

2026 Issue

JABBER WOCK

Department of English



Lady Shri Ram College for Women

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Department of English
Lady Shri Ram College for Women
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2026 Issue

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Editorial

As this academic year draws to an end, one is tempted to question whether this year has been a series of rabbit holes itself; one consuming quandary after another. Amidst the uncertainties, Jabberwock still managed to traverse through human existence and reflect on questions of significance, but our success will be revealed only once the restless flicker of resistance has been ignited in the minds of our readers. The life of writing does not end with what has been written but rather continues in what it has translated to. What we have strived to do, as the editors of Jabberwock Online, the creative sphere of Jabberwock, is to reach readers who are not compliant; who question what is being said, by whom, and to reach what end? We live in an age where distance has been dismantled, but understanding still remains elusive. The writers, poets, and critics within these pages have undertaken this delicate, essential work. They have taken the sprawling vocabulary of modern catastrophe and rendered it in the language we know best: story, image, verse.

In these pages, you will encounter the personal costs of global crises, but you will also find resilience: the stubborn persistence of hope, the improvised solidarities that emerge when institutions fail, the quiet acts of care that continue even as systems crumble. To our contributors: thank you for your courage in translating your affect into art, the world's chaos into meaning, and the despair of both into something we can hold in our hands and examine in the light. To our readers: we ask that you read not just with your eyes, but with your whole being. Perhaps, in seeing each other, we might finally find the will to act for an alternate reality.

Signing out,

Yoganjana & Gowri

Jabberwock Online 2025-2026

Editorial

“There was only one man who ever understood me, and even he did not understand me.”

– Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

Modern writing has, at times, presented itself as a riddle; where life is confusing, should not its reflection be an eternal quagmire in return?

Creative work finds itself in its own unique ‘crisis of translation’— the general populace cannot decode it, and thus writes it off as unimportant, does not see the worth in it, simply because the individual cannot see the meaning meant for the whole. Parallel to continental drift is semantic drift; words evolving across eras, each meaning a stone thrown across the ocean to Lanka; a passage between oppressors and oppressed— wherein the oppressor of us all is time.

Words like ‘awful’ are driftwood, changing their shape in the winding rivers of time; they are pieces of clay made to widen and narrow and swim— etymology ties itself to etiology, each studying

a worthy cause.

Everything shifts, we learn through phenomena such as these, nothing is stable.

Our mother feeds us alphabet soup, and we jumble it into new combinations with our spoon before swallowing it whole.

In the soup lies repetitions; A,C,G,T combining and recombining— D.N.A Nucleotide bases giving us Grammar Axioms or Theories of Change. We gulp such soup to feed the butterflies in our stomach; born themselves out of recombination, a continual translation we must all face, from past to present, from soup to words.

We, at Jabberwock, are seasoned chefs, and even more seasoned linguists. To solve the crisis of hunger faced by the world; our writers work in soup kitchens, adding the pepper of punctuation and the spice of life to a broth they dole out liberally.

One of the few things that sounds the same across languages is a rumbling stomach; starvation.

As the world hungers for words they may understand, the pen turns, in a crisis, not to a sword, but a ladle.

Despite all ideological thrusts, writing rises as a process of confronting crises, and this issue, attempts to render visible the crises that have been invisibilised. We would also like to take a moment to reflect on one of the team's highlights for the academic year—Jabberwock organised its own Paper Presentation Competition under the aegis of Litmus after a hiatus of 5 years. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank our staff advisors who went above and beyond their required job description to help us create a space of learning around the journal, one that we hope keeps on improving. We would like to thank all our contributors for taking out the time to make their submissions, especially during times when critical thought and inquiry are under constant scrutiny by states.

And lastly, how does one thank the labour (and love) of those who stood by us despite our last minute texts and a hundred edit suggestions? One probably cannot. And therefore, to our dear team, yours is the debt we will leave unpaid, quite helplessly, so.

With love,

Ayanna and Sakshi

Editors-in-Chief

Jabberwock Academic

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The Domestic Space as the Site of Resistance: Exploring Diaspora in Meera

Syal's 'Anita and Me'

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Abstract

A diasporic identity constantly oscillates between that of the native land and the land of immigration. There is a constant negotiation between an identity that could be and the one that is not- therefore a sense of not-belonging. The members of the diasporic community always find themselves negotiating between their foreign identity, which, more often than not, is alien to them and their native identity. The problem exacerbates in the midst of stereotypical cyclones when it becomes difficult for them to be their authentic self due to tremendous prejudices being thrown their way. Thus the practice of their own culture becomes limited, often stripped away from the grandeur and confidence that it would otherwise garner in the homeland. Yet, there is a persistence in the practice. And more importantly, there is a constant attempt to create spaces where they can practice their cultures and be their authentic selves. What are these spaces and where do they reside; how near or far from the centre of the society? One such space is the domestic. For the diasporic community, it is a politically loaded space. How does one understand these politics? What then, are the ways in which they ensure the protection of this space and what are the key characteristics that distinguish it from other public or even private spaces. It

necessarily becomes the space of resistance against the foreign identity that they are expected neither to take on nor fully stay away from. In the following essay, there is an attempt to study the creation, protection, maintenance and the metaphorical politics of such a domestic space in Meera Syal's novel, *Anita and Me*.

Keywords: Diaspora, Identity, Self, Culture , Resistance

A diasporic identity constantly oscillates between being one of the native land and one of the land of immigration. There is a constant negotiation between an identity that could be (of the land of immigration) and the one that no longer is (of the home land). One neither feels at home in the foreign land nor does not feel at home in the hometown thereby always corrupting any and every idea of belongingness. In the foreign land, thus, the only safe haven for the diasporic subject, that is individually distorted and has been uprooted culturally is in the company of others. Homi K Bhabha in his interview with Stierstorfer (Bhabha and Stierstorfer) mentions how his idea of a cultural misfit is analogous to Walter Benjamin's analogy of the broken pieces of glass fitting together because they fit into each other notwithstanding their differences. That is where the glass vessel derives its strength from. Thus, the problem of a cultural 'misfit' is more of a problem of translation of cultures and this translation is not inseparable from its own dynamics of temporality, contradictions and asymmetry. In this light, this essay tends to look at Meera Syal's Betty Trask Award winning book, *Anita and Me*. The book is a bildungsroman of the protagonist Meena, who, like every nine-year-old girl, cannot wait to grow up and break free from her parents. However, her struggles are unlike those of the other British girls from the small town of Tollington. She constantly undergoes a tussle of trying to situate herself

and her identity between one that she inherits by virtue of her birth, i.e Punjabi and the other by virtue of her domicile, i.e British; where she not just wants *chapati* and *dal* but also fish and chips. In talking about the struggles of adjustment in the credit of Meena, the author observes the construction of the Indian lifestyle in which Meera finds herself situated but not uninfluenced from the British lifestyle. This paper reads the lifestyle of the Kumar family as a resistive way of being and as a counter to the invariably hegemonic British lifestyle. Furthermore, it also observes the politics of the domestic space, as a space of liberating freedom to the diasporic subject offered by the virtue of its interiority that the protagonist notes as the 'in' which is separate from the 'out'.

At the instance when Meena goes out for a movie with her parents, Mrs Kumar is dressed in a 'dusty pink sari with small silver lotus blossoms on its borders' (Syal, 25). The young girl notes how when the family has to be in what she calls the 'out' as she defines it as the space that has the British gaze because of their presence. The contrasted 'in' for her is the space where there is an absence of the said gaze and only finds the presence of the 'Indian friends.' Interesting to note is the understanding of this dichotomy of the space in a child as young as Meena. Moreover, the construction of the supposedly 'Indian' space is only limited to the interiority of the domestic where they "sit in each other's lounges, eat each other's food and watch each other's televisions."

The tendency of the parents, as Meena observes, is to wear their 'smartest clothes' in the 'out'. The mother's experiential understanding is also such that she automatically knows that she would get fewer stares and whispers if "she had donned any of the sensible teachers' trouser suits she would wear for school." How does one understand this need to dress up in a much more conscious way, even if

they are in their Indian attires? More important and probably haunting is the thought of the comfort that the mother would derive by being in western clothes. The understanding then, is of an increased possibility of emancipation by decreasing the markers of differentiation of identity. Thus, there is always a certain tension in the public space- marked by the presence of the foreigner gaze. In such a space, there is a need for an approval from another subject- a quest for familial recognition. Later on in the novel, one encounters Indian women coming across each other in market places and as they would be dressed in '*salwar kameez*', they'd "stare at each other in that innocent, direct way of two rare species who have just found out they are vaguely related." This recognition is the moment of realisation of Bhabha's analogous understanding of the diaspora subject vis-à-vis glass.

Therefore, the inner and the outer become vastly different spaces in the book. In padding the domestic 'in' in the novel, the "mehfils" (Syal, 71) of Mr Kumar were legendary. The young narrator describes them as "evenings where our usual crowd plus a few dozen extra families would squeeze themselves into our house to hear papa and selected Uncles sing their favourite Urdu *ghazals* and Punjabi folk songs (Syal, 71).

The domestic space of the Kumars is quite different from that of Aunty Sahila and that is primarily due to the non-religious lifestyle. Where on one hand, the former had an elaborate shrine with "Lord Rama and Shri Krishna and Ganesha" (Syal, 93) with incense sticks, diyas, offerings of fruits and "photographs of departed loved ones" (Syal, 93). At this juncture, it must be noted that the non-religiosity of Mr. Kumar and the Kumar family in general is not because of a Western influence but because of the experiences around Partition that "had removed any lingering religious instincts he

might have kept through suspicion or habit” (Syal, 92). At the core of the observation, thus, is the fact that religious or non-religious, the constitution of the secular space is informed by South Asian events and beliefs, vastly distant from any influence of the Western culture, thereby retaining their political grain and the immunity from the influences of western subscription of intellectual make up.

Meena makes a very interesting observation post the Diwali celebration at the Kumar’s. She notices how everyone is donned in Indian clothes; “the purple *salwar kameez* suit, stiff with yellow elephant embroidery around the cuffs and neckline” (Syal, 107), “[the] glorious emerald green sari” (Syal, 108) of Aunt Shaila, “jewelled sandal”, “streak of vermilion silk” and “glittering nose ring” of the other guests (Syal, 111). She had seen all of them at some point in her life in their formal workday clothes of “English separates and over co-ordinated suits” (Syal, 112). Coming from a young child, this observation seems naïve but speaks volumes about the politics of the interiority of the domestic space where the Indian identity is asserted and practised and the skin of the conformity to the hegemonic, English identity is cast off. Such moments of intimate discovery of the Indian self by Meena also occur in the occasional familial gatherings. These would be marked by nostalgic voyages down the memory lines to the times that the grown-ups had spent in India. The singing of the song ‘Mera Saya Sath Hoga, Tu Jahan Jahan Chalega’ and the uncles joining in the melody is a suggestion of the grounding in their Indian identities.

Henri Lefebvre, the French Marxist Sociologist and Philosopher in his *The Production of Space* understands spaces beyond their mere physicality, as socially and culturally produced and thus spaces as a reflection of power relations and ideologies (1). His concept of the ‘spatial triad’ posits that a social

space is a dialectical combination of three interconnected elements- spatial practice (perceived space), representations of space (conceived space), and representational spaces (lived space). The 'perceived space' is the physical and material space of everyday life and how it is used and experienced (38). One sees this with the altars in the home of Aunty Shaila and the way in which Mr Kumar would lay out clean white sheets on the floor for the mehfil. It is also reflected in the habit of the Indian families in taking off their shoes before entering the drawing rooms.

The 'conceived space', then, refers to the space as designed and planned by the architecture which is controlled in the town of Tollington by the English planners. There is no way in which the Kumars could have altered this aspect of their homes because the houses were pre designed. Theirs is a post war, British housing, similar to the houses of the other people in the mining town of Tollington, displaying the working-class integration into the economic structure of England. They have the front garden typical of the English houses and the interior space is neatly divided into compact rooms that cater to the working-class respectability and family structure of England.

Lastly, the 'lived space' is the one which is affectively, symbolically and emotionally constituted. It is connected to imagination, art and cultural meaning and is the most active site for resistive acts and derivation of alternate meaning. It becomes the containers of memory and consciousness and therefore the most malleable in turns of cultural imagination. This lived space is what the Kumar family and their Indian relatives most conspicuously inhabit. Be it through the mehfiles of Mr Kumar, the Indian dressing, the cuisine and any other sensibility of the Indian kind, acts of symbolic resistance through

unabashed following of the cultural identity happens from the lived space of the home, thereby rendering the domestic as highly charged in terms of its politics.

It is also a space which is the least porous when it comes to the diffusion between the English and the Indian ways. This minimal porosity metaphorically shields it from the gaze of the people of the 'different' land thereby depreciating the need to fit in. The neighbours of the Kumars such as the Rutters symbolically cross the thresholds of their houses through views and conversations but only enough so, for they largely remain outside the home of the Kumars. The only 'other' who gets to ever enter their house is Anita Rutter who Meena is trying to be friends with. She is invited over dinner and is served with Indian cuisine. When she observes Mr Kumar using his hands to eat his food, she is grossed out, thanks to the unrelenting and unapologetic culinary habit of the Kumars. It is these small acts by them that become acts of resistance against a monolithic, hegemonic identity that they are expected to put on since they are living on the 'other's' land and therefore ought to adopt their ways of being. Such tacit acts of resistance are followed unabashedly in the hardcore 'desi' ways in the private space wherein no English personnel is present and therefore the best way to understand the usage of hands by the Kumars to eat his food, despite the presence of Anita in the household is, as simple as it can get, merely out of habit.

It is imperative to note that all this is happening in the midst of the racial practices that are pitted against the family of the Kumars—from the denial of medical care to Mrs Kumar during the time of her pregnancy to the denial of economic and sustenance avenues to the bread earners of the family. It is, but inevitable that they have to find ways to resist and establish their own identities somewhere or

the other. Their revolutions ‘were quieter and often unwitnessed’ (Syal, 165). As the young Meena notices, the versions of the history of the Kumars are their own. They are not just the writers but also the executors of the same. Perhaps this history is written in the intimate moments the family shares in the living room singing Hindi songs. It is experienced in the trips to the Gurdwara and Meena’s understanding of Diwali and the Indian Christmas, again, within the space of the domestic realm. This resistive tendency to the British ways of being lies not only in the lifestyle and cultural practices but also in their thoughts. Meena’s aunties “did not rage against fate or England when they swapped misery tales, they put everything down to the will of Bhagwan, their Karma, their just deserts inherited from their reincarnation which they had to live through and solve with grace and dignity” (Syal 67). There is an evident shift from the cognitive understanding of the occurrences to humans which is highly non-European and deeply rooted in the Indian theological and cosmic philosophies. Thus, the interior—both the mental and the homely is rooted in the Indian ways of being and thinking.

Nilanjana Bhattacharya in his essay *Popular Hindi Film Song Sequences Set in the Indian Diaspora and the Negotiating of Indian Identity*, draws upon post-colonial theorists such as Partha Chatterjee and distinguishes between the “inner domain” of culture (religion, music, myth, family, language) and the external domain (technology, politics, modernity). In songs set in diaspora contexts, the inner domain is emphasised to assert cultural authenticity and continuity. In *Anita and Me*, the inner space both of the mind and the home (the domestic), therefore then becomes not just a site of cultural assertion but also of active resistance to sustain the thread of cultural belonging and Indianness. The diasporic identity can thus, never remain static. It is in a constant flux of negotiation,

compromise, nostalgia and navigation between the two very different identities that exist in different realms- the outer and the inner, the public and the private. The self then, has to locate itself in this gyre of complexities and it is precisely that what Meena tries to wrap her head around thereby making *Anita and Me* a quintessential diasporic novel centred around, among other themes explored in the essay, identity creation which can be read for its fair share of resistance.

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Ghungroo On His Feet: Exploring the Space for Queer Expression in Indian Classical Dance

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Abstract

“A woman in a man’s world is considered progressive, but a man in a woman’s world is considered pathetic.” Mahesh Dattani, in his play *Dance Like a Man*, offers a glimpse into the reality of our bifurcated world, where spaces are segregated into two spheres: that of the masculine and the feminine. Yet, often one can see traversing down the dance halls, considered especially feminine, figures who may not conform to societal expectations of the same, as the fluid contours of queerness seep through its cracks. Queerness, as a spectrum, is as multifarious as can be, and waltzing on these stages, multiplicities of identity are mirrored, refracted, and reimagined, be it by way of theme, dancer, or the characters portrayed. In dance, popular depictions of figures like Ardhanarisvara, a deity who embodies liminal sexuality, combines both divine feminine and masculine energies represented by the union of Shiva and Parvati, but is this queerness limited to mythos?

Queer people from marginalised sections of society have but highly limited avenues where they can express their identities in a safe environment. The practice room of a classical dance form can be seen as one of those milieus. The effeminate traits that a Guru reaffirms to be a part of any graceful dancer's identity then become the very object of derision targeted at the queer artists outside the four walls of the dance studio.

In an art form which requires equal mastery of both stereotypically male and female mannerisms in order to do justice to one's performance, what is the magnitude of explicit visibility that is granted to the queer artists in the Indian landscape? Through fieldwork and textual analysis, this paper aims to realise and problematise the limits of mobility afforded to subversive gender identities in the context of Indian classical dance.

Keywords: *Indian classical dance, queerness, gender expression, politics of visibility, gender.*

Classical dance forms in India have been a significant part of the cultural fabric for over 2000 years, tracing back to the *Natya Shastra* (Jadzia 156) which enshrined methods of fine arts and continues to influence Indian classical music and dance as we see it today. Codified through aesthetic theory, ritual practice, and multiple stages of its revival into modern versions of the same, these forms—whether Bharatanatyam, Kathakali, Odissi, or others, have long been framed as embodiments of “tradition,” discipline, and most relevantly, societal order. Yet the dancing body has never been a stable or neutral site. Rather, it has been a terrain upon which questions of caste, sexuality, respectability, and gender have been negotiated and policed. To examine Indian classical dance,

therefore, is not merely to study choreography or technique but to confront a dense politics of embodiment. Within this framework, the examination of queer roles, as to whether it is also merely just the dancing body or does it reflect the anxieties of common societal customs, is the objective of this paper.

As we venture to ruminate upon the ties Indian classical dancing has with queer identity, it becomes imperative to really deconstruct the statement and its implications. What is classical? What or who do we qualify as “queer”? Why is identity, in this paradigm, at all connected to the art form in question? The most appreciable ruminations on the term “classical”, in our opinion, are provided by Leela Samson. Samson believed that categories were the “bane of our existence” (Samson 5) and if being termed as a “classical” dancer turns people away from her, then she would rather not identify with it, “if it suggests an exclusivity that is not me and if it is not of the people”. If “classical”, for Samson, suggests something with origins in India and tied to the Indian identity, she problematises it by mentioning that many instruments that are termed as “classical” in India had origins from different parts of the world before they acquired a history of their own in the Indian context. In *Classical Dance in Contemporary India*, Leela Samson argues,

Musical instruments, for instance, that we have adopted as our own, like the violin, the French harmonium, the saxophone, the mandolin, the guitar, the clarinet and the piano - the last has several avatars in keyboards, synthesisers, harmoniums, etc. - these all have roots in foreign lands. Yet they have a life in India that goes back several centuries. Practitioners of these do not acknowledge these to be anything but indigenous. They should be eligible to get national awards as classical Indian instrumentalists. Yet the piano and an Indian who plays classical

music on it is denied one because the instrument is deemed 'foreign'. I am not sure, but does the violin or mandolin or guitar look more Indian or less Western to you, than the piano? Is it the size of the instrument that we are prejudiced against? Or are we still heckled by the name, the looks and, perhaps, the colour? (80)

In fact, Samson is glad for the multicultural parentage of these. She urges for the “essential unity of all life”, for a “religion of eternity”. As we delve deeper into the question of identity and acceptance and hypothesise as to what causes them, such a mindset proves to be one that is of note. Perhaps this “unity” which, Samson believes, we all have in the back of our minds, is similarly harboured in the field at hand, something that would only be a godsend to the queer individual seeking a space to flourish artistically.

As for “queerness”, from our own experience, we assume a similar definition to Miller and Grollman for how they define “transgender people”(Miller et al 821), “people...whose gender identity and expression do not normatively align with their sex”. In this context, anything that does not align with the normative views of conventional gender performativity will be referred to as “queer” with the interest of brevity. Further, as read in the works of accomplished dancers like Samson and Yodh, one can learn how intricate the ties between identity and classical dance are. Yodh especially writes about how her personal search for an “Indian” identity had pushed her closer to forming a relationship with her craft. (Medh 673-76). According to her learning from her instructor, the great exponent of Bharata Natyam, Late Smt. T. Balasaraswati,

For Hindu Indians, the goal of life is *moksha*, i.e., a direct experience of the fundamental unity of a human being with the Infinite or Supreme Reality. All the traditional Indian arts explicitly acknowledge as their aim the bringing of human beings ever closer to this state of *moksha* (673).

It is in this fundamentalism of identity that one can somewhat source the appeal traditional Indian arts have for queer individuals. Yodh also sheds light on what is the essential function of all traditional Indian arts, “The function of all classical Indian dances is three-fold: for the propitiation and pleasure of the gods; for the enjoyment of the *rasika* (connoisseur); and for the education and enjoyment of all others”.

It is then neither puerile nor audacious to presume that it is this losing of one’s identity to a unity dedicated to serving the gods that particularly constitutes the appeal to those whose identities have been historically policed and causes of oppression.

A pertinent distinction must be made at the very onset—. The norm of fixed gender binaries has never been an integral part of classical arts in South Asia, and one must depart from this Western idea that transvestism is equal to being a celebration of gender ambiguity. Samson makes a similar comment to this in her handling of the word “tradition”.

Talking of words and nomenclatures, Sadanand Menon questions the use of the term ‘tradition’. He says ‘tradition’ is a non-indigenous category in the Indian lexicon and gained currency only in the context of the Indian freedom struggle at the turn of the nineteenth

century, when clichéd binaries like tradition versus modernity, change versus continuity, unity versus diversity, etc., came into play. Otherwise, it was words like *parampara* (convention), *sampradaya* (school), *purana* (received practice) or *reeti-rivaz* (customs and manners) that were in use. In the post-colonial period, he suggests, 'a newly defined tradition' may well have come as a boon to the westernised urban Indian elite and represented 'a power block': 'Aligning with tradition was a means of self-inscription into the body politic of an emerging nation-state, something they had been marginal to in the earlier monarchical system and against which they had connived, on the side of imperial power' (86).

Kerala's Kathakali offers a striking example. Traditionally performed exclusively by men, it requires actors to master both hypermasculine and stylised feminine roles through codified gesture, make-up, and even corporeal training such as body language. In her study *'The Sense of a Lady': An Exploration of Transvestite Roles in Kathakali and Their Relation to Keralan Gender Constructions*, Jenny Nilsson argues that Kathakali renders gender visible as a performed and disciplined construct rather than a biological given. Male performers, therefore, enact out the 'woman' through costume, movement vocabularies such as *lasya*, and what practitioners describe as cultivating the "mind" or "sense" of a woman. The stage thereby exposes gender purely as technique- one that is learned, stylised and rehearsed. At the same time, Nilsson cautions that such transvestite performance does not automatically destabilise patriarchy; instead, it often reinscribes male control over representations of femininity. This tension between subversion and containment is crucial for understanding how queerness operates within classical forms.

At the core of Indian classical dance pedagogy lies a fundamental requirement: dancers must master the expression of both masculine and feminine emotional registers. According to the *Natya Shastra*, the foundational treatise attributed to Bharata Muni (circa 200 BCE–200 CE), Performance Arts are organized around the duality of *Tandava* and *Lasya* (Jadiza 156-7), with *Tandava* representing the masculine aspect, characterised by vigour, power, and rhythm and associated with Lord Shiva's cosmic dance, while *Lasya* embodies "the feminine aspect, characterized by grace, *bhava* (expression), and *shringaar* (love) and is traditionally linked to Goddess Parvati. However, these categories were never conceived as exclusive domains. Performance traditions like the Sattriya dance form of Assam, explicitly integrate both Masculine (*Paurashik Bhangi* which is energetic and with jumps), and Feminine (*Stri Bhangi* possessing *Lasya* or is delicate) dance styles. s two styles, one Masculine (*Paurashik Bhangi* which is energetic and with jumps), and Feminine (*Stri Bhangi* possessing *Lasya* or is delicate). Within the walls of a practice room, queer male dancers are often appreciated and valorised for innately possessing the mannerisms required to refine *lasya*, yet these same mannerisms are rebuked outside the artistic sphere. Jeeno Joseph, a Bharatanatyam dancer interviewed by *HuffPost*, articulates this tension directly: "There is a stigma regarding male Bharatanatyam dancers or male Indian classical dancers in general, because it is a very graceful art form. It requires a sense of subtlety" (Kuruvilla). He further notes that while Bharatanatyam practitioners are taught that "dancers are essentially blank canvases on which any character or story can be painted" (Kuruvilla), male dancers face persistent questions about their sexuality and masculinity precisely because they have mastered the feminine expressiveness the art demands. This constitutes what we might term the "effeminacy paradox": the *guru* reaffirms that graceful, delicate movement, often coded

as feminine, is essential to accomplished dancing, yet these same traits mark male practitioners as suspect or deviant outside the studio. The material requirements of classical dance performance further complicate this terrain. Joseph's account notes, "...male Bharatanatyam dancers...are also expected to don silks and makeup during performances. They wear gold jewellery, tie silk garments around their waists and wrap strings of bells around their ankles. They often use lipstick, blush, eyeliner, eye shadow, and eyebrow pencils to help emphasise their facial expressions."

These adornments, essential to the visual language of classical dance, become flashpoints for accusations of effeminacy or homosexuality. Ravi Yadav, in his essay, "*What is the Society's Problem with Male Classical Dancers?*" observes: "Men are not supposed to wear anklets adorned with bells on their feet (*ghungroo*), shiny glittery costumes, makeup and the rest required in classical dance styles, because according to our society if they do so then they will come under the appellation of being homosexual or perhaps a trans person." What emerges from contexts like these is a picture of the dance studio as a peculiar kind of closet, a space where gender variance is not only permitted but cultivated, yet whose boundaries are strictly policed. The studio authorises gender crossing *as performance*, as technique, as devotional practice, but not necessarily as lived identity. One therefore makes the realisation that the supposed appreciation of the queer identity coexists and, in fact, also supports the stigmatisation of the queer dancer, and is not, instead, as one would immediately assume, battling the stigma and discrimination by giving queer dancers a space for visibility. For queer practitioners specifically, this creates what might be termed a "double consciousness" around gender performance. They must navigate the gap between the studio's requirement for gender fluidity and society's demand

for gender conformity, between *abhinaya*'s mandate to embody multiple genders convincingly and the imperative to disavow any suggestion that such embodiment reflects their "real" identity.

Classical dances, then, as observed socially and through texts produced out of that society, coincidentally have, in a way, also been conceived to occupy the space of "queerness", that is to say, something that subverts the accepted gender norms. For men who identify as and lead otherwise heterosexual lifestyles, engaging in the classical dances is considered unmanly and feminine. This is best seen in the figure of Jairaj in Mahesh Dattani's 1989 play *Dance Like a Man*. Jairaj, along with his wife Ratna, is an accomplished Bharata Natyam dancer. His early years as a dancer, however, were not easy, having to face his prejudiced, conservative father. Jairaj's father, firstly, had a problem with recognising Jairaj's "art" as anything respectable, seeing as it was not a conventional male hobby. He had paraded himself to be liberal, leading to him consenting to the marriage of his son and Ratna, who did not belong to their community, to support his brand. However, as we see in the course of the play, he is as "conservative as the people ruling over us". He would've made a cricket pitch for Jairaj if his son had been into cricket, but his son's choice being dance rendered him hesitant to approve. Secondly, Jairaj's father had a problem with his guruji being a man with long hair, evidently queer in his expression of gender, coupled with the fact that his mother apparently belonged to a lower caste. He complains to Jairaj that he had never seen "a normal man" with such long hair, nor one walking down the street with his ghungroo going, "chhk chhk chhk chhk". This apprehension heightened when Ratna, in idle conversation, mentioned to him by mistake that Jairaj himself was planning to grow out his hair to enhance his *abhinaya* and that Jairaj would be starting to learn a new dance form that would require

him to dress up as a woman himself. Third, since the eve of capitalism, the prevailing notion has been that the man of the family unit must earn, and must earn sufficiently and by himself enough to feed and clothe his family. This was a far cry from Jairaj's reality; he was the only son of a respectable upper-caste household who was pursuing a field with, to his father's dismay, not many economic prospects at the time. As a cherry, albeit dipped in poison, on top of this, the field was considered not only unmanly and queer, but the art of "prostitutes". At a micro-level, Dattani's play crafts out the perfect picture of liberal hypocrisy and layered oppression, but it is important to remember that even Jairaj's family was operating within the bubble of upper-caste, upper-class privilege. That is only a reality for a handful in India, and further down the social strata, the stigma and oppression only tends to worsen.

The classical dance studio thus exemplifies what queer theorist, José Esteban Muñoz, calls "disidentification" (12): a mode of working "on and against" dominant ideology, using its tools and structures even while recognising their limitations. Queer dancers disidentify with the normative gender expectations of classical dance by learning to perform both masculine and feminine roles as the tradition demands, while infusing those performances with meanings and resonances that exceed the tradition's explicit intentions. Building on Muñoz's idea that disidentification allows subjects to resist and rework the calls of dominant ideology, a queer dancer's misrecognition functions as a generative act. It opens up visibility and creates space for them to actively shape and articulate their own identity. Using Muñoz's theory that "Disidentification permits the subject of ideology to contest the interpellations of the dominant ideology" (12), a misrecognition by the queer dancer subject provides for the visibility and space for them to create their own identity. In his words, "Counterpublicity is

thus born from a modality of disidentification that is essentially an act of *tactical misrecognition* that serves as a bulwark against the effects of dominant publicity”. This analysis reveals that the mobility afforded to subversive gender identities within the dance studio is real but circumscribed. The studio offers sanctuary, a space where crossing gender boundaries is not only permitted but required, yet it remains a conditional sanctuary whose protections evaporate the moment dancers assert that their gender fluidity extends beyond aesthetic technique into lived identity. The effeminate traits that make a dancer “graceful” within the studio mark them as suspect outside it, creating what amounts to a spatial and social closet around queer expression in Indian classical dance.

Mahesh Dattani’s play’s title poses an impossible question—Can one dance like a man when the very grammar of classical dance in India, as seen by the society at large, remains coded as feminine? This paper resolves to provide the grounds for a, but is instead the site from where resistance must begin. Critically situating José Esteban Muñoz’s theory of disidentification allows us to discern how disidentification is neither assimilation nor outright refusal, but rather a third mode that works on, with and against dominant ideology. Raymond Williams’ tripartite division of culture into dominant, residual and emergent discourses (40-42) offers a similar view to this. While heteronormativity may be the accepted dominant norm, the emergent queer culture co-opted by classical Indian dance clings to its underbelly with conviction. Queer dancers practice disidentification constantly, ; they perform both *stri* and *purush bhava* with equal mastery, the androgynous, deified roles of Ardhanarishwar and Brihannalla, they perform the same-sex desires through the safely devotional roles of Radha-Krishna narratives, all while knowing that these performances must remain legible as “tradition” rather than an explicit queerness.

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The Making of Well-Behaved Suffering: Affective Containment and the Cultural

Translation of Crisis

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Abstract

Through case studies across the literary, cinematic and artistic spheres, This paper reconceptualises translation as an affective and sociopolitical procedure rather than a purely linguistic phenomenon. Within this framework, translation operates as a shift in narrative authority, for the wider global circulations, from the stakeholder group(s) to a positional outsider—often a societally dominant—mediator of the culture. Crisis, the paper argues, is preserved precisely to an extent that can be felt without distressing the existing political obligations and hegemonic social framework. The shift facilitates its reformation into either a globalised cultural spectacle or aestheticised into consumable, algorithmically reproducible tropes. This renders it emotionally consumable and politically palatable while nullifying the social accountability and mitigating affected identity.

The paper delves into case studies across the literary, cinematic, and artistic spheres within the Indian context to situate a recurring translational pattern. Nagraj Manjule's *Sairat* places caste as a structurally and systemically antagonistic force, Khaitan's adaptation *Dhadak*, however, restructures the narrative towards class difference and forbidden love. Caste-based marginalisation, in this process, is not erased but subjected to capitalistic translation that dilutes the specificity towards class for pan-India circulation. The movie's end consolidates this shift, it converts caste violence into a condition to be grieved, instead of placing it as a structure to be confronted. Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar*, rooted in gendered trauma and identity, undergoes a cinematic production where its translation by male auteurs does not deny suffering but rather redirects it towards culturally safe alternatives; maternalistic sacrifice in this case.

The paper draws a comparative analysis of Mira Nair's *Monsoon Wedding* and Govind Nihalani's cinematic migration of the play *Party* to examine the political consequentiality of the stakeholder community within the domain of parallel art-house cinema. While both the creations serve as a social critique, Nihalani's stakeholder locus enables critique without affective containment, whereas Nair's externally positioned mediation translates crisis into narratable and serviceable culminating into an ideological closure. Parallel dynamics are witnessed in the arena of visual arts, under practices that satisfy the global aesthetic regime, often without credits, while detaching the history and labor associated. Anita Dube's uncredited appropriation of poet-activist Aamir Aziz's poem "*Sab Yaad Rakha Jaega*" ironically against a velvet backdrop artwork, serves as the case study for commercial translation of literature across mediums.

Engaging with the theories of Sara Ahmed, Aijaz Ahmed, Arjun Appadurai, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak et.al., the paper proposes that translation operates as a technology of power through which varied forms of crisis are selectively preserved, and circulated, rendering affect as a means of containment.

Keywords: narrative authority, cultural mediation, affective containment, Indian literature and cinema, aestheticisation of crisis

Introduction

Translation is commonly described as the transformation of a text from one language to another, but such transformation necessarily involves the reconfiguration of identities embedded in that text.

Linguistic choices carry cultural positions, moral hierarchies, and emotional registers, all of which are tied to how individuals and communities are represented. Translation therefore functions as a site where identities are actively rewritten.

The translator is plagued with three identities: his (subjective or social identity), the writers, and the readers (role or professional identity); i.e., the Self and the Other (Eesa, Maha Tahir). At the same time, the translator must engage with the author's narrative identity and anticipate the expectations of the target readership. Translation thus becomes a space where self and other are continuously negotiated, raising the question of which identity ultimately governs representational choices. When these identity positions remain unreconciled, translators often resort to strategies that either absorb the foreign text into familiar cultural frameworks or preserve its strangeness through

visible difference. These tendencies, commonly discussed as domestication and foreignisation are expressions of how the translator positions the self in relation to the source culture and the target audience. In contexts of intensified global circulation, this tension becomes sharper. Translation increasingly serves markets that demand accessibility without discomfort and difference without disruption. Within this economy of cultural exchange, cosmopolitanism is often proposed as an ethical solution that balances openness to difference with global intelligibility. Michael Cronin's concept of micro-cosmopolitanism, in particular, attempts to address identity negotiation at the level of everyday cultural contact.

Building upon this framework, the first segment of this study examines the cinematic translation of Nagraj Manjule's *Sairat* (2016) into Shashank Khaitan's *Dhadak* (2018). Drawing upon Aijaz Ahmad's postcolonial Marxist critique, this analysis demonstrates how caste-based structural oppression in the regional narrative is reconfigured into class-based interpersonal conflict in the pan-Indian adaptation. Ahmad's theorisation elucidates the mechanisms by which marginal narratives are depoliticised for mainstream consumption: systemic antagonisms are displaced, and affect is curated for audience empathy without structural accountability. In *Dhadak*, caste violence is neutralised into interpersonal tragedy, producing a consumable emotional spectacle that satisfies commercial imperatives while diluting the political urgency embedded in *Sairat*.

The second segment engages with art-house cinema, contrasting Govind Nihalani's *Party* (1984) and Mira Nair's *Monsoon Wedding* (2001). Here, Arjun Appadurai's theorisation of global cultural flows is invoked to explain how the translation of crisis across locational and audience regimes

shapes narrative legibility. Whereas *Party* maintains the uncompromising immediacy of class and political critique, rendering trauma intractable and locally situated, *Monsoon Wedding* mediates conflict for transnational intelligibility, employing color, music, and celebratory closure to contain affect. The translation of crisis, in this sense, operates as a process of affective smoothing, producing narratives that are both culturally specific and globally palatable.

A third dimension considers the gendered mediation of literary texts, exemplified in the cinematic adaptation of Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar* (1950). Drawing upon Sara Ahmed and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the study illustrates how translation reshapes narrative priority and ethical attention. While Khushwant Singh's English translation preserves Pritam's focus on female interiority, the cinematic adaptation contracts the ethical field: multiple female trajectories are reduced to emblematic casualties of Partition, transforming sustained gendered trauma into episodic spectacle. Spivak's theorisation of subalternity clarifies how the narrative authority of women is mediated, often subordinated to institutional or auteurial imperatives, highlighting the ethical stakes inherent in translation.

Finally, the paper examines the appropriation of Aamir Aziz's protest poem *Sab Yaad Rakha Jaega* by Anita Dube in a commercial gallery context. Engaging Emily Apter's critique of global circulation, this segment demonstrates how political identity and crisis can be aestheticised and reconstituted as individual artistic capital, detaching collective urgency from institutionalised spaces of representation. Here, translation functions as symbolic extraction: affect is preserved, but structural and political stakes are muted.

Taken together, these segments illustrate a recurring pattern: translation operates as a technology of affective containment. Across media, literature, cinema, and visual art, crisis is preserved sufficiently to evoke emotion, yet restructured to render it palatable, and socially non-disruptive. By synthesising insights from Ahmad, Appadurai, Ahmed, and Spivak, this study situates translation as a deliberate negotiation of identity, narrative authority, and affect, revealing its power to shape the ethical and political contours of cultural consumption

This study adopts a comparative, qualitative, and interdisciplinary design to examine how the affective containment of translation renders the crisis emotionally consumable exemplified by case studies from the domain of literature and media. The research triangulates textual analysis, critical discourse analysis, and digital ethnography in order to move between literary representation, mediated culture, and the contextual social effects.

The corpus comprises three components. First, cinematic translations in the form of *Dhadak-Sairat* and *Pinjar* are employed as structural references to the study's conceptual apparatus. Second, a purposive sample of *Monsoon Wedding* and *Party* are adopted from the domain of global art-film. Selection criteria remains the translation of the crisis, and engagement to the sociopolitical turmoil of the nation. Third, contemporary affairs of affective containment via cultural translation are observed, as in the context of the Anita Dube-Aamir Aziz case study. The samples are purposive and theoretical, rather than statistically representative.

The analysis proceeds in three stages. The first stage involves engaging with stakeholder material, this includes *Pinjar* by Amrita Pritam, *Party* by Govind Nihalani, and *Sairat* by Ngraj

Manjule. The second stage involves consumption of the translated versions, *Pinjar* by Chandraprakash Dwivedi, *Monsoon Wedding* by Mira Nair, and *Dhadak* by Shashank Khaitan. The final stage involves comparative analysis of the material, and drawing upon critical theories for the same.

Interpretive claims are developed through a triangulated theoretical matrix. Aijaz Ahmad's work highlights how depoliticisation becomes the requisite means for marginal narratives to enter mainstream circuits. Arjun Appadurai's theory supplies vocabulary for the global cultural flow and locality. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concepts are evoked to analyse how translation becomes a tool to shift narrative focus and authority. Emily Apter's critique of global circulation is engaged with to contextualise the intelligible palatability of crisis under translation. These frameworks are applied conjunctively to demonstrate how representation, affect, and translation cohere into a transnational grammar of sociopolitical structures.

To link mediated representations with social practice, the Vadehra art gallery incident is treated as case studies. The case is corroborated through multiple reportage sources and situated within the broader representational and affective patterns identified in the corpus.

1. From Caste to Class: The Cultural Translation of *Sairat* into *Dhadak*

Nagraj Manjule's National Film Award-winning *Sairat* (2016) is, in crux, a love story between Parshya, the lower-caste son of a fisherman, and Archi, the upper-caste daughter of a landlord. The film became the highest-grossing Marathi movie of all time and the first in the language to garner Rs. 100 Cr+ worldwide (box office data), reshaping expectations of what regional cinema could achieve. Politically

active and deeply grounded in caste realities, *Sairat* derives its stakeholder narration from the lived logics of caste, shaped by Manjule's own experiences. The crisis then positions caste as a structural antagonist, rather than dissolving conflict in the consumerist trope of the star-crossed forbidden love. Violence, in Manjule's cinema, exists as raw, hard-hitting, functioning as collective enforcement of the social status quo.

Dhadak (2018), directed by Shashank Khaitan, is the Hindi-language adaptation of *Sairat*. It narrates the story of Madhu and Parthavi, son of a middle-class café owner and daughter of the local politician. The rendition pivots the locus to the comparatively urban space of Udaipur, while shifting the central conflict from the foregrounded caste-based distinction to class difference that rests in the backdrop to the plot. The crisis herein becomes primordially of class difference, typical to the formulaic trope of Bollywood; an additional layer of family honor is evoked to replace the explicit caste pride central to *Sairat*. Consequently, the social antagonism is depicted in an interpersonal manner, rather than being articulated as a systematic flaw.

The adaptation acts not merely as a linguistic adaptation, but also as a shift from the regional audience to a wider strata of pan-India audience, a multiplicity in viewership. The centrality of caste does not disappear, but is rather translated into a globally palatable format that enables widespread circulation without threatening the dominant spectator strata, to that of forbidden love and class difference. The external positionality of Khaitan further entails that caste becomes ineffable, while the violence loses the structuralism and is rather deemed individual-driven, of honor, of tragedy; this weakens the sociopolitical antagonism.

Referencing Aijaz Ahmad's Marxist postcolonial cultural critique, *Dhadak's* adaptation of *Sairat* exemplifies how, for marginal narratives to enter mainstream circuits, evident depoliticisation is necessary, sympathy needs to be garnered without enthralling structural discomfort. Successful capitalistic translation, Ahmad outlines, can be created by displacing conflict and converting substantial contradictions into societally soluble emotions and interpersonal conflict that are situated at a single antagonist (Ahmad 79).

The translation renders the social critique to a tragic love story of youthful rebellion, with emotional loss acting as empty catharsis, curating a safe space to experience cursory emotions without real-life consequentiality. This globalised product procures inevitability of punishment, neutralised within the audience due to repeated similar narratives, and a softened consumable cultural spectacle is observed; the tempering of the title from *Sairat*, literally Wild, to *Dhadak*, literally Heartbeat, reflects the already argued point of sociocultural tolerability. Despite higher production costs, *Dhadak* achieved the same worldwide box-office collection as *Sairat*.

2. From Aftermath to Event: Gendered Selection in the Film Adaptation of *Pinjar*

When the narrative voice of a woman writer passes into media translated, and directed by other genders, the question is not whether distortion must occur, but which elements are granted narrative priority and which are quietly thinned out. That shift is not automatically a matter of chauvinism. Khushwant Singh's English translation of *Pinjar*, also produced by a male writer, does not dismantle Amrita Pritam's ethical architecture; it largely preserves her attention to women's interior lives, their negotiations with stigma, and survival. What changes in the cinematic version is both the gender of the

mediator alone, but largely axis of selection: Although the film has been widely acclaimed and awarded for its representation of Partition, such recognition largely affirms its success as a historical and communal narrative; a critical reading against the grain is necessary to examine how this acclaim coexists with, and may even depend upon, the displacement of the novel's feminist ethical center.

Pritam's novel as one knows is more about a slow, bruising cartography of what social death does to women. Violence is present, but it is not the organising principle of the narrative. The organising principle is aftermath: rejection by family, coerced belonging, moral dilemmas that do not resolve into heroic gestures, and acts of care that occur in secrecy rather than in public. It is evident that during the Independence of the Nation, where the country was being divided on the bases of religion, women were being victimised, oppressed and traumatised for being a 'Woman'. This has been rendered in writings of various writers who have shown an agonising and harrowing condition of women by citing events which occurred during partition of India and Pakistan. But this was only one side of the coin as on the other side there were women who strongly opposed the harassment being done on them or others either by killing or dying in the struggle (Rawson, Jessica, and Hira Bose). *Pinjar* has broken the stereotype image of women and shown a strong character like Pooro, who defies the social law and acts like an impregnable bird who can never be captured again in the cage of society. The aforesaid novel clearly depicts the resilience of women and enunciates the victimised as strong, powerful gender and keep returning to women who do not survive, who do not return, who are exchanged, hidden, silenced, or erased. In doing so, it builds a collective feminine condition rather than a single emblematic victim.

The novel is built around Pooro's interior life and her fractured identity as Pooro and Hamida, although the inward struggle is never isolated from a wider female world. Unlike the movie the book opens with psychic infestation, Pooro imagining a "worm" inside her body that she longs to tear out, a metaphor that anchors trauma within the female body (Pritam 1). This inward wound is then placed alongside the lives of other women: Kammo, Tara, the mad woman, and later Lajo, whose varied fates create a comparative field of suffering, resistance, madness, and endurance. Pooro's ethical decisions gain weight precisely because they unfold within this network of women. Her double existence, "Pooro by night and Hamida by day," is a sustained condition of divided survival that structures the novel's moral logic (Hassan, Hamza).

The film contracts this ethical field by removing Kammo and Tara altogether and retaining only a minimal set of female sufferers, primarily the mad woman, the refugee girl, and Lajo. This contraction becomes important to notice as it alters how meaning is produced. Without the layered presence of multiple women negotiating different forms of captivity and resistance, Pooro's choices are no longer framed against a spectrum of female destinies but against the chaos of communal violence. What the novel presents as structural gendered trauma becomes, in the film, episodic victimhood within riots. The shift is subtle but decisive: women move from being moral agents situated within a gendered social crisis to being emblematic casualties of a national catastrophe. In this process, resilience is overshadowed by ruin, and endurance is replaced by spectacle. Pooro's suffering on the screen starts in 1946 and extends up to 1947 where the film ends. Dwivedi does not lengthen Pooro's suffering for eleven long years. It is often argued that as a period film, *Pinjar* succeeds because it is careful with

architecture, dialect, costume, and pacing, and because it situates communal violence immediately and unmistakably within the historical moment of 1946-47, thereby fulfilling the generic expectations of Partition cinema. From this angle, Dwivedi's steady narrative rhythm and visual authenticity can be read as marks of historical responsibility and remarkable. Yet it is important to analyse this against the grain as this defence rests on a narrow understanding of what fidelity to a literary text entails. Amrita Pritam did not write *Pinjar* merely as a chronicle of a violent year, nor as a backdrop novel designed to stage riots with ethnographic accuracy. Her narrative is temporally expansive and ethically concentrated on what happens to women before, during, and long after the moment of political rupture. By compressing this temporal spread into a spectacle-driven Partition sequence, the film converts sustained gendered trauma into episodic communal catastrophe. Dwivedi's own pre-release remarks clarify that his interpretive priority lay in staging the collapse of social order and communal harmony rather than in pursuing the novel's sustained inquiry into women's moral survival; he admits that his knowledge of Partition was mediated through texts and films, and he singles out the "crumbling structure of society" as what he found most striking in *Pinjar*. (Rawson, Jessica, and Hira Bose).

3. Art-House Critique and Global Legibility: Translating Crisis in *Party* and *Monsoon*

Wedding

Within the nation and beyond, art house cinema exists as a staunch sociopolitical critique, often aimed at the proletariat and excessive materialism; Govind Nihalani's *Party* and Mira Nair's *Monsoon Wedding* are two films that explore the theme on a domestic and diasporic level, respectively. Both

films are centered in elite, urban households over the span of a social gathering, and attempt to expose class, gender, and moral hypocrisy. However, the media differ starkly in the context of the translation of crisis; the translation herein operates across locational regimes.

Set against the backdrop of an evening party hosted by Damayanti Rane, a rich middle-aged widow, Nihalani's *Party* facilitates a sharp political satire at the post-emergency liberal affluent class. On the cinematographic front, the framing remains claustrophobic and dialogue-heavy, deliberately limiting the emotional release to propel structural discomfort. Intellectuals are revealed to be complicit, self-serving, and morally evacuated in the runtime of the film, with the crisis suspended throughout. The film culminates with the death of poet-revolutionary Amrit, signalling the absence of resolution and/or redemption; the societal fractures are revealed, but not mended, rather deemed permanent.

Nair's *Monsoon Wedding*, released in 2001, revolves around the extravagant wedding at the Verma household; navigating the lives of the urban elites and through its parallel narratives outlines sociocultural conflicts amongst the strata. Crisis here, although variegated, is acknowledged and narrated, but ultimately resolved into containment and subtle resolution. The outsider positioning of Nair, in context to the sociocultural setting of the nation, transforms political impasse into cultural vitality. Even the issue of sexual assault is voiced and believed; however, ultimately folded into a celebratory ending.

Drawing upon Arjun Appadurai's work on Global Cultural Flow and the Production of Locality, one can argue that *Party* differs from *Monsoon Wedding*, especially in regard to the global

legibility. In alignment with Appadurai's argumentation that crisis is translated into recognisable liberal forms, for global intelligibility, the cultural texts circulating worldwide must thus perform locality. (Appadurai 178) Contextually, in *Party*, there is no attempt to perform Indian-ness since the film remains politically and commercially uninterested in export. The trauma, thus, is not softened or aestheticised. Contrariwise, *Monsoon Wedding* performs the Indian-ness wherein Indian family structure is rendered colorful, conflicted, and ethically self-correcting; the systemic and societal asymmetry is attributed to the myopia of the dysfunctional family structure. Trauma is contained through affect, translated into a global liberal legibility.

In *Party*, the crisis is not narrated; it circulates pragmatically within the atmosphere with no moral resolution. *Monsoon Wedding* addresses patriarchy, sexual abuse, postcolonial identity, and generational and social conflicts, but continually within the framework of color and music. An eventual affirmation follows. Here, translation operates as emotional smoothing, trauma becomes ethically resolved and narratively legible so that the family, and in situ the audience, can move forward. Global grammar of resilience, as Appadurai outlines, is followed. (Appadurai 183)

4. From Protest to Property: Cultural Translation and Symbolic Extraction in Contemporary Art

The controversy centres on Anita Dube's use of lines from Aamir Aziz's protest poem *Sab Yaad Rakha Jayega* in several artworks exhibited at Vadehra Art Gallery, Delhi, without the poet's prior consent. Aziz, whose poem emerged during the anti-Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) protests and

became widely circulated as a chant of resistance, accused Dube of appropriating his work within a commercial gallery setting, where the pieces were displayed and offered for sale (Ghoshal, Somak).

While Dube acknowledged what she termed an “ethical lapse” and stated that her intention was to honour the poem, Aziz described the act as theft and erasure, arguing that his politically situated voice had been absorbed into elite art circuits without his knowledge or agency.

This episode can be read as a case of cultural translation in which both crisis and political identity are reconstituted as they move from the sphere of collective protest into institutional art economies. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues, cultural translation is never a neutral transfer of meaning but a process shaped by power, in which dominant structures determine how subaltern voices are rendered legible, often at the cost of their political specificity. In this sense, Aziz’s poem undergoes not merely a change of medium but a transformation in function: from a performative political utterance embedded in bodily presence, risk, and collective address, to an aesthetic object situated within regimes of display, authorship, and exchange.

While the language of protest remains visually present in the gallery installation, crisis is preserved only as representational content, detached from the immediacy of state violence, surveillance, and mass mobilisation that originally produced the poem. What is translated is not the political condition itself but its affective residue, rendered suitable for contemplation rather than confrontation. This aligns with Emily Apter’s critique of global cultural circulation, where crisis is often aestheticised and redistributed as a cultural sign, allowing institutions to exhibit political urgency without participating in its risks or consequences.

Within this translational shift, the poet's identity as a politically positioned subject is displaced by the artist's institutional authorship, which governs how the work is framed, valued, and circulated. Authorship, in this context, becomes a mechanism through which narrative authority and economic benefit are reassigned. The gallery thus functions not merely as a site of display but as a translational filter that converts collective political expression into individual artistic capital, revealing how cultural translation can operate as a form of symbolic extraction rather than solidaristic exchange.

Conclusion

The paper demonstrates how translation operates as a cultural tool of affective containment, guarding the narrative framework that governs how crisis is circulated within dominant social economies.

Through the case studies of *Sairat-Dhadak*, *Pinjar*, *Party-Monsoon Wedding*, and the appropriation of Aamir Aziz's *Sab Yaad Rakha Jaaega*, it shows how the testimonial authority shifts from the stakeholder to mediating figures and institutions. This shift renders the preservation of the crisis, but the intensity and consequence witness an adjustment that nullifies social accountability and mitigates the identity of the affected. Caste violence is repackaged into the trope of forbidden love, gendered survival is organised into historical spectacle, sociopolitical conflicts witness contained resolution, and protest is converted into aesthetic property. These translations ensure wider global circulation, and newfound recognition while structural conflicts and political impasse merge into the backdrop; what results is a recurring pattern within the sphere of media, one that invites empathy without confrontation, sympathy without consequences.

By outlining affective containment as substantial to translation, the paper critiques the celebratory neutralised forms of cultural mobility induced by translation, and insists on situating it as a site of power and ideological management.

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Victuals

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Open palms

once foretold destiny,

now, with fingers clenched

around blue light;

radiated—

not emitted—

One cannot tell

a goose from a man.

The goose left the house

wearing a faux leather jacket again—

because it's Friday night again.

Worth quantified;

greed compartmentalised;

into a grid—

aestheticised;

gluttony, gluttony, gluttony;

of the soul;

of the body;

of eyes that masticate all the time;

a meal served with each upward swipe

In liquid crystal.

better than ceramic

And carved with mass credence.

‘human’ is an obsolete term—

says the newest update.

With this version,

we are solipsistic little universes

that feed like quasars

with circumambulating minds.

fingers retrace their patterns daily—

As on facing neurological decline.

the metropolis barges upon my senses.

it leaves me gasping—

but does not leave me.

I forage on crossroads for bullet points.

this city

tantalizes;

tempts me to dream more;

fondles me,

as I hang

onto another high-rise;

but all of this information is futile.

across temporal spans and topography,

the market

istheculturestillcelebrated—

hypnosiswillbecomplete

whencreaturesforgettoclosetheireyes.

I consume, therefore I am.

The contemporary mall-goer does not speak

In digressing riddles;

butaphrasedsummary;

A greater globe could not be known by me.

O to commit the blasphemy of starvation.

No Exit

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It will perish at the

bridge where no one meets

It will turn into something else—

the one-winged, beakless phoenix.

Flapping,

pulverised

Slumberous birds in the trees

Jolted awake

they fled to see

Whose ashes are these?

Wittgenstein wrote, “The limits of my language are the limits of my world.”

I use language to describe the world before me and the world inside me; I grasp reality with the

loose strings of letters. The dictionary is the next best thing to god.

Yet I am lost in the bilingual passage.

What does it mean to speak one language, and to write in another?

To forget its alphabet—

first to learn, first to lose.

At what point words began to disappear?

Vocabulary thinned,

Half-familiar letters turned into strange shapes.

Yet it never goes away.

I see words being translated from Hindi to English, and English to Hindi.

Like sitting in a slaughterhouse.

Distorted yet alike;

Boars skinned from the same knife.

How apart can they be in this abattoir?

So far.

They are two people who will never understand each other.

Two people never understand each other anyway.

For Kafka wrote, “I keep trying to convey something which cannot be conveyed, to explain

something which cannot be explained, something in my bones, which can only be experienced in these same bones.”

Translated words,

weak made weaker.

Children’s heads buried in workbooks,

Of letters and calligraphy— a, b, c

Did I mention I have forgotten

The Hindi alphabet?

The tiger laughs

The dove sings its wordless song

The children now repeat in

Singsong

a, b, c, d, e, f, g

h, i, j, k, l, m, n, o, p

Candies are doled out to the ones

Who recite the oppressor’s alphabet well—

from a to z.

But now it is their language too,

No man can own a tongue.

Yet it abandons her—

All coherence,

Once the life-giving thing.

Rummaging through remnants

Limited, limited.

Yet it never goes away

I will write until the last light goes out.

Limited it may be, yet the soul enlarges,

Atoms multiply.

Limited I may be, yet I love it all the same.

I will always dwell in language,

and I will do my unbelonging here.

not a last resort,

a House where

I am eternally lodged.

No exit.

Its not Normal | Its Constant

Chunchangliu Gonmei

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Note: The poem is a Twin Cinema,

“Written in two parallel columns, each can be read vertically as independent narratives, often presenting correlating or contrasting perspectives. The true magic emerges when read horizontally across both columns, revealing an entirely new narrative that transcends the individual parts.”

Cited: Twin Cinema Poetry: Singapore’s Revolutionary Poetic Form

<p>It's not normal, hands sewing together an apology It's not normal this mouth that whispers to me, kisses me good and It's not normal words meant to land so softly like snow on skin only to begin to thaw</p>	<p>It's constant clawing, tearing, ripping me again saying I was wrong, I was weak for a moment, only a moment It's constant bites, again and again and again, leaves purple and pink bruises It's constant grip on my throat my heart my spirit they harden like glue and render me fixed, constant I will break if I try to flee, even slowly</p>
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Why Can't Halwa Stay Halwa?

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Why can't halwa stay halwa?

Why is it chai tea and not just chai?

You can't have bread bread,

Just learn to call it naan.

Americans say football and don't mean soccer,

Can we say halwa and not mean pudding?

When there isn't an answer,

Does 'close enough' always suffice?

Do you translate language or tradition?

Footnotes don't take much space.

Spectrum Reflection

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[L.S.

EABU—

GTK.]

IANAL.

IMHO—

C.R.E.A.M,

D.E.I.

DG,

ASICS;

CAPTCHA,

dsp,

dsvp,

GGWP.

LIFO,

ALAP,

ICYMI,

DIY.

YWMV,

Aoe,

COL,

NCND—

BANANA,

NIMBY,

NIABY,

NOME;

EPCOT,

FCFS.

Ag,

loq.

AFAICT,

ACAB;

CAVE.

A,S,L?

NQOCD,

act

RFR—

RSVP,

EFL,

ENY,

etal.

IFF.

DTR,

RFC,

RBAR—

DLTBGYD

ASAP,

h.c,

CMIAW,

ITALY.

KE

LLTI,

OOBE—

N/K/A

ASD;

ANTY.

NPO,

NHB,

IDDI.

(GTG.

EOM.)

Translation:

[Lectori Salutem (greetings to the reader).

Explain Acronyms Before Use—

Good to know.)

I am not a lawyer.

In my humble opinion—

Cash rules everything around me,

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

Dei Gratia (by the grace of God),

Anima Sana In Corpore Sano (a sound mind in a sound body);

Completely Automated Public Turing test to tell Computers and Humans

Apart, *Decessit sine prole* (died without issue),

Decessit sine vitae patria (died within father's lifetime),

Good game, well played.

Last in, first out,

As late as possible,

In case you missed it,

Do it yourself.

Your Wallet May Vary;

Area of effect,

Cost of living,

Neither confirm nor deny—

Build Absolutely Nothing Anywhere Near Anything,

Not In My Backyard,

Not In Anyone's Backyard,

Not On Mars Either;

Experimental Prototype Community Of Tomorrow,

First come, first served.

Silver,

Loquitur (he speaks).

As far as I can tell,

All Cops Are Bastards;

Citizens Against Virtually Everything.

Age, Sex, Language?

Not Quite Our Class, Dear;

Aetatis (at the age of)

Right of first refusal—

Répondez s'il vous plaît (respond, if you please),

Male chauvinist pig,

English as a foreign language,

Enemy,

Et Alia (and others),

Identification, friend or foe.

Determine the relationship,

Request for comments,

Row by agonising row—

Don't let the Bastards grind you down.

As soon as possible,

Honoris causa (for the sake of honour),

Correct me if I am wrong,

I'll truly always love you.

Knowledge engineering

Limiting Long Term Illness,

Out of body experience—

Now known as

Autism spectrum disorder;

Acronyms, no thank you.

Nothing by mouth,

No holds barred,

I don't do initialisms.

[Good to go.

End of Message.]

Qilins and Zombies/ Rebirth: Revenge and Second Chances

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Death. Is it the end? Or the beginning?

All you can see is flames as they slowly engulf you. You can do nothing, exhausted by constant betrayal, each one chipping a part of you that you did not know existed. Death, your silent, sweet companion greets you— Until life brings you back into the living world, years into the past, reigniting your passions for revenge. Or... perhaps not? You just got hit by our darling truck-kun on your way back from work. You end up waking up in school and trying to make up for your regrets.

If you end up in any of these cases, you are sure to be diagnosed with rebirth-syndrome common to C-Novels. But about truck-kun, bid him a teary goodbye, he's Japanese, so he's not so common. There is nothing new about reincarnation in Indian culture, or any other Asian culture for that matter. We've heard about it in Mahabharata, with characters like Amba; who takes revenge on Bhishma as Shikkandi. This idea is also integral to Hindu culture, as Karma plays a significant role in the cycle of reincarnation. To understand the Chinese idea of reincarnation, we must back-track to our home-boy Siddhartha and his journey in understanding life. Fast-forward a few hundred years, Buddhism is now one of China's most popular religions. According to Buddhism, the cycle of birth and death (called samsara) will continue until you attain enlightenment or nirvana, the ultimate goal of Buddhism.

The one thing that almost all rebirth novels have in common is that their protagonists remember

their former life. Also, the idea of ‘fixing’ the errors of the past is heavily emphasised. It is not only the present that can be mended, but also the past. The boundaries of time are reimagined: what if the future and the past mutually affect each other? I find that the most interesting thing about the human mind is how it comes up with the quirkiest ideas— which has probably influenced my taste in novels. The rebirth genre showcases just that, with its varieties of rebirths, and the motivations of the people

who have been reborn. You could end up in your own body, or you could end up in someone else’s. There is also the possibility of ending up in the future, in the past, or a time beyond your body’s timeline. This is the novelty of the genre of rebirth: to stay within the limits of the human imagination while introducing aspects of the supernatural. The vicarious nature of the novel is further exacerbated by adding rebirth to the mix. Before, regret had no medicine, but now it does. The combinations one can make with other genres is endless. On to my recommendations, which probably are not the best (I have a bad time recommending the right books to the right people). However, they are my favourites, and I find them to have the most interesting twists as well as beautiful emotional development, both of which I feel are key to a good rebirth novel.

The first novel is called ‘Bai Fumei in the ‘70s’ by Sù mèi píng shēng (Bai Fumei is a term that refers to any woman that is white in skin-tone, rich and beautiful, a parallel to the tall, dark, handsome men) A brief plot summary is as follows: The young Zhao Lanxiang thought she had married the love of her life, but her first marriage left her in shambles. This was until she met her second husband in her later years. Though the time they spent together seemed momentary, they weathered the storms of the past together. Death was, however, inevitable to their separation. After dying of old age, she woke up to find herself in her teenage years in the 1970s, before she had ever married her first husband. She decided to provide a good life for her beloved and help him avoid the misfortunes to come. This novel is more of a slice-of-life. Set in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China, it has numerous historical references. It has a well-developed and succinct plot for the Modern era-Rebirth genre.

In my next recommendation; Cen Feng was Xu Zhaixing's idol, an underrated new star in the entertainment industry. He was her light in her darkest days. And his light dimmed when he took his own life. The always smiling idol was secretly depressed, and it was only his death that revealed his tragedy: The toxic environment of the entertainment industry and his utter lack of companionship as an orphan. Xu Zhaixing died in a car accident six months later and was reborn into her high school years, ten years before Cen Feng's suicide. She would do everything in her power to build a world

where Cen Feng would shine, protecting him from everything that sought to harm him. 'Entertainment Industry is Mine' by Chun Dao Han is truly a poignant view on the dark alleys of the entertainment industry. It explores the theme of depression, as Cen Feng has also reincarnated ten years back into the past (This is not a spoiler! It's revealed quite early in the novel.), it takes years for Cen Feng to even remember the feeling of joy. The most beautiful aspect of this novel is how Cen Feng and Xu Zhaixing heal from their past and find peace.

Imagine this: Two people who want to kill each other for years fall in love. When they finally get on a plane to get married, they are reborn back to the days when they fought the most. This is 'Reborn with an Old Enemy on the Day of our Marriage' by Lin Zhiluo. We have our two main characters Lin Qian, the leader of the academics and Zheng PingQing, the school tyrant leading the delinquents; two lovers who act like enemies on the surface. This is not an enemies-to-lovers trope. The two main characters are already in a relationship but there is no lack of banter between the two, making reading about such a couple pleasurable. It is also a blessing to see communication in a sea of misunderstandings. The main aim of this novel is to right the wrongs of their past: due to their fighting that lasted years, the futures of those around them were severely affected. They also find hidden conspiracies that had threatened their lives and take revenge.

I have probably not delivered on the 'revenge' part of the rebirth deal, but I really don't like melodramas as much and find such novels to be quite a drag. But if you do love melodramas, you

do you. I just hope that you have found another reason to pick up a Chinese novel.

Catastrophic Crisis Crawls

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It did not sneak up on us while we slept,
It was a serpent-like thing we fed;
From the friction and firewood we burned,
Thus sparked a destruction that could ~~not~~ be undone.

Mother said, "Forget not your tongue,"
Father said, "Forget not your home,"
World said, "Forget all you've known,"
Employer said, "WORK. Or DOOM."

Capital C. says, "Create! Innovate!
(But most importantly, ACCUMULATE!)"

But I am a renegade, a resistor
In the circuit of flow of trade;
Sometimes I even pirate!

But I know the weapons of mass destruction

Are far too many to NOT operate,

So when they tell us to “pick our battles”,

We must choose ALL and delegate.

Before the Cage captures all,

We must dare to care, care to dare.

BEWARE:

When they tell us to give up,

For then is when the Revolution is here.

Cry of the Bachman's Warbler

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You may find us in the midst of summer, Yellow wings outshining the sun,

Burnt burgundy hues when our skin molts As the trees wilt

As the rivers freeze and the sun shines

Drearier than it did months ago.

We think not of our weeping children—

Yes, my love, I know the food runs scarcer Than a white man's pity for his own kind. We think not
of our dying brethren,

In our minds:

We dream—

River water rushes through forests filled with fish.

And we wake to the wind swept days,

We embrace the sky with open arms.

The firmament ruffles through the grooming of

A dozen pecking mothers.

We spread our wings bright and beat back The blue with the joy of our souls.

Stoic we were.

Stoic we remained as our land was Ravaged apart by many a man's thirst.

Red oak—

Oh! How I miss our mortal mirrors—

They shed as we do when the air thickens. Marshland and wood,

Swampland and mud,

Taken apart by

Invaders disguised as traders of the earth.

Home is not the sky.

Home is not within the observer's eye. Home is not Florida's fervour or Cuba's coast. Home is loss and Home means losing.

For our kind, Home is temporary,

Permanence is worthwhile if the man-made gods had been kind enough

To leave a home for us.

We hide from the keen man's vision.

Lest our colours be too hideous for his swollen tongue to utter.

Today, we are gone but yesterday remembers

The echo of our melody within the brisk river's rinse.

The shrillness of our sound among the raging oak trees.

The beauty of our bodies, lithe and understanding.

Tomorrow you shall know In the marrow of your bone, The delirious sorrow.

What a pity it remains

To not have heard us sing.

State Machinery

Aadya Srivastava

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The axes are levelled,
Their measurements lowered every second;
Every minute, a fist rises.
Newer degrees are created,
Designed to butcher satire and songs,
Fitting them into the rigidities of right and wrong.

The wide old altitudes are altered,
Forgotten to sycophancy,
Or *double-thunk* as threats!
Threats to norms and borders,
Threats to morality and orders.

The overarching loudspeakers
Robotically proclaim:

‘Fists shall be slain

When fists shall be raised.’

Within these cacophonous frequencies,

(Of wavelengths exceeding 20kHz)

The proles locate their music

They locate and imitate and reiterate—

“If fists shall be raised,

Fists shall be slain.”

Thumping their ribs in jingoistic fervour,

Their frail wrists wait to die-out.

“The State—”

-Silenced.

“The Government—”

-Massacred.

“The Media—”

-Slaughtered.

“The Constitution—”

-Jailed.

“Cinema—”

-Killed.

Each fist was slain jarringly,

The green, blue and white ones, more severely.

Untouched were the hands complicit in erasure

But the axe will always remember—

“Whenever fists shall be raised,

Fists shall be slain.”

Religion Through the Eyes of God

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Trauma through the eyes of

An armoured tank heading a hundred heinous miles per hour;

Clashing with the mother of two and leaving her levelled on the spot—

Concrete and woman indistinguishable.

The city is drowned in saffron tonight;

The men bathe in its sombre glow and await a God They know not.

For what God is valued higher than hunger?

What God is worth worshipping if not violence?

What God is loved more lewdly than lust?

Yet,

The men await

A god they know not.

Forsaken lies the temple's beggar and her two children company among the stray
dogs— Equally forgotten.

Pain through the eyes of the glass dagger;

Darting through air to strike the half gnawed feet of the half dead dog.

His crime: worshipping the anointed land with his bloody feet;

Staining the altar with his salivating form—

Which God is his if yours is not?

The land is stained with blood tonight;

The lights are out in Bethlehem but the Christmas tree shines in the land of the free.

I thought, wrongly of course, that your god is not a god of death: But I see now that all gods are
gods of death.

How easily forgotten are the children of Palestine?

(As easily as those in Kashmir staining the saffron fields red with their cherry
blood)

I thought, righteously, that your god was not a god of peace.

In your eyes, reflected in a million shards— Shame.

Mother

Anushvi Sharma

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She speaks in a tongue I do not understand. I see her mouth move to make shapes, and I know there is noise, but it is unfathomable to me. I look at her, puzzled, and she is angry, frustrated. So tired of me, sick of the distance it puts between us. I am straining to hear her, but the chasm is so wide that all she hears back is her echo. Every day she tries to communicate with me, and I smile and shake my head, because she is beautiful and I love her very much. It is simple to love her. She took care of me, nurtured me in my sickness and kissed my temple so tenderly. In my fever, shaking and hazy and terrifying, in the heat of what felt like certain death, her hands were cool and gentle. I recall the calluses of her hard-working hands against my sweaty neck when I was bent over the commode, clutching the white porcelain with whiter hands, retching and heaving. In the haze of madness, she was still, like an island is against the wild waves the storm wrecks against its shores.

I brought havoc into her life, so I know she must not love me so simply. To her I represent darkness and sacrifice. It must be difficult to feed a mouth that does not speak the same vocabulary as her; that cannot learn. When I smile and shake my head in stupid incomprehension, she frowns, tired lines etched in her face. I frown back, and reach a hand across to her, to ease them away. It is painless, smiling. But frowning hurts. It pulls on my face when I turn down my lips to copy her frown, and she does not know this, because then maybe she would frown less. She dodges my hand, still scowling, and my heart pangs; strong and aching. I am scared. She is upset, and she will sulk, and I will wring my hands, and not know For the following days, she is silent. She pretends I do not exist, though she feeds me and waters what to do.

me like a plant. She does not sing, or dance, or laugh at all. I try to reach for her, but she sidesteps and ignores me. I am anxious, chest paining and brain spinning. I do not know how to fix a problem of this magnitude. She does not understand that language does not matter, that emotions can be enough for this to last. I love her as a daughter, but I do not understand her. She is not far away to me. She is tangible, next to me, warm and careful and completely accessible. She does not understand, that language will not change the way I already know her. I understand her, gravedigger hands, dirt in her nails, her tea scorching hot like the sun, her teeth straight and white. I know her scarred face, her aching back that needs to be massaged everyday with hot oil. I know her colossal love just as well as I know her oppressive silence, and her fiery rage that bursts like a volcano, hot magma, but sputters and dies like a flame at the end of the wick. I know her cunning, using things in ways no one else thinks to—making sure nothing goes to waste. I love her and it is easy to do so, but she presumes that it is in its essence a simple love. She saved me, so I love her. She is silly to believe this, because language can not change what goes beyond skin and flesh. My love for her has driven itself through all that is superficial. I am devoted to her, like a daughter is devoted to her mother. She has given me life, and in rebirth, has made herself my god, my king.

She is speaking again, and I am aware that it is in a language that she wishes I could understand. I am aware that it is probably something important, but in staggering relief of hearing her voice again, all I can do is grab her hands and weep. I am kneeling at her feet, crying into her skirts, an infant, holding her hands to stay upright. I am so glad, so furiously happy that she speaks again. I am like an unreasonable lamb, butting my head into the back of her legs, stubbornly demanding attention. Of course she gets tired. She is baffled, mouth hanging open at this outburst from me. It occurs to me that she may not know me the way I know her. She may not know how strongly she can affect me, and how her frowns hurt my face, and her silences are needles in my brain, and her anger is blood in my ears. She says something, then. It is gentle, calming, and so soft. I do not know what she says, but I listen, and it sounds painfully maternal. It is chiding. It sounds like *“I love you.”*

Life Leaves Few Words

Tarini Puli

I Year, BA English (Hons)

Lady Shri Ram College

Words intricated into my being

Like the ideas of an inventor

Inanimate neural is coming—

To replace, they said, my mind's renter.

So I got replaced heeding to it, *click*;

Like deforestation promised development,

My mind, my imagination turned bleak,

Language declined, wasteland settlement.

Peers saw the better, I gloomed—

Fading away is my mediocrity,

I get the regards that termed,

Intellect dawned to make me gritty.

My mind determined the path,

Curiosity made me avoid the *click*.

The ones who did not, overlooked my wrath,

Like the leaf fused to brick.

Rising myself to be lofty,

But wondering am I often,

Subtle search I do to make me faulty,

Withering the leaves that revive the rotten.

Translating the humane by the machine,

Made me anxious but voices of life reconciled,

Rhyming the words that make the world serene.

Fallen leaf finds its roots to once again yield.

without title, finished at 2:05 am

Gowri S.

II Year BA English (Hons).

Lady Shri Ram College

and ye who hast erred, ye who art king,
behold my spectacle, lay bare my sins,
hold your court and brand my skin.
call upon your gods, your hidebound brethren,
call upon your priests and your loyal countrymen.
an aberration has to justify itself,
an aberration needs to explain,
here i am—
an aberration, never to be uncontained.
but you—
normal you, perfect you,
ye who art perfect in your god's visage,
ye who felled nature, ye who art king,
just simply are, no reason, no rhyme,
you were here, and here art you,

the conceivable you, the indomitable truth.

never mind your blood and mine

shine the same crimson,

never mind your eyes and mine

shed the same tears.

for when the stocks need legs

and the noose needs necks,

you'll bind it to me, the inconceivable me,

the sullied being, the relentless falsity.

and ye who hast felled me, ye who art king,

ye who art sullied crimson need n't hide your sins,

for an aberration needs to be ripped out,

an aberration needs to be contained,

and here i am, an aberration,

an aberration laid bare with branded skin,

and ye who hast felled me, ye who art king,

ye who art sullied crimson need n't hide your sins.

A Yearly Affair

Poojita Chand

II Year, BA English (Hons).

Lady Shri Ram College

Clad in opaque grey-white,

Each winter, this city becomes

A widower—

Lift the veil to find another.

Every morning a mourning,

Who has the time to sing dirges?

I was born on a December morning,

I immediately fell sick,

Lying in the incubator for weeks like

I lie in my room now.

Waiting for it to pass,

So much life lost.

Lost season,

Like a year with no summer.

Sunless sky,

The plant that cannot photosynthesise

Wilts, weakens and dies.

Seeing how all is all,

Souls bend and languish—

A season where all self is

Obscure, obsolete,

Gone.

Going out is like

Visiting someone filial in the prison;

Their faceless visages all ash.

People walk everywhere

They play and pray they eat

Masked and unmasked,

Laughing, coughing, unhindered;

Like children who have learnt to

Live with their chronic disease.

Dissent dies in their

Aching throats

'Benign and seasonal;

It will pass'

I could have borne a

Pair of infected lungs

If that was all there was.

Drawing Love as I Saw it at Six

Sakshi Singh

III Year, BA English (Hons).

Lady Shri Ram College

My art teacher says that good art describes raw emotion.

I want to draw love.

A brush in hand, I stare at the white canvas sheet. It stares back.

A voice rings in my head,

“Think from a childlike perspective, she says— innocent, pure, worry-free!”

My best piece.

Love as it read to me at six.

A house tour.

An unfinished plate earns me two slaps to the face

Moments later, my mother calls me back to the kitchen,

A plate of oranges in her hand;

She sits next to me, peeling them one at a time,

“Keep the sour ones away, only sweet bits for my princess!”

She laughs. I hadn't heard her laugh in a while.

In the evening, I see her relish the leftover pieces.

The overwhelming scent of orange peels brings tears to my eyes.

I read silent apologies.

“Today at school, everyone praised my drawing! I want to be an artist.”

“Reckless dreamers are not allowed in this house!”

The conversation ends with shattered glass and tear-stained cheeks.

Weeks later, father walks in with a mug with a heart-shaped yellow post it.

“You always wanted to taste coffee, right? Here’s a cup.

Don’t tell *Amma!* This will be our secret!”

The steaming mug burns my hands.

It feels like hugs from a distance.

A low grade on an English test means several rounds of punishment.

Flooded waterlines, bruised cheeks, a worn-out school uniform with missing buttons. My mother slammed the door.

I wipe my tears and see speckles of cement and dust.

In the morning, I find the uniform on my bed—

With new, shining buttons in place of the missing ones—

A cookie box that has seen only needles and threads in the past decades lies not too far away. The big white cookie label gawks back at me. It screams disguised affection.

The finished work stares back at me.

I take a black marker and paint over speckles of cement and broken glass.

Ugliness must be masked.

I join the pictures now, like a piece of blackout poetry.

Orange peels, coffee cups, bookshelves and disguised cookie boxes.

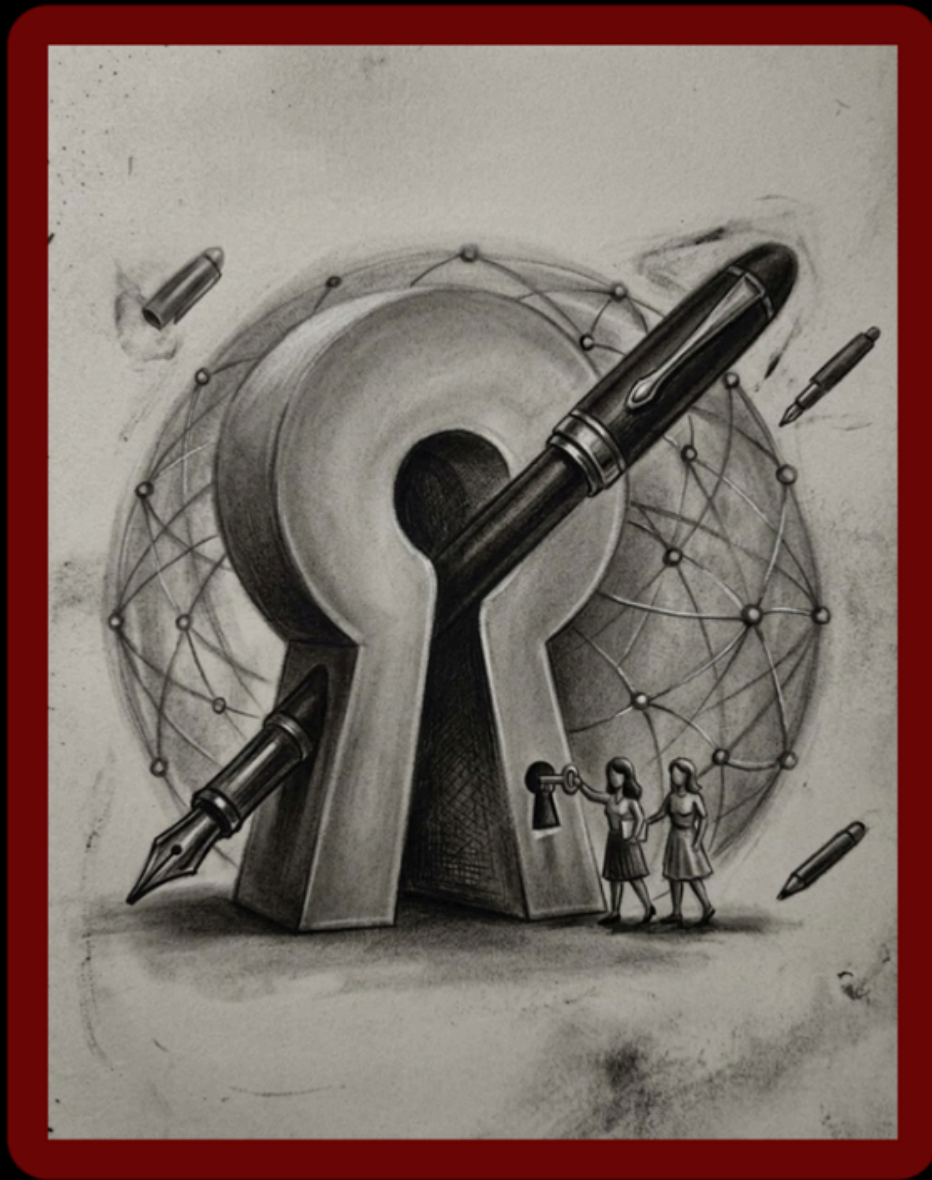
(Silent apologies, the feeling of warm hugs and affection.)

My best piece.

Does it read love now?

The tour of my heart.

Jabberwock 2026



To know many languages is to have many
keys to one lock" — Voltaire