn't like these are new phenomena, but they have been so often nowadays, that readers or viewers don't even give them a second thought anymore. India is increasingly getting communal, divisive, and excessively less tolerant. Everything seems like – daily life. A life that is full of pain and suffering, where your religious identity is the only thing defining you. It might seem like there isn't any alternative to this form of lifestyle, but if we dive into the early bhakti traditions; we might get answers to some unanswered questions.

Kabir was one such pioneer of the bhakti tradition, known most for Hindu-Muslim syncretism. Syncretism refers to 'the amalgamation or attempted amalgamation of different religions, cultures, or schools of thought.' The 14th and 15th Century in India saw the rise of various scholars, poets or artists that tried to unite the increasingly torn up society. K. Satchidanandan in Kabir Today wrote that Tulsi and Sur address God, whereas Kabir primarily addresses the common people. Kabir wants us to listen to him and then awaken ourselves. The sheer rawness in his writing is what stands him out and also what blends him in into the common public.

### **Life**

Kabir Das, born in Varanasi, was a 15th-century Indian mystic poet and saint, whose writings greatly influenced Hinduism's Bhakti movement and his verses are also found in Sikhism's scripture Guru Granth Sahib. Many postulations exist about his birth family and early life. According to one, Kabir was born to a Brahmin unwed mother in Varanasi, by a seedless conception and delivered through the palm of her hand, who then abandoned him in a basket floating in a pond. Baby Kabir was then picked up and eventually raised by a Muslim family. However, many modern scholars have abandoned these legends for lack of historical evidence, and Kabir is widely accepted to have been born and brought up in a family of Muslim weavers. Indologist Wendy Doniger says, Kabir was born into a Muslim family and various birth legends attempt to "drag Kabir back over the line from Muslim to Hindu".

His religious epistemology arises from the diversified lifetime he pursued. He deserted Islam and became a follower of the Hindu teacher Ramananda. But he later abandoned Hinduism too. He associated himself with the weavers, and not by Hindus or Muslims. In his poems, he calls himself a julaha or kori – meaning weaver. Kabir didn't receive any formal education and he even wasn't trained as a weaver – which makes it seem like he wasn't very connected to his 'job' too. Even his death is shrouded in mysteries and legends, as it's believed that when he died, both his Hindu and Muslim followers started fighting about the last rites – and that when they lifted the cloth covering his body, they found flowers instead. The Muslim followers buried their half of the flowers while the Hindus cremated theirs.

Not much is known about his real life, only short stories or legends present in old scriptures, with not much proof to ascribe to. Some say he didn't marry, while others believe he had been married once or even twice and that he had a son named kamala and a daughter named kamali. He used to speak in a crude, local language that many scholars have even found rude or unruly, but which would have made him highly popular in the lower section of the society. Many related to his teachings as it wasn't bound by a certain 'God', he spoke for the good of humanity as a whole, for all types of equality to be established – social, economic or religious. He wanted people to reconnect to the supreme God.

“कामी क्रोधी लालची, इनसे भक्ति ना होए |

भक्ति करे कोई सूरमा, जाती वरण कुल खोय ||”

You can't devote yourselves while still pursuing the road of anger and greed. The valorous is the one who leaves behind his family and caste to completely devote himself.

Kabir's motivation to speak against the popular beliefs arose out of a longing for truth. He was unable to accept the inconsistencies of faith, and believed love to be above any kind of belief. He emphasized that love was the only medium which could bind the entire humankind in an unbreakable bond of fraternity. His ideas are in the form of simple poems or dohas - mostly couplets, and are popularly sung in rural India. Kabir's poems essentially teach humility, religious tolerance and that faith lead us to be humble.

“प्रेम न बड़ी उपजी, प्रेम न हात बिकाय |

राजा प्रजा जोही रुचे, शीश दी ले जाय ||”

You can't cultivate love, nor buy it at a marketplace. Whosoever seeks love – be it a king or the common man, he should completely offer his head and existence for it.

## Teachings

### *Supreme Being*

Most of Kabir's lifetime has been spent with Hindu ascetics, saints and Muslim sufis. So he imbibed the tenets of both religions and realized the best of both. Allah and Ram were but names of the same Divine existence. Kabir deliberately abandoned the two faiths and chose a middle path. He spread the simple message of love and fraternity amongst all living beings. The presence of only a single God is the central point of his teachings. God is transcendental, unlimited, endless, pure, omniscient and omnipotent. In Kabir's opinion God alone was Ram, Rahim, Govind, Allah, Khuda, Hari etc. In whatever name one addresses Him, God is one. Hence Kabir preached Monotheism. When he uses Ram in his poems, it's not the Vaishnav God that is being referred to here, rather Kabir's version of the all compassionate lord.

“बाहर क्या दिखलाये, अंतर जपिए राम |

कहा काज संसार से, तुझे धानी से काम ||”

Why make a show of your love for God, just remember him internally. Why do you care about the world, when nothing else matters rather than God.

Kabir was also against idol worship and caste distinctions. He saw the idols as lifeless and meaningless way to reach God.

“पाथर पूजे हरि मिले, तो मैं पूजू पहाड़.

घर की चाकी कोई ना पूजे, जाको पीस खाए संसार”

If praying to a stone idol can make you reach God, Kabir can pray to a whole mountain. He also asks why doesn't anyone worship the house 'chakki', that gives flour to eat for the whole world..

Kabir also lays strain on the ideas of pilgrimages, purity, fasting, and other ritual practices throughout his works. A verse of Kabir's pertaining to the ritual washing, discusses the importance of physical and spiritual cleansing. Kabir states, “What is the good of washing and cleaning the body on the outside, if the inside is full of greed and filth? Without chanting and remembering the name Ram, one can not escape hell, even with a hundred baths!” (Kabir 192).

“नहाये धोये क्या हुआ, जो मन मेल न जाय |  
मीन सदा जल में रही, धोये बाँस न जाय ||”

Why wash and clean so much, when the foul of mind doesn't go away. Just like a fish stays in water forever, but still possesses a foul smell.

“माला फेरत जुग भया, फिरा न मन का फेर |  
कर का मन का डार दे, मन का मनका फेर ||”

This is a sarcastic irony on the people who follow any religion blindly. One can spend years counting beads of rosary, but couldn't control their own heart. So leave the beads and focus on your heart.

He believed strongly in the concept of One God. He believed in the notion of 'Koi bole Ram Koi Khudai...' The main idea behind these were that whether you chant the name of any Hindu God or any Muslim God, the fact is that there is only one omnipotent and omniscient God. Kabir rejected the teachings of other religions; but he was still followed by many, and also created his own group. Both Hindus and Muslims are his followers and are known as Kabirpanthis.

“कबीरा लोहा एक है, गढ़ने में है फेर |  
ताहि का बख्तर बने, ताहि की शमशेर ||”

The same metal can take different forms. The same iron change its form, just like God who is one but goes by different names.

### **Social equality**

Kabir was completely against the caste system imposed and followed by the Hindu community. Reacting to the authority that the Vedas and the Quran hold, he emphasised on the inner virtues of man. For him, the love for the human race, irrespective of caste, colour or creed, was the true religion. He appealed to the Hindus to give up rituals, sacrifices, and caste differences. His views and teachings, which were highly challenged and rejected by the upper castes, were largely accepted by the lower strata of the society – or by the common man.

“जाति न पूछो साधु की, पूछ लीजिये ज्ञान,



मोल करो तरवार का, पड़ा रहन दो म्यान।”

We must ask a saint’s knowledge, rather than his caste. Just like we bargain for the sword, and not give much importance to the sheath. In other words, what matters is the internal quality.

### ***Economic equality***

He wrote extensively on materialism, the rich-poor divide and how the rich should not exploit the poor as it could have bad consequences. He emphasised on minimalist living, to stay away from greed and selfish desires, to work for the good of others, and help people in need.

“बड़ा भया तो क्या भया, जैसे पेड़ खजूर

पंथी को छाया नहीं फल लागे अति दूर।”

If you are too big like a date palm tree, your existence is useless to a traveller as he can’t get any fruits or even any shade. Similarly being very big or very rich is also useless if you aren’t good to others.

“उज्ज्वल पहरे कापड़ा, पान सुपारी खाय |

एक हरी के नाम बिन, बंधा यमपुर जाय ||”

Even if your clothes are vibrant, or your mouth is full of fresheners. But to avoid hell, all you need is the name of God.

“तिनका कबहूँ न निंदिये जो पावन तर होए

कभू उडी अँखियाँ परे तो पीर घनेरी होए”

Just like a small speck of dust can irritate your whole existence, similarly oppressing the weak can lead to the latter being a big problem to the oppressor.

### **Attaching strings – Then to Now**

Just by inscribing Secularism in the Constitution doesn’t specify that it will be followed in the society. Our society is being increasingly divided along the lines of caste and religion. Therefore, it is very important to study Kabir and his teachings by everyone, irrespective of their religion, caste, class or sect. There needs to be a better tolerance and understanding of people towards each other, which has been getting lost due to the increasing use of machines and technology and decreasing use of actual feelings and emotions. Terrorism has been on rise,

which can go to any extent to get their wishes fulfilled. It is high time that people start to get compassionate towards their fellow beings and stop any and every identity divide that's killing hundreds every day; either in national wars or local communal riots.

Learning even from Kabir's life, could teach us a lot. He has been in the company of Hindu saints as well as Muslim Qazis, hence giving him this wider picture of love towards everyone. If only we try to understand the 'other' more deeply than we do now, it could help us reduce biases and dogmas that we've been living with throughout our life. Everyone adhering to a certain religion or God is just looking for someone bigger than themselves to hold accountable, or go to, at the end of the day. So was Kabir really wrong in calling him one supreme Lord rather than Ram or Allah?

With the recent horrific Hathras case, it came as a shock to many well-off-sections of Indian society that the caste system still prevails very strongly in rural India. It might seem like it has been dealt with, but it's very much present all around us, without us even being aware of it. This again emphasises the need to imbibe the ideals of Kabir in the population, which can teach one to not distinguish on the basis of birth. Merit or knowledge could be considered as a judging factor but not socially constructed groups like Caste as it is detrimental to almost half of the population. The higher caste needs to stop feeding over the lower to fulfil their desires.

Today's world is also bogged down by the excessive materialism of the world. The deep-seated economic inequalities of the world are leading to increasing discontent across the world. The recent trend and hype of minimalism, was also reiterated by the poet almost seven centuries ago. He supported the idea of minimalist living that was advocated by the Sufis – to not hoard more than was needed for living life.

### **Conclusion**

Kabir is modern as much for his style as for his universal message that transcends all forms of sectarianism and dogma. Using questions, riddles, surprises, paradoxes, enigmas: he often appears as compelling the reader to scrutinize everything they believe and live by. The way he writes, using sarcasm, humour, rhymes and common day to day language – makes him still widely popular among the young culture of India. Distinctions of gender, caste, race and religion simply melt before this enlightening lightning that electrifies the dialect of the rural masses.

Many indie bands today have started incorporating Kabir's dohas as songs in their creation, to reach the Indian audience, while making a positive impact. Example – Kabir's cafe one such band talks about their mission of uniting people through their songs and through Kabir. There is no doubt that Kabir das has been a major influence on Indian minds, even though he hasn't got a lot of place in the curriculum. He has been so mixed with the day-to-day culture of India that without even studying about him, we get to know this great personality. But there is a need to better educate the younger as well as the older generation with the syncretic thought and ideals of Kabir for a spiritual and peaceful existence.

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## PLAGIARISM AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF IDEAS

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Plagiarism, undisclosed pseudonyms, and redundant publication are numerous, in the world of published academia, especially in academic philosophy. Even though several of the worst instances have appeared in public arenas like the press, those in the industry seem to be unaware or simply, ignorant of this issue.*

*In this paper I will attempt to understand and explain the concept of an 'idea', what it stands for in the world of philosophy- and if in fact, it can be stolen.*

## What is Plagiarism?

Plagiarism is often thought of as copying someone else's work or borrowing someone else's original ideas. However, words like "copying" and "borrowing" may obscure the gravity of the crime:

To "plagiarise," according to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, means:

- *to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own,*
- *to use (another's production) without crediting the source,*
- *to commit literary theft*
- *to present as new and original an idea or product derived from an existing source”*

These elements are usually included in most definitions of plagiarism but to be more precise, it is best to explore them in more detail.

Most plagiarism is unintentional, despite the fact that most meanings contain a reference to a deliberate attempt to steal. Despite this, it must be understood that plagiarism is plagiarism regardless of whether it is deliberate or not, and unintentional plagiarism will (at least in theory) result in the same penalty. (Ross, 2004). Ross also stated other criteria for elements in a research paper, or a subjectively original piece of work to be claimed as plagiarised.

Since it takes independent analytical effort to ingest text and put it into your own vocabulary, paraphrasing is often considered a lesser sin than straight copying. Nonetheless, it still includes the unacknowledged use of someone else's work. The reason why paraphrasing is considered significantly less shameful than straight-up copying is because of the encouragement it has received from advisors, teachers and professors at higher educational levels. Indiana University, a prime example, has a website dedicated to advising students about how to avoid plagiarising and providing examples of acceptable and inappropriate paraphrasing. It lists 'only a few words and phrases have been changed' as one of the conditions for inappropriate paraphrasing. Alas, the ideals of Indiana University are not upheld in the honest academia world and paraphrasing is still paraphrasing.

Now, it is understood that copying or paraphrasing a text without acknowledgement; following someone else's ideas without acknowledgement are all examples of cheating or plagiarism. Ross moves on from these numerous definitions of plagiarism to a much more thought-provoking question.

*Can ideas be stolen?*

### **The Philosophy of Ideas**

It would be a shame to speak of the concept of ideas and not refer to Rene Descartes. “I think, therefore I am” can have the title of the most popularly used philosophical quote in everyday discourse attributed to it with zero hesitancy. But Descartes conception of ideas was the focal point to his philosophy, just like Plato and his Form of the Good or contrastingly, Nietzsche and his Will to Power.

There are substances, properties, and modes in Descartes' ontology. In terms of ontological dependency, these are understood in relation to one another. Basically, modes depend on attributes and attributes depend on modes. Since the dependency relationship is transitive, modes essentially rely on substances. In conclusion, where there are no modes, there are no substances.

Ideas, Descartes said, are modes of thinking. It is the manifestation of a thought and holds the lowest run in his ontological ladder. He believed that thoughts weren't the only way to think. Doubting and judging were two examples of thought styles and Descartes established a simple division of the different modes of thought early in the Third Meditation. (Descartes, 1996)

He categorised them as either simple or complex. Simple modes included the idea, while doubting, evaluating, and judging were included in complex modes. Nonetheless, ideas are constituents of all dynamic modes. He claimed that at least two simple mental components made up a complex mode of thought: an idea and another "additional" mental function.

‘ Considerations of order appear to dictate that I now classify my thoughts into definite kinds, and ask which of them can properly be said to be the bearers of truth and falsity. Some of my thoughts are as it were the images of things, and it is only in these cases that the term “idea” is strictly appropriate — for example when I think of a man, or a chimaera, or the sky, or an angel, or God. Other thoughts have various additional forms: thus when I will, or am afraid, or affirm, or deny, there is always a particular thing which I take as the object of my thought, but my thought includes something more than the likeness of that thing. Some thoughts in this category are called volitions or emotions, while others are called judgements.’

In this passage, ideas are portrayed as modes of thought that depict objects to the mind, such as a man, Pegasus, the sky, an angel, or God or even colours, sounds, and feelings. According to Descartes, an idea is the only type of (simple) mode that can accomplish this. When one of

the more nuanced modes of thinking is being considered- like being afraid of the lion or disbelieving in the face of a chimaera- it is the notion that is presenting; an idea becomes the vehicle of representation. (Kurt, Winter 2018 Edition)

Descartes recognised three types of ideas: inherent ideas, adventitious ideas, and factitious ideas. The categories were created after he considered the source of the ideational contents, as well as how they were presented to the mind. The first group of ideas consisted of those whose origin was derived from his essence- inherent, as in something he has known all his life, while the third type of idea was one whose contents were derived from the contents of other ideas.

So, for him, the idea of say, God was inherent because it was an idea that stemmed from his being. He was sure that it was neither adventitious nor factitious.

Plato's concept of an idea was born much before the actual birth of Descartes' and can be summed up quite accurately by this passage from the republic:

"We both assert that there are," I said, "and distinguish in speech, many fair things, many good things, and so on for each kind of thing."

"Yes, so we do."

"And we also assert that there is a fair itself, a good itself, and so on for all things that we set down as many. Now, again, we refer to them as one idea of each as though the idea were one; and we address it as that which really is."

"That's so."

"And, moreover, we say that the former are seen, but not intellected, while the ideas are intellected but not seen." (Plato, 2007)

To him, ideas were something much beyond our being and instead they were part of a realm of ideas that existed independently of knowledge and opinions. Ideas were merely just that, ideas. John Locke, in sharp contrast to both Descartes as well as Plato, spoke about ideas as things that stemmed out of observation and experience. Anything that was experienced was an idea and anything that could be innate was brought forth into the world through experience, sensation or reflection. He also classified ideas into simple and complex.

While the concept of ideas does bring forth the rationalist vs empiricist debate, it is understood that ideas are phenomena that can only be seemingly experienced by one individual at a time. A raw idea can only ever be finessed by another person, not experienced simultaneously.



## **Can Ideas Actually Be Stolen?**

Ross starts this discourse by saying that it would be ridiculous to ask students to have a source for every single concept or fact they use in an essay. No one would accuse a student of plagiarism if they write, "René Descartes (1596–1650) was a dualist," even though the student's knowledge of Descartes' name, dates, and dualism was not the result of their own independent thinking and in fact, sourced from outside texts.

The crux of this is that we all accept the fact that there is a body of 'common knowledge' that authors, especially students, can draw on without providing a source. By implication, students declare their ideas as their own if they convey them in their own words without acknowledgement. However, it does happen to be inherently difficult to tell whether they came up with them on their own or were influenced by extracurricular reading. It would be almost difficult to prove that students borrowed or stole ideas rather than coming up with them themselves—and it is a bad practice to make anything illegal if it is unpoliceable. As a result, including the copying of ideas in a university concept of plagiarism further complicates a problem that is already difficult.

If we went by what any of the above-mentioned philosophers said then ideas could not be stolen.

So, then why are there so many ethical concerns, patents, and copyrights?

Well, Praveen Chadda in his article for *The Wire*, says that plagiarism in research does not always take the form of plagiarized phrases. Scientists put time and effort into their study, whether it's confirmatory, gradual, or ground-breaking. Many scientists, theorists and researchers, in general, agree that new ideas are at the core of research that is later labelled as a novel, journal, research paper or article. (Chadda, 2018)

For incremental research, a new concept would be needed, as would an out-of-the-box idea for that previously existing research to now be considered as path-breaking. And, as active researchers are slowly being forced to shift from confirmatory to incremental or ground-breaking science, the role of ideas in our research papers becomes more critical than the role of words.

It is easily understood and often observed that an idea can be plagiarised even after it has been published in a journal or released in a preprint archive. Without a doubt, the errant paper would have paraphrased the definition, making it impossible for current software to detect any text

similarity. You could use an expert since they will be able to prove that the same concept was used without assigning credit, but convincing experts to read your earlier paper can be more than a little difficult, especially if you're a student.

Through clever word manipulation, idea plagiarism may result in the wrong individual being honoured, gaining unjustified social reputation, and society might just start accepting advice and recommendations from sources that may disseminate false information.

Apart from the obvious stealing of credit, there are also a lot of ethical considerations that go into plagiarism policing. Michale Dougharty says that plagiarism in philosophy research is much harder to point out for three reasons-

“First, an article in a philosophy journal generally has a longer shelf-life than, say, an article in an oncology journal. This means that citable literature can go back very far and that defective articles can have a long-lasting destructive influence.

Second, the basic tools for maintaining a reliable record of the scholarly literature in other disciplines are not currently available to philosophy. Much of the scholarship in philosophy is not citable through a DOI. This means that it cannot be discussed on the excellent DOI-based post-publication review venue PubPeer.

Third, unlike the MEDLINE database for the biomedical disciplines, the two major databases in philosophy, The Philosopher's Index and PhilPapers, do not update their entries to indicate when articles have been retracted or subject to a published correction (e.g., corrigendum, erratum, or expression of concern).” (Dougherty, 2018)

In short, post-publication analysis in philosophy is more complicated, because even though a publisher makes a clarification, it is not expressed in the field's traditional databases. Working on retractions in philosophy is not for the faint of heart because even if a plagiarised article is retracted, the retraction will go unnoticed by the rest of the sector. It's not uncommon to see retracted philosophy papers quoted in subsequent literature.

So technically, ideas can be stolen.

## **Conclusion**

Plagiarism cannot be eradicated by improving detection methods and providing dire notices of retribution. A punitive approach, on the other hand, makes it more difficult to create an academic environment where good practices are internalised by students. The focus should be

on positively improving and rewarding good practice, as well as restructuring evaluation tasks to remove the incentive and ability to cheat. Much of the tension generated by plagiarism suspicions would dissipate if plagiarised work fails due to failure to meet a clearly specified evaluation criterion.

As Michael Dougherty said, “I’m generally hopeful that the situation in philosophy will improve, but right now there is much work to be done.”

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## THE SHAKESPEAREAN PRINCE

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### **ABSTRACT**

*“My crown is called content: A crown it is that seldom kings enjoy.” - Henry VI (3.1.65)*

*The Prince was meant to serve as a handbook for rulers, a guide to expanding and maintaining power. However, perhaps its greatest failure lies in the fact that rulers who have followed these strategies have often witnessed their reign end sooner than desired. William Shakespeare was one staunch critic of Machiavellian leadership. He has even used the term ‘machiavel’ in as many as three of his plays, namely, Part I and III of Henry VI and The Merry Wives of Windsor. A reading of Shakespeare’s works reveals his political philosophy towards the nature of governance. This paper seeks to apply a hermeneutical approach to Shakespeare’s plays in order to assess the characteristics that shape a successful leader. It identifies inherent flaws prevalent in the Bard’s “Machiavellian” characters and attempts to create a Shakespearean prince relevant to contemporary times.*

**Keywords:** *Shakespeare, Machiavelli, leadership, regime*

## Introduction

According to Aristotle, man is a political animal, and Shakespeare's deep understanding of human nature implies that he understands politics as well (Cooper, 2017).

The 17th century Scottish playwright has supplemented political philosophy by creating new contexts of ethical questioning throughout his plays. On close inspection, one finds that he has made bold arguments on the nature of human conscience and the resulting consequences of human action (Schulman 2014, 1-22).

This undercurrent of political commentary is particularly prevalent in Shakespeare's historical plays. Not only has he provided an interpretive recount of political history, he also highlights the attributes of an effective leader (Garen 1965). This contrasts Niccolò Machiavelli's conception of the Prince. Although one cannot be sure of Shakespeare having directly read the treatise, several implicit critiques can be found in his works. This paper thus attempts to analyse these critiques and create a new 'Shakespearean Prince', according to the portraits of leadership and politics given in his work.

The first section gives a brief history of *The Prince* along with an overview of the chapters focusing on the qualities of a ruler. This is followed by a deep insight into the problems and politics of leadership prevalent in Shakespeare's plays. The last segment then analyses how Shakespeare's works overcome the deficiencies found in Machiavelli's treatise, finally suggesting characteristics that would be more suitable in the contemporary world.

### A Brief History of 'The Prince'

*"Everyone sees what you appear to be, few experience what you really are."*

*The Prince, Chapter XVIII*

Niccolò Machiavelli (May 3, 1469–June 21, 1527) was a 16th century Italian Renaissance statesman and philosopher most well-known for writing 'The Prince' - a manual on acquiring, preserving, and expanding power. Often considered the father of modern political theory, Machiavelli challenged prevailing notions of ethical righteousness in statecraft. Thus far, political thinkers like Plato, Aristotle, and St. Augustine believed that power could only be exercised by a virtuous ruler (Nederman 2019). Machiavelli, however, claimed that morality did not determine the legitimacy of power; it was the proper application of authority that ensured a successful reign.

'The Prince' was written in the midst of political instability. In 1512, the Medici family had reclaimed power by defeating the Florentine army and dissolving the republican government to institute another regime. Machiavelli was accused of conspiring against the new state and was incarcerated for twenty-two days, tortured, and even temporarily exiled from the country. The book was, therefore, an attempt to redeem his political status (Butters 2010); it was first dedicated to Giuliano de' Medici, but with his death in 1516, Machiavelli gave it to his nephew, Lorenzo de' Medici.

Though 'The Prince' was completed by the Christmas of 1513 (Frediani 2020), it was officially published only in 1532, five years after Machiavelli passed away. The book quickly became a controversial affair. Machiavelli was criticized for encouraging cruelty and normalising abuses of power by claiming that the end justified any means used to reach the goal. His 'new prince' was modelled after Cesare Borgia, a ruthless military commander who sought to conquer and expand the Papal States with armed force. Thus, 'The Prince' was banned by the Catholic Church for undermining and discrediting Christian norms.

However, despite this, 'The Prince' continues to influence political thought, philosophy, and practice. Isaiah Berlin claimed that Machiavelli "helped cause men to become aware of the necessity of making agonizing choices between incompatible alternatives in public and private life" (Poggioli 2013). Thus, while the book sheds light on a world that is "strictly demoralized", one where human nature is unsentimental, uncompromising, and severely practical (Harrison 2011), it does emphasise the need to seize one's future, for change lies solely in the hands of a changemaker.

### **I. Qualities of the Prince**

In Chapters XV to XXII of *The Prince*, Machiavelli deviates from the "Great Tradition" and goes against the customary view of a virtuous ruler who must lead an honourable life (Strauss 1957, 13-40).

In Chapter XV, Machiavelli differentiates between the imagined world of virtues and the real world, where human nature is full of vices. He explicitly says that if a Prince focuses on what "ought to be done" rather than what transpires in reality, he will be brought to ruin. According to him, honesty is not always desirable. The Prince must decide whether to be good or otherwise depending on the urgency of his situation. The qualities of a prince can make him either remarkable or contemptible but is impossible for a Prince to have all the good qualities because of the basic "frailty and crossness" of human nature.

The Prince should carefully choose which vices to avoid, and which to pursue in order to preserve his dominion; when viewed impartially, things that seem like virtues can often lead to destruction. On the other hand, things that seem to be vices, when followed by a prince, may lead to the peace and security of the state (Machiavelli 2011, 69-70).

Chapter XVI draws a contrast between liberality and parsimony and discusses the benefit of one quality over the other. Machiavelli believes that developing a public image of liberality is a dangerous endeavour; generosity is most genuine when privately practised, but if the Prince wants the public to be aware of his virtue, no luxury can be spared. This inevitably leads to high taxation and causes people to hate the Prince. His empty coffers further lessen his respect. This sort of liberality harms the many and benefits the few. The Prince should not be afraid of being called covetous, for when he has full treasuries that allow him to defend his state without excessively taxing the people, he will seem the most liberal of all (Machiavelli 2011, 71-73).

Chapter XVII says that, in most cases, a prince would rather be seen as a merciful ruler than a cruel one. However, he must be cautious of his mercy being taken advantage of. A Prince should not pay heed to “the scandal of being cruel” as long as it keeps his people united. Exorbitant mercy is harmful to everyone in the state while cruelty only has its effect on a limited number of people, many of whom deserve it. Machiavelli therefore believes that it is better to be feared than loved. He says that although being both is the most convenient, it is difficult to achieve, mainly because of the fickle nature of man. People will always be ready to help a Prince that benefits them but will desert him when trouble comes. They do not heed ties of love, but will never transgress if they fear punishment (Machiavelli 2011, 74-77).

In Chapter XVIII Machiavelli reminds us that the Princes who have circumvented the honour of keeping promises have been much more successful than those who have displayed honesty. A Prince should imitate the lion’s strength and a fox’s cunning; he must never keep his word if it is inimical to his goals. However, this hypocritical nature must be disguised from the people. It is relatively easy to do because men are so controlled by their present necessities, that they “allow themselves to be deceived” (Machiavelli 2011, 77-81).

Chapter XIX takes a more cautionary note. Machiavelli warns the Prince to be strong and decisive; if he is frivolous, indecisive and effeminate, it will breed hatred among his people. Thus, to avoid the threat of conspiracy, he must ensure that he has the love of his people (Machiavelli 2011, 82-92).



Similarly, in Chapter XX, Machiavelli first cautions that the Prince should never disarm his people as doing so would inspire hatred. If he arms them instead, their arms become his. Second, creating factions in a state makes it vulnerable to invaders. Thirdly, he says that the Prince should encourage enemies to rise against him so as to have a greater reputation when he defeats his foes. Fourthly, Machiavelli warns against blindly trusting those who helped him rise to power, as they may have done so purely out of animosity with the previous government. Those who were initially suspicious of him may be more useful, as they will be anxious to prove themselves to him. Lastly, speaking of fortresses built to fend off attacks, Machiavelli says that the support and love of the people serve as better protection than any fortress the Prince can build (Machiavelli 2011, 93-97).

And finally, in Chapter XXII, Machiavelli highlights the importance of choosing the right ministers for the state. He claims that the prince's intelligence is judged on the basis of his advisor's expertise and worth. Machiavelli identifies three classes of intelligence - the first-class inherently possesses wisdom, the second is able to recognise merit and third is devoid of both these qualities. It is imperative for a ruler to fall in either of the first two classes in order to gain the support of the people. And hence, a prince must be careful while forming his government, for an untrustworthy and incompetent minister will directly impact his standing and ability to rule. The prince can therefore reward his advisors for their servitude, to ensure that they submit personal interests to the national will.

## **II. Around the World in Sixteen Plays**

Evidence of the centrality of politics in Shakespeare's works can be gauged simply from his choice of subjects. The ten historical plays he had written surrounded the monarchs of England and concentrated on the political matters of their court including war, legitimacy and the role of religion in the state. The central question of the fictional accounts of these rulers was the qualities that make a good king. Shakespeare uses the downfall of these monarchs to create a picture of what a successful monarch should not do, and in turn leaves clues as to what a perfect king would look like, according to him.

Even Shakespeare's tragedies have deep political connotations. Of the ten plays, four take place in the world of ancient Rome and carry heavy political themes. Macbeth, King Lear and Hamlet continue this exploration into the issues of legitimacy, succession and the potential sources of tyranny and usurpation that lurk behind all leaders.

Shakespeare's last plays were called romances or tragicomedies, where he is often seen as trying to transcend politics ("Introduction to Shakespeare and Politics" 2012). Yet, elements of political debate remained.

As he explores human nature through his plays, he inevitably exhibits the underlying political nature of humankind. His characters and their fate reveal the qualities which Shakespeare believes to be detrimental to good leadership, which will be explored in the next section.

### **The Fate of the Fox**

On close inspection of his plays, many of Shakespeare's characters show a distinct Machiavellian streak, even though it is unconfirmed whether he ever read Machiavelli's work himself. These characters display a tendency of manipulation, deceit and self-interest in the pursuit of their goals and the playwright seems to hold disdain for these qualities, often trying to uncover the corrupt undercurrents of politics and their unfortunate consequences

Measure for Measure, one of Shakespeare's comedy plays, is based in the court of Duke Vincentio, who is said to be modelled after Machiavelli's ideal Prince: Cesare Borgia, whose more popular name was Duke Valentino. In the play, the Duke uses Angelo as a pawn, which can be compared to Borgia's use of Remirro de Orco, an account that Machiavelli presents in *The Prince*. Borgia consolidated the insolent province of Romagna by putting Orco in charge, despite knowing that he was a cruel man. When Borgia felt that his people had learnt their lesson, and one he was certain that Orco was hated, he convened a hearing to clarify that he did not condone the cruelty of Orco and that his actions were not representative of the Duke. Shortly after, Orco was found dead, satisfying as well as stunning the people. Borgia succeeded in being both feared and loved, while not earning the hatred of his citizens (Plantinc 2010, 144-168).

His parallel, Duke Vincentio, shows complete understanding of the fraudulent nature of politics. He uses terror and love differently according to the needs of the state. For most of his rule, Vienna was a peaceful state, giving the Duke the space to be a generous leader. As a part of this facade, he barely enforced his own lechery laws. The people thus mistake this generosity for his goodwill.

However, when the Duke is preparing for war against Hungary, he is in need of soldiers who are fit to fight and officers who can command respect. But the general populace had become idle and licentious after years of sexual indulgence and lax authority. Vincentio then realizes

that enforcing the laws would instill hatred against him, even though it is a necessary course of action. He even confesses to himself: "Sith 'twas my fault to give the people scope, 'Twould be my tyranny to strike and gall them/ For what I bid them do" (Plantinc 2010, 144-168). Thus, he devises a plan to put Angelo in his own place to carry out the task, and as soon as he had served his purpose, Angelo was humiliated in front of the people and disposed of.

In *King John*, based on the historical figure, Shakespeare does not veer far from the reality in describing the King as weak, duplicitous and a self-indulgent tyrant. His reign was one of royal absolutism and he managed to be both a lion and a fox in order to attain his goals by avoiding moral reflections (Stark 1930, 35-62).

Shakespeare explores, in depth, the consequences of the self-interest (which he calls commodity) that is displayed by King John. For John, his ascension to the position of King holds far more value than the welfare of England. (Canty 1970, 1-126). Philip the Bastard even reprimands him for his one-sided deal with France which left England in a worse-off position. In fact, Philip, although of illegitimate birth, presents a kinglier picture by putting the interests of England above all.

In the beginning of the play, King John usurps the throne of the legitimate heir, his nephew Arthur. In Act III, he begins to consider the political necessity of killing Arthur in order to consolidate his throne and avoid civil war, seemingly following Machiavelli's directives to, "learn how not to be good, and to use it or not, according to necessity." (Canty 1970, 1-126) However, when an unintended flurry of events does eventually lead to Arthur's death, his courage and resolution begin to deteriorate, and he is unable to rid himself of guilt or escape the charges that implicate him (Canty 1970, 1-126).

Even Cassius, the main conspirator in the assassination of Julius Caesar, keenly followed Machiavelli's philosophy that 'the end justifies the means'. He tried to explain the assassination as an act of moral justice, invoking patriotism and concern for the future of Rome. As Shakespeare writes, "Such men as he be never at heart's ease, Whiles they behold a greater than themselves" (Stark 1930, 35-62). However, blinded by self-interest, he does not see the good that Caesar has done for Rome. Cassius eventually faces the consequences of his actions and ironically, he kills himself with the same sword that he had used to attack Caesar.

In *The Tempest*, the protagonist Prospero lives as a tyrant on an island and follows the Machiavellian ideal that it is better to be feared than loved. His subjugation seems to work perfectly on Ariel, who views Prospero with a combination of fear and adoration. However,

his reign is perceived differently by all the inhabitants of the island. Prospero fails in retaining power over Miranda, due to her love, as well as Caliban, due to his hatred. This failure seems to highlight the flaw in The Prince, proving that “power is case-by-case”. The ruled people and the environment are large contributors to the success of a ruler (Knapp, 2013). Ironically, even Ariel, who is the epitome of the success of Machiavelli’s theories in action, ends up free from subjugation at the end of the play.

Richard III was the last of Shakespeare’s English princes who procured the crown using manipulation and deceit. He was widely known for his limitless ambition and violent means and hence was a perfect Machiavellian Prince in the sense that he showed no moral principles on his path to the throne. Machiavelli’s famous maxim was, “One asks about what and not about how. If one has might, one has right.” Richard incarnated this policy, closely resembling Cesare Borgia. A line from the play directly suggests that he, "...set the notorious Machiavel to school" (Stark 1930, 35-63). Richard famously said,

*"Conscience is but a word that cowards use,*

*Devised at first to keep the strong in awe.*

*Our strong arms be our conscience, swords our law.*

*March on. Join bravely. Let us to it pell mell*

*If not to heaven, then hand in hand to hell."*

*(Richard III, 5.3. 329-330)*

During Richard’s lifetime, rulers changed too often for him to truly believe in the divine right of monarchs. He realized that power meant everything and that ambition holds no value if it is simply characterized by yearning and not action. Taking action, for him, meant the death of all those standing between him and the crown of England, which included the then present king, Henry VI and his son, as well as his own family members.

This is the only play in which the main character shares his actions and motives with the audience. However, in doing so he further separates himself from the characters around him. And therefore, upon winning the crown, Richard finds himself completely alone (Corrigan 1999, 95-107).

The next day after his ambition is fulfilled, he loses the battle. A fervent speech of self-criticism during the battle shows how much his own manipulations have affected Richard’s mind

(Donker, 2016). He declares, “I am a villain! – Yet I lie, I am not” (Richard III, 5.3.191). The play ends with his humiliating death, showing the fruitlessness of ambition. His last words were ‘my kingdom for a horse!’ - he is ready to trade his painfully earned kingdom for merely a horse. And thus, Shakespeare demonstrates the futility of Richard’s ambition (Corrigan 1999, 95-107).

### **The Unsuitable Men**

A recurrent theme that can be found in Shakespeare’s plays is that of a ‘disengaged’ ruler, one who appears to shun the responsibilities of running a state. Kings end up reaping the benefits that come with a monarchical regime, knowingly or perhaps unintentionally oblivious to the actual demands of the post (Kurland 1996).

For example, these qualities can be observed in Coriolanus (also known as Caius Martius), the Roman general in Shakespeare’s play of the same name. An ardent advocate of aristocratic structures, Coriolanus is unable to accept the social changes taking place in Rome. Rather than striving to unite the people, his speeches inflame existing divides in society. And hence, it is this intense belief in class privilege that renders Coriolanus incapable of fulfilling the role of a ruler; he fails to gain any approval from the masses, he craves recognition that is devoid of accountability, and he wants despotic power instead of democratic control (Lalley 1990).

In the play, Coriolanus thus constantly shifts stances in political and military matters, abandoning his country to join opposing forces only to defect back in dire situations. His egoistic pride repeatedly makes him prioritise his needs over and above the interests of his people and allies. Yet, eventually, it is this characteristic that made him excellent at warfare and helps him flourish on the battlefield (Parrott and Farnham 1950), perhaps not as much in the position of giving orders.

Finally, unlike Shakespeare’s other works wherein characters undergo a major change for the better or even for worse, Coriolanus remains the same throughout the entire play. There is no growth in his personality, no attempt to overcome deficiencies and he continues to remain a leader bereft of the ability to lead (Lalley 1990).

One can also find similar themes in Shakespeares’ Richard II. King Richard is described as an unrealistic, politically imprudent ruler who acts according to his own devices. He dreams and lives in his own idealistic imaginative world, far from practical thought and action. King

Richard is hence portrayed as an incompetent and passive statesman who is ready to barter his kingdom in exchange “for a little grave” (Garen 1965).

Like Coriolanus, King Richard also prefers limitless, absolute power, even though it seems that he doesn't have the skill or knowledge to use it. Not only does he constantly ignore the advice of his councilmen, Richard also surrounds himself with men who do not challenge his way of thinking; constant flattery shrouds him from the consequences of his actions (Lalley 1990).

In the same play, however, Shakespeare contrasts King Richard II's character with Henry Bolingbroke (popularly recognised as Henry IV). Henry was banished from the kingdom after a fight with another Duke (he accused him of murdering his uncle); he later returns to claim the throne after King Richard misuses funds to finance wars.

Bolingbroke is grounded, quiet, firm and delivers on his promises. He knows what is necessary for his people and his regime, and hence takes the steps required to ensure an equilibrium between both responsibilities. Moreover, Henry doesn't use flamboyant language to attract crowds, his choice of words highlights his decisiveness and frame of mind and perhaps it is this very virtue that makes him accepted by people (Garen 1965).

Henry VI is another king who falls in this category. Unlike his predecessor, Henry is easily manipulated, naive, and often lost in confusion. Because of this, he is unable to take decisive action and hence cannot command control or influence over politics and his people. This is further exacerbated by his inability to understand the realities of governance. Moreover, Henry was a devout Christian at a time when Machiavellianism had started gaining momentum in the 16th century, making scholars claim that this disconnect between private and public virtues ultimately caused a rift in his regime (Alton Bloom 1975). 50

Throughout the play, therefore, one can see how Henry lacks the strength, resolve, and even resilience to face adversity; there are several instances when he ends up throwing tantrums instead. This can be attributed to the fact that Henry never wanted to rule, a direct opposition to Richard II and Coriolanus' desire for power. He envied the 'easy life' of commoners, shepherds, and monks, yet again refuses to find the will to commit to either of them. Thus, Henry can't make himself give up the crown as well, for he is used to the life of constant respect and obedience (Alton Bloom 1975).

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<sup>50</sup> There are some who believe that Shakespeare in no way suggested that Henry's Christianity was a hindrance to his rule or that his reign would have survived if he had been more ruthless.

However, Henry does have some genuine qualities. He is kind, he shows true compassion by offering to sacrifice himself to stop all suffering, and this is not just restricted to his own people but humanity as a whole. And most of the time, he attempts to do the right thing - though the outcome may not always be morally or politically sound. Henry's power trajectory also does not follow the usual crest and trough format - he maintains a sort of consistency in his responses to situations. And hence, while Henry does seem to possess all the virtues of a good human being, as a king, he doesn't pull through.

All three plays thus highlight the inherent deficiencies in leadership; they turn out to be the 'wrong men attempting to do the wrong job'. According to Getzels and Guba's 'Nomothetic and Idiographic Dimensions of Social Behavior', this can be attributed to the conflict that arises between an individual's identity and the role that is given to them. For each king, there was disconnect between their perception of the position and the expectations of the masses. And hence, it was this imbalance that ultimately led to the downfall of their regime. To prevent such an occurrence, it becomes important to understand the true nature of kingship i.e. a position that is not divinely sanctioned but an anthropic structure bound by limitations, checks and balances. Moreover, in order to fully adjust to the role, a king must be able to gauge the level of support s/he has from the people, for they finally hold the potential power to take over the position (Lalley 1990).

### **Blinding Lights**

The beauty of Shakespeare lies in his understanding of human nature. He dabbles in the depths of dispositions, often focusing on distinctive characteristics that define the trajectory of an individual's path. This is particularly prominent in several historical and tragical plays of Shakespeare; he is able to pinpoint precisely the chink in each ruler's armour.

For instance, King Leontes from the *Winter's Tale* is characterized by his fierce and abrupt jealousy that erupts in Scene II of Act I in the play. He accuses his wife, Hermione, of infidelity with Polixenes, the Bohemian king and Leontes' childhood friend. And, as Hermione is with child during the time, he assumes that Polixenes is the father. This triggers and stimulates extreme suspicion, causing him to lose sight of logic, reason and morality - even the most innocent actions seem conflictual to him. This turmoil is best captured when Leontes' declares that, "All's true that is mistrusted", for it highlights his profound reliance on his own beliefs (Jones-Davies 2010).

Unfortunately, the desire for retribution combined with Leontes' emotional instability and refusal to believe the truth causes immense death and destruction throughout the storyline (Trienens 1953). He inadvertently kills Hermione and her son Mamillius (both die of shock) and also banishes his newborn daughter, Perdita, from the kingdom.<sup>51</sup>

However, towards the end, Leontes does pull through. Even though it takes him sixteen years of introspection to realise his faults, he understands the severity of his misjudgement and the depth of his insecurities, finally finding peace in the truth (Colley 1983).

The Winter's Tale is not the only play where Shakespeare highlights the ill-effects of jealousy. In Othello, he describes it as a "green-eyed monster" that can be conquered, as opposed to a disease that Leontes suffers from, one that cannot be easily treated (Chidester, n.d.).<sup>52</sup>

Othello centers around the perils of jealousy as well as those of blind trust. The plot revolves around Iago who was denied lieutenantcy by Othello, his general. Outraged by this injustice, Iago embarks on a mission of manipulation and contorts Othello's love for his wife by making him believe that she is having an affair with Cassio, the man who he made his second in command over Iago (Hermann 2019).

Although Othello was a great general, old age made him vulnerable to the maligning influence of others, especially Iago. Mark Stein argues that Iago is not just an external character, but represents the internal workings of Othello's mind that is struggling with emotions of jealousy, envy and self-doubt (Stein, 2005). The play ends with Othello killing his wife Desmonda and thereafter realizing her innocence. He kills himself out of grief and the once great general is reduced to a suspecting and untrusting man. Iago managed to maneuver Othello easily as he had become increasingly isolated during the course of the play. This highlights the importance of verification of information as well as a close consideration of the people who are held in a ruler's confidence.

King Lear is another play that shows how idiosyncratic attributes can determine the course of the future. Lear, who was the King of Britain, had decided to step down after a successful reign,

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<sup>51</sup> A statue of Hermione comes to life when Perdita returns home.

<sup>52</sup> The Merry Wives of Windsor and Cymbeline are other plays where Shakespeare deals with the adverse impact of jealousy.



choosing to use love as a yardstick to apportion his kingdom. Eager to gain more land, Lear's eldest daughters (Goneril and Regan) flower him with forged flattery. However, Cordelia, his youngest, who truly loves him the most, struggles to put it in words - "Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave/ My heart into my mouth. I love your majesty/ According to my bond; no more nor less."

Misunderstanding the depth of her affection, Lear erupts into a fit of anger. This leads to a series of unfortunate events - Cordelia is banished from the kingdom and Goneril and Regan show their true intentions, making Lear lose his mind in the midst of a storm. Tragically, towards the end, Lear and his daughters are just a few who perish at the hands of misfortune. Thus, King Lear's need for public declarations of love causes immense devastation for it blinds him to the true colours of human nature (Lalley 1990).

Parallels can also be drawn to *Timon of Athens*, one of Shakespeare's most criticised plays.<sup>53</sup> Timon's desire to be liked compels him to excessively give away his wealth, even at the cost of his own economic security. He believes that he can win friends with his over-generosity (Kahn 2019), oblivious to the human aspect of friendships. Thus, when Timon falls in debt and turns to his 'friends', he naturally finds no one to rely on. This betrayal completely transforms his world; Timon becomes negative and narcissistic, he claims that he has no control over fate (Lichti 2010) and hence wishes the utmost suffering for mankind (Davidson 1980). Thus, Timon's philanthropy (of sorts) proves to be a curse in disguise.

Shakespeare also highlights the repercussions resulting from a lack of thought about future consequences. Prince Hamlet is one character who manages to foil even the most straightforward tasks. For instance, in spite of being equipped with credible information, Hamlet doesn't act on it. A constant analysis of the details clouds whatever clarity he has (Upadhyaya 2009), and hence even though he knows what is required of him, he spends the rest of the day avoiding it. Moreover, Hamlet makes no attempt to prepare or plan for future contingencies, whether it is to avenge his father's murder or avoid his uncle, Claudius' constant attempts to threaten his life. This inability to focus and take concrete decisions is perfectly captured by the opening phrase of his soliloquy, "To be, or not to be." Unfortunately, in the end, Hamlet's procrastination and indecisiveness leads to more than seven deaths in the play,

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<sup>53</sup> The play is reportedly co-authored by Thomas Middleton.

with the final scene closing with a litter of corpses sprawled across the stage, one of them being his own (Cochran 2006).

Macbeth displays an example of a competent leader blinded by the pursuit of their ambition. In the beginning of the play, Macbeth is a brave and revered general who has just quelled a rebellion. He receives praise from the King of Scotland, who awards him a promotion, making him the Thane of Cawdor. Macbeth, however, is unaware of this as he makes his way back from battle. On the way he encounters three witches who greet him in turn using his present title, his new title (which he has no knowledge of) and the title of King.

Macbeth is taken by surprise, but upon realizing that he has indeed become the Thane of Cawdor, he begins to wonder whether he truly is destined to be King. He lets his ambition overtake all his other senses and one sees this unfolding throughout the play. In many instances, he forgoes his principles at the bequest of others, primarily his wife Lady Macbeth, in order to reach the crown.

It is surprising that a war hero with magnificent physical strength displays close to no psychological strength and allows himself to be “steered like a mule” (Cochran, 2018). His path to become King is fraught with so much sin that even he realized that there is no exit:

*“I am in blood*

*Stepped in so far that, should I wade no more,*

*Returning were as tedious as go o'er.”* (Macbeth 3. 4. 137–139)

Humility and strong principles are a deterrent to following such paths, however, Macbeth lets ambition overtake his principles of valor and honor. He also begins to think of himself as invincible, which leads to blindspots in his evaluation of the situation. By draining himself of humility, Macbeth fails to see his weaknesses and becomes more prone to accepting advice from his wife and the three witches. He follows the path to arrogance, delusion, and destruction until eventually, Macbeth’s own life becomes unbearable for him (Cochran, 2018).

Another play that deals with the lack of humility, and the blinding effect it has on a ruler, is Julius Caesar. It can be argued that Caesar’s arrogance is what led to the assassination plot against him. His surety about his invincibility, makes him oblivious to the happenings around him and to the changing emotions of his companions.

The play begins with Caesar's triumphant march in the wake of his victory over Pompeii. The scene establishes his growing popularity among the people; the plebeians see him as a reverent figure and worship him as a God. However, the love he received from his people is starkly contrasted with the resentment among his comrades for his authoritative and arrogant nature. His military victories and successes while running the Republic gave him the arbitrary air of a tyrant. Caesar is often described as a narcissist and such leaders often fail at the interpersonal front. He failed to maintain amiable relations with his Senators because he believed he was above them. Cassius, the chief conspirator, gathers the support of fellow senators by marking Ceasar's uncanny rise to power, saying that he was once a feeble mortal and is now behaving like a God (Khan, 2012)

To an extent, one can also find this theme in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. There are several instances where characters take decisions without considering the impact it would have on society. For instance, to bring an end to the feud between the Montague and Capulet family, Prince Escalus hurriedly passes a law without consulting either of the parties. Similarly, Friar Lawrence, the priest who agrees to secretly marry Romeo and Juliet does so only to gain recognition and prestige; concern for himself partly leads to the death of the two lovers. <sup>54</sup> Tybalt and Mercutio deliberately provoke each other, which naturally results in a violent and fatal duel. Romeo too ignores warnings of 'untimely death', he also directly disobeys Prince Escalus order of banishment by returning to Verona. And hence, though each character takes a conscious decision in a particular course of action, they do not heed its consequences (Pearce 1998).

### **Analysis**

"From its infancy, the study of history has been the study of leaders—what they did and why they did it." - Bernard Bass & Ralph Melvin Stogdill

For a long time, the concept of a ruler was defined by moral and ethical standards. Reality was deemed to be transcendental, and only a virtuous king could have access to it. However, with *The Prince*, Niccolò Machiavelli completely transformed the meaning of virtue. It no longer followed traditional notions of righteousness, rather, it encompassed a range of qualities necessary for governance and statesmanship.

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<sup>54</sup> It was Friar Lawrence who suggested that Juliet drink a potion that would make it seem as if she had passed away.

To possess Machiavelli's virtù, and subsequently exercise power, a prince was required to have complete knowledge of military and political strategies necessary to maintain a state. This could be developed by reading past victories or losses of rulers in order to analyse trends and patterns in regime perpetuity. A virtuous prince was also self-reliant and independent; even in times of peace, he would constantly strive towards fulfilling goals, particularly in terms of security and survival.

However, the most important aspect for Machiavelli was to be prepared for all kinds of circumstances. Fortune was never static and hence a prince was to cultivate flexibility in conduct - he must learn how to switch between good and evil realms, even if it was at the cost of causing harm in certain situations. And therein lay the problem with his treatise.

Machiavelli has been severely criticised for promoting questionable methods to achieve and maintain power. His constant reiteration of utmost practicality in conduct is often at the expense of moral principles. This can be attributed to the fact that he considers human nature to be cynical; Machiavelli claims that "A man who wishes to make a vocation of being good at all times will come to ruin among so many who are not good." The Prince is also aphoristic to an extent - he delivers each statement with such certainty, it seems as though Machiavelli has left no space for contention, diversity or growth.

Shakespeare also appears to be one of his greatest critics; many of his plays are famous for their Machiavellian villains. For instance, a deconstruction of King Edmund, Iago and even Lady Macbeth herself shows how the Bard anticipated the corruption of power once it separated from the realm of ethics.

According to Robert P. Harrison, the core lesson that can be learnt from Shakespeare's works is the importance of the unpredictable. No matter how much one prepares for changing times, there will always exist something that cannot be forecasted. Harrison therefore states that realism alone cannot mould reality, rather, trans-realism which "neither resists nor escapes reality" has a better impact in the long run. And hence, it was human imagination that had the potential to be a true, revolutionising force (Harrison 2011).

Throughout his plays, Shakespeare delves into the depths of a character's relation with politics. Besides contradicting Machiavellian leadership, he also sheds light on the nature of an ideal ruler.

For instance, Henry V, whose story began in Henry IV as Prince Hal, is a charismatic, intelligent and inspiring leader. As a Prince, he seeks to win the affection and respect of his companions by way of his personality and not as a result of his title as Prince of Wales. He adjusts well with the common man despite being born into royalty, he visits taverns and speaks to people in their dialect. Although he was often at odds with his father due to such conduct, he rose up to the occasion of his title when the time came.

When his father's throne was threatened, he rose to the occasion with a passion to prove his worth. He was noble in war, impressing even the enemy with his conduct. "Fare de well, great heart," he said as he lay a scarf on the face of his rival Hostur, granting him dignity in death. He is also generous and prudent. When his friend Falstaff deceives the King by claiming to have killed Hostur himself, Hal does not call out his bluff, not wanting to humiliate him.

This is not to say that he does not calculate his political actions. After he is made King, he refuses to acknowledge Falstaff and his other old companions in order to overcome his unsavory reputation among the people. Henry displays that "real morality is not binary"- rulers need to have complex moral codes while retaining basic values (Murty, 2019).

In Henry V, Henry shows further competency when it comes to leading his troops to war against France. He inspires his men through speeches, which delivers in their midst instead of from a higher pedestal, thus being able to garner their emotions more closely. He said, "we are a band of brothers," and he lives and breathes as one of them. During the speeches, he never mentioned the word 'defeat', bolstering the confidence of the troops.

Henry is also observant and careful of the sentiments of groups both within and outside his kingdom. He makes sure to meet with the Church for the affirmation of God before he invades France, even though he is not obliged to. After defeating France, he does not use terms such as 'surrender', instead discussing a 'peace treaty', to save his opponent from humiliation.

Another character who was posed as an adept leader was Mark Antony from Julius Caesar and Antony and Cleopatra. One of the most important qualities of a leader is to be able to grasp context and act in accordance to it. Mark Antony, in Julius Caesar, shows immense adaptive capacity in the way he reacts to the assassination of his friend by Brutus and his fellow Senators. After initially fleeing from the scene, he pretends to join hands with the conspirators, as a prelude to avenging the death of his friend. He further gains their approval by giving Caesar's funeral speech according to their wishes. Even in his speech in front of his countrymen, Antony shows skill in reading the mood of the crowd. He knows exactly what is required of him in that

situation and molds his behaviour accordingly. This is in contrast to Caesar, who declares himself as “constant as the Northern Star,” and is unwilling to bend his ways for any situation (Murty, 2019).

Even Shakespeare’s characterization of Pericles from *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, was one of honest and noble leadership. He is a skillful soldier, a generous ruler and one who holds much sway with the people. His character combines courage, modesty and honour. His humility is also well displayed when Thaisa praises Pericles for winning the tournament. In response, Pericle merely says, “Tis more by fortune, lady, than by merit.” He completely lacks a tendency towards deception. While he was in Tarsus, Pericles behaved just as charitably as he did in his own kingdom, helping the people to relieve the famine without any conditions (Shahal, 2008).

Finally, Shakespeare’s works also pose as a guide to the modern princet.<sup>55</sup> Through his plays, one can identify an inventory of attributes necessary for a leader.

First, Shakespeare tacitly highlights the importance of self-expression and awareness. The reason why many of his characters are able to grow and mature is because they can hear themselves out loud. This aids the process of visualising their thought process and subsequently identifying areas that need a reconsideration of sorts. Thus, Shakespeare shows that growth is only possible when one accepts the fact that they may not know themselves in entirety (Fitzsimons 2017). When applied to positions of power, such self-reflection has the potential to bring about positive, personal and intersocial change. Leaders become more open to advice and criticism; their actions are not merely responses to stimuli and they are able to find a core purpose (Cochran 2018) with which to rule.

Second, Shakespeare stresses the importance of mobilising people. Particularly with his historical plays, one learns that a regime is only sustainable when its objectives are shared by all. Though Richard III had a powerful vision, very few people had access to the same, creating a divide between the ruler and the ruled. The same can be witnessed in Machivaelli’s *Prince* as well. Even Hamlet chose to avenge his father’s murder alone, even though there were people who believed in his cause. Thus, in order to achieve even the smallest of victories, a leader must empower and enable others to take action and this can only be done when they’re on board for the same reasons.

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<sup>55</sup> Princet or princette is a gender neutral word for prince or princess.

Humility is the third attribute of a competent leader that one can take away from Shakespeare's plays. A lack of humility often leads to blind spots in one's vision; it is a slippery slope leading to destruction (Cochran, 2008). For instance, Macbeth believes himself to be invincible. His inability to recognize his own weaknesses eventually lead to his downfall, even though he was a successful general. Humility also allows those around leaders to challenge their vision without fear, ensuring that decision making reaches its full potential. Macbeth's tyranny forces his followers to flee the castle to find a less authoritarian environment.

Fourth, Shakespeare favours skepticism over blind conviction. Hesitation has certain merits when it comes to leadership. Even a quick glance at the history of international relations would reveal that quick and decisive action is not always the best path for a leader. From World War I to the Gulf War, one can observe how impulsive decision-making has had long-lasting and adverse after effects across countries. With respect to Shakespeare, Othello, with his blind trust in Iago and conviction to kill his wife over false allegations, reveals the importance of hesitation. Shakespeare thus reveals a grave distrust of ungoverned power in his plays, a sentiment that requires more attention in the 21st century (Cooper 2017).

And finally, Shakespeare emphasises the need for channeling emotional sensitivity. One reason why several characters were unable to successfully lead was because they did not consciously make an attempt to recognise and assess their frame of mind. And therefore, a constant repression of their emotions ultimately led to destructive outbursts. Most of these leaders happened to be men. Conversely, Shakespeare's female characters who did not inhabit these roles, demonstrated a predisposition towards leading. For instance, Portia in *The Merchant of Venice* was resilient and responsive to the situation at hand. Even though she does not know Antonio, she dresses up as a man to save him out of her love for Bassanio (Murty, 2019). Similarly, despite being forced into a brothel, Marina from *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* makes the most of her circumstances. She refuses to succumb to external pressures and in fact, changes the lives of the men she meets by teaching them the value of living a virtuous life (Kurland 1996). Thus, one can observe that several women in Shakespeare's plays are able to channelize their emotions in a constructive manner which ultimately helps them fulfill their goal.

This is not an exhaustive list of qualities necessary for a leader. Recognizing Machiavelli's aphoristic tendencies, the research has left space to contextualize attributes depending on the environment (Knapps 2013).

## **Conclusion**

Literature plays an important role in politics and political theory. It revolves around the trials and tribulations that real people face and hence is more relevant to the lives of the populace. Shakespeare's understanding of human nature thus gives a profound insight into leadership and governance. His works recognize and explore the characteristics of leaders that remain significant to this day. This paper has therefore tried to recreate Machiavelli's Prince with the help of Shakespeare's plays.

However, it is not bereft of limitations. First, the paper has relied heavily on a subjective interpretation of the Bard's works. Therefore, it leaves space for differing views. Second, restrictions in the access of information hampered a complete understanding of the subject. And finally, this paper has solely focused on Shakespeare's plays which may have limited the scope of the research.

Nonetheless, the paper does provide an alternative perspective to the responsibilities of leaders, also encouraging a further exploration of the role literature can play in understanding the affairs of the state.



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## FOUCAULT'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY: RETHINKING POWER RELATIONS IN THE PANDEMIC SITUATION

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The aim of the paper is to examine the power relations that exist between the state and the individual and between individuals; the paper will closely analyse the concepts of biopower, panopticon and biopolitics in order to bring about the detailed study of the power relations that traces the possible development from sovereign (an ultimate power or monarchy) to democracy and the concept of 'problematization' in this context. The paper will also try to bring in an account of the pandemic in this context and the emphasis will be to critically reflect on the 'political dream of the pandemic'. The paper will exclusively refer to the works of French philosopher Michel Foucault in order to develop and understand the contours of power relations along with a study on the above-mentioned concepts.*

### **SECTIONS OF THE PAPER**

*The paper will be divided into 3 major sections, the first portion focuses on the mechanism of biopower which is used to employ biopolitics; this section also traces the development from sovereign to democracy, the problematization and how democracy was suggested as a solution to many of them. The second section shifts the focus to the idea of surveillance; the fear of uncertainty which will be discussed referring to Foucault's 'panopticon'. The third and the final section will try to develop our understanding of surveillance in the context of the current global pandemic crisis, critical reflections and analysis will be taken into consideration to work out the developments of the political dream of the pandemic and regularisation.*

**Keywords:** *Power Relations, Biopower, Biopolitics, Panopticon, Surveillance, Pandemic, Michel Foucault.*

## **The Panopticon- A Surveillance Technique and Development of Biopower**

The concept of 'panopticism' by Foucault is based on the idea of the 'panopticon'. This idea was first introduced by Jeremy Bentham in the late 18th century as a prison institution in which one guard would be able to observe all prisoners, but the prisoners themselves would not be able to see the guard or each other. The panoptic structure for the Benthamite prison was a circular atrium with cells along the perimeter facing inwards and with a central watchtower in the middle where the watchman or any person would be able to observe without being observed. The visibility to the crowd as in case of public execution is abolished. The panopticon induces a sense of permanent visibility as well as infused mutation of behaviours of the inmates which in turn ensures the deeper permeation of power relations. Bentham decreed that power should be visible yet unverifiable. In a set up like this the prisoners could be under constant surveillance all the time but they would not know whether or not somebody was watching them, as a result of which the inmates of the cells would self-discipline themselves due to the fear of being punished if caught causing trouble. (Foucault, pg 206)

Foucault applied this model of the panopticon to the functionality of institutions, like asylums, schools, hospitals, military and even the society as a whole, further observing that the authority is the one which maintains the 'look' and the subjects are the ones who are looked upon to keep the labour force under check, and the docile bodies under control. What actually makes the panopticon and the disciplinary power so effective is that it normalizes the judgement of its subjects, the very presence of a gaze which results from a hierarchical structure and a constant awareness that they are under observation and that a system has power over them. There's a uniformity which has to be followed by all the inmates, an effort to keep all the inmates isolated from each other both physically and psychologically so as to avoid grouping which helps keep the bodies docile and ensures there's little opportunity left for rebellion or dissent to grow under such circumstances. It perfects the operations of power by increasing the number of people who can be controlled and decreasing the number needed to operate it. It gives power over people's minds through architecture, As it can be inspected from outside there is no danger of tyranny because the main idea here is to control and eliminate any possible instances of a 'revolution' or 'uprising' against the power or authorities.

Foucault quotes Bentham, saying "There is no danger of a plot, an attempt at collective escape, the planning of new crimes for the future, bad reciprocal influences; if they are patients, there is no danger of contagion; if they are madmen there is no risk of their committing violence

upon one another; if they are schoolchildren there is no copying, no noise, no chatter, no waste of time; if they are 18 workers, there are no disorders, no theft, no coalitions, none of those distractions that slow the rate of work” (Foucault, pg 201) to illustrate Bentham’s vision of a society-wide panopticon and the aspirations he had. For Foucault, the panopticon represents the way in which discipline and punishment work in modern society. It is a diagram of power in action because by looking at a plan of the panopticon, one realizes how the processes of observation and examination operate.

Let's look at an example to better understand this concept. In Timothy Mitchell’s “Colonizing Egypt”, he talks in detail about how panoptic society was implemented to better establish colonial rule in Egypt in the 19th century. Settlements were set up with frames according to the needs of the inhabitants; the villages were centralized so that it was easier for government Officials to check, maintain records, write detailed reports and track populations, thus appearing to be subtle in manifestation and overt in their exercise of power. The Lancaster school moulded young men for military service and practiced excessive social controls and vigorous daily routines. They were told how to sit and stand, which stripped away the most basic sense of individuality and rendered them pliable and docile and even though they were all trained together they were all psychologically isolated from each other; compliant to the disciplinary power, therefore presenting a classic historical account of panopticism.

In his work “Discipline and Punish”, Foucault begins by examining the measures and restrictions that were taken during ‘the plague’ when the boundaries between normal and abnormal become blurred and the latent uncertainty opportun-ates the watchman to institute the instruments of surveillance (at an uncontested expense of the human), to make operations easy for the state. This marks the shift or a transition to a society where disciplining, which is based on examination and close observation proposes itself as the most effective measure to protect the society. As a result of this shift the new state becomes responsible for ensuring the ‘betterment of people’ as a result of mutual agreement between the state and the people. This shift creates the scope to do more and as Foucault suggested that there will be economic, social and political changes. Now in order to ensure this and maintain its authority, the state started evolving various mechanisms through which it will ensure a better life for people, but these mechanisms also enabled power to permeate and leak in the society, to reach the very foundational layers of it. In the panopticon the layers and levels of control were limited to only certain external levels, but with the disciplining (medicalisation/statistics/insurance etc.) of areas like mortality rate, sexuality, the idea of a good life, old age etc. this power penetrates

and dictates the very idea of a good life for oneself. This new form of deeply entrenched power is called 'Biopower'.

### **The Make Live, Let Die- Biopower**

In the second half of the 18th century, a new discourse of power developed, which is not essentially disciplinary but combines and integrates the elements from it to a certain extent. This new form of power as we saw a moment ago is called 'Biopower'; it addresses the multiplicity of men not as individual bodies (as in the case of the panopticon) but on the contrary as a "global mass", possessing the overall characteristics of birth, death, natality, production, illness, old age and so on. (Foucault, 1995). This power dissolves the individual body and looks at us as a 'massifying mass'; as man as species and not man as body. In simple words it looks at man as a population, an abstract term and not as an individual or body. It replaces the body with general biological processes and is thus called as the 'biopolitics of the human race'

"The idea that the State needs to take control of life, to manage it, to compensate for its aleatory nature, to explore and reduce biological accidents and possibilities" (Foucault, 1976). Biopolitics deals with the population as a political, scientific, biological and a power's problem and that is where biopower emerges as mechanisms to tackle this problem. A number of processes to examine the population which are statistical in nature like ratios of birth and death, population counts, fertility and reproduction rate, longevity of a population and so on were carried out. Natalist policies which intervene into the natural process of birth were also beginning to be used; biopolitics developed more or less compulsory and spontaneous techniques to control and permeate into all these aspects of a population, morbidity and madness were also a part of it. Mechanisms like forecasts, statistical measures and overall measures, which are aimed at not modifying an individual, but to intervene "at the level of generality" (Foucault, 1976) are introduced to establish a kind of an equilibrium, a homeostasis. These mechanisms, like disciplinary power, are also aimed at extracting the maximum out of the population; the difference here is that disciplinary power trains individuals, treats them at the level of body, and in biopower there's an overall equilibration and regularity of the population. The aim here is not discipline but regularity. There was an immense loss of populace which caused shortened working hours, wasted energy, cost money and a fall in production, owing to widespread illnesses and endemics. death was now something constantly present, it was permanent which had permeated into life and perpetually diminishes it.

Now with the coming of this new power, new techniques of its manifestation like medicalisation, sanitization, public hygiene and consequential need of regulation of the biological to avoid deflection, led to penetration of power's nature (-disciplining and regularization) into the personal domain. Biopolitics promises effective measures to aleatory human events like accidents, infirmities, old age and anomalies, and in turn introduces much more subtle and rational mechanisms like insurance, individual and collective savings, safety measures et al (Foucault, 1976). It develops control over human relations, how people should act, how they should interact, their environment and the milieu in which they live. Foucault says "it's a new body, a multiple body, a body with so many heads that while they might not be infinite in number, cannot necessarily be counted" (Foucault, 1995). Biopower expresses the need to control the 'randomness' in a population so as to optimize and generalize a state of life. This technology of biopower has the power over the population, over man as living beings, it is the power to 'make life and let die' in contrast to sovereign's right to 'take life and let die'.

One example to better understand this can be the "disqualification of death". In the early seventeenth and eighteenth century, death was a spectacular ceremony in which the family and the whole of the society took part in, but now it has become something to be hidden, something that takes place within the four walls of a chamber; it has become something shameful and private, an object of taboo. Death was highly ritualized and a symbol of transition from one power another, from this world to the next world, it also meant a transmission of "power of the dying to those who survived him"(Foucault, 1976) in the form of last words, wills and so on. Such ritualization of death could be seen in, for instance, in public executions by the sovereign, which had the power over death. But now, as power has decreased and death is outside its domain it has shifted to the power to make life, to intervene in life by controlling and eliminating diseases, deficiencies, accidents and so on; it has ignored death. The most obvious thing then becomes making death private, making it hidden, unlike earlier where it was this moment of absolute manifestation of power. Death now has become a moment where the individual falls back upon himself, retreats from power, in his own private space. Power of this new technology no longer recognizes death and instead uses subtle mechanisms to penetrate within life to predict its possibilities and tries to compensate for its effects (Foucault, 1976). The regularisation or the bioregulation is a feature of biopower, which is affected by the panopticon system, as though the disciplinary and regulatory don't exist at the same level but they are not mutually exclusive and can intersect.



Let's take an example of a model town to understand this; the whole area is divided with grid patterns in a perpendicular way. This is the disciplinary mechanism to control bodies by making individuals visible and normalizing of behaviour, all of this was done by the spatial layout of the town itself. Now, regulatory mechanisms in the same setting would include, health insurance systems, pensions, patterns of saving, rules on hygiene and sanitization, sexuality, procreation and the optimal longevity of the population. Another example can be medicalisation as it can be applied to both the body and the population; both the biological processes and the organism and thus will have both the elements (Foucault, 1976). A society in which both regulatory and disciplinary norms intersect is known as a "normalizing society". It is the power which has taken control over the body on one hand and life on the other, or we can say control of life in general "with the body as one pole and population as the other." A good example is the atomic power, which is not only a sovereign power to kill but also a regulatory power to kill life itself and suppress it. This is an excess of the biopower where man not only manages life but also creates living matter, proliferating life like viruses that not only kill but have the capacity to destroy life itself.

A question arises here: given the advance of regulatory power, whose main function is 'make live', how will the power to kill and function of murder operate in this political system centred upon biopower? It is here that racism intervenes, with the coming of biopower it becomes the tool of the state even though it has been in existence long before. Racism here is a break between races, a hierarchy, a distinction that certain races are good and others as inferior, it's a "way of fragmenting the biological that power controls" so the first function of racism is to fragment; another function that it performs is the very fact that "if you want to live, the other must die" (foucault, 1995). It sort of establishes a relationship between my life and the death of the other, wherein the inferior or the abnormal species must die so that the species in general will become more healthier and purer. Foucault says, "in a biopower system, the imperative to kill is acceptable only if it results not in a victory over political adversaries but in the elimination of the biological threat to and the improvement of the species or race".

Thus, in biopower, the murderous function of the state can only be performed and justified by racism. death here also includes exposing someone to death, the risk of death, political death, rejection and so on. It is not only seen as a way of improving one's own race by eliminating the other race but also regenerating one's own race, as the more and more of us die, the race to which we belong also becomes purer. An example that fits aptly here is of the "Bath Riots" or the "Gasoline Baths" in 1917, where the Mexican immigrants at the border between El Paso,

Ciudad Juarez and Texas were seen as “greasers”, carriers of diseases, racial inferiors, unhealthy and unfit. A new disinfection room was set at the borders, where all those who wished to cross the border had to strip naked, “inspected like livestock”, have their clothes sprayed with toxic pesticides like Zyklon and DDT, seen as “the miraculous white powder that is helping to win the war against diseases”. Or they had to take a vinegar and kerosene bath, burning all their belongings; this also resulted in the jail holocaust. In the words of David Dorado Romo- “This medicalisation and medical inspection and on account of that, the right to disqualify them, treating them as imbeciles, with a dehumanistic gaze, as aliens, idiots, and afflicted with loathsome contagious diseases”.

This is a classic example of state driven racism in biopower. The point to notice here is the fact that even the population agrees to this: there was no resistance owing to the fact that they were carried out in closed chambers, in secluded spaces and thus escaping the public eye, the efforts to conceal it show again a similarity with the panopticon. The state here in biopower is obliged to use race, the elimination of races and purification of races, in order to exercise the sovereign power- the power to kill.

### **The political dream of the pandemic**

Having looked closely at the above discussed concepts, it's time for us to now place them in our current state of society, where the world is faced with a global pandemic. Thousands have lost their lives to a virus and millions globally live isolated and locked inside their houses due to the fear of contracting or spreading the virus. COVID in the form of a pandemic has also provided an opportunity for mechanisms of the state like surveillance, governmentality and biopower to seep in deeper into the levels of generality and control the lives of the global mass.

Panopticism perfectly resonates with our current experience of the quarantine as it describes the disciplinarization of a city and its inhabitants during a plague epidemic. However, if we just insist on coercive measures, on being confined, controlled, and “trapped” at home during these *extraordinary* times, we risk overlooking the fact that disciplinary and biopolitical power mainly functions in an automatic, invisible, and perfectly *ordinary* way—and that it is most dangerous precisely when we do not notice the increase in surveillance mechanisms and indiscriminate control under a new “state of exceptions.” There is also the need to notice the inextricable relation between biopower and racism that Foucault establishes, In a recent piece, Judith Butler rightly remarks “the rapidity with which radical inequality, nationalism, and

capitalist exploitation find ways to reproduce and strengthen themselves within the pandemic zone”. (Butler, 2020)

The *differential exposure* of human beings to health and social risks in the pandemic situation means that some of us have the comfort and privilege of working from our homes and have a roof over our head, there are many others who have to struggle to make ends meet and thus have to risk their lives and go out to work. The differential access to health care facilities and the difference in the risks that we are exposed to are all salient features of biopolitical governmentality. The virus as claimed by many thinkers doesn't put us on a basis of equality; rather, it reveals the dark side of our society which depends upon incessant production of differential vulnerability and social inequalities. The current situation of a migrant crisis in our country as well as in other nations is an excellent example to show how power is exercised in our contemporary world, where on one hand flights and transportation was arranged for people stuck in foreign nations, but nobody was to be held accountable for the state of thousands of migrants, on foot with their families. Through the lens of biopolitics, we can see that certain individuals are being asked to die so that others can continue to live, or, within the logic of biopower: “The very fact that you let more die will allow you to live more” (Foucault, 1990, p. 255). COVID-19 allows vulnerable individuals to be rhetorically re-appropriated as threats to the larger population. These arguments have also been furthered by the citizens and not the states alone. The tracking of COVID-19 spread and social distancing behaviors of the public has made more visible the practices of biopolitics but also generated new opportunities for even greater surveillance and control. The current moment offers an opportunity to shift public perceptions about data surveillance, technological control, and the racial disparities of biopower.

Applying Foucault's (1979) notion of the panopticon, with its twin focus on surveillance and self-regulation, as the preminent form of social control in modern societies, governments around the globe have devised new ways of using data to enforce social distancing measures. The use of cell phone-derived location data has been the most common method of collection, In April, *The Guardian* revealed a draft memo that raised concerns related to a COVID-19 app being developed by the United Kingdom's National Health Service (NHS). This memo stated that device IDs could be used to de-anonymize data and allow individual app users to be identified, raising questions about whether this complies with current data privacy laws in the United Kingdom (The Guardian, 2020).

Another new mode of surveillance developed during the pandemic is a cell phone-based geofencing system that explicitly targeted particular users who were quarantined; this system continually monitors cell phone locations, alerting authorities if the signal travels too far beyond the geofence to which the user is restricted. In India, an app called ‘aarogya sethu’ has been in light for recording spatial and location-based data and personal information from the individual’s cell phone and is used to track the cases in the vicinity of the person. However the usage of location based data is not a new phenomenon but the pandemic has opened a plethora of opportunities to normalize or regularize constant surveillance in the name of public health.

Surveillance technologies which enable further entrenchment of biopower include drones, thermal cameras and video surveillance which alerts the authorities when any ‘abnormal events’ are recorded. In China, drones are being used to carry large QR codes to cars at checkpoints; where they must scan the code and enter health information on a government website. In both the US and China these drones act as portable loud speakers to enforce social distancing protocols and lockdown rules. In Russia, an artificial intelligence for facial recognition is being used; here the cameras are placed on most buildings which are able to instantly recognize the individuals breaking social distancing norms. This allows tackling at the level of the population. South Korea, Israel and Singapore use location data, video camera footage and credit card information to track the spread of COVID-19 by monitoring human behavioral patterns.

Some of these technological advances have no doubt been advantageous in limiting the spread of the virus, however the main concern that is raised is the possibility of governments and states getting accustomed to wielding power and authority, and the possibility of not repealing these even after the pandemic is over, the possibility of criminalizing social movement, thus it's important to take these aspects into consideration which can lead to our own subjectivation. The enforcement of quarantine orders has fashioned a virtual panopticon that monitors our lives on an unimaginable scale, Mapping acts as a powerful means of control, which raises the important question of ‘What is going to happen to the data collected and stored when the pandemic ends’? As The potential for abuse of personal data by government and commercial entities is practically limitless. How will society balance the constitutional rights against the new normal of a virtual panopticon and ensure a sense of security?

On one hand, governments have increased measures of surveillance and control for population management. On the other hand, this occurs within the larger context of the racial disparities

woven into biopower as individuals are increasingly asked to take responsibility for making life and death decisions themselves. It offers an opportunity to shift public perceptions about data surveillance, technological control, and the racial disparities of biopower which have existed in our society for long but have never been so prominent. Compared to the episodes of past centuries, one of the specific features of the current health crisis consists in the proliferation of securitarian measures, the strong resurgence of disciplinary approaches, and above all their joint updating in the light of computing technologies and their use by the police, therefore they more massively detect deviations from the norm, whether it is through measuring body heat or spatial proximity between individuals. These methods of surveillance are most suitable as they are cost efficient and enable multiple surveillance. Another important relation that can be traced is between the individuals, of how the persons look at each other with a 'gaze' that the other might transmit the virus to them; the discriminant and inhumanistic treatment of those infected by the virus speaks a lot about the power relations that exist even between individuals. Such policies receive support from the social elites or the privileged groups as they also benefit from them and contribute to normalising this discourse and ultimately diverts attention from crucial issues of public problem. Didier Bigo points out in a commentary on Giorgio Agamben's theses, "the crisis does not so much lead to a state of exception as it extends the contradictions inscribed at the heart of the liberal state, and of routing practices".

The current pandemic poses a situation in front of us where on one hand there is extensive surveillance and medicalization, all evolving as techniques of biopower and leaking deeper and deeper into this global mass which have existed and manifested over a very long time and on the other hand it also brings out the realest and the barest image of the functioning of power in a bio regularized state, which offers opportunities to think, to analyse, and to resist. I would like to end with a quote by Foucault which I believe is the most well suited in this scenario:

"the real political task in a society such as ours is to criticize the workings of institutions that appear to be both independent and neutral, to criticize and attack them in such a manner that political violence that has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight against them".

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## IS PHILOSOPHY OBSOLETE AS A DISCIPLINE?

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Philosophy and particularly its validity as an academic discipline have been under constant attack over the years, especially from the domain of science. This paper traces various accounts of the nature and purpose of philosophy and analyses certain characteristics of its institutional manifestations that open it to such condemnation. It concludes that philosophy undermines itself by fixating on emulating the scientific method as reflected in the analytic tradition and by refusing to diversify.*

Martin Heidegger famously distinguished the human being by saying that “its existence is a problem for it”. It is not surprising hence, that the greatest philosophical debate is regarding the very warrant of the enterprise itself. While mathematics clearly is about the study of abstract quantities, biology about life and living organisms and history dedicated to studying the past, philosophy remains elusive and at odds in answering what it’s for or even what it ‘is’. Once an honoured assistant of theology, philosophy’s existential crisis likely gave us the synthetic a priori as Kant, awakened from his dogmatic slumber by Hume, scrambled to answer the question ‘How is metaphysics possible?’, Nietzsche’s declaration of all philosophy as the “confession of its originator...and unconscious autobiography” and more recently Stephen Hawking’s- who is notably not a philosopher himself -shattering statement that “philosophy is dead” in the 21st century due to its inability to keep up with ‘modern scientific developments’.

These are but a few instances. Prominent thinkers like Heidegger, Richard Rorty and Alain Badiou have all declared their versions of the death of philosophy. Neither is Hawking the only scientist to do so. Lawrence Krauss, renowned theoretical physicist and author of a popular science book that provides an account of the origin of the universe from ‘nothing’ or a quantum state is a popular critic of the philosophy of science as was the giant Richard Feynman. Neil deGrasse Tyson has brushed off philosophy as ‘distracting’. There is no shortage of scientists who harbour disdain for philosophy. This paper looks at the characteristics of philosophy in academia and tries to ascertain what has made the ‘subject’ vulnerable to much vitriol and decisive remarks about its demise.

### **The Conception of Philosophy and its Purpose**

The encyclopaedia Britannica defines philosophy as “the rational, abstract, and methodical consideration of reality as a whole or of fundamental dimensions of human existence and experience” (Britannica). There is no place or time untouched by the pursuit of philosophy yet there is no universally accepted answer for the question of what its subject matter is. Philosophy can be presented as historical periods, rival traditions (rationalism vs. empiricism, analytic vs. continental) or as an amalgamation of subfields such as metaphysics, logic, ethics and epistemology. Additionally, it can be subjected to the critical lens of gender or racial exclusion as academic philosophy devolves into a display of overwhelming demographic homogeneity.

Thus, opinions have ranged from calling it ‘the queen of the sciences’ to dismissing it as a symptom of ‘intellectual immaturity’ deserving to be banished to the archive of speculative disciplines. From the aforementioned conventional definition, it is evident that the



philosophical method still continues to be prominently a priori. But a few contemporary philosophers find this rationalist stance easy to maintain due to the apparent lack of rational consensus in the field. Even when one leans towards naturalism, it usually just becomes just another a priori commitment.

Over the course of history, philosophy has encompassed different subjects. From 12th century Greece to the 19th century, natural philosophy – the precursor of science - included astronomy, medicine and physics (Lindberg). The advent of modern universities saw subjects like psychology, sociology, economics and linguistics detach themselves from traditional philosophy and establish disciplinary worlds of their own. Philosophy remained a chaotic leftover unyielding to an agreed-upon or precise methodology. Heidegger pronounced the end of philosophy in this dissolution and the abandonment of the fundamental questions that determine our lives.

Even muddier is the purpose of philosophy. Within academia, philosophy can either be seen as a disinterested search for the truth about abstract problems or a practical guide for how one ought to live or both. Doing philosophy can have both intrinsic and extrinsic ends. Externally, it could help in earning a livelihood or acclaim for one's intellectual acumen or can simply be a pastime if one enjoys working through intellectual dilemmas. But it is the intrinsic value; the point that the argumentation and conceptual clarification specific to philosophy aims to attain that remains unascertainable because of its lack of rational consensus. Questions as fundamental as these, by definition, tend to be philosophical. Hence, philosophy is left to self-examination and there is no other discipline to which the investigation of philosophical presuppositions can be delegated.

Bertrand Russell understands philosophy as a middle ground between science and theology. It shares with theology speculations on matters on which definite knowledge remains unknown and like science, it does not conform to traditional or revelation based authority and appeals to human reason. For him, philosophy is a No Man's Land where neither the certain knowledge of science nor the dogma of theology exists, leaving it vulnerable to attacks from both sides. He contends that ever since men became capable of free speculation, their actions have largely depended upon their theories regarding reality, life and morality. To understand any nation, one had to understand its philosophy and philosophers. The circumstances of men and their philosophy exist in a reciprocal relationship (Russell).

On the other hand, in a provocatively titled paper called “Truth but no Consequences: Why Philosophy doesn’t matter”, Stanley Fish, a literary theorist and public intellectual argues that one’s philosophical positions on abstract issues do not have any practical consequences nor do they inform a person’s character or moral status. More specifically, whatever metaphysical theory of truth one may espouse will have no impact on a person’s perception of truth in mundane situations. The context that causes such sentiments to arise will be explored further.

### **The Linguistic Turn and Scientism**

Since fundamental questions tend to remain contentious forever, a response has been curated to scale down the ambitions of philosophy, without discarding its a priori methodology but with a respectable leeway given to the a posteriori methodology of science with regards to factual questions. This brings us to the “linguistic turn” in twentieth-century philosophy. Conceptual or linguistic competence became the intellectual tool that supported a posteriori inquiry. Broadly speaking, the outcome led to philosophical questions becoming conceptual questions instead. This approach characterizes the broad tradition of analytic philosophy.

Although this paper won’t attempt to relay the extensive history or the breadth of analytic philosophy, it will try to identify certain characteristics unique to the tradition which opens philosophy to the kind of critiques which are the focus of this paper. This is relevant to philosophy’s overall reception today as the majority of philosophy departments across the world identify themselves as followers of the analytic tradition.

Analytic philosophy has dominated academic philosophy, especially Anglo-American philosophy since the early 20th century (Preston). Its founders are G.E Moore and Bertrand Russell who broke away from the school of Absolute Idealism dominant in British universities of the day. Gottlob Frege is also considered as one of the founders by many. Analytic philosophy emphasized the linguistic and logical analysis of concepts in varying degrees over many sub-traditions and micro-revolutions. It primarily differentiates itself in its opposition to traditional philosophy at large - beginning with absolute idealism and then later classical phenomenology and postmodern philosophy.

Analytic philosophy takes a strong stance against metaphysics and generally assumes scientific methodology to be the best provider of truth if not the tools of formal logic. Philosophy is regarded as a science of sorts which uses the deductive and a priori, attaining a function similar to that of mathematics. A phase in the history of analytic philosophy to be noted is logical positivism. Developed by the Vienna Circle – a group of philosophers, scientists and logicians-

the core view of logical positivism was that of scientism: the view that all knowledge is scientific knowledge, an immediately apparent circular statement.

Philosophy has done itself a disservice by binding itself to the hard sciences. A philosophy that insists on keeping up with the latest scientific developments would die, as Hawking rightly says, in this instance because keeping up with all that's going on in the field of science is an unfair thing to demand even from a scientist extraordinaire, let alone a philosopher. And science is hardly a worthy arbiter of Absolute truth.

Thomas Kuhn in 'The Structure of Scientific Revolutions' put forward the influential idea of a 'paradigm shift' which is brought about by a narrative of scientific progress as not linear. In fact, science regularly plunges into revolutionary phases (examples include the Copernican revolution and transition from Newtonian mechanics to Quantum physics) where it renews itself and discards previously unquestioned intellectual frameworks. Science does not work toward some absolute truth but merely seeks to continue studying and understanding the world. Kuhn also says that there is no objective way of assessing the relative merits of competing paradigms in science.

In fact, when scientists like Hawking and Krauss make such definitive claims about reality, they are inadvertently engaging in philosophy – in this case, the philosophy of science. This proves that the weight of philosophy is hard to escape from. The very practice and demarcation of disciplines especially science depend on philosophical foundations. It can be argued that theoretical physics includes a lot of metaphysical speculation by physicists (the many-worlds theory, string theory) where they lack empirical support. The view that all existence is ultimately physical is extremely difficult to prove. The philosopher Jason Waller says that a single discovery of something remotely non-physical would prove it wrong (Waller). Further, it has to be realized that science is a social endeavour like any other defined by human interactions and power structures (research grants, funding, and publishing in journals).

### **Philosophy and the University**

The late 19th and early 20th century saw an attack of the broad conception of truth which encompassed both knowledge and morality. Until then, moral philosophy and natural theology in a university curriculum worked together to reconcile religious and secular studies. This institutionalization of the abstract idea of the unity of truth was fairly normative in nature and reinforced its validity. But due to the inevitable contradictions between these two areas of knowledge, reformers initiated a reorganization of universities that would ensure both the

moral relevance of truth and its ability to encompass all knowledge without restricting scholarly progress. Unfortunately, the results were “educational and scholarly practices that encouraged specialization rather than intellectual synthesis” (Rueben). Thus it was convenient to embrace the fact that fact was separate from values. Religion came to be seen as a force antithetical to intellectual advancement and science came to be perceived as a particularly reliable and progressive form of inquiry because of its supposed openness and empirical methods.

A modern form of religious education was to be the scientific study of religion which concluded that the ‘truth’ of religion was different from the factual truth of science. Religion’s marginalization ensured the loss of its stake on morality leaving science to take up yet another weighty duty – that of moral guidance. It was believed that scientific inquiry would encourage the same good personal habits that liberal Christianity did. But it wasn’t soon before biological and social scientists became uncomfortable with moral aims thrust upon their disciplines and adopted a morally neutral and more practical-utility stance. The humanities with its incompatibility to specialized research and subject matter that would not easily translate into material or practical outcomes rushed in to sweep up the mantle of moral education and guidance. Morality became disassociated with factual knowledge and aligned instead with a fictive and aesthetic truth. This institutional separation was reflected in the curriculum.

Developments in philosophy in the 1920s and 1930s are responsible for these intellectual changes in higher education. Logical positivism put forward a clear distinction between statements of knowledge and value judgements. Philosophers also began to associate morality with non-cognitive sentiments and aesthetics (Rueben). As a result, philosophy who had assumed the moral guardianship of religion and the epistemological guardianship of science lost both. This is the intellectual context in which philosophers consider questions of knowledge and morality today.

The institutionalization of philosophy as a result of modernization wherein it can be pursued only in a serious academic setting is one of the enduring failures of contemporary philosophy. This was in response to the development of the natural and social sciences that previously comfortably identified as natural and moral philosophy respectively as separate disciplines and the emphasis on specialization. The 20th century brought the latest existential quandary of philosophy where it found itself navigating non-existent theoretical and institutional space in the modern research university. This meant adopting the scientific structure and method of

knowledge production and inevitably inviting the exasperation and rebuke of science, especially that of physics.

Another casualty is the universalization of philosophy's current impasse. Because most contemporary students in university today study some variation of the western canon by virtue of the colonial project, the above predicaments will be all too familiar to any student enrolled in this rarely acknowledged degree today. This calls for a decolonization of education and canons because if analytic philosophy is where western philosophy has stopped, then most departments across the world stop there. Philosophy exists mostly as a 'subject' to be studied and maybe more than any other discipline, makes no effort to include any other non-European tradition. Instead of studying classical philosophy as sad attempt at modern science or alternative traditions under the ostensible domain of area studies, it is time academic philosophy opened itself to the insights offered by Chinese, Africana, Indian, Islamic, Jewish and Latin American thought, all of which have their unique takes on metaphysics, epistemology, ethics and areas developed where western philosophy might have abandoned. Philosophy thrives on interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity and it was never meant to assume the cold and hard gaze of science. Science has its place and philosophy ensures it.

We all philosophize on some level. Some of us are just more aware of it than others. What we need is a return to philosophy as it was first conceived – the love for wisdom and this is what continues to draw students who are intrigued by the most fundamental questions about life to it. Philosophy is first and foremost an exercise of our self-evident capacity for rational thought and the application of accumulated life experiences and scientific learning in making the best judgements possible, protected from the self-assured ideologies of both zealous religion and scientism.

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